

**LANGUAGE IDENTITY & MANAGEMENT IN  
SINGAPORE: UPDATED FINDINGS FROM THE IPS  
SURVEY ON RACE, RELIGION AND LANGUAGE**

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# **LANGUAGE, IDENTITY & MANAGEMENT IN SINGAPORE: UPDATED FINDINGS FROM THE IPS SURVEY ON RACE, RELIGION AND LANGUAGE**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This paper analyses language-related findings from the IPS Survey on Race, Religion and Language (RRL), conducted in 2013, 2018, and 2024. The latest wave is based on an approximately 45-minute self-administered survey conducted from April to August 2024, with a sample of 4,000 Singapore residents derived from Department of Statistics household listings. This included a booster sample of about 1,000 Malay and Indian respondents to support finer-grained comparisons.

The paper examines self-reported language proficiency, language use in social and workplace settings, the appropriateness of Singlish across contexts, language and identity, cohesion and differentiation, policy perceptions, and motivations to speak English well. Where relevant, responses are tracked over time and differences across key demographic groups are examined.

As a broader backdrop, prevailing Department of Statistics (DOS)' data on language use at home shows that English has become increasingly dominant in Singapore households. Among residents aged five and over, the proportion speaking English most frequently at home rose from 23.0 per cent in 2000 to 48.3 per cent in 2020, while Mandarin, Chinese dialects, Malay, and Tamil declined as most frequently spoken home languages. However, these figures capture dominant language use at home

rather than language proficiency. The RRL survey should therefore be read as a complementary account of self-reported proficiency, social and workplace use, identity, norms, and policy attitudes.

### **Language proficiency**

- Self-reported oral English proficiency continued to rise over time; around eight in 10 respondents in 2024 said they could speak English “well” or “very well” (81.5 per cent), up from 71.9 per cent in 2013. English proficiency remained strongly stratified by age; nearly all respondents aged 18–35 reported high proficiency (97.3 per cent), compared to about six in 10 respondents aged over 65 (62.2 per cent) [2.1.1, 2.1.2].
- Perceived official Mother Tongue oral proficiency was broadly stable for Mandarin and Malay; over eight in 10 Chinese respondents reported speaking Mandarin well or very well (80.9 per cent), while over nine in 10 Malay respondents reported likewise for Malay (93.2 per cent).
- Among all Indian respondents, 68.8 per cent reported speaking Tamil well or very well in 2024; slightly up from 64.1 per cent in 2018 [2.2.4]. However, given Indians in Singapore are linguistically heterogeneous, we note that among Indian respondents of Tamil descent, over nine in 10 reported speaking Tamil well or very well (92.9 per cent), and close to seven in 10 reported speaking it very well (68.8 per cent) in 2024 [2.2.5].
- Heritage language proficiency improved from 2018 to 2024, with 61.4 per cent of respondents reporting that they could speak their heritage language at least well, up from 53.7 per cent in 2018; the proportion saying they could not speak it fell sharply from 18.6 per cent to 7.0 per cent. Older respondents, Indians, and those who were not Singapore citizens by birth tended to report stronger heritage language proficiency. Among Chinese respondents who identified a

Chinese dialect as their heritage language, overall proficiency dipped slightly despite an increase in the proportion who said they could speak it very well, suggesting a more polarised proficiency profile [2.3.1–2.3.7].

- Singlish proficiency also increased; close to six in 10 respondents reported speaking Singlish at least well in 2024 (57.8 per cent), up from 46.8 per cent in 2013. This too was sharply age-stratified, ranging from 80.0 per cent among 18–35-year-olds to 29.1 per cent among those over 65. Malay respondents reported the highest Singlish proficiency (67.9 per cent), and citizens were more likely than PRs to report higher Singlish proficiency (60.8 per cent versus 44.9 per cent) [2.4.1, 2.4.2, 2.4.3, 2.4.6].

### **Perceived change in language standards**

- Around six in 10 respondents felt English standards today are better than 10 years ago; 59.4 per cent said this for written English and 62.4 per cent for spoken English in 2024 [2.5.1]. Younger, Malay and Indian respondents were more likely than older and Chinese respondents to perceive improvement [2.5.2, 2.5.3].
- By contrast, views on Mother Tongue standards were more divided; only 39.2 per cent felt written Mother Tongue standards had improved and 36.5 per cent said the same for spoken Mother Tongue, while roughly a quarter perceived deterioration [2.6.1]. Chinese respondents were less likely than Malays and Indians to perceive improvement, and younger, higher-educated, and more affluent respondents were more likely to think Mother Tongue standards had worsened [2.6.2, 2.6.3, 2.6.4, 2.6.5].

### **Language use in daily life**

- English continued to consolidate its role as Singapore’s dominant common language. In informal social settings, over eight in 10 respondents reported using English with friends often, very often, or always in 2024 (80.8 per cent), up from 69.9 per cent in 2013; this reached 96.5 per cent among respondents aged 18–35 [3.1.1, 3.1.2].
- Mother Tongue use with friends remained broadly stable within the corresponding ethnic groups; around eight in 10 Chinese respondents frequently used Mandarin with friends (80.2 per cent), about nine in 10 Malay respondents frequently used Malay with friends (91.7 per cent), and around two-thirds of Indian respondents frequently used Tamil with friends (64.4 per cent) [3.2.1, 3.3.1, 3.4.1].
- Singlish use with friends increased substantially; over half reported using it often, very often, or always in 2024 (55.0 per cent), up from 39.2 per cent in 2013. This was especially pronounced among younger respondents; 76.6 per cent of those aged 18–35 reported frequent Singlish use with friends, compared to 24.9 per cent of those aged over 65. Citizens were also more likely than PRs to use Singlish frequently with friends (57.3 per cent versus 44.6 per cent) [3.5.1, 3.5.2, 3.5.7].
- Heritage language use with friends also rebounded in 2024 after falling in 2018; 45.6 per cent reported using heritage languages frequently with friends in 2024, up from 32.2 per cent in 2018, though still below 2013 levels (49.5 per cent). Again, this was much more common among older respondents; 65.4 per cent of those over 65 reported frequent use, compared to 19.2 per cent of those aged 18–35 [3.6.1, 3.6.2].
- In the workplace, English remained clearly dominant; 85.6 per cent reported using English often, very often, or always at work in 2024. Mandarin was the second most frequently used workplace language (54.9 per cent), while

Singlish (41.5 per cent) and heritage languages (26.0 per cent) were used less often, though both had grown since 2018 [3.7.1].

### **Appropriateness norms in relation to language**

- Across the various scenarios tested, respondents generally viewed Singlish as more acceptable in social than in professional settings. In professional settings, the highest acceptance was for using Singlish with colleagues at work; about half found this often or always appropriate in 2024 (49.5 per cent). In social settings, over 60 per cent generally viewed Singlish as often or always appropriate, except in department stores where acceptance was more muted [4.1].
- The classroom remained a comparatively guarded domain; among respondents aged 18–35, one in five felt it was often or always appropriate for teachers to use Singlish during lessons (20.0 per cent), compared to 10.4 per cent among those aged over 65. Conversely, 72.0 per cent of respondents aged over 65 said this was rarely or never appropriate, compared to 39.9 per cent of younger respondents [4.1.1].
- Similarly, the use of Singlish by government officials during speeches was widely seen as inappropriate, with about six in 10 respondents across education groups saying it was rarely or never appropriate [4.2.3].
- In more informal government-facing interactions, acceptance was somewhat higher, but still limited; for instance, only 25.2 per cent of respondents aged 18–35 felt Singlish was often or always appropriate at a government counter, falling to 17.8 per cent among those aged over 65 [4.2.5].
- Written workplace communication was also more tightly bounded; more than half across age groups viewed using Singlish in emails to colleagues as never or rarely appropriate, and Indian respondents were especially likely to do so

(65.4 per cent) [4.3.2]. Singlish use with supervisors was most commonly seen as “sometimes appropriate”, with older, Indian, and degree-holding respondents somewhat more likely to view it as inappropriate [4.3.3].

- By contrast, among friends, Singlish was widely accepted; 80.4 per cent of respondents aged 18–35 felt it was often or always appropriate, though this dropped to 61.0 per cent among those aged over 65 [4.4.5].
- Taken together, the findings suggest that Singaporeans continue to distinguish sharply between informal rapport-building uses of Singlish and contexts where Standard English is expected [4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4].

### **Language and identity**

- Identity patterns have shifted steadily towards English and Singlish over time. The proportion of respondents who identified most with their official Mother Tongue or parents’ heritage language fell from 65.1 per cent in 2013 to 50.4 per cent in 2024, while the proportion identifying most with English or Singlish rose from 33.8 per cent to 47.6 per cent [5.1.1].
- At the same time, Singlish retained significant symbolic value. Agreement that Singlish gives Singaporeans a sense of identity rose from 50.0 per cent in 2018 to 57.8 per cent in 2024; agreement that Singlish is an important part of culture that should not be lost rose from 44.4 per cent to 50.6 per cent; and agreement that people do not really bother whether someone speaks Standard English or Singlish rose from 50.0 per cent to 55.0 per cent [5.2.1].
- Yet these views were not uniform; Indian respondents were less likely than Chinese and Malay respondents to agree that Singlish gives Singaporeans a sense of identity (49.8 per cent versus 58.7 per cent and 56.9 per cent respectively), and were also less likely to agree that Singlish is an important part of culture that should be retained [5.2.3, 5.2.6].

### **Cohesion, capital, and discrimination**

- On linguistic capital, almost six in 10 respondents agreed that speaking an official Mother Tongue well would confer advantages in work and business in Singapore (57.2 per cent) and internationally (58.6 per cent), both slightly up from 2018. Chinese and younger respondents were more likely to perceive such advantages [6.1.1, 6.1.7., 6.1.8].
- Attitudes towards unfamiliar languages reflected some ambivalence, but acceptance rose from 2018 to 2024 across all three scenarios tested. In 2024, 48.8 per cent said they were fine if people around them spoke a language they did not speak, 35.2 per cent said the same for public speeches in an unfamiliar language, and 34.4 per cent were fine if service staff in an Orchard Road shop did not speak to them in English [6.2.1]. Acceptance was generally lower for public speeches and service encounters than for hearing unfamiliar languages in one's surroundings [6.2.1 to 6.2.4].
- Most respondents in 2024 felt language prejudice was “about the same” as five years ago (58.6 per cent), but younger respondents were more likely than older ones to think it had worsened; 17.5 per cent of those aged 18–35 said there was more or much more language prejudice today, compared to 5.0 per cent of those aged over 65 [6.2.5, 6.2.6]. Chinese respondents were the least likely to believe language prejudice had worsened, while Malays were less likely than other groups to think it had lessened [6.2.7].

### **Policy perceptions**

- Perceptions of fairness in the language policy system improved markedly. In 2024, 62.7 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that the Government had

maintained a fair system or policy for everyone regardless of language proficiency, up from 50.1 per cent in 2018 [7.1.1]. This sentiment rose sharply with age; 45.8 per cent of respondents aged 18–35 agreed or strongly agreed, compared to 79.7 per cent of those aged over 65 [7.1.2]. Chinese and Indian respondents were more likely than Malay respondents to perceive the system as fair (63.9 per cent and 62.5 per cent, compared to 51.8 per cent) [7.1.3].

- Support for stronger state action to curb Singlish remained limited but rose slightly from 2018 to 2024; 26.8 per cent agreed or strongly agreed in 2024, up from 22.2 per cent in 2018 [7.2.1]. Support rose with age in the crosstabulations, from 21.2 per cent among respondents aged 18–35 to 38.8 per cent among those aged over 65 [7.2.2]. Minority-race respondents were more supportive than Chinese respondents; 32.7 per cent of Indians and 28.6 per cent of Malays agreed or strongly agreed, compared to 25.0 per cent of Chinese respondents, and when “somewhat agree” is included, support reached 59.4 per cent among Indians and 62.2 per cent among Malays, compared to 47.8 per cent among Chinese respondents [7.2.3].
- Views on preserving new immigrant languages were broadly stable, but support increased slightly from 36.7 per cent in 2018 to 39.3 per cent in 2024 [7.3.1]. Older and less highly educated respondents were more supportive in the crosstabulations, and PRs were more supportive than citizens (47.6 per cent versus 38.5 per cent) [7.3.2, 7.3.3, 7.3.4].
- Support for active Government promotion of proficiency in English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil also increased, from 53.5 per cent in 2018 to 60.3 per cent in 2024 [7.4.1]. Support rose from 48.8 per cent among respondents aged 18–35 to 74.9 per cent among those aged over 65 [7.4.2]. Crosstabulations show that respondents with secondary education and below were somewhat more supportive than those with post-secondary qualifications [7.4.3], while Indian

respondents were the most supportive across racial groups (64.6 per cent) [7.4.4].

### **Motivation to speak English well**

- Respondents expressed high levels of support across all proposed motivators for speaking English well, with roughly seven in 10 or more agreeing or strongly agreeing across items in both 2018 and 2024. The clearest increase was for admired well-known personalities who speak English well, where agreement rose from 63.4 per cent to 67.9 per cent [8.1].
- Older respondents were generally more likely to see employer support, school or teacher support, courses, and admired public figures as motivating; for example, 75.6 per cent of those aged over 65 said employer support would motivate them, compared to 62.8 per cent of those aged 18–35, while 74.2 per cent of older respondents said admired public personalities would motivate them, compared to 63.1 per cent of younger respondents [8.2.2, 8.3.2, 8.3.4, 8.4.1].

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Singapore prides itself on being a multicultural city-state. Linguistic diversity is a prominent feature of this multiculturalism and shapes interactions among the diverse population. Given the close relationship between language, identity and social cohesion, the state has played an active role in managing Singapore's linguistic landscape.

### 1.1 Proficiency in Languages

The 1957 pre-independence census captures the extent of Singapore's linguistic diversity before the consolidation of post-independence language policy. At the time, Singapore's resident population spoke a wide range of languages (State of Singapore, 1957, as cited in Kuo, 1976, p. 4). Although only 1.8 per cent of the population spoke English in 1957, English was subsequently made an official language and the working language when Singapore gained independence in 1965. Two commonly cited reasons explain this decision. The first was the need to maintain racial harmony, a particularly pressing concern given the racial riots that had occurred the year before. English was regarded as a "foreign" language that did not belong exclusively to any one ethnic group. As such, the Chinese, Malay or Indian community could not claim to be disadvantaged by its required use. Essentially English was treated as ethnically "neutral" (Tan, 2017, p. 96).

The second reason was economic. English was seen as essential to Singapore's ability to connect with global networks of science, technology, trade and commerce. Singapore's founding Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew recognised that the young

nation's survival and success depended on being "plugged into" these global networks, where English was already an important language (Goh, 2017, p. 59). This strategic emphasis on English has often been credited as one of the factors that enabled Singapore to move rapidly from a developing economy to a highly developed one within a few decades (Goh, 2017, p. 59).

As one of Singapore's official languages and the working language, English was first introduced as a compulsory language in schools, though not necessarily as the first language. By the 1970s, it had become the main language of instruction, ensuring that successive cohorts of students would acquire some degree of competence in English. In Tan's words, English had by then "entered the language ecology in a significant way" (Tan, 2017, p. 96).

Singapore was ranked first in Asia and categorised under "Very High Proficiency" in the 2023 Education First English Proficiency Index (EF Education First, 2023, p. 20). Findings from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have further shown that literacy skills among young Singaporeans are much higher relative to other developed economies. In 2022, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) had found that 15-year-olds in Singapore scored much higher than OECD average (OECD, 2023). While young Singaporeans fared much better than their peers from other high-performing economies, older Singaporeans did not perform as well. The 2023 results from the Survey of Adult Skills by OECD has shown that Singaporean adults scored marginally lower than OECD average in terms of literacy, as compared to some of the highest performing countries (OECD, 2024). There was an observed negative correlation between age and literacy in Singapore, with the largest decline in proficiency amongst 35- to 44-year-olds.

English, however, is not the only language around which Singapore's language policy is organised. The Constitution of the Republic of Singapore states that "Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English shall be the four official languages in Singapore" (Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, 2026, art. 153A). As later reflections on Lee Kuan Yew's language policy observed, Singapore's approach was broadly framed around the principle of "English for trade; Mother Tongue to preserve identity" (The Straits Times, 2015). While English was successfully adopted as a common working language, policymakers were also concerned that extensive exposure to English could encourage a more "Westernised, individualistic and self-centred outlook on life" (Wee, 1989, as cited in Ng, 2014, p. 364). To mitigate this, primary school students were required to study a second language from 1960, followed by secondary school students in 1966 (Sim, 2016). The bilingual policy was therefore intended to ensure that Singaporeans acquired a common language that supported national cohesion and economic growth, while also remaining connected to their Asian ethnicities, cultures and identities.

As many scholars have noted, Singapore's three designated "Mother Tongue" languages were often not, in practice, the languages spoken by respondents' mothers or within their families. The 1957 census, cited earlier, recorded a total of 33 languages spoken in Singapore, including 13 languages among the Chinese population alone (Tan, 2017, p. 92). The essays in *Multilingual Singapore: Language Policies and Linguistic Realities* provide a useful entry point into this distinction between official language policy and Singapore's more complex linguistic realities. The RRL survey similarly reflects this diversity through its attention to "heritage languages", recognising that Singapore's lived language landscape extends well beyond the four official languages.

Under Singapore's bilingual policy, all students undergo at least ten years of education in their assigned Mother Tongue Languages. However, while the adoption of the English language has been broadly successful, the bilingual policy has faced more persistent challenges. In 2019, then Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong acknowledged how many Chinese families mainly use English at home, and that Chinese Singaporeans have become less fluent in Mandarin (Zhou, 2019).

This decline in language fluency may be further compounded by students' engagement with their Mother Tongue and how they perceive it as an academic subject, both of which can affect long-term language proficiency (Goh, 2023). In his first National Day Rally, current Prime Minister Lawrence Wong directly addressed this issue. He introduced a change in policy: students could now take the Higher Mother Tongue course in secondary school if they did well in their Mother Tongues in primary school. The choice to learn the language at a higher level was no longer simply determined by the student's overall score (Loh, 2024). On a visit to a pre-school, education minister Desmond Lee emphasised the importance of supporting mother-tongue learning in young children (Tushara, 2025).

## **1.2 Language and Identity**

A survey of language in Singapore would be incomplete without considering Singlish, Singapore's unique and widely used colloquial form of English. Singlish incorporates vocabulary and sentence structures of various languages and hence deviates from standard English. Then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong described Singlish as "not English", but rather "a broken, ungrammatical English sprinkled with words and phrases from local dialects and Malay", which non-Singaporean English speakers may find difficult to understand (Goh, 1999a). As a result, the use of Singlish has long been

discouraged by the government because of its perceived negative economic and social impact (Lee, 1999). The most obvious example of such measures would be the Speak Good English Movement.

The relationship between Singlish, the state, and the public is complex and has been widely discussed. Linguists have examined Singlish as a legitimate object of study, with Tan Ying-Ying arguing that it may be understood as a “common language” in Singapore (Seilhamer & Kwek, 2021; Tan, 2017). Beyond academic scholarship, cultural figures such as Gwee Li Sui have also advocated for Singlish, including through literary works written in Singlish and translations of texts such as *The Little Prince* (Gwee, 2017; de Saint-Exupéry & Gwee, 2019).

Despite official efforts to discourage its use, Singlish continues to function as an important marker of national and cultural identity for many Singaporeans (SG101, 2023). In the 2018 wave of the RRL survey, half of respondents agreed that speaking Singlish gives Singaporeans a sense of identity (Mathew et al., 2020, p. 110). Its use in popular culture and consumer products further illustrates this symbolic role. Local brands such as *wheniwasfour* and The Little Dröm Store have incorporated Singlish phrases into merchandise, positioning them alongside other recognisable symbols of Singaporean identity, such as the dragon playground. Its appearance in the National Day Parade also suggests that official attitudes towards Singlish have become less rigid over time (Chan, 2025).

The changing status of Singlish is particularly evident in the case of Phua Chu Kang, an iconic Singaporean sitcom character. In his 1999 National Day Rally speech, then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong criticised the character for making “the teaching of proper English difficult” (Goh, 1999b). Subsequently, the character was depicted as attending English classes. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Phua Chu Kang

was mobilised in a public health campaign to encourage vaccination (Choo, 2021). This shift from being framed as a problem for language policy to being used as a vehicle for public communication reflects a broader re-evaluation of Singlish's social value. More broadly, the inclusion of several Singlish expressions in the Oxford English Dictionary in recent years further indicates its growing recognition beyond Singapore (CNA, 2025; Lee, 2016).

### **1.3 Survey Methodology**

The findings presented in this paper are primarily derived from an approximately 45-minute self-administered survey conducted from April 2024 to August 2024. Fieldwork and data collection were conducted by IPS Social Lab. In total, the full survey sample comprised 4,000 unique respondents after quality checks.

At the outset, a sampling frame comprising a list of 6,000 randomly generated residential household addresses was obtained from the Department of Statistics (DOS). Invitation letters with details of the RRL survey were sent to the residential addresses in the sampling frames, two weeks prior to surveyors from IPS Social Lab physically visiting the addresses.

Surveyors would then brief potential respondents about the study using a pre-set Participant Information Sheet, invite the individuals to participate in the study, and obtain their consent. A booster sample of approximately 1,000 Malay and Indian minority-race respondents (obtained to ensure representation and enable fine-grain comparisons across responses) was also apportioned within the target of 4,000 respondents. This booster sample was obtained by surveyors knocking on the doors

of Malay and Indian households, following a prescribed process to search for such households after locating a pre-assigned address from the sampling frame.

Surveyors then handed a tablet to the respondent (e.g., iPad, Galaxy Tab) on which to self-complete the survey questions. If the respondent was uncomfortable using the tablet or had difficulty reading, the option for surveyors to read out the questions and record their answers was made available. The survey was conducted in all four official languages (English, Mandarin Chinese, Malay, and Tamil). Respondents were given \$20 (via PayNow or cash) as a token of participation upon survey completion.

Responses were then weighted to mirror the prevailing demographics of Singapore's resident population. As such, the findings are generally representative of the Singapore adult resident population. However, the RRL survey data is not exempt from the typical biases prevalent in face-to-face survey methods, including:

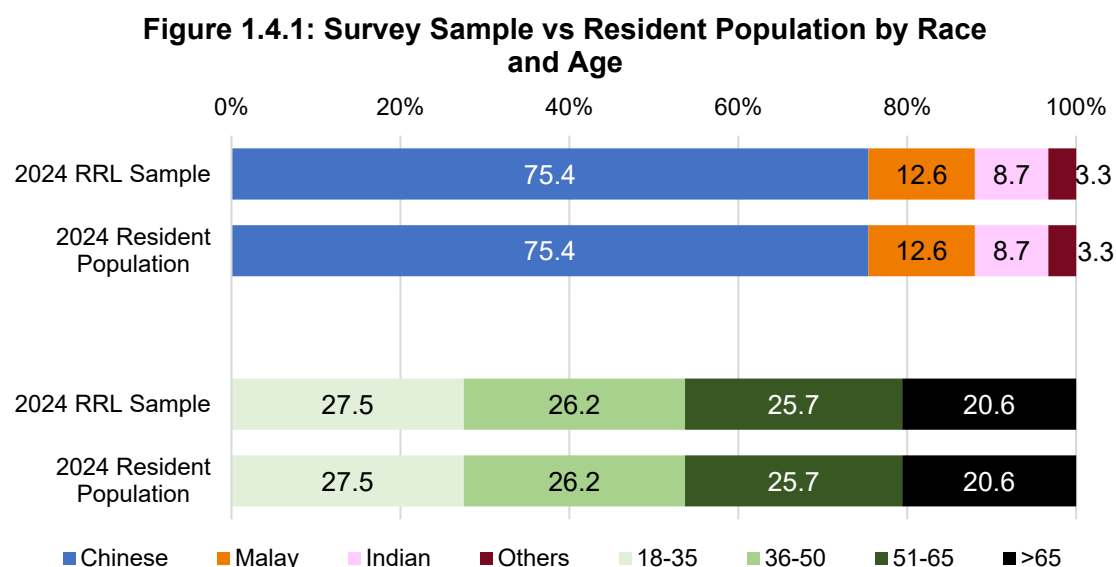
- Under-representation of certain profiles who have less opportunity to respond to the survey at the door during survey administration hours (e.g., individuals with certain occupations / extenuating circumstances); this was partly dealt with by fieldworkers visiting an address at different time slots and on weekdays and weekends, so that such respondents can be included in the study.
- Social desirability bias arising from respondents answering the survey in a manner ostensibly viewed more favourably as compared to more 'impersonal' or 'removed' methods such as an online survey; this is, however, partially resolved with a CAPI method with surveyors according respondents' privacy to answer the questions.

## 1.4 Demographics and Representation

The overall responses for survey questions reported in the ensuing chapters were weighted across age, race and gender with reference to prevailing Singapore resident demographics. In the following subsections, we explore some key demographic breakdowns of the samples in relation to the Singapore resident population.

### 1.4.1 Race and age profiles in the 2024 RRL sample mirrored the Singapore resident population after weighting

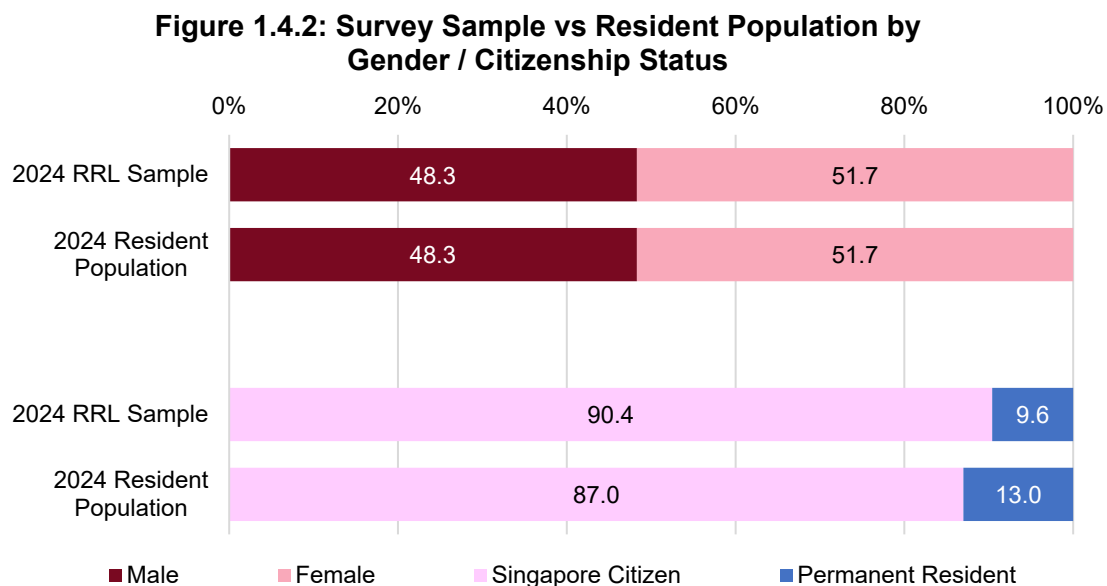
The proportions of respondents in the 2024 RRL sample were identical to the prevailing Singapore resident population<sup>1</sup> in terms of race and age cohorts after weighting. Only respondents 18 years old and above at the time of administration were eligible to participate (see Figure 1.4.1).



<sup>1</sup> Using publicly available information from Singapore Department of Statistics (DOS); accurate as of 2023 End-June (M810011 - Singapore Residents by Age Group, Ethnic Group and Sex, End June, Annual).

**1.4.2 Gender breakdowns for the 2024 RRL sample were also identical to the resident population after weighting; there was a slightly higher proportion of SCs surveyed relative to prevailing demographics**

The proportions of respondents in the 2024 RRL sample by gender were also identical with the prevailing Singapore resident population after weighting. There was a slightly higher representation of Singapore Citizens (SCs) compared to Permanent Residents (PRs) (see Figure 1.4.2).



**1.4.3 The RRL sample was underweight on individuals with secondary and below qualifications, and overweight on individuals with ITE, polytechnic, and professional qualifications relative to the resident population; it was overweight on HDB 1-3 room dwellers relative to the resident population**

There was an under-representation of individuals with secondary and below educational qualifications, and a corresponding over-representation of individuals with

ITE, polytechnic, and professional qualifications in the 2024 RRL sample relative to the resident population<sup>2</sup>. In this regard, cross-tabulations to ascertain whether education impacted responses were applied to all question items at the outset. Where statistically significant, cross-tabulations of responses by education levels are presented in this report, alongside other variables.

To capture broader trends, analyses presented aggregate reported highest educational qualifications into three broad ordinal categories: 1) secondary and below education, 2) ITE, polytechnic diplomas, and professional qualifications not amounting to a degree, and 3) bachelor's degree or higher qualifications (see Figure 1.4.3).

#### ***1.4.4 The 2024 RRL sample was overweight on public housing dwellers and underweight on private property dwellers relative to the resident population***

The 2024 RRL sample also has a higher proportion of HDB dwellers relative to the resident population<sup>3</sup>; this was in line with the increased possibilities of surveyors being able to come into contact with this population owing to the ease of access to their houses. Meanwhile, the corresponding response rates for private property dwellers were also much lower, due to additional difficulties with securing access especially in condominiums and cluster housing where surveyors are generally not allowed access. In the same vein as the education variable, housing types were aggregated into four broad ordinal categories to better capture broad trends: 1) 1-3 room HDB flats, 2) 4-room HDB flats, 3) 5+ room HDB flats including 5-room, executive, maisonette and

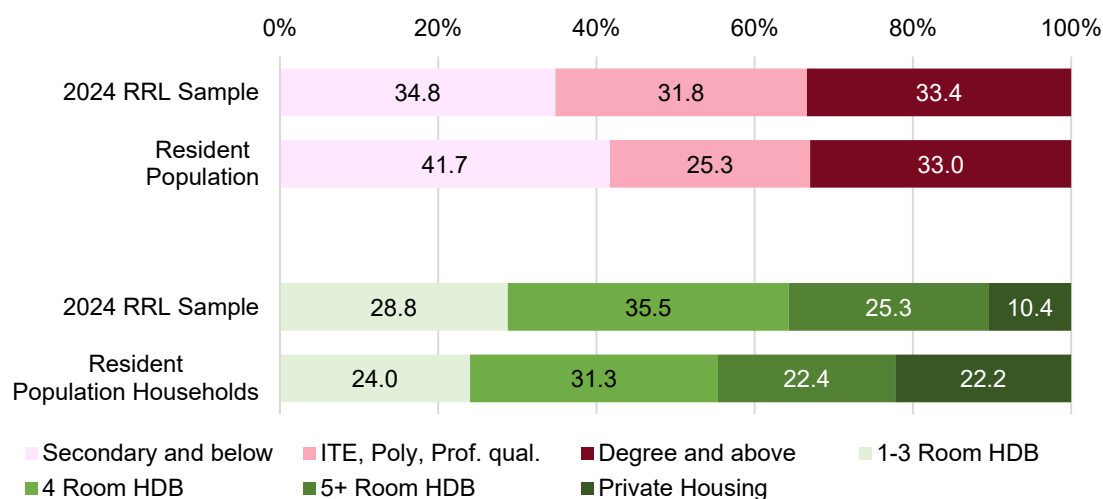
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<sup>2</sup> Numbers are for Residents aged 25 years and over, latest available 2020 from Singapore Department of Statistics (DOS) (M850581).

<sup>3</sup> Numbers are for Resident Households by Type of Dwelling, latest available 2023 from Singapore Department of Statistics (DOS) (M810351).

HUDC units, and 4) Private housing, comprising condominiums, landed property, or other types of private accommodation such as shophouse units (see Figure 1.4.4).

**Figure 1.4.3/4: Survey Sample vs Resident Population by Highest Educational Qualifications Attained / Housing Type**



## 1.5 Analysis Strategy

While there was a confluence of factors impacting responses to the question items, we have condensed the myriad findings across results using a two-step approach to augment the relative accessibility of the content and ease of understanding for a non-academic, general audience:

- 1) Running ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions with demographic responses and other salient responses as independent variables as a 'filter' to identify significant findings;
- 2) Presenting single cross-tabulations based on 1) for the most salient and significant results, and selected regressions where appropriate

## 2. LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Singapore's approach to bilingualism has long been framed as both a practical necessity and a social resource in an increasingly divided world. In a speech commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Lee Kuan Yew Fund for Bilingualism, then Education Minister Chan Chun Sing situated bilingualism as a way for Singaporeans to understand and connect with different cultures (Chan, 2021, as cited in Chew, 2021).

Over time, policies and initiatives promoting bilingual education have contributed to broad-based proficiency in English and the official Mother Tongue languages, although proficiency remains uneven across groups and generations. At the same time, Singapore's linguistic landscape extends beyond the four official languages; recent years have seen renewed interest, including among younger Singaporeans, in preserving and learning heritage languages such as Hokkien, Teochew, and Cantonese (Hoo, 2024).

Before delving into self-reported language proficiency, it is useful to situate the findings presented in this paper against broader shifts in Singapore's home-language environment. DOS data has shown that English has become increasingly dominant as the language most frequently spoken at home among Singapore residents. The share speaking English most frequently at home rose from 23.0 per cent in 2000 to 48.3 per cent in 2020, while the corresponding shares for Mandarin, Chinese dialects, Malay, and Tamil declined over the same period (DOS, 2026).

These home-language trends provide an important backdrop, but they should not be read as direct measures of language proficiency. DOS data captures the language

used most frequently at home, while the RRL survey captures adults' self-reported ability to speak different languages and their reported use of these languages across social and workplace settings. A respondent may therefore report strong proficiency in a language, even if it is no longer the dominant language spoken at home.

Against this backdrop, this chapter examines language proficiency and perceived language standards in Singapore using the RRL survey across the three waves (2013, 2018–19, and 2024). Sections 2.1 to 2.4 focus on self-reported oral proficiency in English, the official Mother Tongue languages, heritage languages, and Singlish, and document how these patterns vary across key demographic groups. Sections 2.5 and 2.6 then examine perceptions of change in English and Mother Tongue standards over the past decade, distinguishing between written and spoken standards, and assess whether demographic patterns persist after accounting for other factors.

To measure self-reported oral proficiency, respondents rated how well they could speak each language using the criteria in Table 1. These measures provide a useful overview of Singapore's linguistic landscape, but they reflect respondents' own interpretations of proficiency levels. Individuals may differ in what they consider speaking a language "very well"; for example, holding sustained discussions on complex topics versus being conversational in informal settings. As such, the results in this chapter should be interpreted as self-assessed proficiency rather than an objective test of language competence.

**Table 1: Language Proficiency Level Criteria**

How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks? (Tick the most appropriate response)	
1	Can't speak (cannot perform tasks in this language)
2	Somewhat well (can exchange greetings)
3	Fairly well (can make purchases in a shop or food centre)

4	Well (can talk about family, friends, etc.)
5	Very well (can discuss ideas like religion, politics, technology, etc.)

The survey collected only self-reported oral proficiency data, alongside perceptions of general spoken and written language standards in Singapore. The languages surveyed include English, Mandarin, Malay, Tamil, and Singlish, and respondents' parents' heritage languages.

## 2.1 English Language Proficiency

English is Singapore's working language; it is the main medium for government, law, education, and public administration. As of 2020, almost half of Singapore residents use English at home (DOS, 2021). This change is stark when compared with 1980 when households used a mix of languages and English ranked low in its frequency of use (DOS, 1981). What is notable about that census too is the immediate effects of language policy in schools. Students who had greater exposure to the bilingual policy were reported to speak Mandarin and English at home more often than the general population, using these languages more with their siblings than with their parents (DOS, 1981).

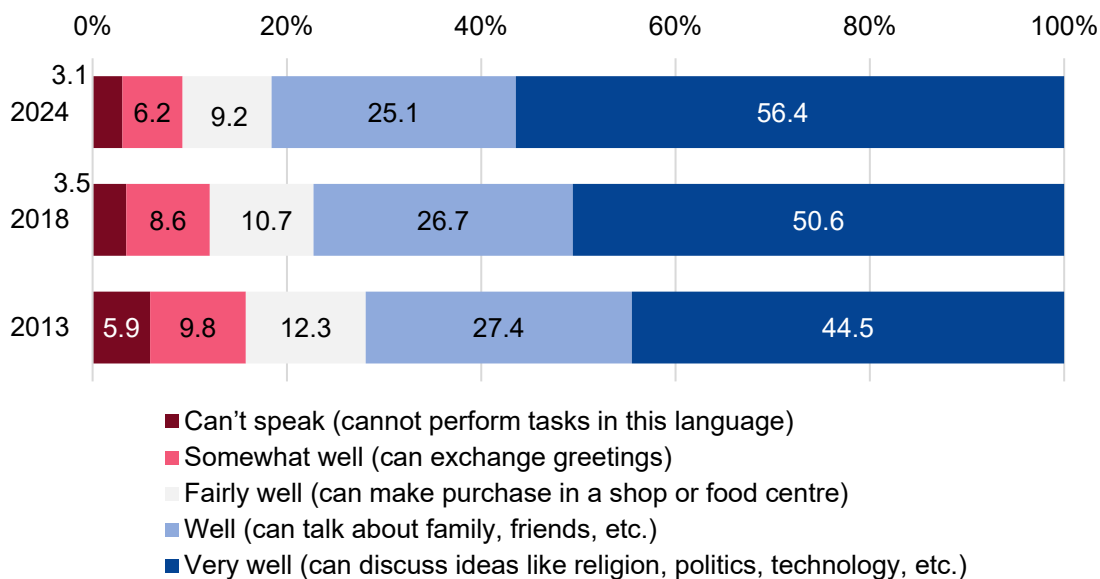
The rise in self-reported English proficiency observed in the RRL survey should be read against the broader rise of English in the home environment. DOS data shows that English became the most frequently spoken language at home among residents aged five and over by 2020, reaching 48.3 per cent, up from 23.0 per cent in 2000. The age-specific data also indicates that English home use is especially pronounced among younger cohorts (DOS, 2026).

Against this backdrop, this section examines how respondents assess their oral English proficiency across the three RRL waves, and how these self-assessments vary across key demographic groups in 2024. Sections 2.1.1 to 2.1.6 describe trends over time and differences by age, race, education level, affluence (housing type), and citizenship status. Section 2.1.7 then uses a linear regression model to assess whether these patterns remain after accounting for multiple factors simultaneously.

***2.1.1 Around eight in 10 respondents in 2024 felt that they could speak English well or very well; this is an increase from seven in 10 respondents indicating likewise in 2013***

When assessing their own English proficiency, the proportion of respondents who reported being able to speak English “well” or “very well” increased from 71.9 per cent in 2013 to 81.5 per cent in 2024 (it also rose to 77.3 per cent in 2018). Correspondingly, the proportion who indicated that they “can’t speak” or can only speak English “somewhat well” declined from 15.7 per cent in 2013 to 9.3 per cent in 2024 (see Figure 2.1.1).

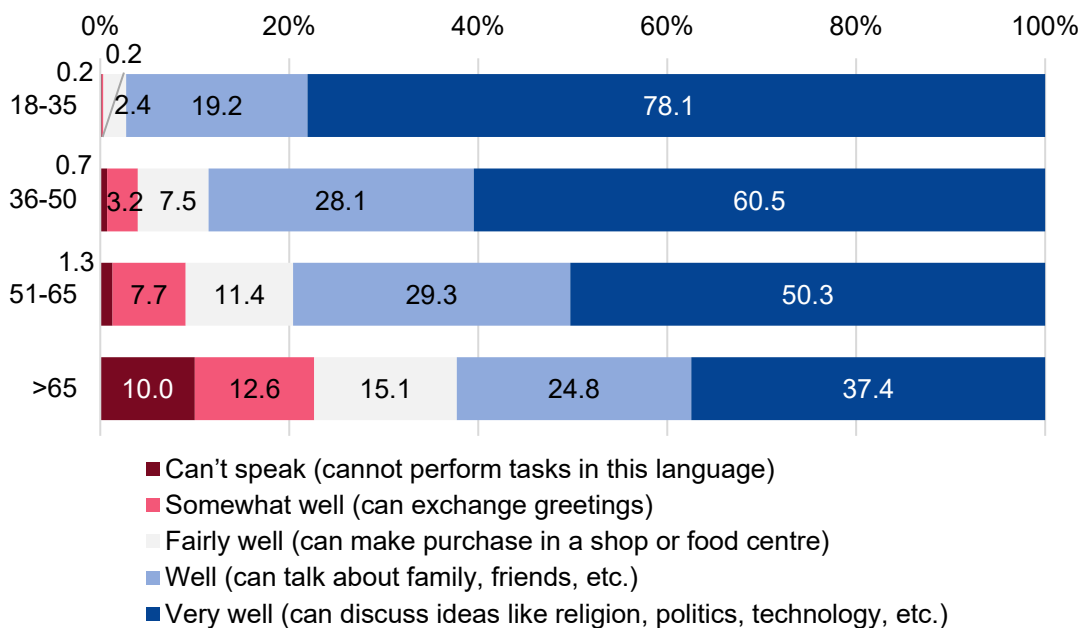
**Figure 2.1.1: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (English)?, responses by wave**



**2.1.2 Nearly all respondents in the 18-35 age cohort felt they could speak English well or very well, as compared to over six in 10 respondents over 65 years old**

When examining responses by age cohort, self-reported English proficiency showed a clear gradient by age. Nearly all respondents aged 18–35 reported being able to speak English “well” or “very well” (97.3 per cent). This proportion declined with age; it was 88.6 per cent among those aged 36–50, 79.6 per cent among those aged 51–65, and 62.2 per cent among those aged over 65. Correspondingly, only 0.4 per cent of respondents aged 18–35 indicated that they “can’t speak” English or could speak it only “somewhat well”, compared to 22.6 per cent among those aged over 65 (see Figure 2.1.2).

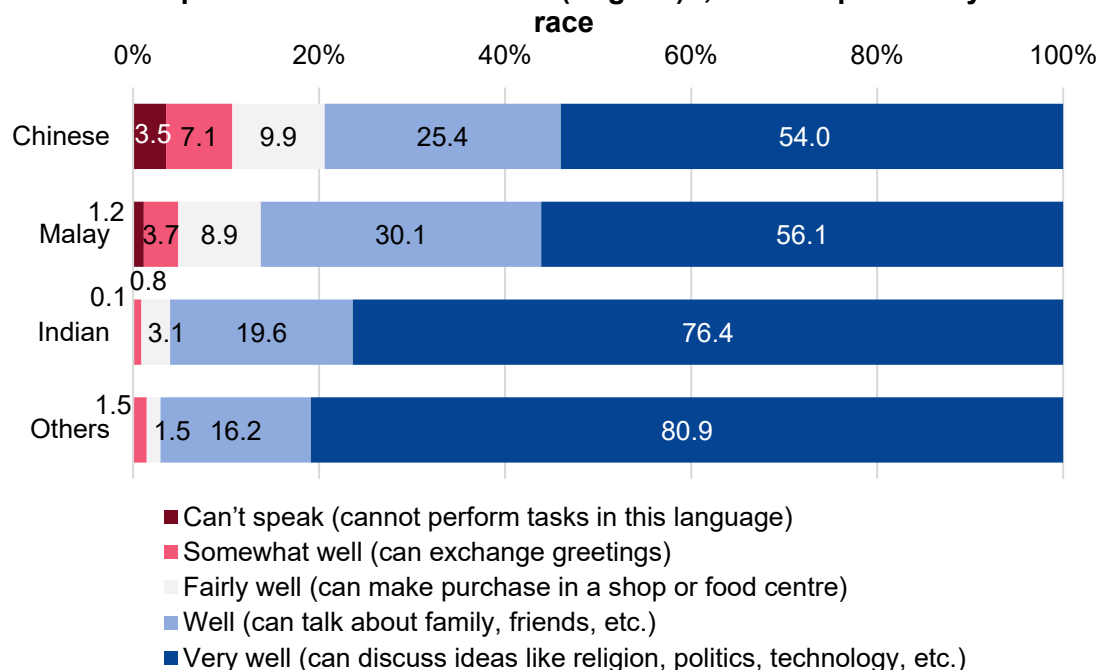
**Figure 2.1.2: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (English)?, 2024 responses by age**



**2.1.3 Virtually all Indian respondents indicated that they could speak English well or very well, as compared to over eight in 10 Malays and under eight in 10 Chinese**

When comparing responses across racial groups, we note that Indian respondents were most likely to indicate speaking English well or very well (96 per cent) as compared to their Malay and Chinese counterparts (86.2 per cent and 79.4 per cent, respectively). Chinese respondents were the most likely to indicate lower proficiency in spoken English (10.6 per cent) (see Figure 2.1.3).

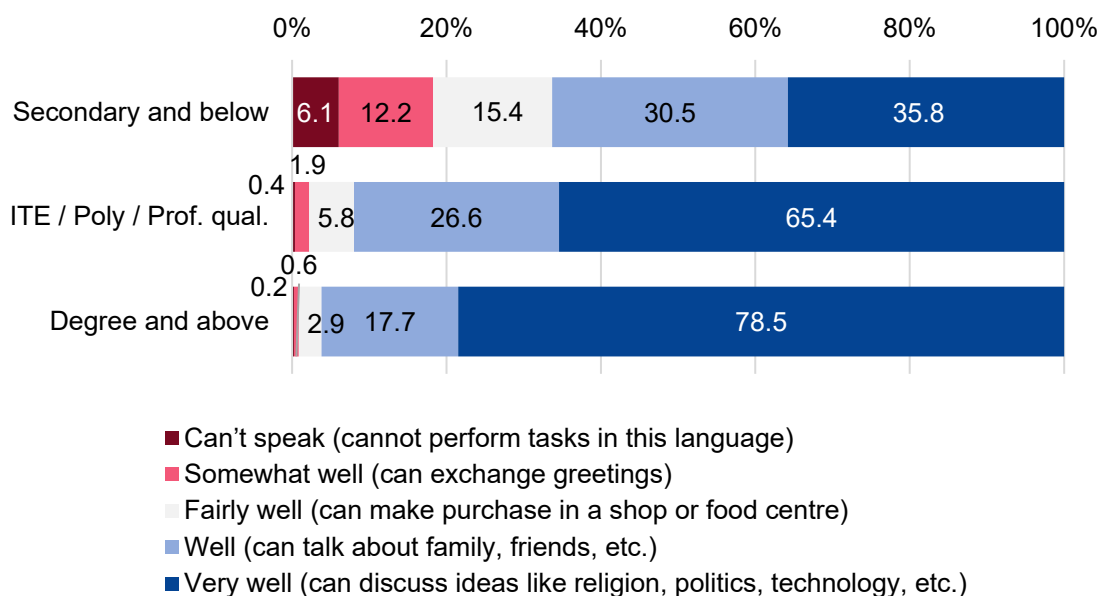
**Figure 2.1.3: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (English)?, 2024 responses by race**



**2.1.4 Almost all degree-holders indicated they could speak English well or very well, compared to around two-thirds of those with secondary education and below**

Almost all respondents with a degree and above indicated that they could speak English “well” or “very well” (96.2 per cent), as did over nine in 10 respondents with ITE, polytechnic or professional qualifications (92 per cent). In contrast, around two-thirds of respondents with secondary education and below reported being able to speak English well or very well (66.3 per cent). Correspondingly, those with secondary education and below were more likely to indicate lower English proficiency; 18.3 per cent reported that they “can’t speak” English or could speak it only “somewhat well”, compared to 2.3 per cent among those with ITE, polytechnic, or professional qualifications and 0.8 per cent among degree holders (see Figure 2.1.4).

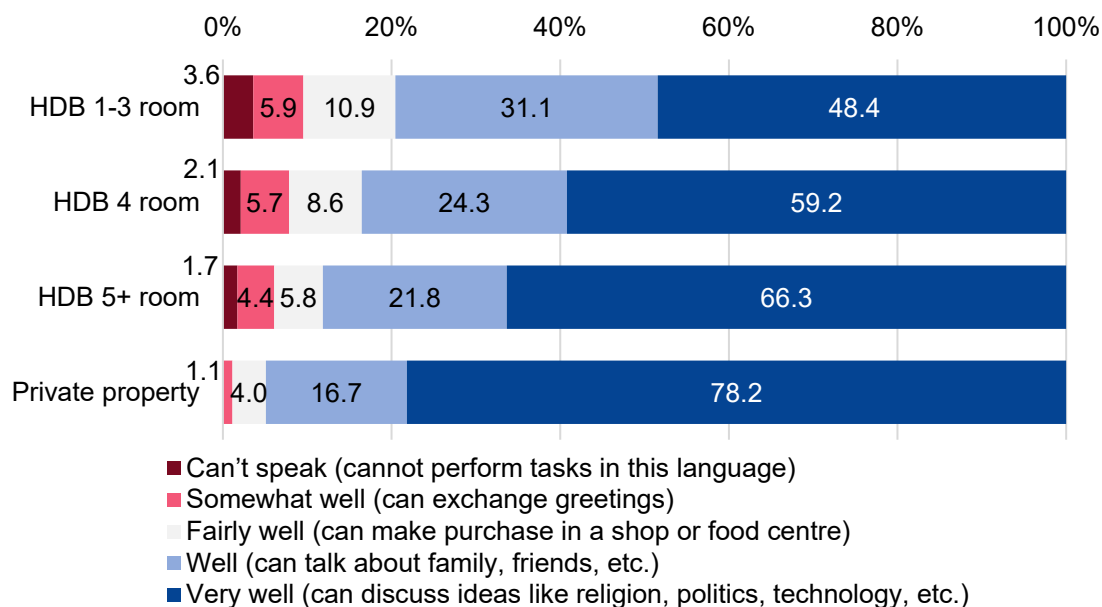
**Figure 2.1.4: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (English)?, 2024 responses by education level**



### ***2.1.5 More affluent respondents reported stronger proficiencies in speaking English***

Almost all private property residents indicated that they could speak English “well” or “very well” (94.9 per cent), compared to 79.5 per cent of respondents living in HDB 1–3 room flats. Respondents in larger public housing fell in between; 83.5 per cent of HDB 4 room residents and 88.1 per cent of HDB 5+ room residents reported being able to speak English well or very well (see Figure 2.1.5).

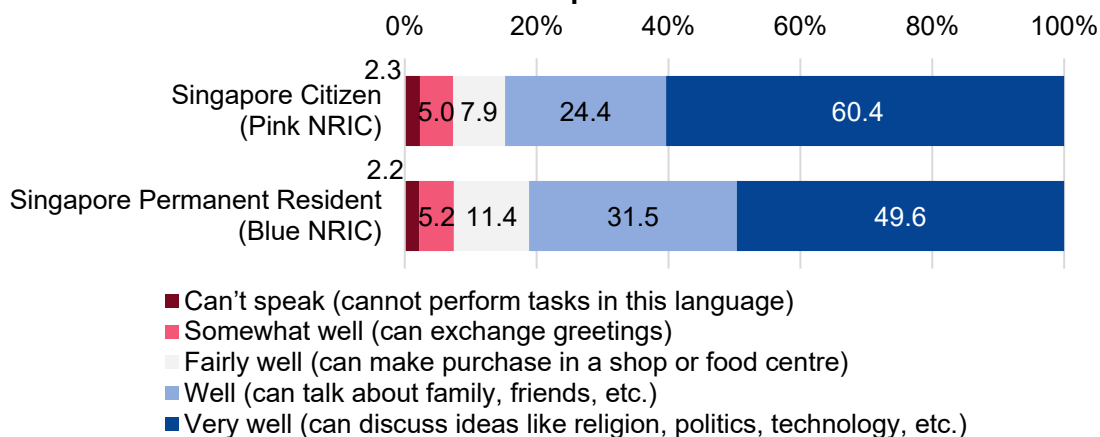
**Figure 2.1.5: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (English)?, 2024 responses by housing type**



### ***2.1.6 Marginally higher proportions of SCs indicated higher levels of oral English proficiency compared to PRs***

When perusing results by citizenship status, we note that over eight in 10 SC respondents (84.8 per cent) indicated that they could speak English well or very well. The corresponding proportion for PR respondents was 81.1 per cent (see Figure 2.1.6).

**Figure 2.1.6: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (English)?, 2024 responses by citizenship status**



### ***2.1.7 Race, age, gender, education, housing, income, and citizenship were statistically significant predictors of English proficiency***

To better understand what factors are associated with respondents' perceived oral English proficiency, we used a linear regression model to analyse the survey responses. This allows us to examine the relationship between each factor (including race, age, gender, education, housing, income, and citizenship) and English proficiency while holding other factors constant. In line with the preceding crosstabulations, non-Chinese, younger, male, more highly educated, more affluent respondents (i.e., residing in larger housing types and drawing higher incomes), and Singapore citizens tended to self-report higher oral English proficiency on average (see Table 2.1.7).

**Table 2.1.7: English proficiency (linear regression)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>.093***</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>.160***</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>-.182***</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	<b>-.036*</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>.293***</b>
<b>Housing</b>	<b>.044*</b>
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	<b>.113***</b>
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	<b>-.155***</b>
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.251

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## 2.2 Official Mother Tongue Proficiency

In Singapore, Mother Tongue languages are assigned according to ethnicity due to the Bilingual Education Policy. However, particularly for Singaporeans who grew up between the 1960s and 1980s, these assigned “mother tongues” did not necessarily correspond to the languages used by their parents at home, nor to the languages they would naturally use when communicating with members of the same ethnic group. This issue was noted by then Deputy Prime Minister Goh Keng Swee, who was tasked in 1978 to lead a study team examining problems in Singapore’s education system and proposing reforms. The resulting report observed that “85 per cent of them [school children] do not speak either of these languages [English and Mandarin] at home” (Goh & The Education Study Team, 1979).

Over time, as more cohorts have passed through the bilingual education system, one might expect self-reported proficiency in assigned Mother Tongue Languages to increase or at least stabilise. This expectation, however, requires qualification. Since

the 1990s, Indian students have been permitted to study Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, or Urdu as non-Tamil Indian Languages (NTILs) in place of Tamil (Sim, 2016). Nonetheless, this remains an exception-based arrangement rather than the default structure of Mother Tongue education. Parents must apply for their children to be exempted from their assigned Mother Tongue Language, with applications assessed on a case-by-case basis (MOE, 2026). If approved, students generally pursue NTIL instruction outside their mainstream schools through approved community organisations. Beyond the education system, Tamil also remains the only Indian language accorded official language status in Singapore (Centre for Singapore Tamil Culture, 2025).

Department of Statistics home-language data indicate a decline in the use of official Mother Tongue Languages as the languages most frequently spoken at home. Among residents aged five and above, Mandarin Chinese declined from 35.6 per cent in 2010 to 29.9 per cent in 2020, while Malay and Tamil also recorded declines over the same period (DOS, 2026). These shifts, however, should not be interpreted straightforwardly as equivalent declines in oral proficiency. The RRL findings show that self-reported proficiency in Mandarin and Malay among the corresponding racial groups remains high and broadly stable. This suggests that language competence may continue to be sustained through schooling, ethnic community use, and other social domains, even as English becomes increasingly dominant in the household.

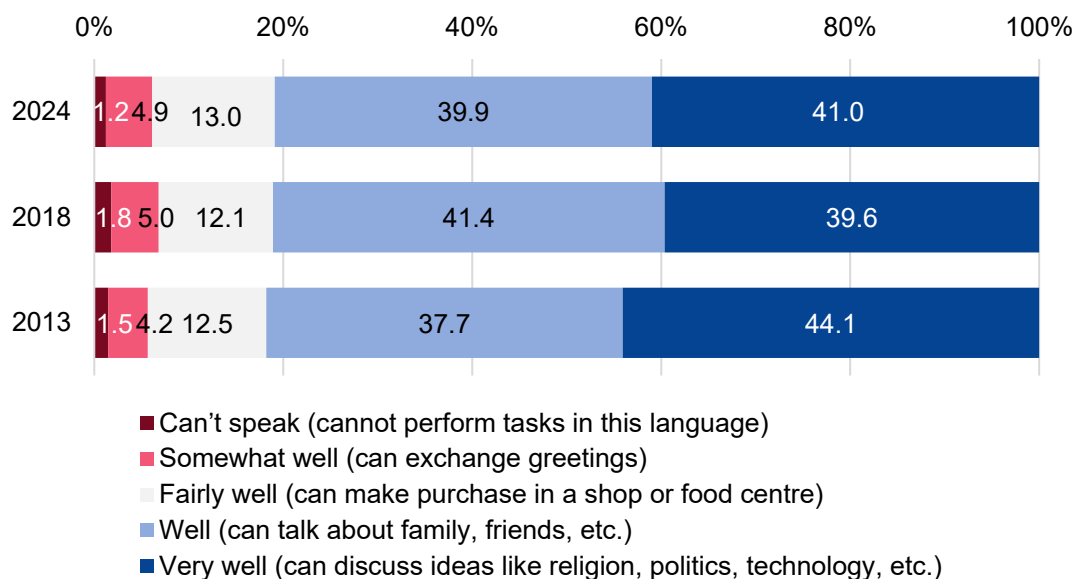
The interpretation of Tamil is more complex because of the linguistic heterogeneity of Indian Singaporeans. DOS tracks Tamil as a home language, whereas the RRL survey distinguishes between Indian respondents overall and Indian respondents of Tamil descent. Lower aggregate levels of Tamil proficiency or home use among Indian respondents may reflect the presence of non-Tamil Indian language communities, rather than a simple decline in Tamil proficiency among Tamil Indians specifically.

The following sub-sections focus on the reported oral proficiencies of the relevant racial subsets of the RRL sample, with regards to each Mother Tongue language in turn.

### **2.2.1 Over eight in 10 Chinese respondents reported speaking Mandarin well or very well; broadly similar proportions from 2013 to 2024**

Chinese respondents' self-rated Mandarin proficiency remained largely unchanged across the three waves. In 2024, 80.9 per cent of Chinese respondents indicated that they could speak Mandarin "well" or "very well", comparable to 81.8 per cent in 2013 (and 81 per cent in 2018) (see Figure 2.2.1).

**Figure 2.2.1: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (Mandarin Chinese)?, Chinese respondents' responses by wave**



### **2.2.2 Gender, income and citizenship were statistically significant predictors of reported spoken Mandarin proficiency among Chinese respondents**

To better understand what factors are associated with Chinese respondents' perceived oral Mandarin proficiency, we used a linear regression model to analyse the survey responses. This allows us to examine the relationship between each factor (including age, gender, education, housing, income, and citizenship) and reported oral Mandarin proficiency while holding other factors constant. The findings show that females, the more affluent, and PRs among Chinese respondents self-report higher oral Mandarin proficiency on average (see Table 2.2.2).

**Table 2.2.2: Reported spoken Mandarin proficiency among Chinese respondents (linear regression)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Age</b>	-.040
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	<b>.054*</b>
<b>Education</b>	.002
<b>Housing</b>	-.031
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	<b>.121***</b>
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	<b>.056*</b>
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.020

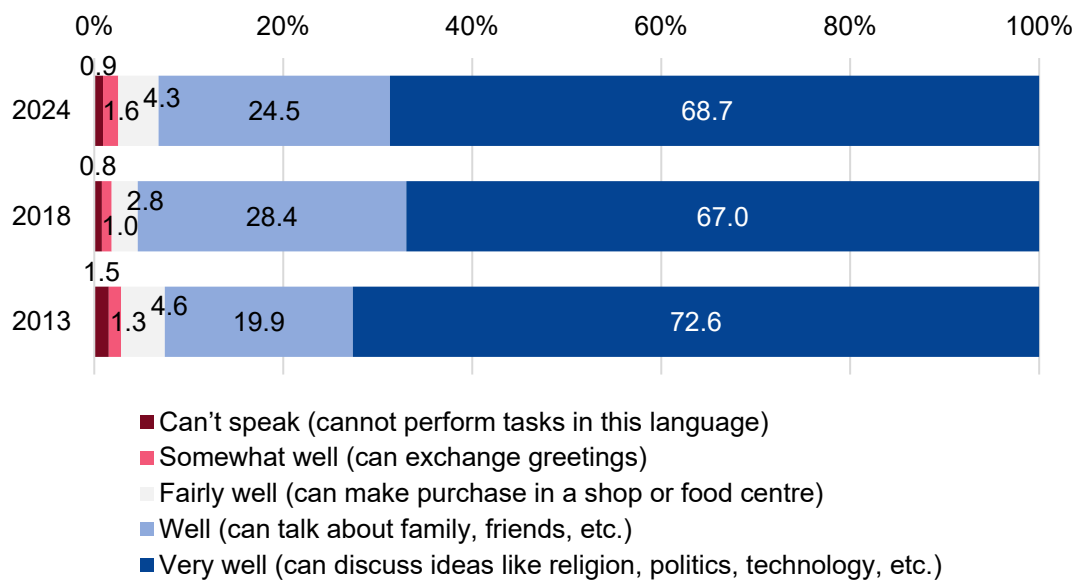
\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

### **2.2.3 Malay respondents' reported proficiency in their official Mother Tongue also remains largely unchanged from 2013 to 2024; over nine in 10 indicated that they could speak Malay well or very well**

In 2024, 93.2 per cent of Malay respondents indicated that they could speak Malay "well" or "very well", comparable to 92.5 per cent in 2013 (and 95.4 per cent in 2018)

(see Figure 2.2.3). Ensuing linear regressions revealed no other statistically significant demographic predictors of reported oral Malay proficiency among Malay respondents.

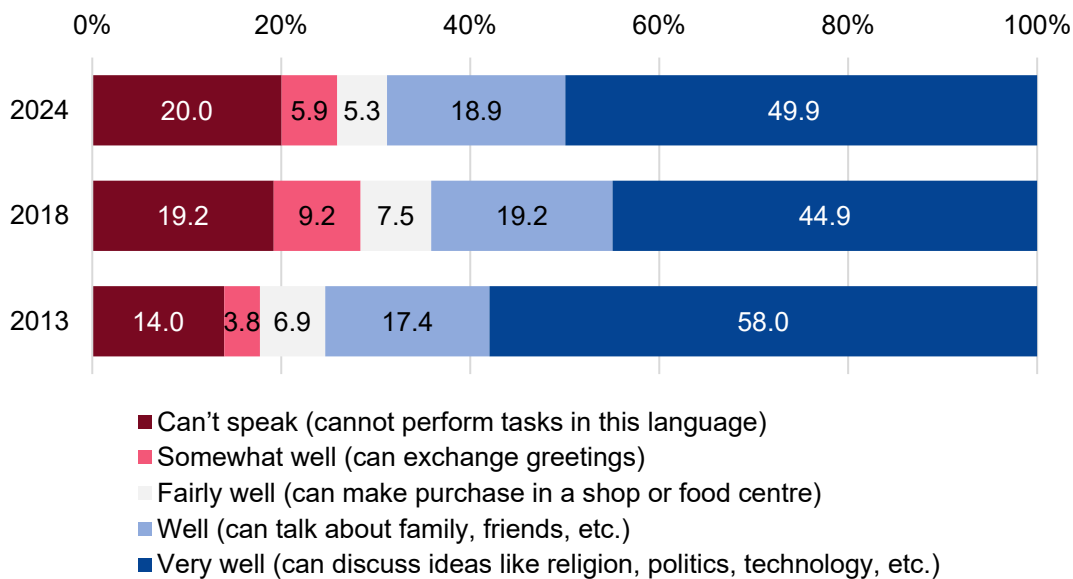
**Figure 2.2.3: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (Malay)?, Malay respondents' responses by wave**



#### **2.2.4 Over nine in 10 Indian respondents of Tamil descent reported speaking Tamil well or very well**

In 2024, 68.8 per cent of Indian respondents indicated that they could speak Tamil “well” or “very well” (18.9 per cent and 49.9 per cent respectively), down from 75.4 per cent in 2013, but a slight increase compared to 2018 (64.1 per cent). Correspondingly, the proportion of Indian respondents who reported that they “can’t speak” Tamil increased from 14 per cent in 2013 to 20 per cent in 2024, while the share indicating that they could speak Tamil only “somewhat well” declined from 9.2 per cent in 2018 to 5.9 per cent in 2024 (see Figure 2.2.4).

**Figure 2.2.4: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (Tamil)?, Indian respondents' responses by wave**



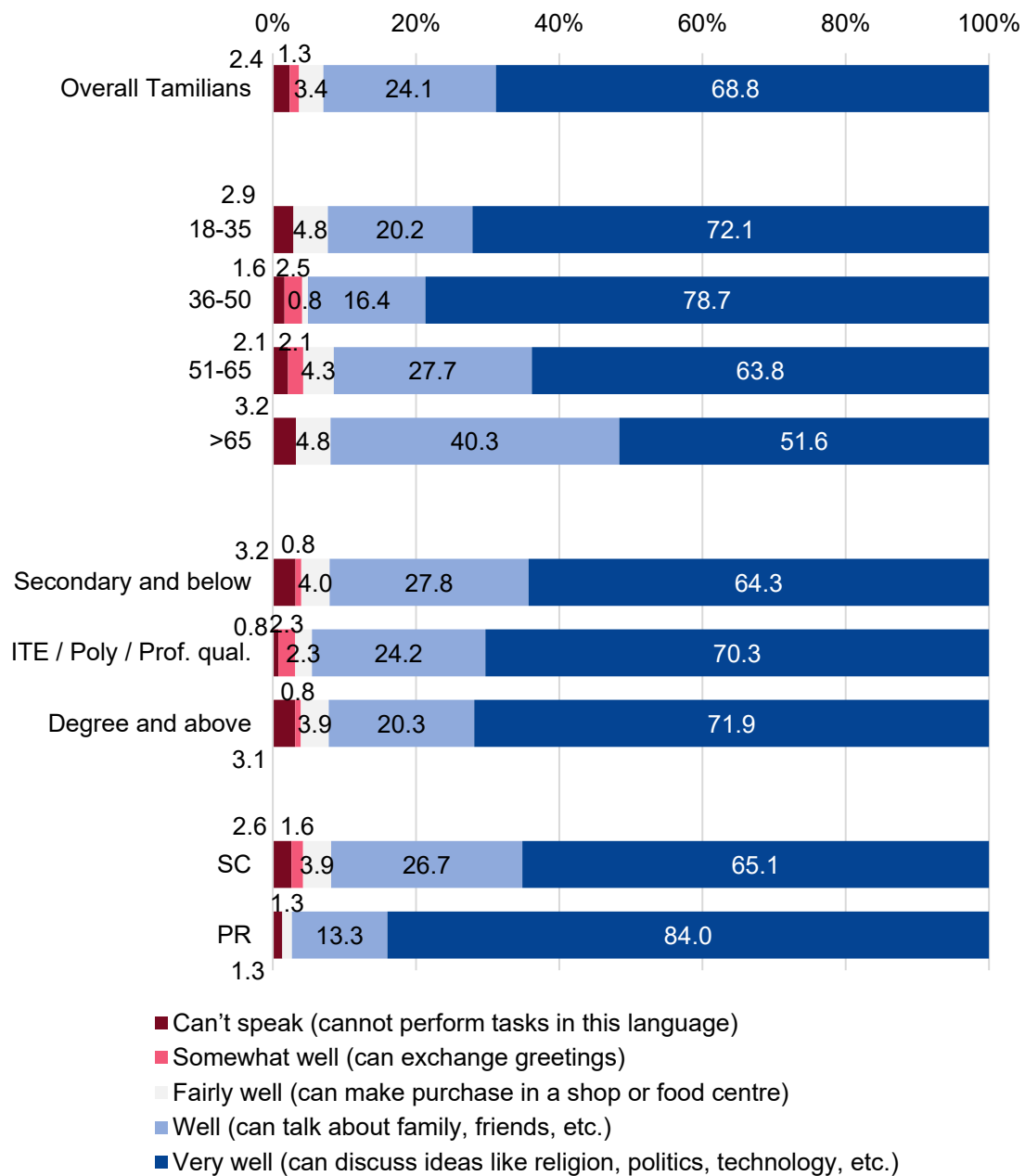
However, Indians in Singapore are a linguistically heterogeneous group relative to Malays and Chinese. Hence, we further proceed to peruse self-rated oral Tamil proficiency with only Indians of Tamil or Tamilian descent. For this subset of respondents comprising 49 per cent of the overall Indian respondent pool, over nine in 10 respondents indicated being able to speak Tamil well or very well (92.9 per cent), and close to seven in 10 respondents indicated speaking Tamil very well (68.8 per cent) (see Figure 2.2.5).

### ***2.2.5 Younger, higher-educated, and PR Indian respondents of Tamil descent were more likely to indicate speaking Tamil very well compared to their peers***

We proceed to present selected crosstabulations by age, although the results should be interpreted with the understanding that linear regressions revealed no statistically

significant demographic predictors of reported oral Tamil proficiency among Indian respondents of Tamil descent. Younger respondents in this subset were more likely to indicate strong proficiency (over seven in 10 respondents of Tamilian descent vs under two-thirds of those 51-65 and just over half of those over 65 years old). Degree-educated Indians of Tamil descent were unsurprisingly also more likely to indicate strong oral proficiency in Tamil (71.9 per cent) compared to their peers (64.3 per cent for those with secondary and below education). Greater proportions of PRs of Tamilian descent (84.0 per cent) also indicated speaking Tamil very well as compared to their SC counterparts (65.1 per cent) (see Figure 2.2.5).

**Figure 2.2.5: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (Tamil)?, Tamilian respondents' responses by demographics\***



\*Question on dialect group / ethno-linguistic background only asked in the latest 2024 wave to differentiate Indian Tamil respondents from other Indian respondents; hence, no comparisons across RRL waves are available.

### 2.3 Heritage Language Proficiency

While heritage languages are not formally taught in schools and have historically been discouraged, they remain in active use in Singapore (DOS, 2021). In recent years, there has also been growing interest, particularly among younger Singaporeans, in preserving and learning these languages (Tang, 2022b). As a result, we may observe a different relationship between age, time, and self-reported proficiency compared to English and the official Mother Tongues.

The DOS data on frequency of language use at home provides an important long-run backdrop to the RRL findings on heritage languages. Chinese dialects, in particular, have declined sharply as the language most frequently spoken at home, from 23.8 per cent of residents aged five and over in 2000 to 8.7 per cent in 2020. Among Chinese residents specifically, the decline is also stark: the share speaking Chinese dialects most frequently at home fell from 30.7 per cent in 2000 to 11.8 per cent in 2020 (DOS, 2026). This long-term decline in dominant home use is consistent with decades of English- and Mandarin Chinese-centred language policy and schooling.

At the same time, the RRL findings suggest that reduced home dominance does not necessarily mean complete loss of oral ability. In 2024, a majority of respondents still reported being able to speak their heritage language at least well, and older respondents were especially likely to report stronger proficiency. Among Chinese respondents who identified a Chinese dialect as their heritage language, overall proficiency dipped slightly from 2018 to 2024, but the proportion indicating that they could speak it very well increased. This suggests a more uneven pattern: Chinese dialects have clearly declined as everyday home languages, but pockets of strong proficiency remain.

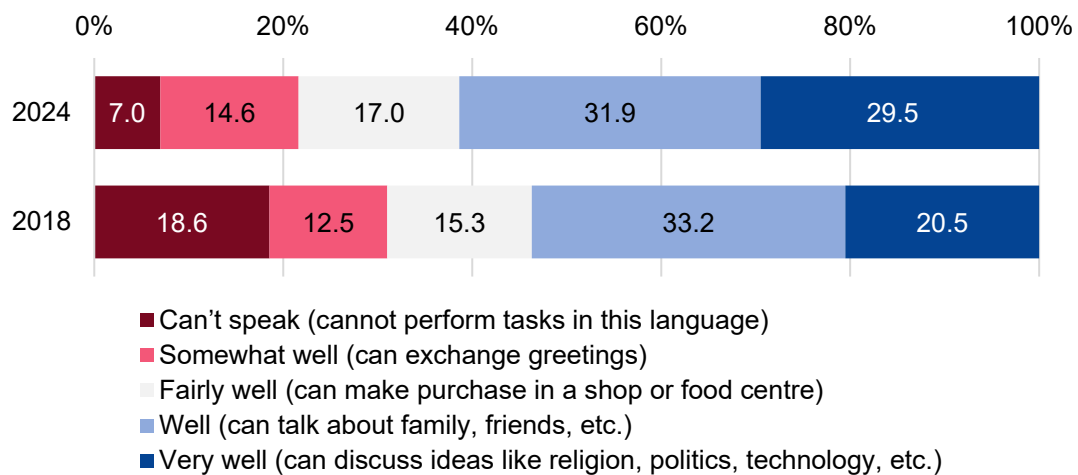
For Malay respondents, “heritage language” in the RRL survey does not simply refer to Malay, which is the official Mother Tongue, but may include sub-ethnic languages such as Javanese, Boyanese, or Bugis. DOS’ Malay home-language figures therefore should not be treated as a direct comparator for Malay respondents’ heritage-language proficiency in RRL.

This section first tracks changes in heritage language proficiency across the 2018 and 2024 RRL waves (Section 2.3.1). It then examines differences by key demographic characteristics in 2024, including age, race, education level, and citizenship status (Sections 2.3.2 to 2.3.6), before using a linear regression model to assess which factors remain associated with heritage language proficiency after accounting for other variables (Section 2.3.7).

### ***2.3.1 The proportion of respondents who could speak their heritage language at least “well” increased from 2018 to 2024***

The proportion of respondents who reported being able to speak their heritage language at least “well” increased from 53.7 per cent in 2018 to 61.4 per cent in 2024. Correspondingly, the proportion indicating that they “can’t speak” their heritage language fell from 18.6 per cent in 2018 to 7 per cent in 2024 (see Figure 2.3.1).

**Figure 2.3.1: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (Heritage language)?, responses by wave, full sample\***

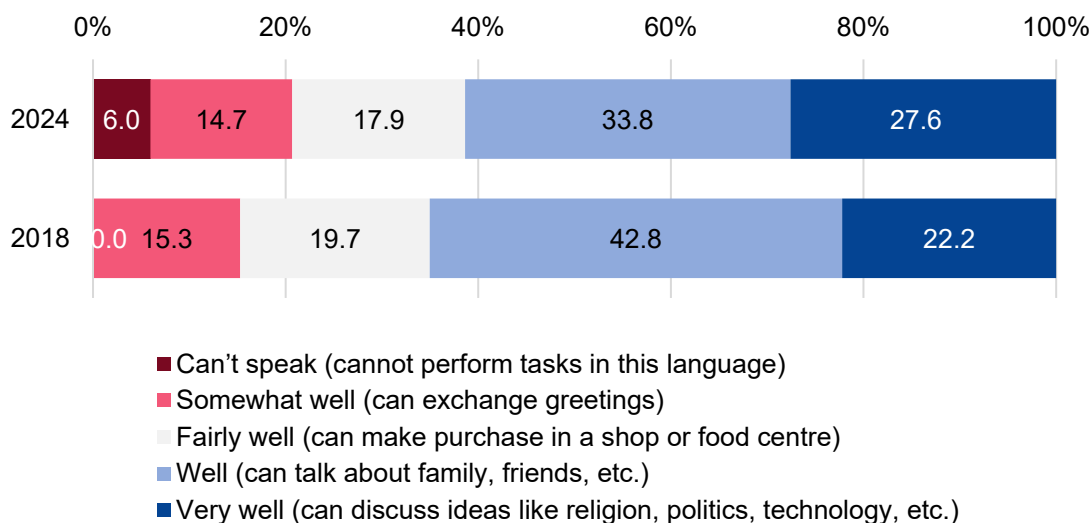


\*The results for the 2013 RRL sample have been omitted, as the question item was asked in a different format and is hence not comparable with the 2018 and 2024 RRL responses.

**2.3.2 However, Chinese respondents indicating a Chinese dialect as their heritage language were slightly less likely in 2024 than in 2018 to indicate speaking their heritage language well or very well**

Chinese respondents who identified a Chinese dialect as their heritage language were slightly less likely in 2024 than in 2018 to indicate that they could speak it “well” or “very well” (61.4 per cent vs. 65.0 per cent respectively). Notwithstanding this, the proportion indicating they could speak the dialect very well increased (27.6 per cent in 2024 vs. 22.2 per cent in 2018), although this was offset by a decline in those indicating they could speak it well (33.8 per cent in 2024 vs. 42.8 per cent in 2018). At the same time, a larger share in 2024 said they could not speak the dialect at all (6.0 per cent, up from virtually none in 2018), suggesting some simultaneous strengthening at the top end but erosion at the bottom end of heritage language proficiency for this group (see Figure 2.3.2).

**Figure 2.3.2: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (Heritage language)?, 2024 responses for Chinese respondents indicating a Chinese dialect as heritage language**



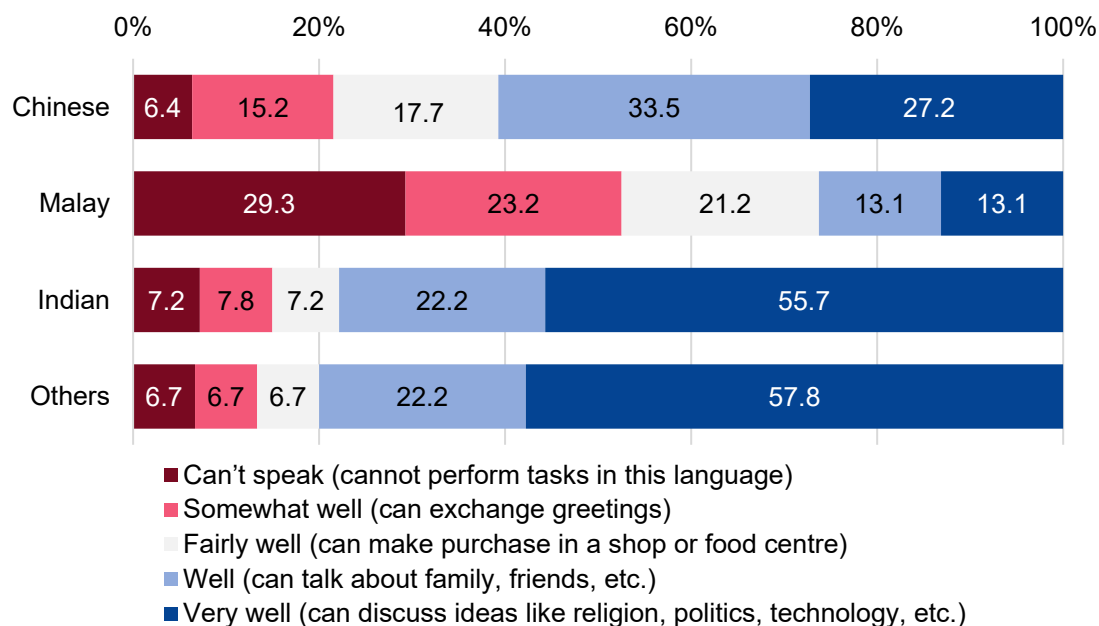
*\*The results for the 2013 RRL sample have been omitted, as the question item was asked in a different format and is hence not comparable with the 2018 and 2024 RRL responses.*

### ***2.3.3 Indian respondents reported the highest heritage language proficiency; Malay respondents indicated the lowest levels of heritage language proficiency***

Indian respondents were most likely to indicate that they could speak their heritage language at least “well” (77.9 per cent). Chinese respondents reported lower proficiency, with 60.7 per cent indicating that they could speak their heritage language well or very well. Malay respondents reported the lowest heritage language proficiency; only 26.2 per cent indicated that they could speak their heritage language “well” or “very well”, and they were the most likely to report that they “can’t speak” their heritage language (29.3 per cent) (see Figure 2.3.3). These findings reflect how, for many Chinese respondents, “heritage language” often refers to dialects such as Hokkien, Teochew, or Cantonese rather than standard Mandarin. Decades of Mandarin-centric schooling and the Speak Mandarin Campaign, alongside English use, have shifted

families away from dialect transmission. For Malay respondents, “heritage language” would similarly capture sub-ethnic languages (including Javanese, Boyanese, and Bugis) that have been displaced post-independence by standard Malay and English.

**Figure 2.3.3: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (Heritage language)?, 2024 responses by race\***



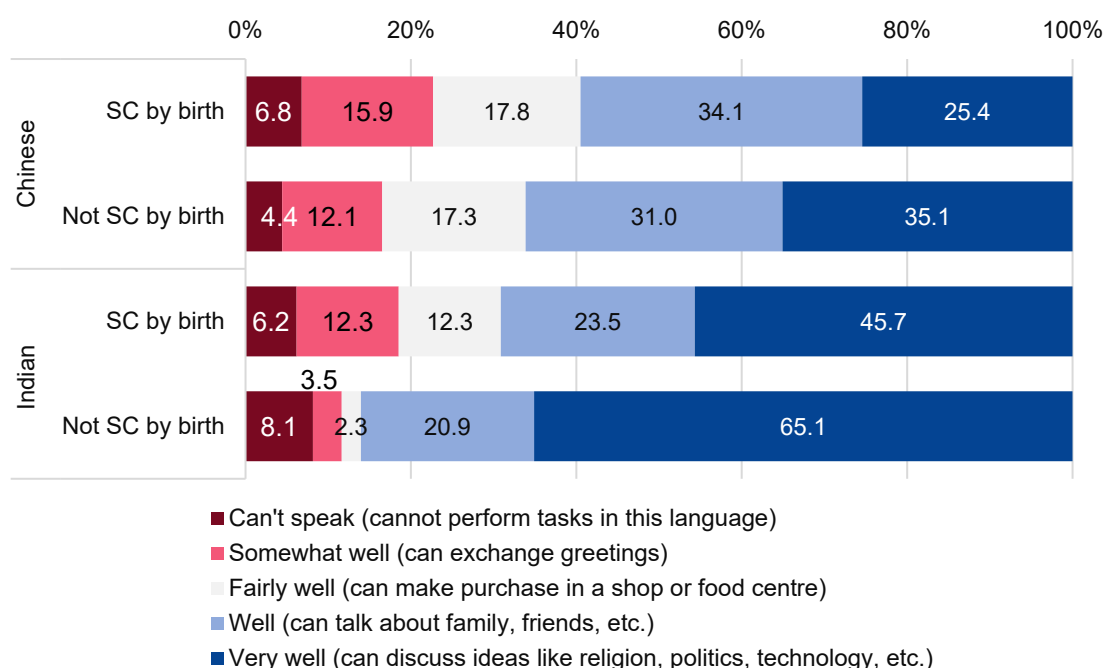
\*Proportions shown for Chinese respondents in this figure differ slightly from those presented in Figure 2.3.2 as this figure shows responses for all Chinese respondents, including those indicating non-Chinese dialects (e.g., Thai, Vietnamese, Burmese, etc.)

### **2.3.4 Heritage language proficiency is impacted significantly by citizenship status, with Chinese and Indian PRs and naturalised citizens indicating higher heritage language proficiencies compared to citizen-by-birth peers**

Across both Chinese and Indian respondents, those who were not SCs by birth were generally more likely than SCs by birth to indicate that they could speak their heritage language “very well”. For instance, among Chinese respondents, the proportion indicating very well for those not SC by birth was 35.1 per cent as compared to 25.4

per cent for SC-by-birth Chinese. Among Indian respondents, the corresponding difference was even larger (65.1 per cent for those not SC by birth vs. 45.7 per cent for SC by birth). Conversely, SCs by birth in both groups were generally more represented in the lower and middle proficiency categories, suggesting comparatively weaker heritage language command overall (see Figure 2.3.4).

**Figure 2.3.4: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (Heritage language)?, 2024 responses by race and citizen by birth status\***

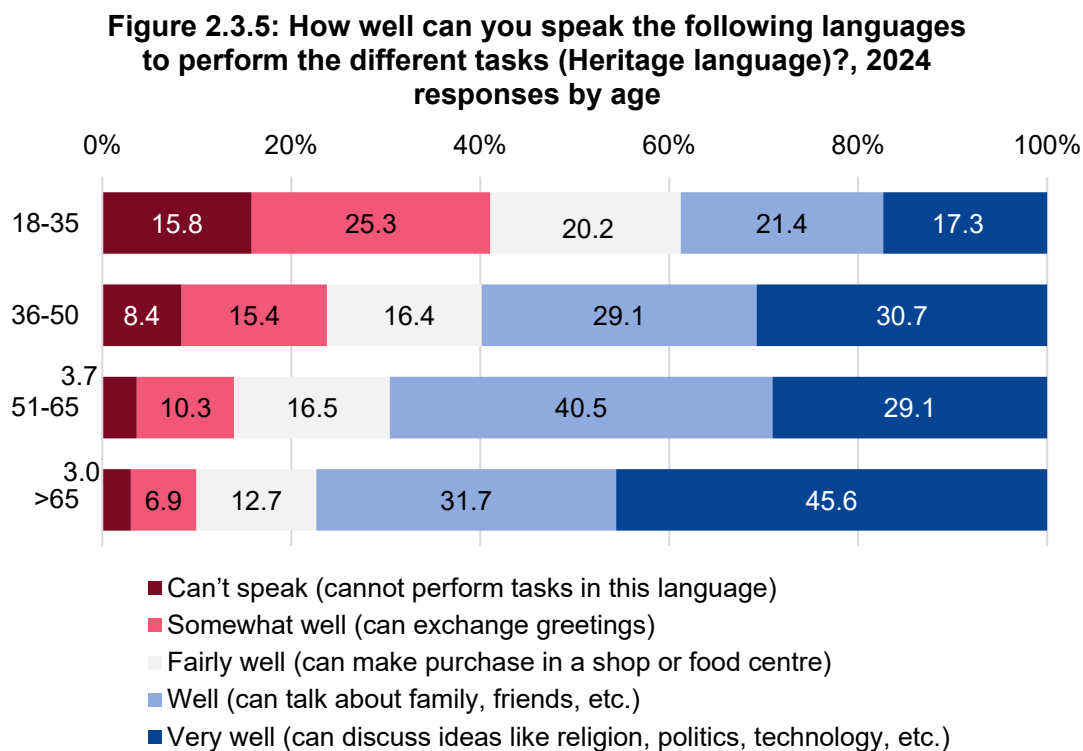


\*The sample size of PRs for Malays and Others was too small to derive statistically significant conclusions; hence, breakdowns for these categories were omitted; 'Not SC by birth' also includes PRs.

### ***2.3.5 Older respondents reported stronger proficiencies in heritage languages; over three-quarters of those aged over 65 indicated they could speak their heritage language well or very well***

Reported heritage language proficiency varied by age; under four in 10 respondents aged 18–35 reported being able to speak their heritage language at least “well” (38.7 per cent). This proportion was higher among older cohorts; 59.8 per cent of those aged

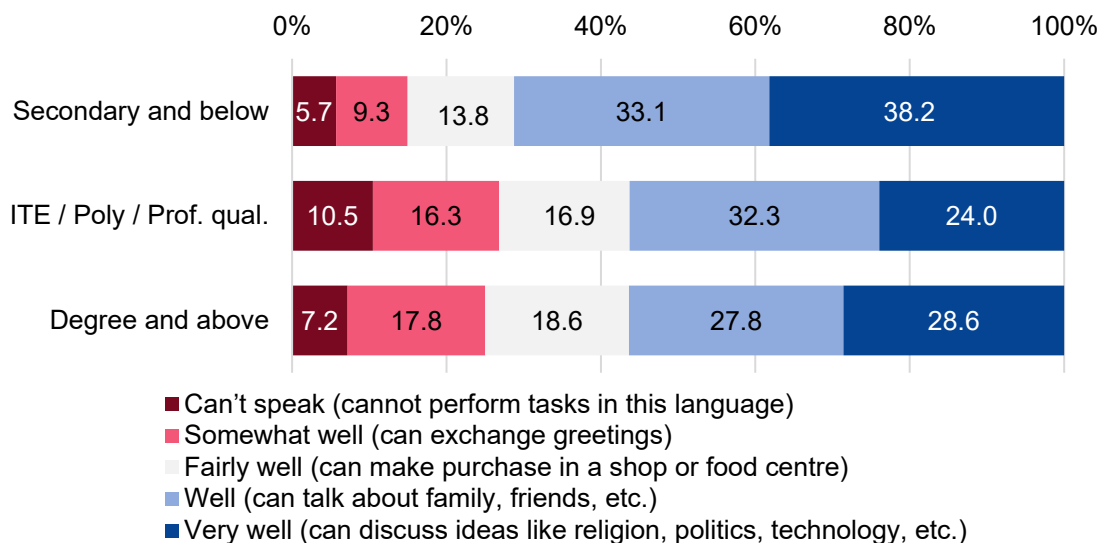
36–50, 69.6 per cent of those aged 51–65, and 77.3 per cent of respondents aged over 65 indicated that they could speak their heritage language “well” or “very well” (see Figure 2.3.5).



### ***2.3.6 Respondents with secondary education and below reported stronger heritage language proficiency than those with post-secondary qualifications***

Over seven in 10 respondents with secondary education and below indicated that they could speak their heritage language at least “well” (71.3 per cent). In contrast, around 56 per cent of respondents with post-secondary qualifications reported the same; this was 56.3 per cent among those with ITE, Polytechnic, or professional qualifications and 56.4 per cent among degree holders (see Figure 2.3.6).

**Figure 2.3.6: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (Heritage language)?, 2024 responses by education level**



### ***2.3.7 Race, age, and citizenship are statistically significant predictors of heritage language proficiency***

In line with the preceding crosstabulations, linear regression analysis based on the full RRL sample indicate that respondents who are older and PRs tended to report higher heritage language proficiency, after accounting for other factors. Race was also a statistically significant predictor; non-Malay respondents reported higher heritage language proficiency on average. Gender, education level, housing type, and income were not statistically significant predictors of heritage language proficiency. While the crosstabulations suggest that respondents with lower education reported higher heritage language proficiency, this association was not statistically significant after accounting for age and other factors, suggesting that the observed education gradient may potentially be driven by cohort differences in age and related demographic composition too (see Table 2.3.7).

**Table 2.3.7: Heritage language proficiency (linear regression)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>-.116***</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>.074**</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>.232***</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	-.017
<b>Education</b>	-.039
<b>Housing</b>	-.032
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	.062
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	<b>.130***</b>
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.091

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## 2.4 Singlish Proficiency

Singlish has historically been discouraged in formal settings, including through public campaigns that emphasised the importance of Standard English. However, Singlish remains widely used as a “contact language spoken by almost every Singaporean”, and continues to function as a salient marker of local identity and informality (Tan, 2017, p. 87).

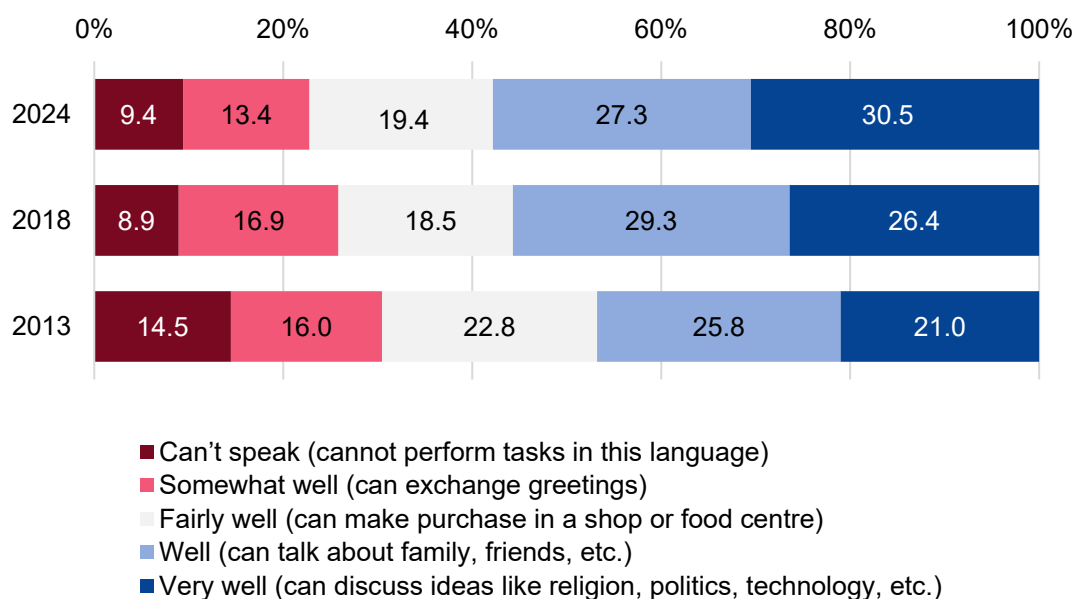
While DOS does not measure Singlish use, the growth of English as a home language provides part of the broader linguistic context in which Singlish has expanded as an informal contact language. The RRL survey is especially useful here because it captures a language variety that is socially salient but not reflected in official home-language categories. Against this backdrop, this section examines how respondents assess their Singlish proficiency across the three RRL waves, and how self-assessed

proficiency varies across demographic groups in 2024, including age, race, education level, socio-economic indicators, and citizenship status. It concludes with a regression analysis to assess which associations remain after accounting for other factors.

### **2.4.1 The proportion of respondents who could speak Singlish at least “well” increased from 2013 to 2024; close to six in 10 indicated this in 2024**

The proportion of respondents who reported being able to speak Singlish at least “well” increased from 46.8 per cent in 2013 to 57.8 per cent in 2024 (it also rose to 55.7 per cent in 2018) (see Figure 2.4.1).

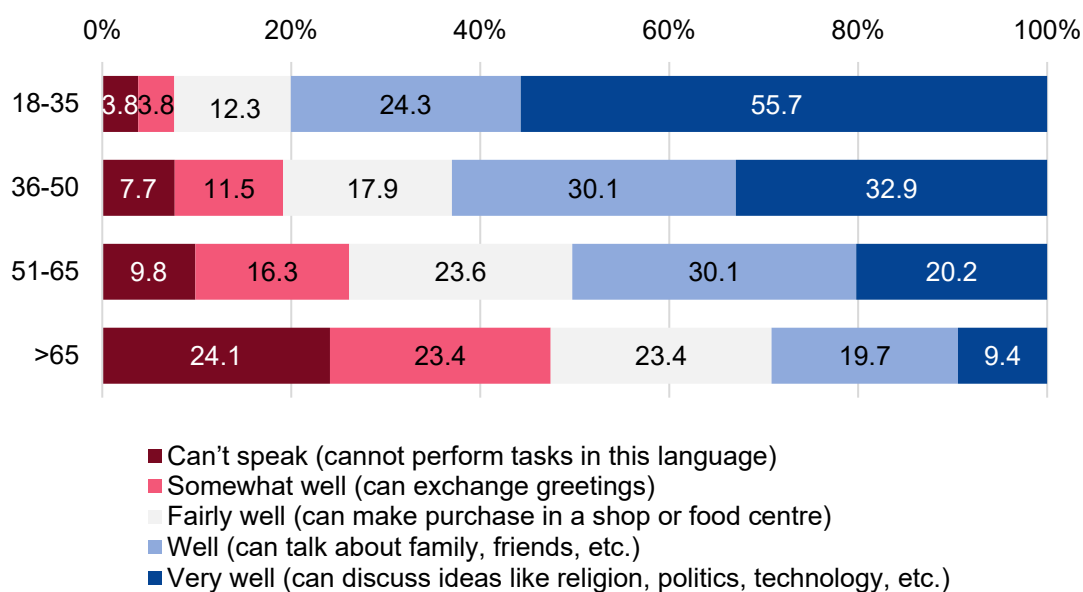
**Figure 2.4.1: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (Singlish)?, responses by wave**



### **2.4.2 Younger respondents were more likely to indicate higher proficiency in speaking Singlish**

Four in five respondents aged 18–35 reported being able to speak Singlish at least “well” (80 per cent). This proportion declined with age; it was 63 per cent among those aged 36–50, 50.3 per cent among those aged 51–65, and 29.1 per cent among respondents aged over 65 (see Figure 2.4.2).

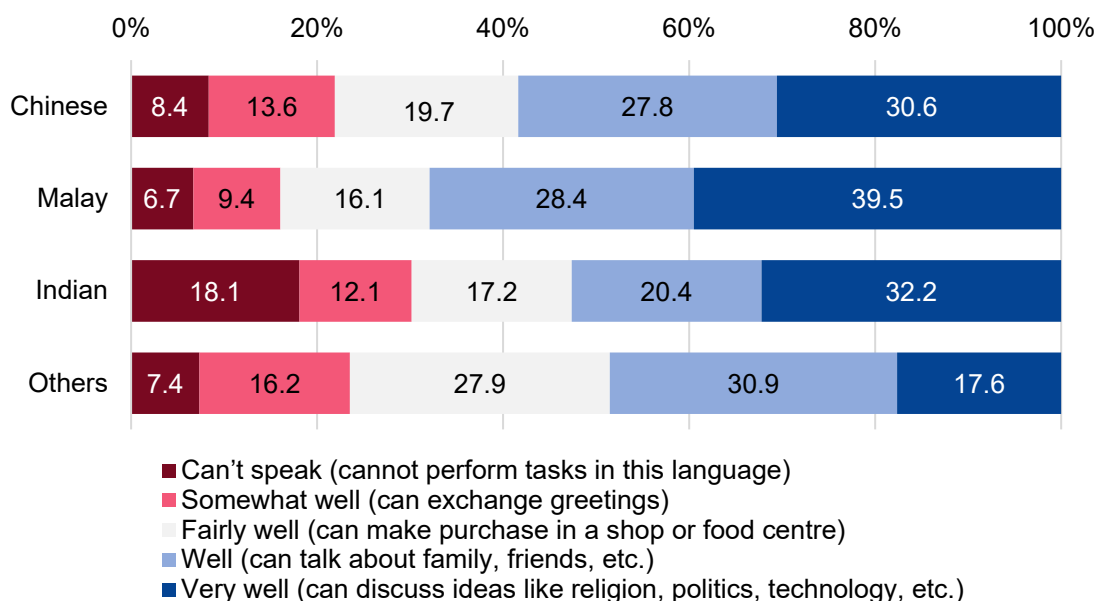
**Figure 2.4.2: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (Singlish)?, 2024 responses by age**



### 2.4.3 Malay respondents reported the highest Singlish proficiency

Singlish proficiency varied across racial groups, with around two-thirds of Malay respondents indicating that they could speak Singlish at least “well” (67.9 per cent), the highest across the four racial groups. Meanwhile, 58.4 per cent of Chinese respondents and 52.6 per cent of Indian respondents said the same (see Figure 2.4.3).

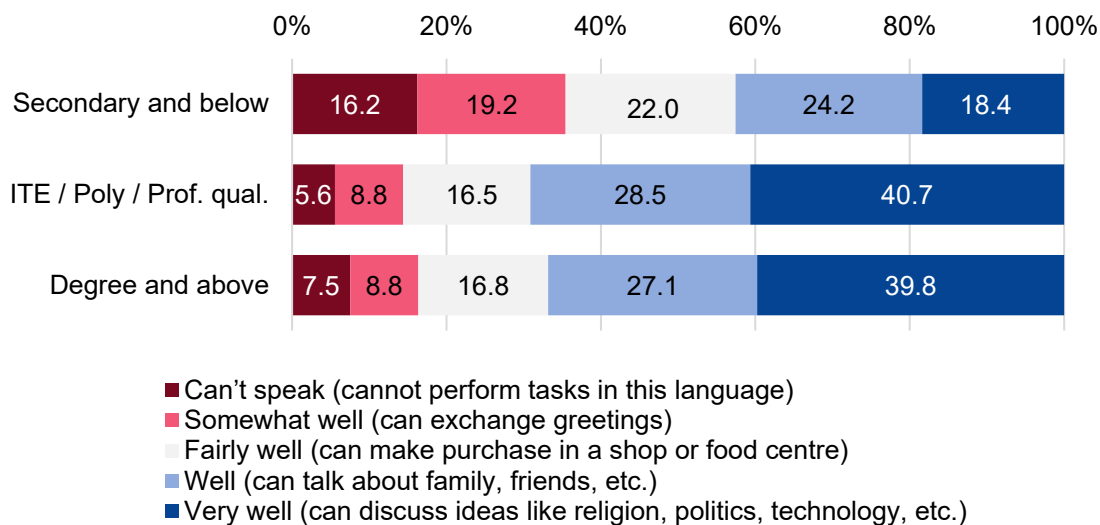
**Figure 2.4.3: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (Singlish)?, 2024 responses by race**



**2.4.4 Higher-educated respondents reported stronger Singlish proficiency; over two-thirds of those with post-secondary qualifications indicated they could speak Singlish well or very well**

Over two-thirds of respondents with post-secondary qualifications indicated that they could speak Singlish at least “well”; this was 69.2 per cent among those with ITE, Polytechnic, or professional qualifications and 66.9 per cent among degree holders. In contrast, under half of respondents with secondary education and below reported being able to speak Singlish well or very well (42.6 per cent). This gap was driven mainly by higher-educated respondents being substantially more likely to report speaking Singlish “very well” (40.7 per cent among those with ITE, Polytechnic, or professional qualifications and 39.8 per cent among degree holders), compared to those with secondary education and below (18.4 per cent) (see Figure 2.4.4).

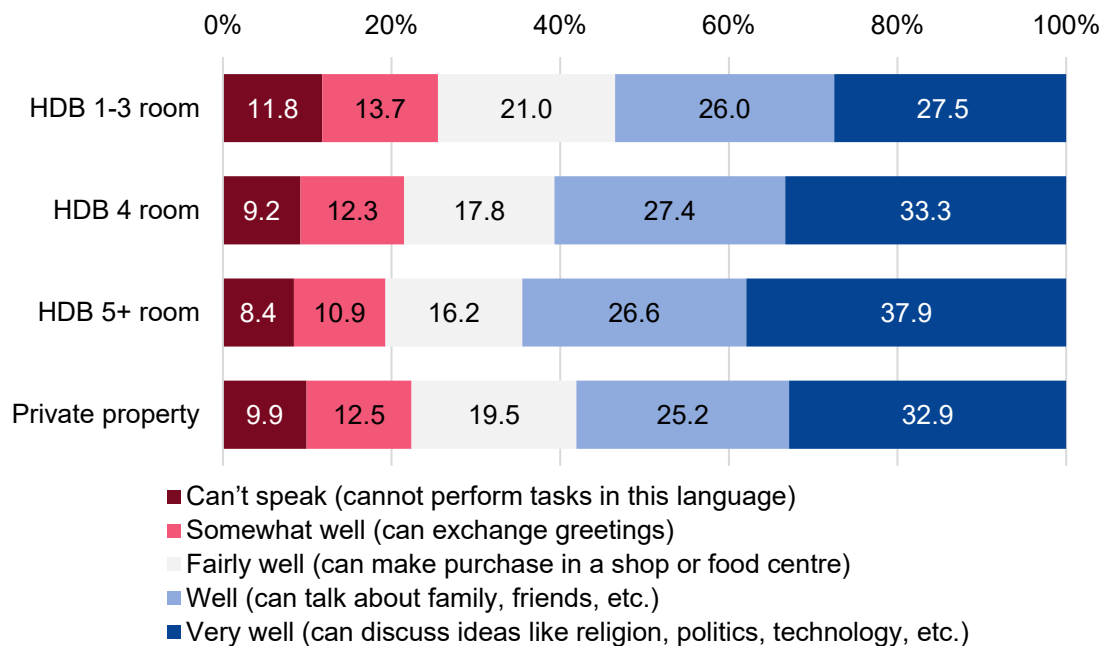
**Figure 2.4.4: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (Singlish)?, 2024 responses by education level**



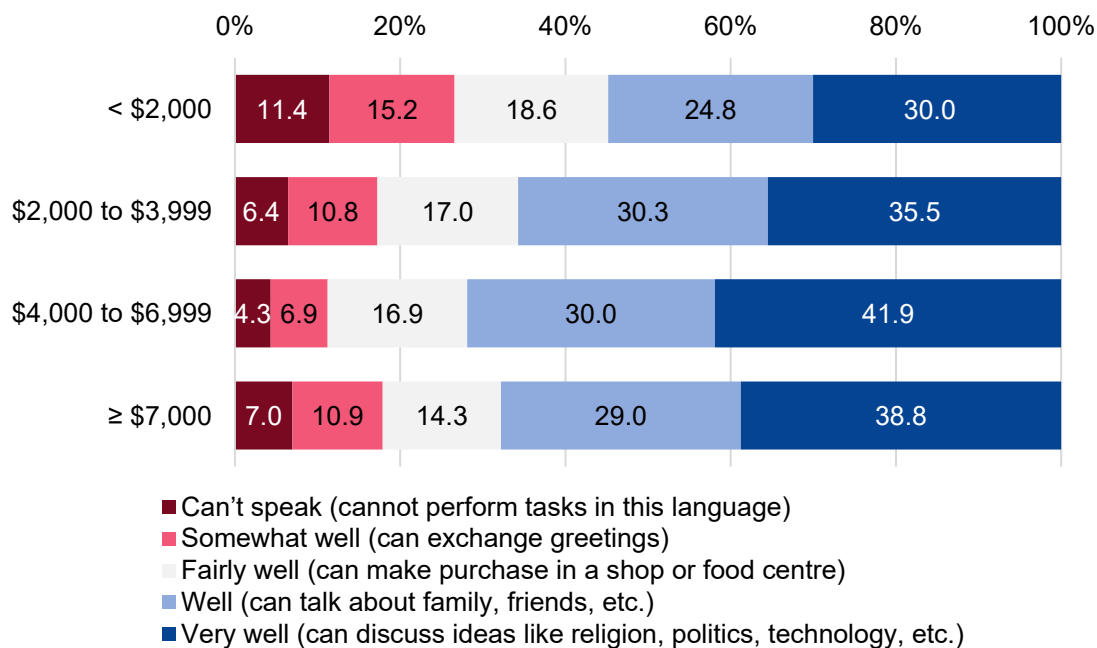
### ***2.4.5 Singlish proficiency was tied to income and housing type in a curvilinear trend***

Singlish proficiency traces an inverted-U along socio-economic lines: both the lowest and the highest status groups report weaker command, while the middle strata appear most fluent. Among earners below S\$2,000, only 54.8 per cent say they can speak Singlish “well” or “very well”; the share rises steadily through the lower- and upper-middle brackets, peaking at 71.9 per cent for those earning S\$4,000–6,999, then dips to 67.8 per cent among those earning S\$7,000 or more (see Figure 2.4.5b). Housing tells a parallel story: just over half of residents in one- to three-room HDB flats (53.5 per cent) are proficient, the proportion climbs in four- and five-room flats (60.7 per cent and 64.5 per cent), and falls again for private-property dwellers (58.1 per cent) (see Figure 2.4.5a). Together, the two figures suggest that Singlish is most strongly anchored in Singapore’s heartland middle class, while both the most economically disadvantaged and the most affluent are less likely to use it with confidence.

**Figure 2.4.5a: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (Singlish)?, 2024 responses by housing type**



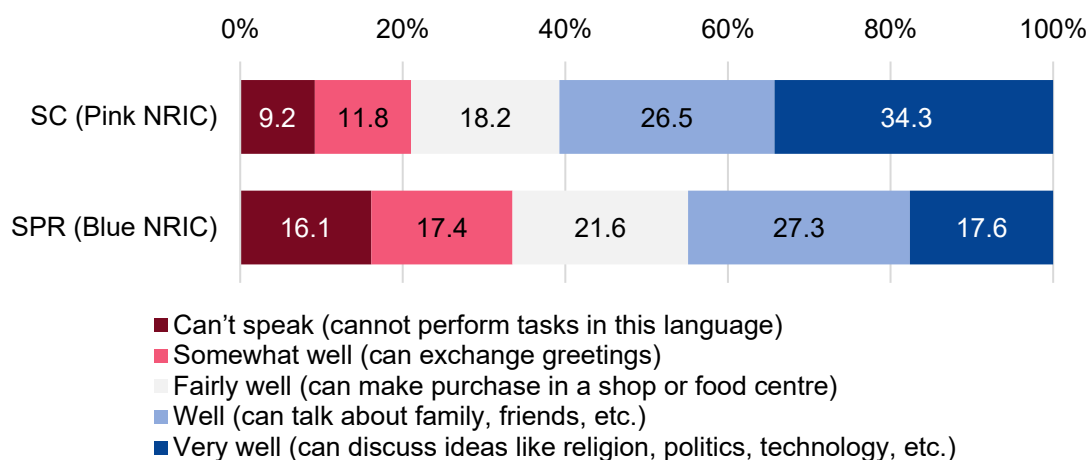
**Figure 2.4.5b: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (Singlish)?, 2024 responses by income**



#### **2.4.6 Six in 10 SCs indicated higher levels of Singlish proficiency; over four in 10 PRs indicated likewise**

SCs were more likely to report a higher proficiency in speaking Singlish. Overall, 60.8 per cent of SCs indicated that they could speak Singlish at least “well” as compared to 44.9 per cent of PRs (see Figure 2.4.6).

**Figure 2.4.6: How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks (Singlish)?, 2024 responses by citizenship status**



#### **2.4.7 Race, age, gender, education, income, and citizenship were statistically significant predictors of Singlish proficiency**

In line with the preceding crosstabulations, linear regression analysis based on the full RRL sample indicate that respondents who were Malay (or non-Indian), younger, male, higher-educated, higher-income, and Singapore citizens tended to report higher perceived Singlish proficiency (see Table 2.4.7).

**Table 2.4.7: Singlish proficiency (linear regression)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>.051**</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>-.061**</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>-.290***</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	<b>-.075***</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>.110***</b>
<b>Housing</b>	.017
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	<b>.056*</b>
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	<b>-.161***</b>
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.166

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## **2.5 Perceptions of Change in English Standards Over Time**

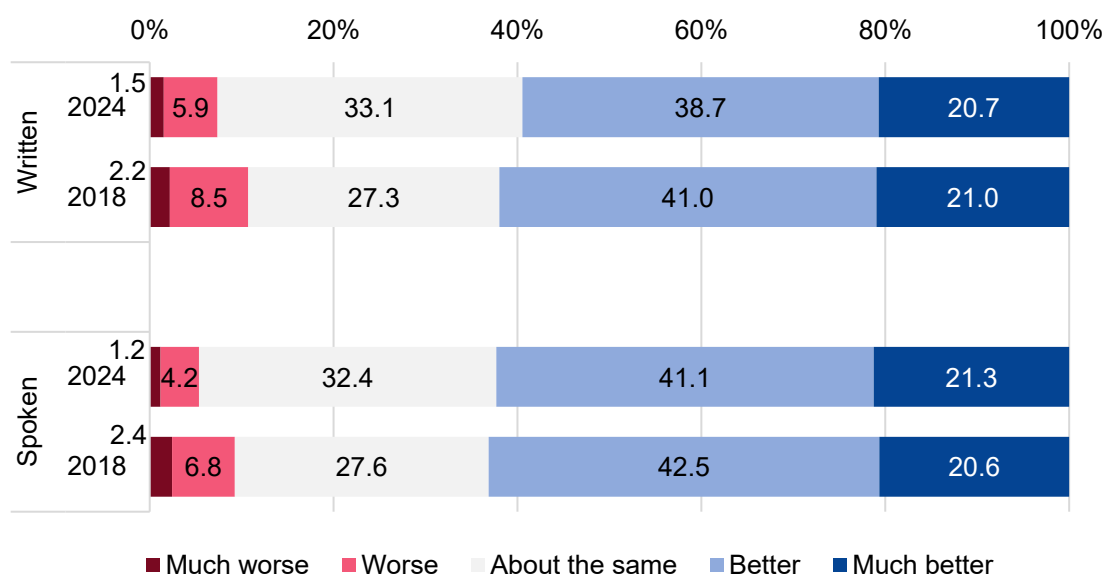
This section examines how respondents perceive changes in general written and spoken English standards today compared to 10 years ago. It first compares perceptions across the 2018 and 2024 waves, and then describes how views vary across key demographic groups in 2024, including age, race, education, and socio-economic indicators. It concludes with regression analyses for spoken and written English to assess which demographic differences remain associated with perceptions of change after accounting for other factors.

### **2.5.1 Perceptions of general English standards remained broadly stable between 2018 and 2024**

Across both waves, around six in 10 respondents perceived the general English standard today to be better than that of 10 years ago. In 2024, 59.4 per cent felt that

written English was better or much better than a decade ago (compared to 62 per cent in 2018), while 62.4 per cent felt the same for spoken English (compared to 63.1 per cent in 2018). Correspondingly, around one-third of respondents in 2024 felt that standards were about the same (written: 33.1 per cent; spoken: 32.4 per cent), and only small minorities perceived standards to be worse (see Figure 2.5.1).

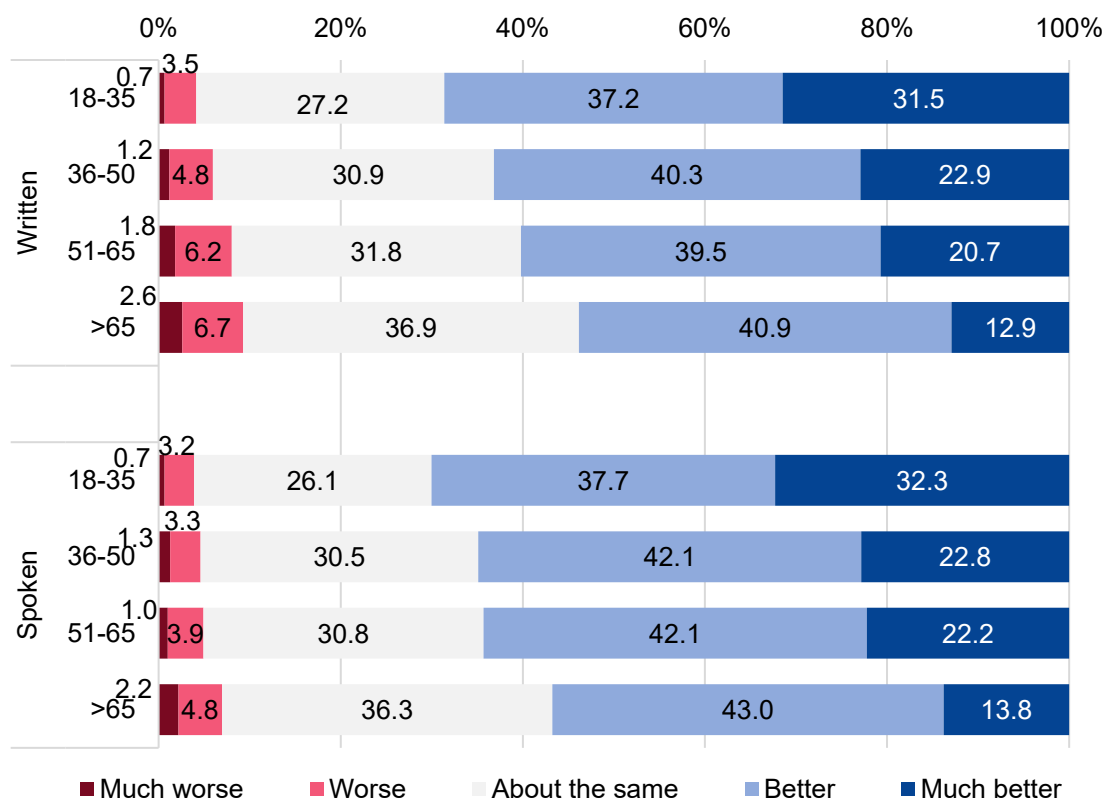
**Figure 2.5.1: Perception of general English standard as compared to 10 years ago, across waves**



### ***2.5.2 Younger respondents were more likely to perceive English standards today as better than 10 years ago***

Around seven in 10 respondents aged 18–35 felt that both written and spoken English standards today were better or much better than 10 years ago (written: 68.7 per cent; spoken: 70 per cent). This proportion declined among older cohorts; among respondents aged over 65, 53.8 per cent perceived written English standards to be better or much better, and 56.8 per cent perceived the same for spoken English (see Figure 2.5.2).

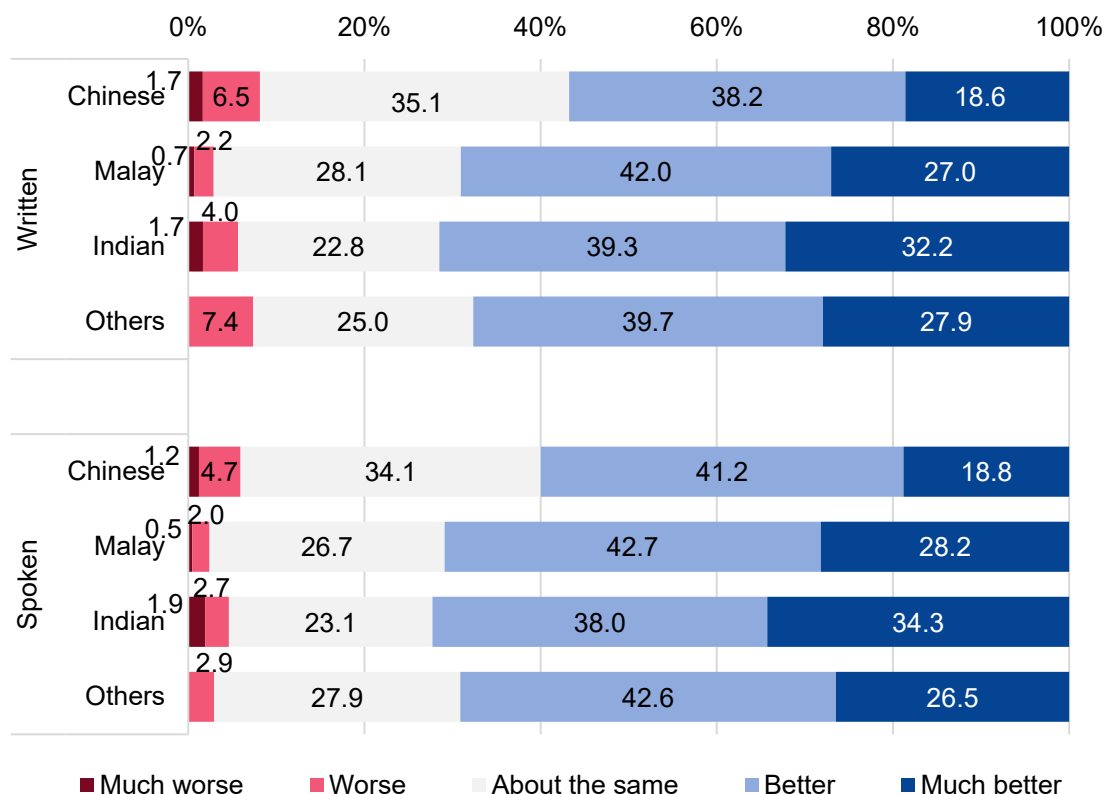
**Figure 2.5.2: Perception of general English standard as compared to 10 years ago, by age cohort (2024)**



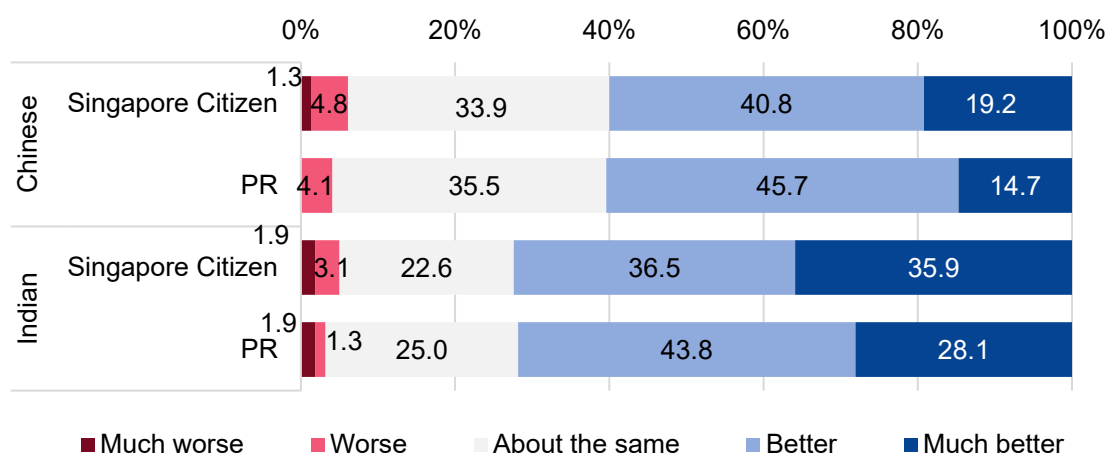
### ***2.5.3 Chinese respondents were the least likely to perceive English standards today as better compared to 10 years ago***

Approximately seven in 10 Malay and Indian respondents indicated that the written and spoken English standards are better or much better as compared to 10 years ago. Chinese respondents, on the other hand, were less likely to indicate likewise about the written and spoken English standards (56.8 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively) (see Figure 2.5.3a). Further breakdowns by citizenship are provided for reference and show that relatively similar proportions of Chinese and Indian SCs and PRs indicate that spoken English standards are better or much better today compared to 10 years ago, although slightly higher proportions of SCs selected the “much better” option.

**Figure 2.5.3a: Perception of general English standard as compared to 10 years ago, by race (2024)**

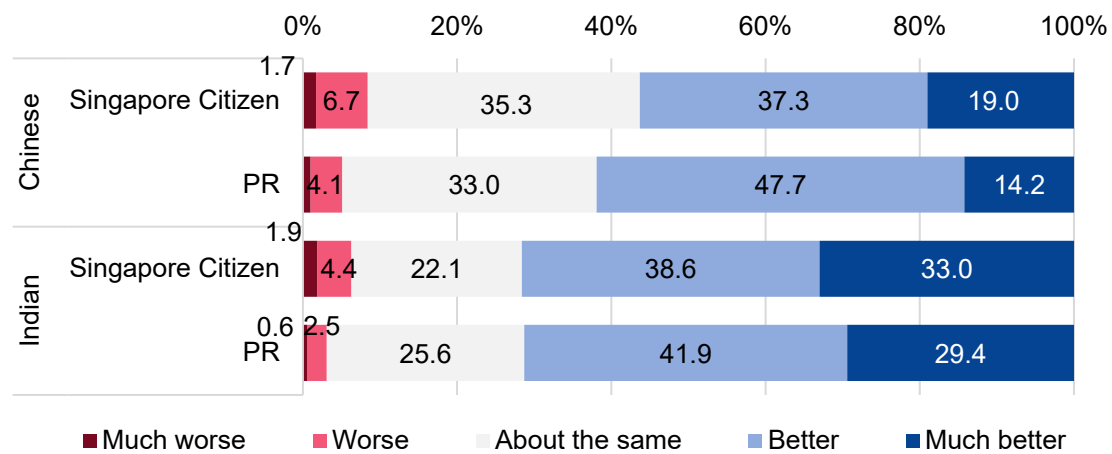


**Figure 2.5.3b: Perception of spoken English standard as compared to 10 years ago, by race and citizenship status (2024)\***



\*The sample size of PRs for Malays and Others was too small to derive statistically significant conclusions; hence, breakdowns for these categories were omitted.

**Figure 2.5.3c: Perception of written English standard as compared to 10 years ago, by race and citizenship status (2024)\***

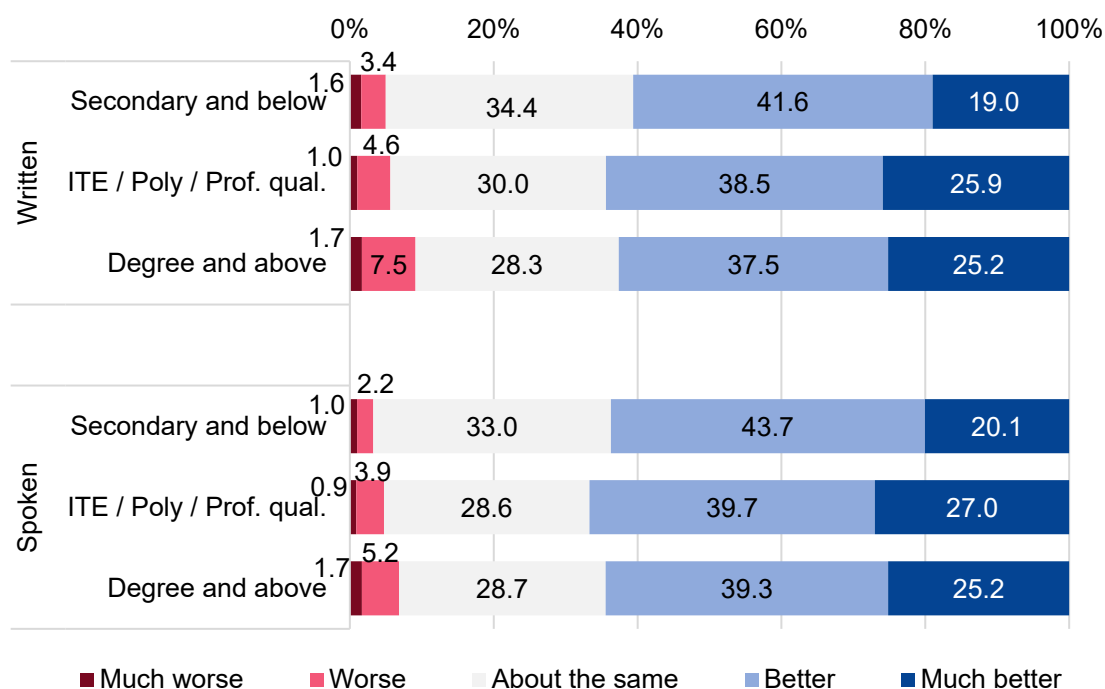


\*The sample size of PRs for Malays and Others was too small to derive statistically significant conclusions; hence, breakdowns for these categories were omitted.

#### **2.5.4 Perceptions of English standards today were broadly similar across education levels**

Perceptions of general English standards in 2024 were largely consistent across education groups. Around six in 10 respondents across all education levels perceived written English standards today to be better or much better than 10 years ago, ranging from 60.6 per cent among those with secondary education and below to 64.4 per cent among those with ITE, Polytechnic, or professional qualifications. A similar pattern was observed for spoken English, where about two-thirds across all education levels reported that standards were better or much better (ranging from 63.8 per cent to 66.7 per cent) (see Figure 2.5.4).

**Figure 2.5.4: Perception of general English standard as compared to 10 years ago, by education level (2024)**

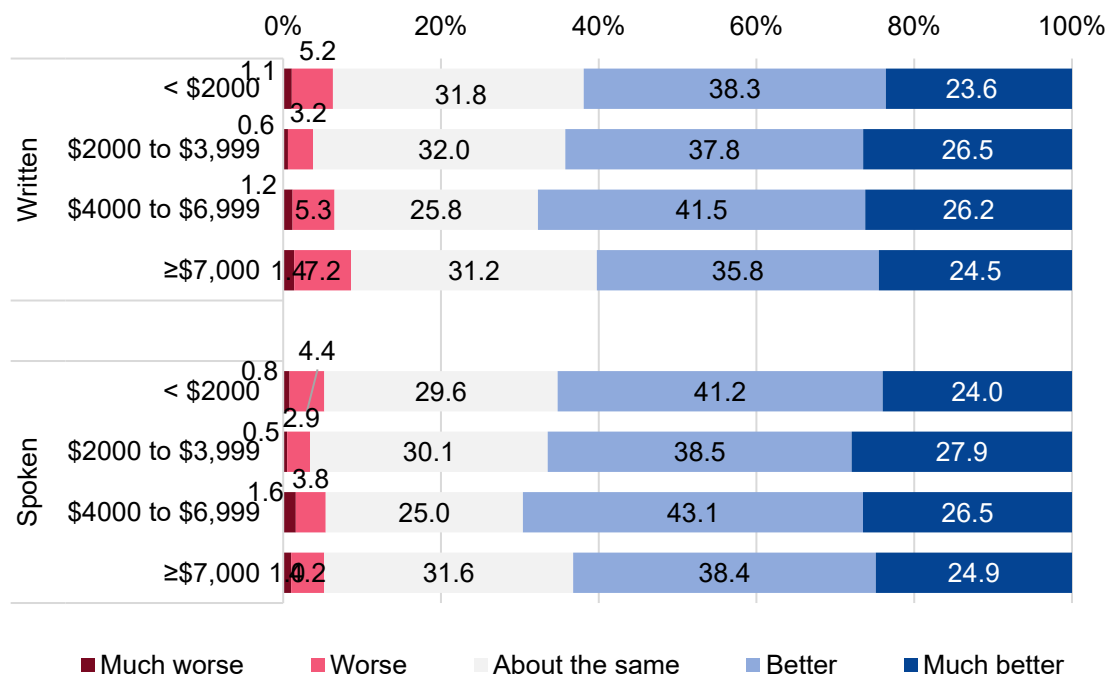


### ***2.5.5 Higher SES respondents were marginally less likely to perceive English standards as having improved***

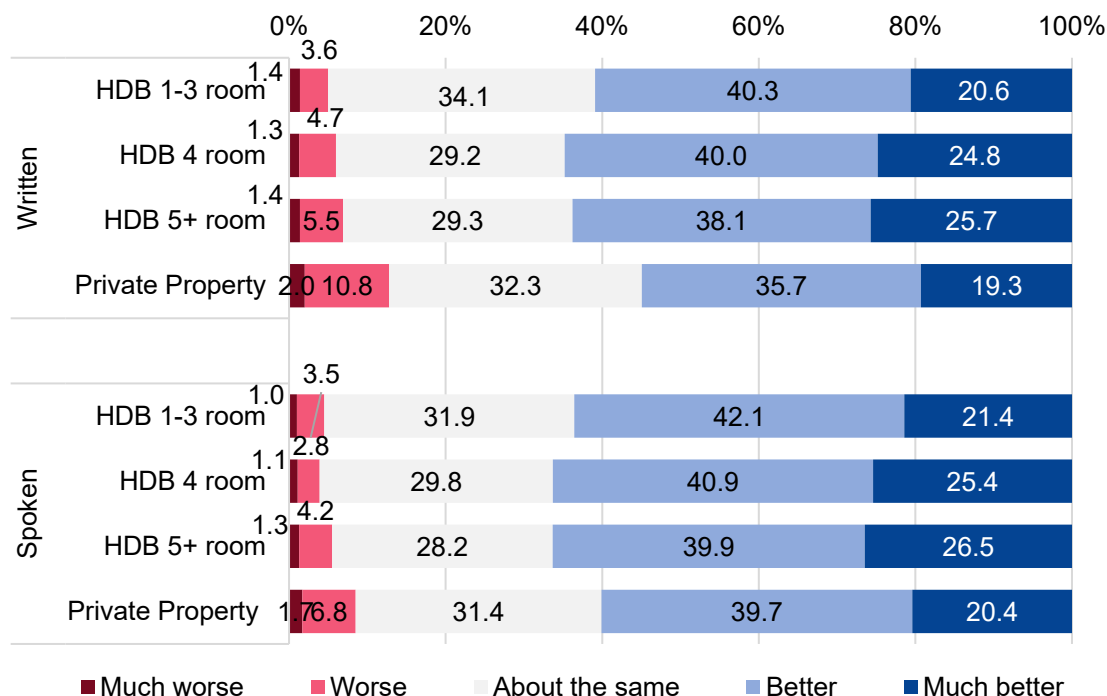
Perceptions of improvements in English standards varied only modestly by income and housing type in 2024. Across both written and spoken English, respondents earning \$4,000 to \$6,999 were most likely to perceive standards as better or much better than 10 years ago (written: 67.7 per cent; spoken: 69.6 per cent), while those earning \$7,000 and above were slightly less likely to report this (written: 60.3 per cent; spoken: 63.3 per cent) (see Figure 2.5.5a).

A similar pattern was observed by housing type. Private property residents were the least likely to perceive improvements in both written (55 per cent) and spoken English standards (60.1 per cent), compared to HDB residents (ranging from 60.9 to 64.8 per cent for written; and 63.5 to 66.4 per cent for spoken) (see Figure 2.5.5b).

**Figure 2.5.5a: Perception of general English standard as compared to 10 years ago, by income level (2024)**



**Figure 2.5.5b: Perception of general English standard as compared to 10 years ago, by housing type (2024)**



### 2.5.6 Race, age and education were statistically significant predictors of perception of spoken English standards compared to 10 years ago

Alongside preceding crosstabulations, linear regression analysis based on the full RRL sample indicate that respondents who were Malays, Indians, younger and lower educated were more likely to perceive spoken English standards today as better than 10 years ago. While other selected crosstabulations are presented for completeness, gender, housing type, income, and citizenship status, were not statistically significant predictors in the regression model (see Table 2.5.6).

**Table 2.5.6: Perception of spoken English standard as compared to 10 years ago (linear regression)**

Variables	Standardised Coefficient
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>.066**</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>.081***</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>-.100***</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	-.012
<b>Education</b>	<b>-.063*</b>
<b>Housing</b>	.020
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	.043
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	.003
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.017

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

### 2.5.7 Race and age were statistically significant predictors for perception of written English standards relative to 10 years ago

In line with the preceding crosstabulations, linear regression analysis based on the full RRL sample indicate that race and age were the only statistically significant predictor of perceptions of written English standards compared to 10 years ago; Malays, Indians,

and younger respondents were more likely to perceive written English standards as better. Other variables, including gender, education level, housing type, income, and citizenship status, were not statistically significant predictors (see Table 2.5.7).

**Table 2.5.7: Perception of written English standard as compared to 10 years ago (linear regression)**

Variables	Standardised Coefficient
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>.083***</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>.095***</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>-.120***</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	-.008
<b>Education</b>	-.026
<b>Housing</b>	.005
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	.024
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	.023
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.027

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

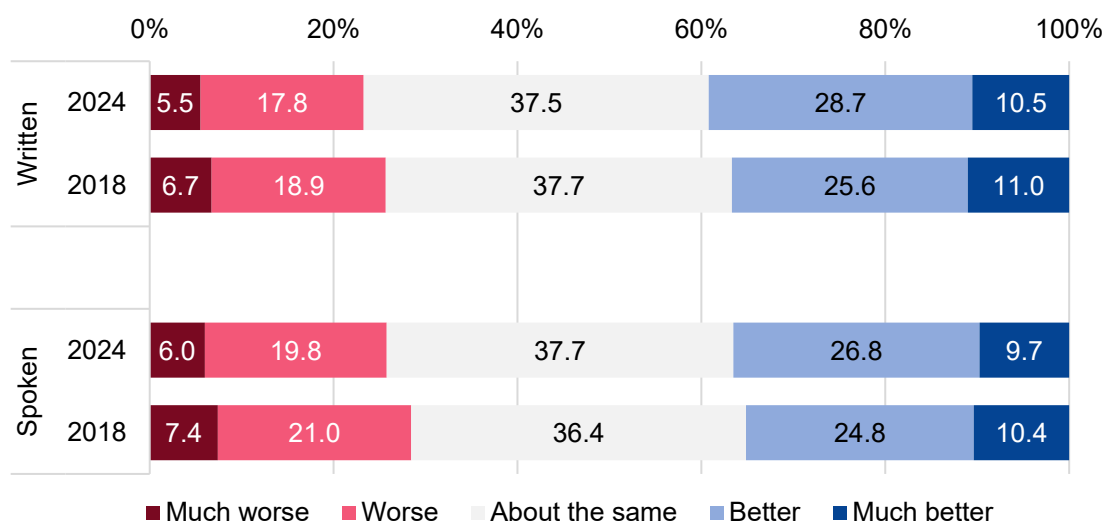
## 2.6 Perceptions of Change in Mother Tongue Standards Over Time

This section examines respondents' perceptions of how written and spoken Mother Tongue standards today compare with those of 10 years ago. It first compares overall perceptions across the 2018 and 2024 waves, before describing how views vary across demographic groups in 2024, including age, race, education level, socio-economic indicators, and citizenship status. The section concludes with regression analyses for spoken and written Mother Tongue standards to assess which demographic differences remain associated with perceptions after accounting for other factors.

### 2.6.1 Perceptions of general Mother Tongue standards remained broadly stable between 2018 and 2024

Across both waves, around one-third to two-fifths of respondents perceived general Mother Tongue standards today to be better or much better than 10 years ago. In 2024, 39.2 per cent felt that written Mother Tongue standards were better or much better (compared to 36.6 per cent in 2018), while 36.5 per cent felt the same for spoken Mother Tongue standards (compared to 35.2 per cent in 2018). Correspondingly, around 37 per cent of respondents in both waves perceived standards to be about the same in 2024 (written: 37.5 per cent; spoken: 37.7 per cent), and around a quarter perceived standards to be worse or much worse (see Figure 2.6.1).

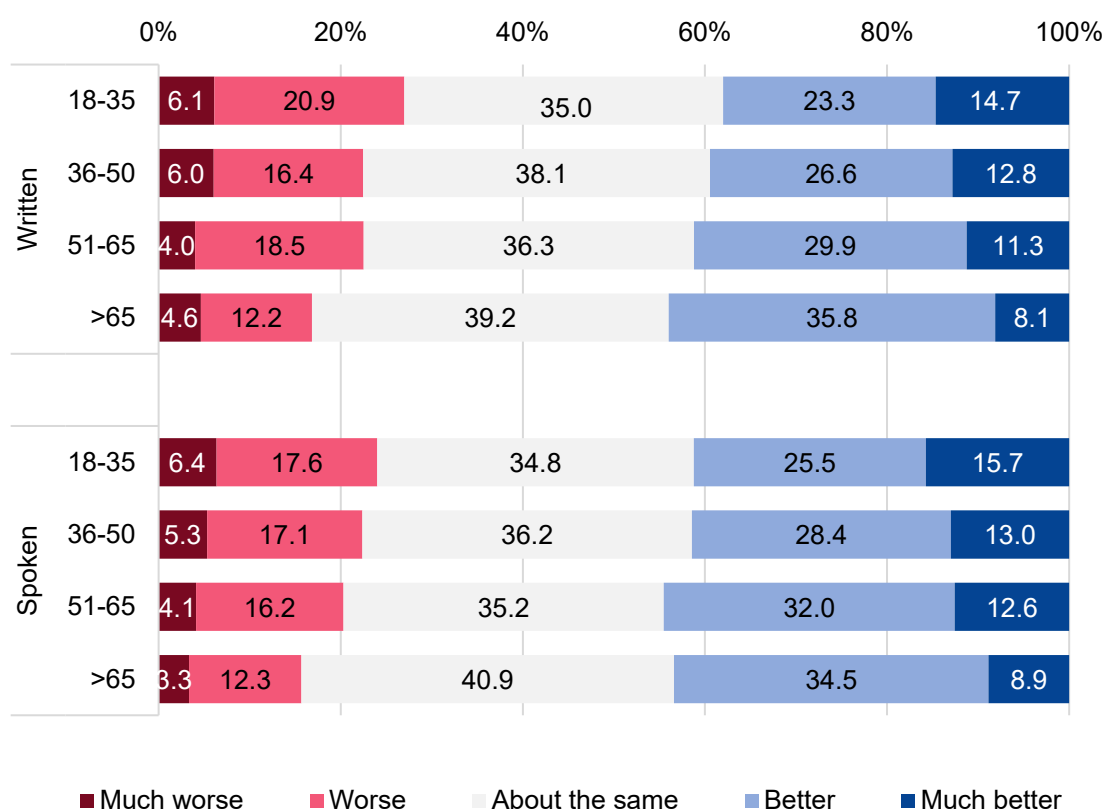
**Figure 2.6.1: Perception of general Mother Tongue standard as compared to 10 years ago, by wave**



### 2.6.2 Younger respondents were more likely to perceive the general Mother Tongue standard to be worse or much worse than 10 years ago

Perceptions of decline in Mother Tongue standards varied by age in 2024. Around one-quarter of respondents aged 18–35 felt that Mother Tongue standards today were worse or much worse than 10 years ago (written: 27 per cent; spoken: 24 per cent). In contrast, under one-fifth of respondents aged over 65 reported the same (written: 16.8 per cent; spoken: 15.6 per cent) (see Figure 2.6.2).

**Figure 2.6.2: Perception of general Mother Tongue standard as compared to 10 years ago, by age cohort (2024)**

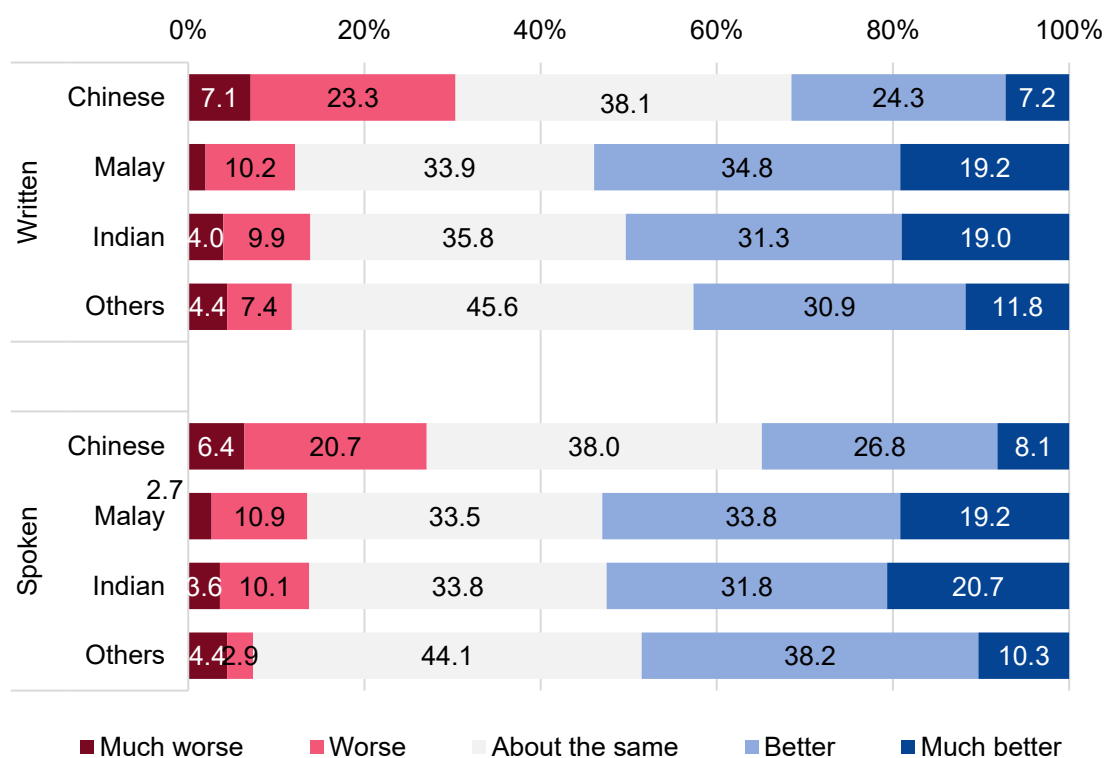


### ***2.6.3 Malay and Indian respondents were more likely to perceive both written and spoken Mother Tongue standards as better or much better than 10 years ago, relative to their Chinese peers***

Perceptions of changes in Mother Tongue standards varied across racial groups in 2024. Malay and Indian respondents were more likely to perceive both written and

spoken Mother Tongue standards as better or much better than 10 years ago (written: 54 per cent and 50.3 per cent respectively; spoken: 53 per cent and 52.5 per cent respectively)<sup>4</sup>. In contrast, Chinese respondents were less likely to report improvements compared to their minority-race peers (written: 31.5 per cent; spoken: 34.9 per cent) and were more likely than their minority-race peers to indicate that standards were worse or much worse (written: 30.4 per cent; spoken: 27.1 per cent) (see Figure 2.6.3)<sup>5</sup>.

**Figure 2.6.3: Perception of general Mother Tongue standard as compared to 10 years ago, by race (2024)**



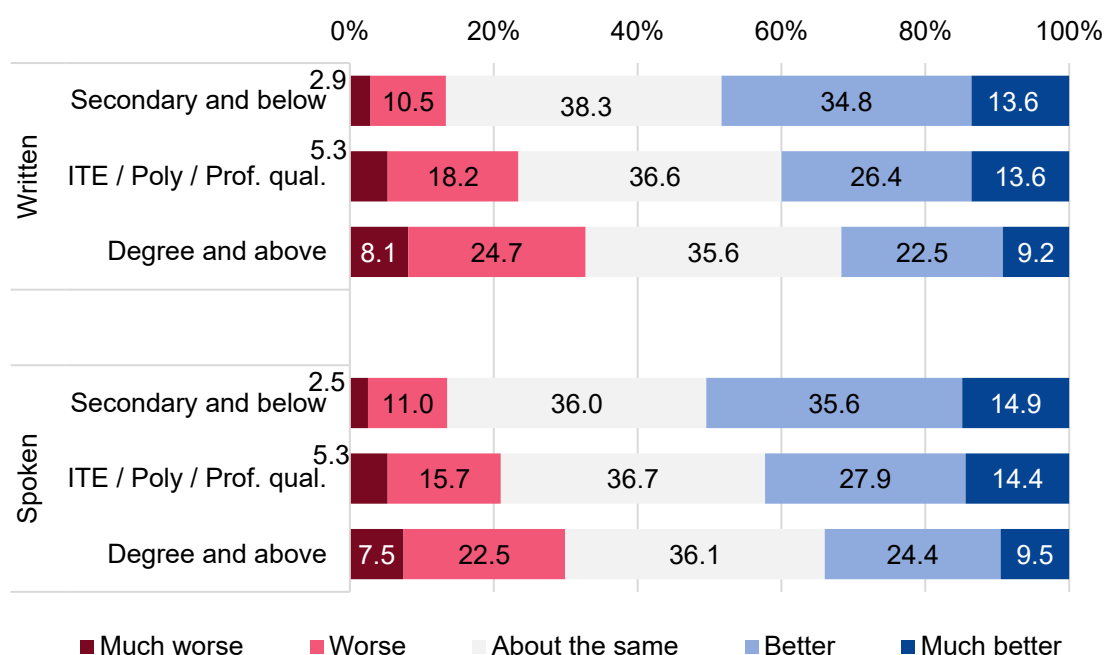
<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that here, responses of Indian respondents may not refer specifically to Tamil (the official Mother Tongue for Indians in Singapore), due to the more general wording of the question item: "How do you think the written standard of each language has changed compared to ten years ago? – Your mother tongue". Hence, the findings here should not be analysed in tandem with 2.2.4 (which focuses on self-reported oral proficiency of Indians, and Indians of Tamilian descent, specifically in relation to Tamil).

<sup>5</sup> While these findings may seem at odds to those set out in 2.2.1 (i.e., not only did Chinese respondents' self-rated oral Mandarin proficiency remain stable across the waves, but eight in 10 reported speaking their Mother Tongue well or very well), it is important to note that perceptions of one's oral proficiency in Mother Tongue may differ from perceptions of prevailing general standards of Mother Tongue in Singapore

### 2.6.4 Higher-educated respondents were more likely to perceive Mother Tongue standards as worse than 10 years ago

Around half of respondents with secondary education and below perceived both written and spoken Mother Tongue standards to be better or much better than 10 years ago (written: 48.4 per cent; spoken: 50.5 per cent). In contrast, around one-third of degree holders reported the same (written: 31.7 per cent; spoken: 33.9 per cent) (see Figure 2.6.4).

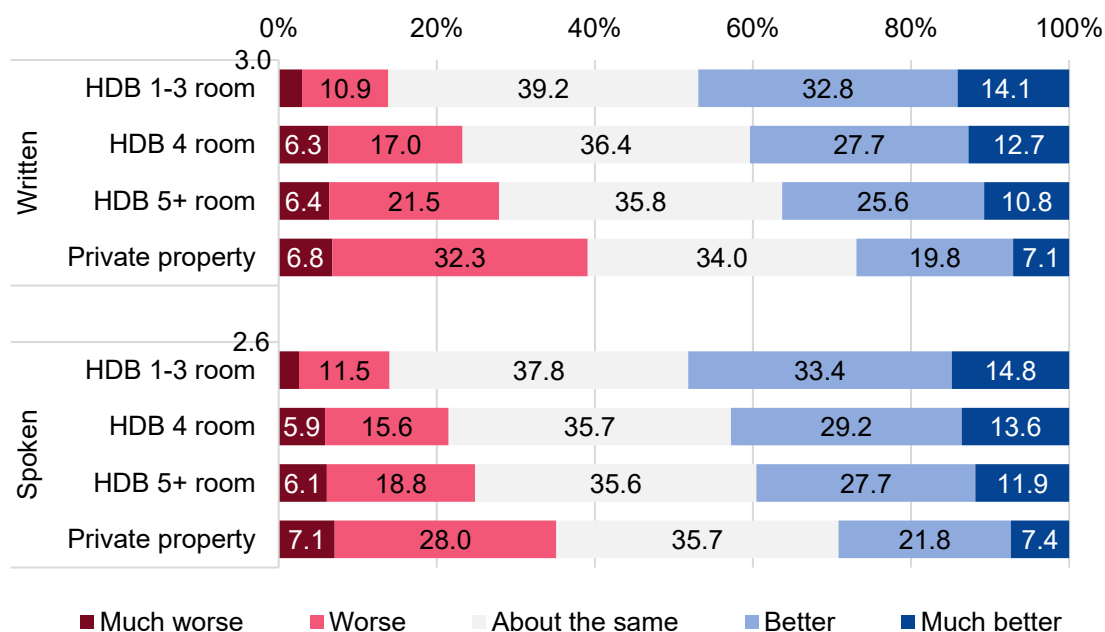
**Figure 2.6.4: Perception of general Mother Tongue standard as compared to 10 years ago, by education level (2024)**



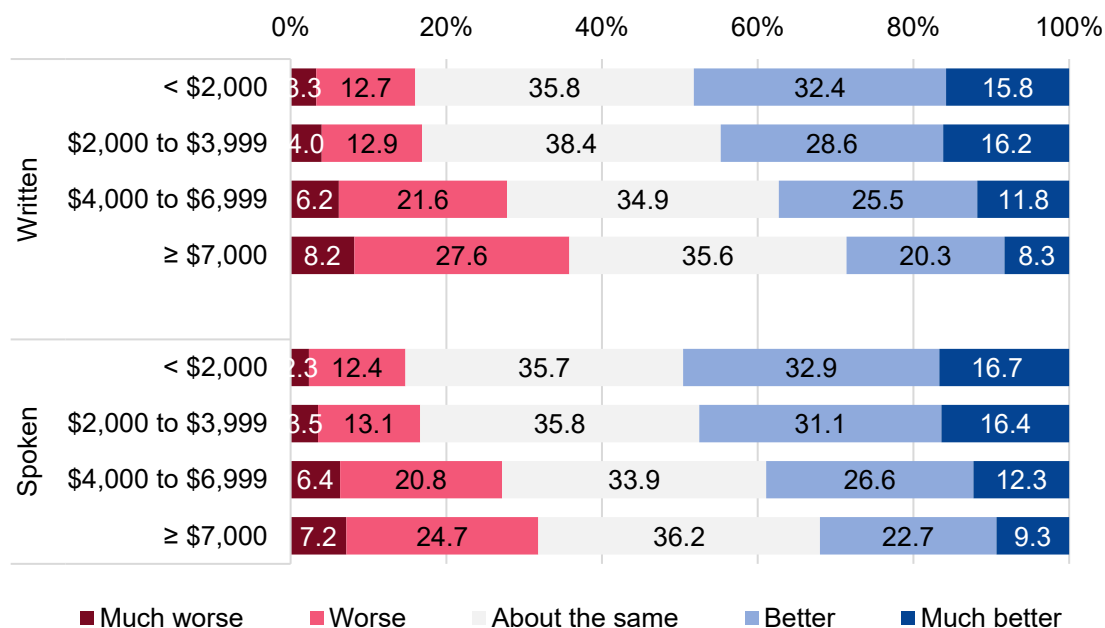
### 2.6.5 More affluent respondents were more likely to perceive Mother Tongue standards as worse than 10 years ago

Perceptions of decline in Mother Tongue standards varied by SES in 2024. By housing type, the proportion indicating that written Mother Tongue standards were worse or much worse increased with housing affluence; this rose from 13.9 per cent among HDB 1–3 room residents to 27.9 per cent among HDB 5+ room residents, and was highest among private property residents (39.1 per cent). A similar gradient was observed for spoken Mother Tongue standards (see Figure 2.6.5a). By income, respondents in the lowest-income group were least likely to perceive deterioration; around 16 per cent of those earning below \$2,000 reported that Mother Tongue standards were worse or much worse (written: 16 per cent; spoken: 15.7 per cent). This proportion increased among higher-income respondents, reaching 35.8 per cent for written standards and 31.9 per cent for spoken standards among those earning \$7,000 and above (see Figure 2.6.5b).

**Figure 2.6.5a: Perception of general Mother Tongue standard as compared to 10 years ago, by housing type (2024)**



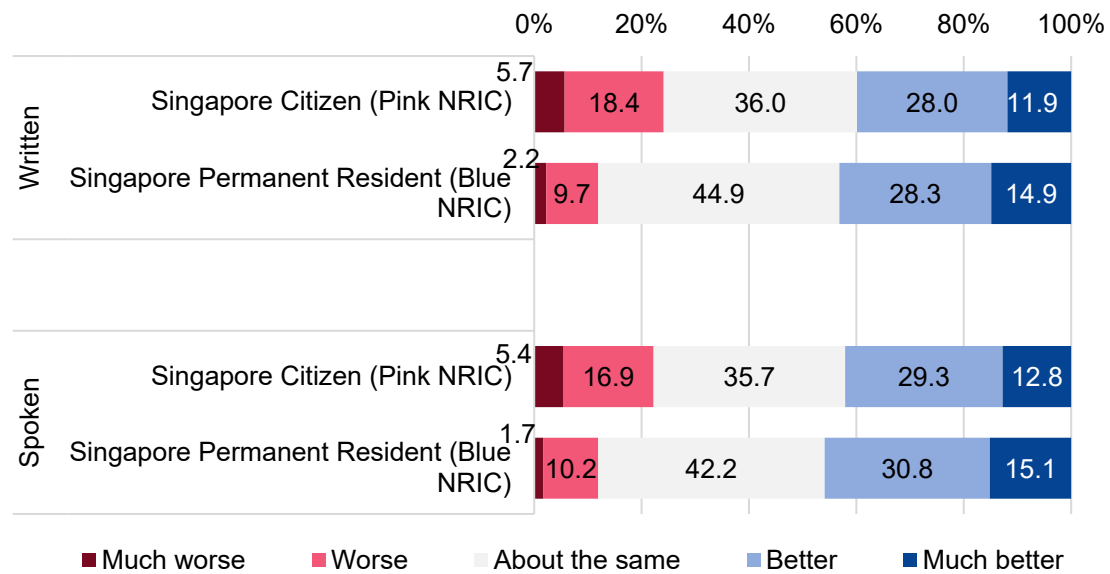
**Figure 2.6.5b: Perception of general Mother Tongue standard as compared to 10 years ago, by income level (2024)**



### **2.6.6 SCs were more likely to perceive today's Mother Tongue standards as worse or much worse than 10 years ago, as compared to PRs**

Around one-quarter of SCs indicated that Mother Tongue standards today were worse or much worse than 10 years ago (written: 24.1 per cent; spoken: 22.3 per cent). In contrast, around one in eight PRs reported the same for both written and spoken standards (11.9 per cent each) (see Figure 2.6.6).

**Figure 2.6.6: Perception of general Mother Tongue standard as compared to 10 years ago, by citizenship status (2024)**



**2.6.7 Race, education level, income, and citizenship were statistically significant predictors of the perception of spoken Mother Tongue standards compared to 10 years ago**

Linear regression analysis indicates that respondents who were Malay, Indian, lower educated, less affluent, and PRs were more likely to perceive spoken Mother Tongue standards today as better than 10 years ago. Other variables, including age, gender, and housing type, were not statistically significant predictors even as crosstabulations for some of these demographics were included prior to the regression findings for comparison (see Table 2.6.7).

**Table 2.6.7: Perception of spoken Mother Tongue standard as compared to 10 years ago (linear regression)**

Variables	Standardised Coefficient
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>.106***</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>.102***</b>
<b>Age</b>	-.008
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	-.013
<b>Education</b>	<b>-.122***</b>
<b>Housing</b>	-.017
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	<b>-.066**</b>
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	<b>.085***</b>
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.059

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**2.6.8 In the same vein, race, education level, income, and citizenship were statistically significant predictors of perceptions of written Mother Tongue standards compared to 10 years ago**

Linear regression analysis indicates that respondents who were Malay, Indian, lower educated, less affluent, and PRs were more likely to perceive written Mother Tongue standards today as better than 10 years ago (see Table 2.6.8). Other variables, including age, gender, and housing type were not statistically significant predictors, even as crosstabulations for some of these demographics were included prior to the regression findings for comparison.

**Table 2.6.8: Perception of written Mother Tongue standard as compared to 10 years ago (linear regression)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>.150***</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>.118***</b>
<b>Age</b>	.010
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	.006
<b>Education</b>	<b>-.115***</b>
<b>Housing</b>	-.028
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	<b>-.063**</b>
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	<b>.090***</b>
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.076

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

### 3. LANGUAGE USE

The language ecology of households has shifted over time; most notably through the rise of English as the language most frequently spoken at home (DOS, 2021). However, home use is only one domain of language practice. The RRL survey examines how residents report using different languages with friends and colleagues. This distinction is important, because languages that are no longer dominant at home may still be used frequently in ethnic, social, or workplace contexts. Conversely, languages that dominate the home may not be viewed as equally appropriate or useful across all settings.

The following analyses examine respondents' reported frequency of using English, the Mother Tongue languages, Singlish, and other heritage languages when communicating with friends in informal social settings and with colleagues in workplace settings. Taken together, these patterns provide an overview of how language practices have shifted across the three RRL waves, and the extent to which Singapore's bilingual policy continues to shape language use in everyday interactions.

Where relevant, the chapter also highlights differences by key demographic characteristics in the latest wave, such as age, education level, and affluence. Findings presented for each Mother Tongue language; Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil; focus on the responses of the corresponding racial group (Chinese, Malay, and Indian respondents respectively)<sup>6</sup>, given the close link between these languages and ethnic-linguistic identity in Singapore.

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<sup>6</sup> The data presented is intended to capture the broader and more pertinent trends. While this means that respondents from other racial groups who speak another group's Mother Tongue are excluded from the descriptives, such cases are not substantial.

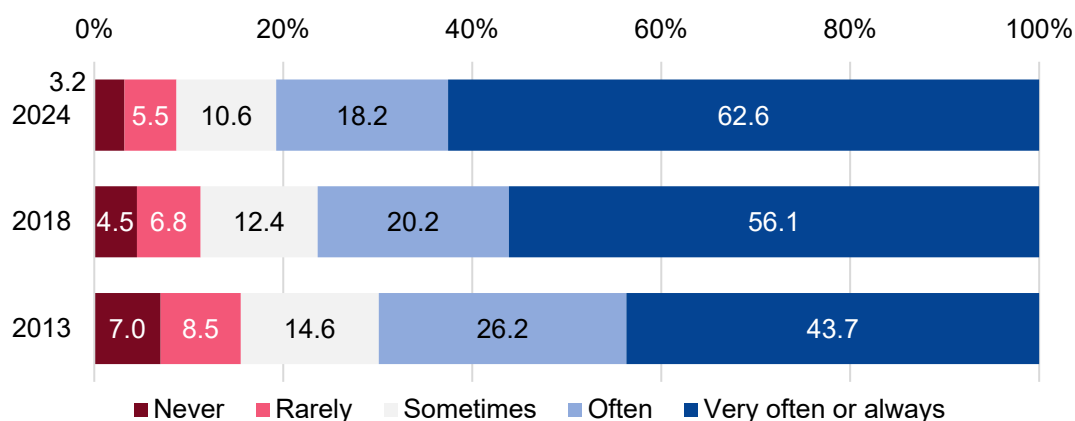
### **3.1 English Language Use in Social Settings**

This section analyses the reported frequency of using English when communicating or interacting with friends, among all RRL respondents across the three waves and key demographics of interest for the latest wave. It concludes with a linear regression analysis of English use among friends using the full respondent sample. In general, the RRL finding that English use with friends and at work has increased is directionally consistent with prevailing DOS' home-language trend, which shows English being the most frequently spoken language at home in 2020 (DOS, 2021).

#### ***3.1.1 The proportion of respondents who use English frequently with friends increased from 2013 to 2024, with over eight in 10 reporting using English often, very often, or always in 2024***

In 2024, over eight in 10 respondents indicated that they often, very often, or always use English with their friends (80.8 per cent). This represents a steady increase from 2018 (76.3 per cent) and 2013 (69.9 per cent). This trend was driven mainly by a growing share who reported using English “very often or always”, which rose from 43.7 per cent in 2013 to 56.1 per cent in 2018, and further to 62.6 per cent in 2024. Correspondingly, smaller proportions reported never or rarely using English with friends (see Figure 3.1.1).

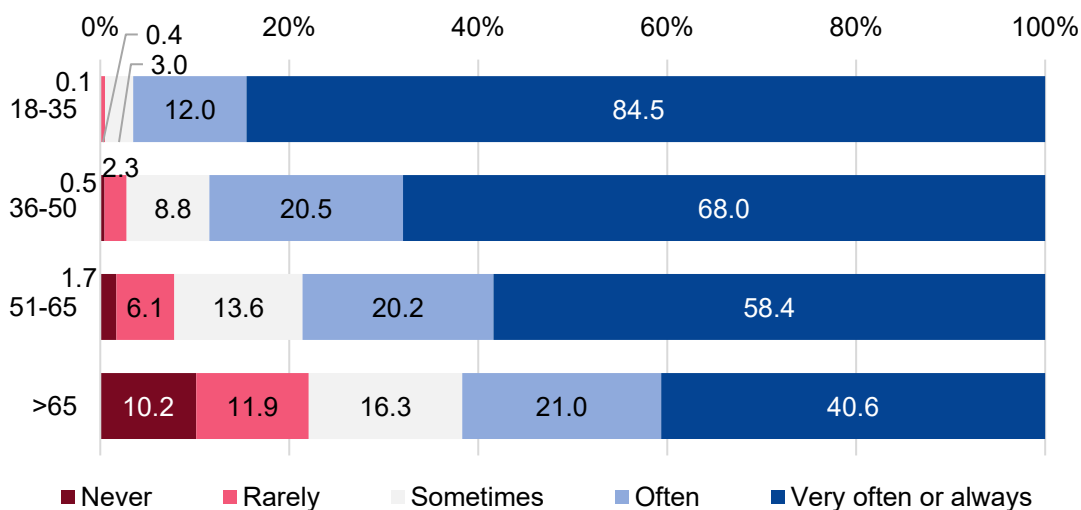
**Figure 3.1.1: Respondents' frequency of using English socially with friends, by wave**



### ***3.1.2 Younger respondents were substantially more likely to use English frequently with friends, compared to older age cohorts***

English use with friends varied markedly by age in 2024. Almost all respondents aged 18–35 reported using English with friends often, very often, or always (96.5 per cent), including 84.5 per cent who indicated using English “very often or always”. This proportion declined among older cohorts; 88.5 per cent of those aged 36–50 and 78.6 per cent of those aged 51–65 reported using English often, very often, or always with friends. Respondents aged over 65 were the least likely to report frequent English use with friends (61.6 per cent) and were correspondingly more likely to indicate never or rarely using English with friends (22.1 per cent) (see Figure 3.1.2).

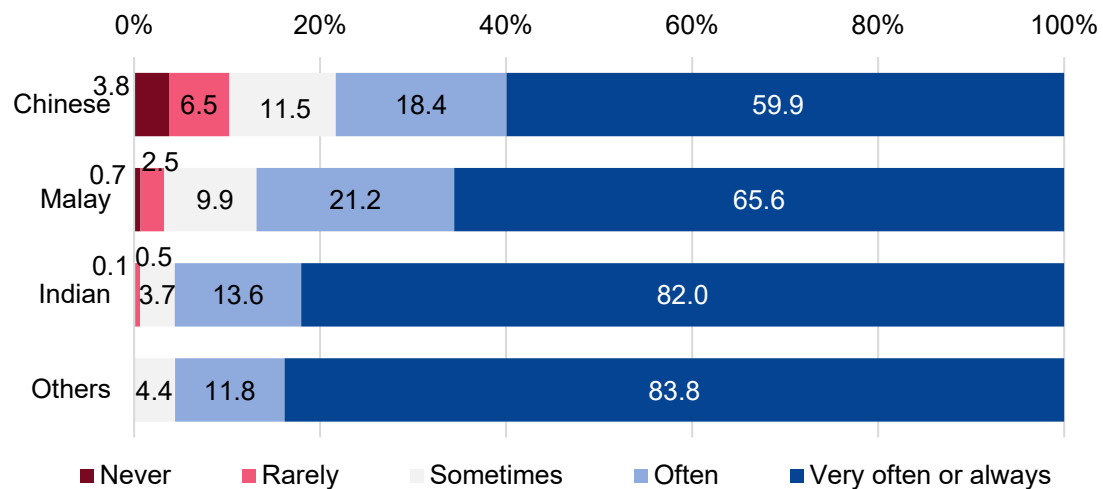
**Figure 3.1.2: Respondents' frequency of using English socially with friends, by age cohort (2024)**



### ***3.1.3 Indian respondents were more likely to use English frequently with friends***

Almost all Indian respondents reported using English with friends often, very often, or always (95.6 per cent). In contrast, Chinese and Malay respondents were (in relative terms) less likely to report frequent English use with friends (78.4 per cent and 86.8 per cent, respectively). In the same vein, Chinese respondents were also more likely to indicate never or rarely using English with friends (10.3 per cent), compared to Malays (3.2 per cent) and Indians (0.6 per cent) (see Figure 3.1.3).

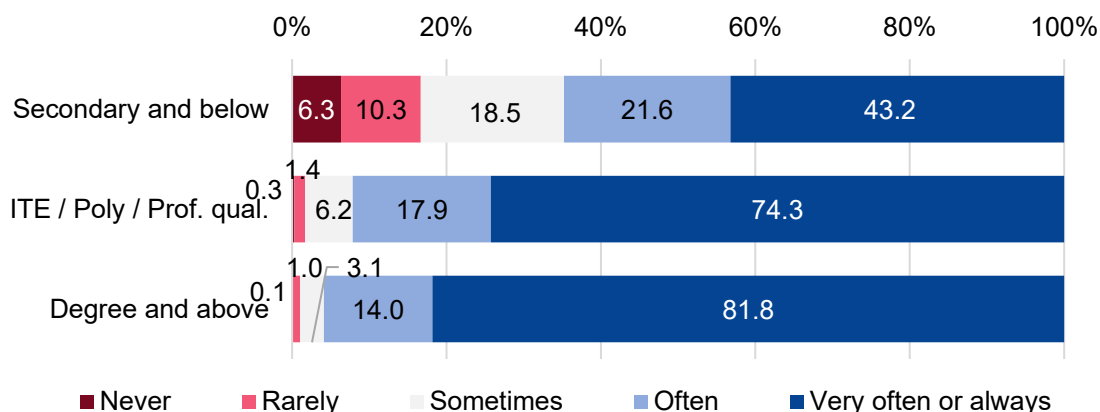
**Figure 3.1.3: Respondents' frequency of using English socially with friends, by race (2024)**



### ***3.1.4 Higher-educated respondents were more likely to use English frequently with friends relative to those with secondary and below qualifications***

English use with friends differed markedly by education level too. Over nine in 10 respondents with post-secondary qualifications reported using English with friends often, very often, or always, including 92.2 per cent of those with ITE, Polytechnic, or professional qualifications, and 95.8 per cent of degree holders. In contrast, around two-thirds of respondents with secondary education and below indicated frequent English use with friends (64.8 per cent). This gap was driven mainly by higher-educated respondents being substantially more likely to report using English “very often or always” with friends (ITE, polytechnic or professional qualifications: 74.3 per cent; degree and above: 81.8 per cent), compared to those with secondary education and below (43.2 per cent) (see Figure 3.1.4).

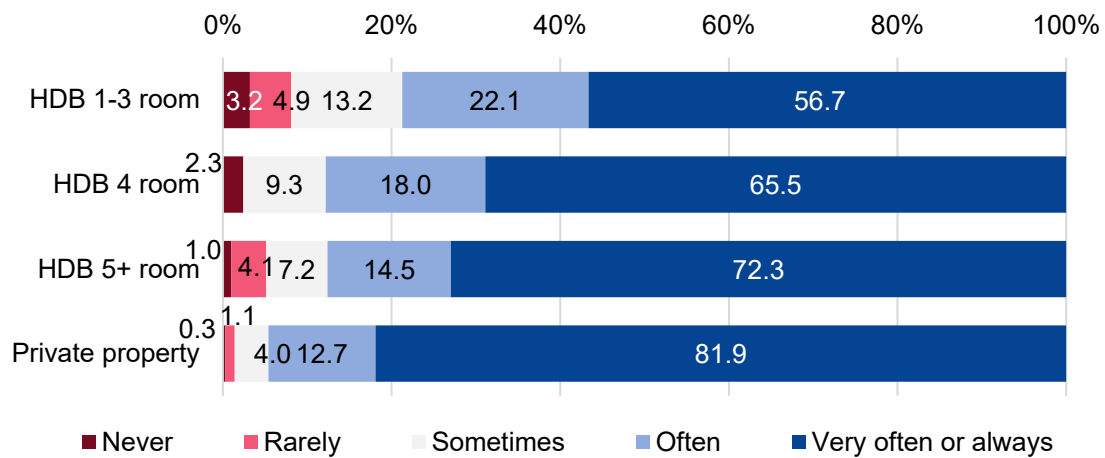
**Figure 3.1.4: Frequency of using English socially with friends, by education level (2024)**



### ***3.1.5 More affluent respondents were more likely to use English frequently with friends, compared to those living in smaller HDB flats***

English use with friends also differed by housing type; over nine in 10 private property dwellers reported using English with friends often, very often, or always (94.6 per cent), compared to under four-fifths of those residing in HDB 1–3 room flats (78.8 per cent). This gradient by housing type was driven mainly by more affluent respondents being more likely to report using English “very often or always” with friends (private property: 81.9 per cent, compared to 56.7 per cent among HDB 1–3 room residents) (see Figure 3.1.5).

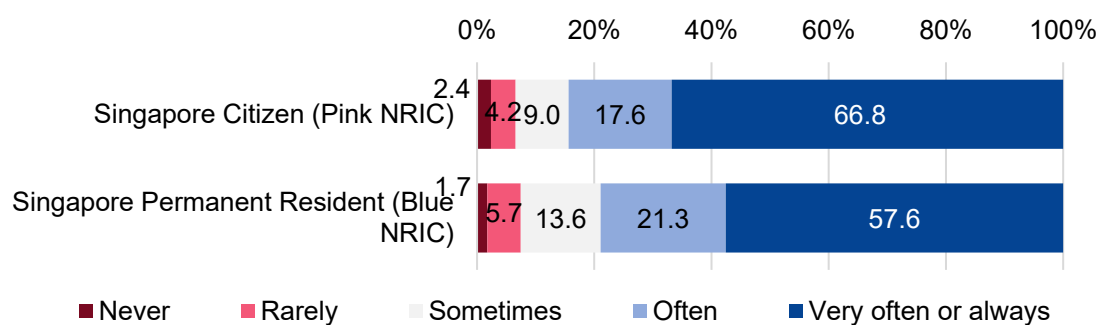
**Figure 3.1.5: Frequency of using English socially with friends, by housing type (2024)**



### **3.1.6 SCs were marginally more likely than PRs to use English frequently with friends**

Over eight in 10 SCs reported using English with friends often, very often, or always (84.4 per cent), compared to around four-fifths of PRs (78.9 per cent). This marginal difference was driven mainly by citizens being more likely to indicate using English “very often or always” with friends (66.8 per cent, compared to 57.6 per cent among PRs), while PRs were correspondingly more likely to report using English only “often” or “sometimes” (see Figure 3.1.6).

**Figure 3.1.6: Frequency of using English socially with friends, by citizenship status (2024)**



### 3.1.7 Race, age, education level, income, and citizenship were statistically significant predictors of frequency of English use with friends

In line with the crosstabulations preceding this section, linear regression analysis based on the full RRL sample indicate that individuals who are Malay, Indian, younger, more highly educated, and more affluent (i.e., drawing higher incomes), were more likely to use English with friends frequently. Housing type was significant in the crosstabulations but not after accounting for other factors. Citizenship status was also a statistically significant predictor; SCs were more likely than PRs to use English with friends frequently (see Table 3.1.7).

**Table 3.1.7: Frequency of using English with friends (linear regression)**

Variables	Standardised Coefficient
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>.113***</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>.156***</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>-.185***</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	-.026
<b>Education</b>	<b>.293***</b>
<b>Housing</b>	.027
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	<b>.079***</b>
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	<b>-.147***</b>
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.226

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

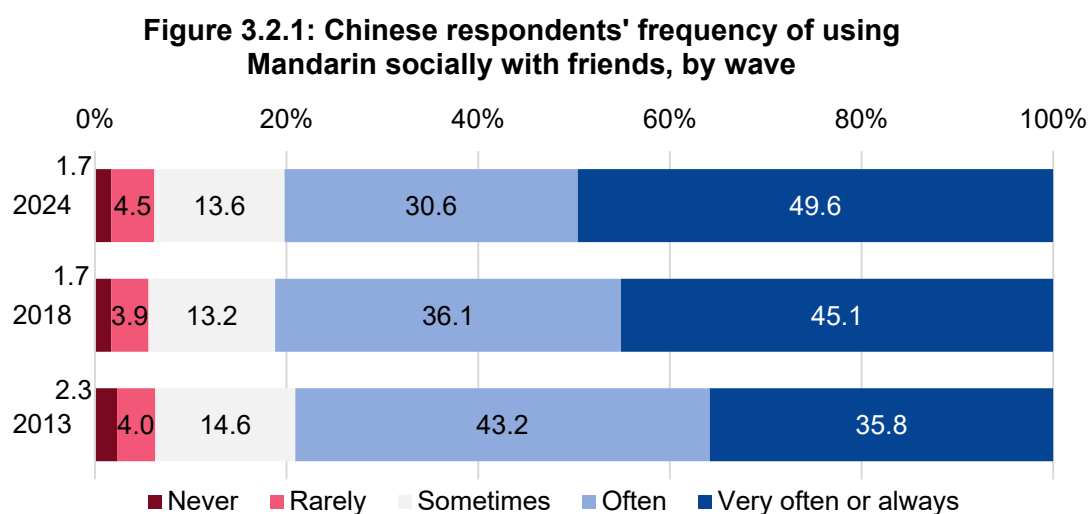
## 3.2 Mandarin Use in Social Settings Among Chinese Respondents

This section analyses the reported frequency of using Mandarin when communicating or interacting with friends, among Chinese respondents across the three RRL waves

and key demographics of interest for the latest wave. It concludes with a linear regression analysis of Mandarin use among friends using the Chinese respondent sample. In general, while prevailing DOS data suggests declining use of Mandarin Chinese (as well as Malay and Tamil) as the most frequently spoken home language (DOS, 2021), RRL findings show that these languages continue to be used frequently with friends within the corresponding racial groups. This points to domain differentiation rather than straightforward language loss.

**3.2.1 The proportion of Chinese respondents who use Mandarin frequently with their friends remained largely unchanged from 2013 to 2024, with approximately eight in 10 indicating they often, very often, or always use Mandarin with their friends**

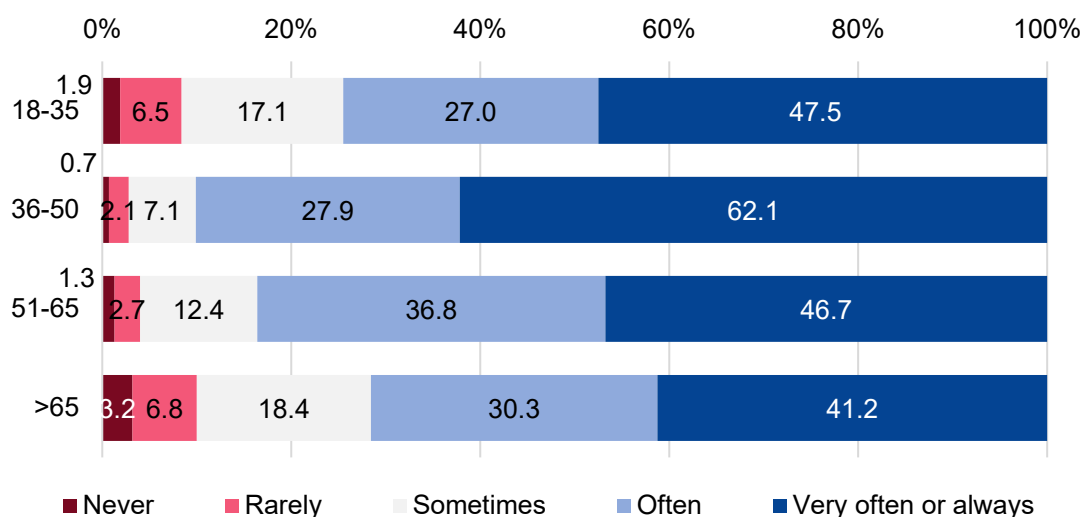
Approximately eight in 10 respondents indicated in 2024 that they often, very often, or always use Mandarin with their friends (80.2 per cent). This proportion has been relatively consistent since 2013 (see Figure 3.2.1).



### 3.2.2 Middle-aged Chinese respondents were more likely to indicate using Mandarin more frequently with friends, as compared to their younger and older peers

Nine in 10 Chinese respondents aged 36-50 indicated using Mandarin often, very often, or always with their friends (90 per cent), and over eight in 10 Chinese respondents aged 51-65 indicated likewise (83.5 per cent). These proportions fall over seven in 10 Chinese respondents in the youngest (74.5 per cent) and oldest age cohorts (71.5 per cent) (see Figure 3.2.2).

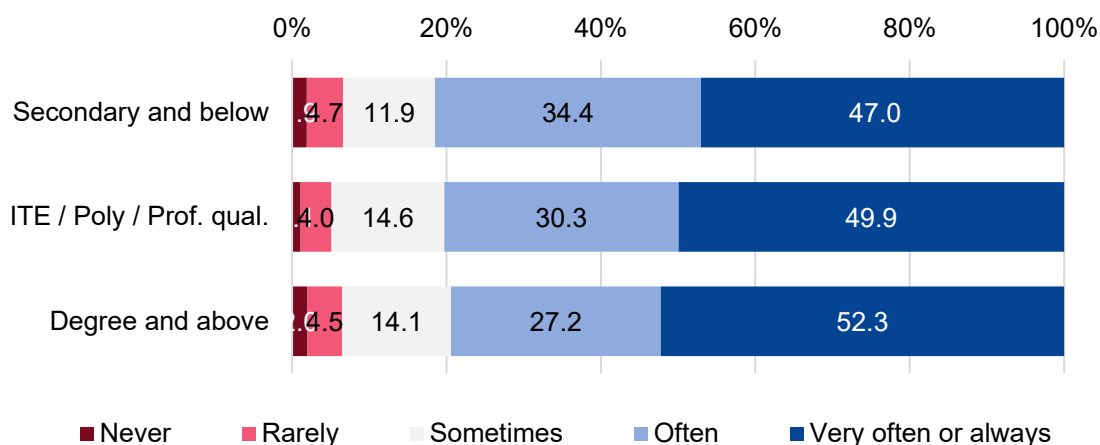
**Figure 3.2.2: Chinese respondents' frequency of using Mandarin socially with friends, by age cohort (2024)**



### 3.2.3 Higher-educated Chinese respondents were slightly more likely to report “very often or always” using Mandarin with friends

Across education levels, about eight in 10 Chinese respondents reported using Mandarin with friends often, very often, or always. However, higher-educated respondents were slightly more likely to indicate using Mandarin “very often or always” as compared to their lower educated peers (see Figure 3.2.3).

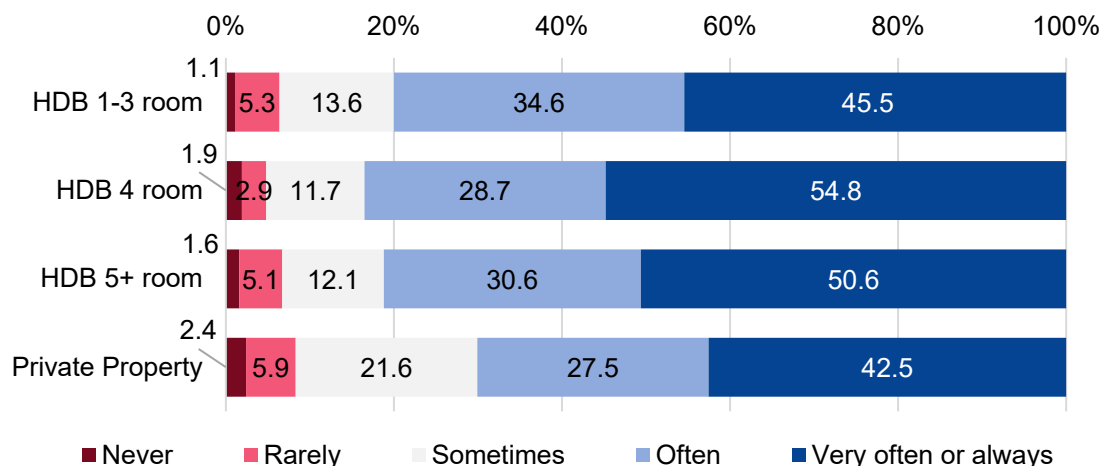
**Figure 3.2.3 Chinese respondents' frequency of using Mandarin socially with friends, by education level (2024)**



### ***3.2.4 Chinese private property dwellers were less likely to report using Mandarin frequently with friends, compared to HDB dwellers***

Across HDB housing types, around eight in 10 Chinese respondents reported using Mandarin with friends often, very often, or always. However, Chinese private property respondents were less likely to indicate frequent Mandarin use with friends (70 per cent) (see Figure 3.2.4).

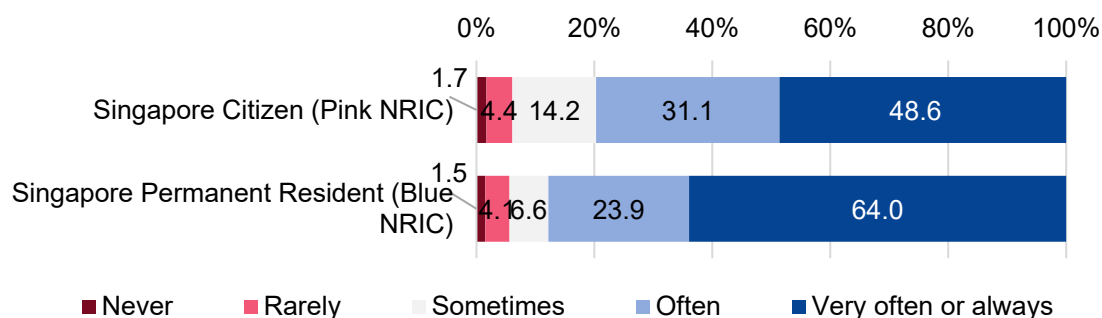
**Figure 3.2.4 Chinese respondents' frequency of using Mandarin socially with friends, by housing type (2024)**



### **3.2.5 Chinese PRs were more likely than citizens to report often, very often, or always using Mandarin with friends**

Close to nine in 10 Chinese Permanent Residents reported using Mandarin with friends often, very often, or always (87.9 per cent), compared to about eight in 10 Chinese citizens (79.7 per cent). This difference was driven mainly by PRs being substantially more likely to indicate using Mandarin “very often or always” (64 per cent, compared to 48.6 per cent among citizens), while citizens were more likely to report using Mandarin “often” or “sometimes” (see Figure 3.2.5).

**Figure 3.2.5: Chinese respondents' frequency of using Mandarin socially with friends, by citizenship status (2024)**



### 3.2.6 Gender, affluence, and citizenship were statistically significant predictors of frequency of Mandarin use with friends among Chinese respondents in the 2024 RRL sample

In line with the crosstabulations preceding this section, findings from the linear regression analysis based on Chinese respondents in the 2024 RRL sample indicate that individuals who were female, were residing in public or smaller housing types, had higher incomes, and were PRs, were more likely to use Mandarin with friends frequently (see Table 3.2.6).

**Table 3.2.6: Frequency of using Mandarin with friends among Chinese respondents (linear regression)**

Variables	Standardised Coefficient
Age	-.045
Gender ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	<b>.087**</b>
Education	-.024
Housing	<b>-.062*</b>
Average Gross Monthly Income	<b>.079*</b>
Citizenship ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	<b>.053*</b>
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.016

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

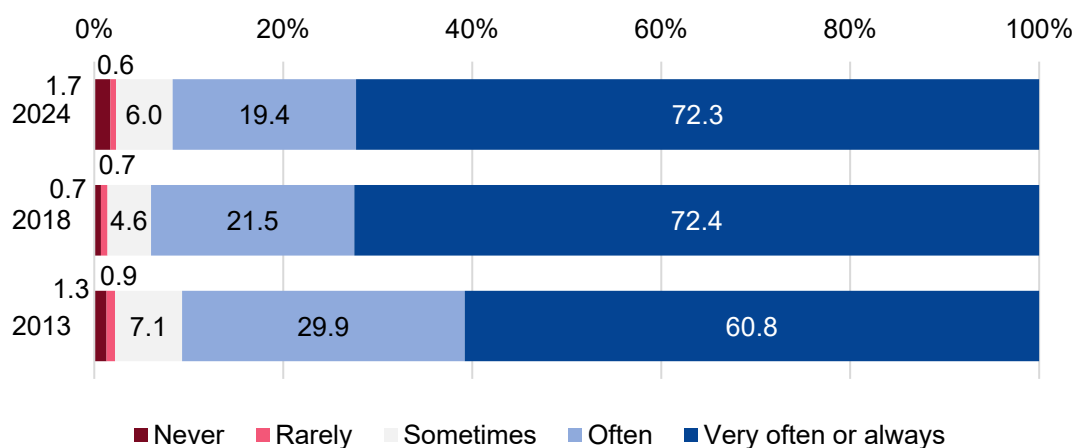
### 3.3 Malay Use in Social Settings Among Malay Respondents

This section analyses the reported frequency of using Malay when communicating or interacting with friends, among Malay respondents across the three RRL waves and key demographics of interest for the latest wave. It concludes with a linear regression analysis of Malay use among friends using the Malay respondent sample.

**3.3.1 The proportion of Malay respondents who use Malay frequently with their friends remained largely unchanged from 2013 to 2024, with approximately nine in 10 indicating they often, very often, or always use Malay with their friends**

Approximately nine in 10 respondents indicated they often, very often, or always used Malay with their friends (91.7 per cent); this proportion has been relatively consistent from 2013 to 2024 (see Figure 3.3.1).

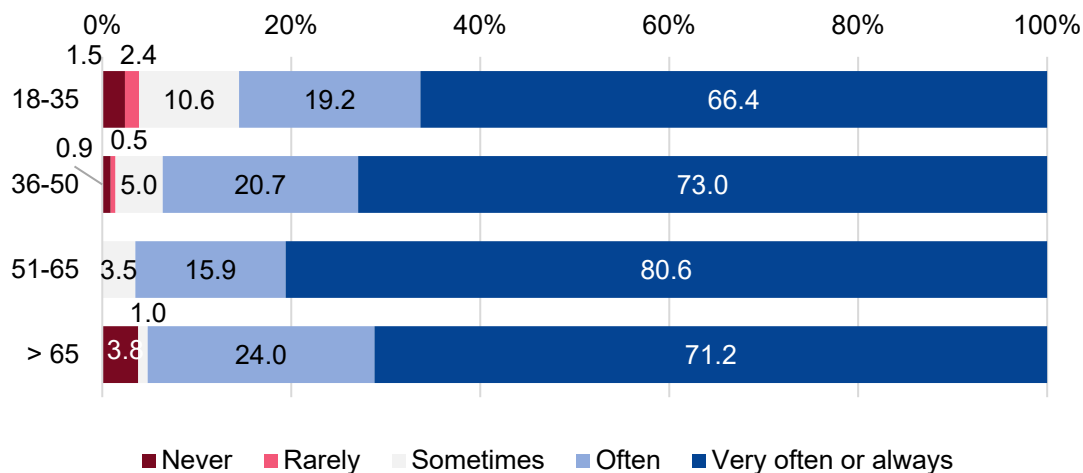
**Figure 3.3.1: Malay respondents' frequency of using Malay socially with friends, by wave**



**3.3.2 Malays in the youngest age cohort were less likely to indicate often, very often, or always using Malay with their friends as compared to their older peers**

Over 90 per cent of Malays across all ages used Malay with their friends, with the exception of Malays 18-35 years old (85.6 per cent) (see Figure 3.3.2).

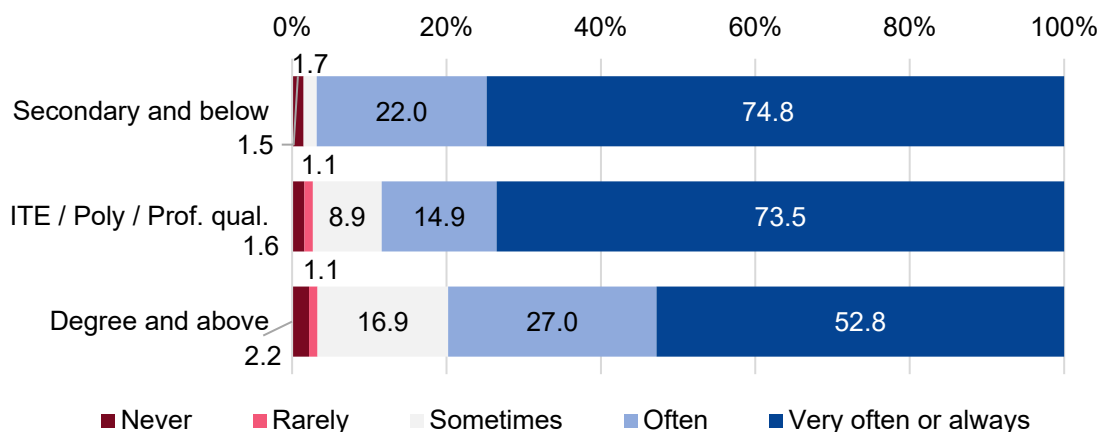
**Figure 3.3.2: Malay respondents' frequency of using Malay socially with friends, by age cohort (2024)**



### 3.3.3 Higher-educated Malays were less likely to indicate using Malay as frequently with their friends as compared to their lower educated peers

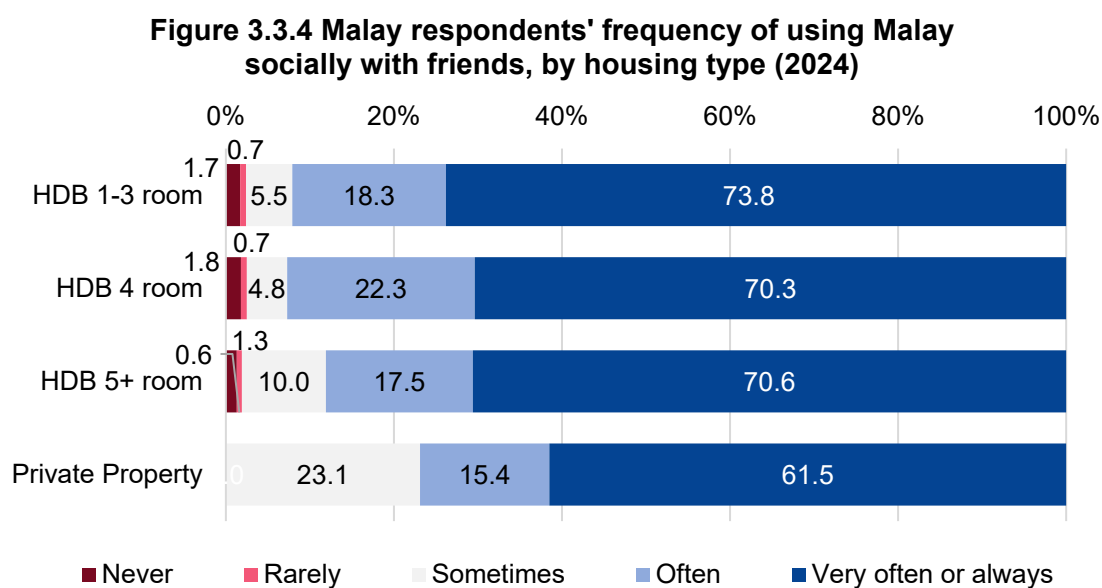
While eight in 10 degree-holding Malay respondents indicated using Malay often, very often, or always with their friends (79.8 per cent), this proportion augments to nearly all Malays with secondary and below education (96.8 per cent) (see Figure 3.3.3).

**Figure 3.3.3 Malay respondents' frequency of using Malay socially with friends, by education level (2024)**



### 3.3.4 *More affluent Malays residing in larger public housing or private property were less likely to indicate using Malay as frequently with their friends*

While over three-quarters of Malay private property dwellers indicate using Malay often, very often, or always with their friends (76.9 per cent), over nine in 10 respondents residing in HDB 1-3 room flats indicate likewise (92.1 per cent) (see Figure 3.3.4).



### 3.3.5 *Education level was the main statistically significant predictor of frequency of Malay use with friends*

In line with the crosstabulations preceding this section, findings from the linear regression analysis of all survey respondents indicate that education was the main driver of frequency of Malay use with friends; Malay respondents with lower education levels were more likely to indicate using Malay frequently with friends (see Table 3.3.5).

**Table 3.3.5: Frequency of using Malay with friends among Malay respondents (linear regression)**

Variables	Standardised Coefficient
Age	.052
Gender ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	-.066
Education	<b>-.135**</b>
Housing	-.073
Average Gross Monthly Income	.074
Citizenship ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	.008
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.025

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

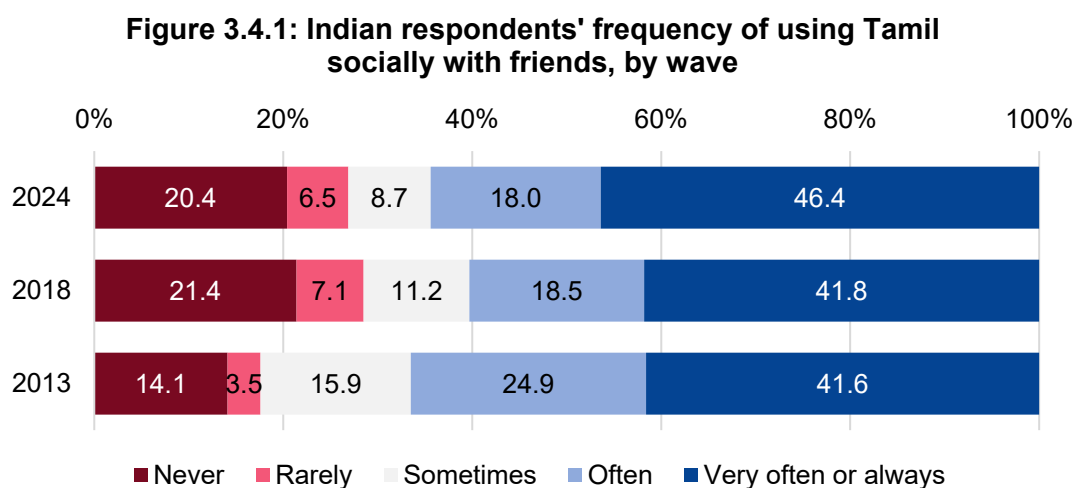
### 3.4 Tamil Use in Social Settings Among Indian Respondents

This section analyses the reported frequency of using Tamil when communicating or interacting with friends, among Indian respondents across the three RRL waves and key demographics of interest for the latest wave. It concludes with a linear regression analysis of Tamil use among friends using the full respondent sample.

#### ***3.4.1 The proportion of Indian respondents who use Tamil frequently with friends remained broadly stable from 2013 to 2024, with around two-thirds reporting often, very often, or always using Tamil with friends***

Around two-thirds of Indian respondents in 2024 indicated that they use Tamil with friends often, very often, or always (64.4 per cent). This was broadly comparable to 2013 (66.5 per cent), although there was a modest dip in 2018 (60.3 per cent). However, this stability masks some compositional shifts. The proportion reporting

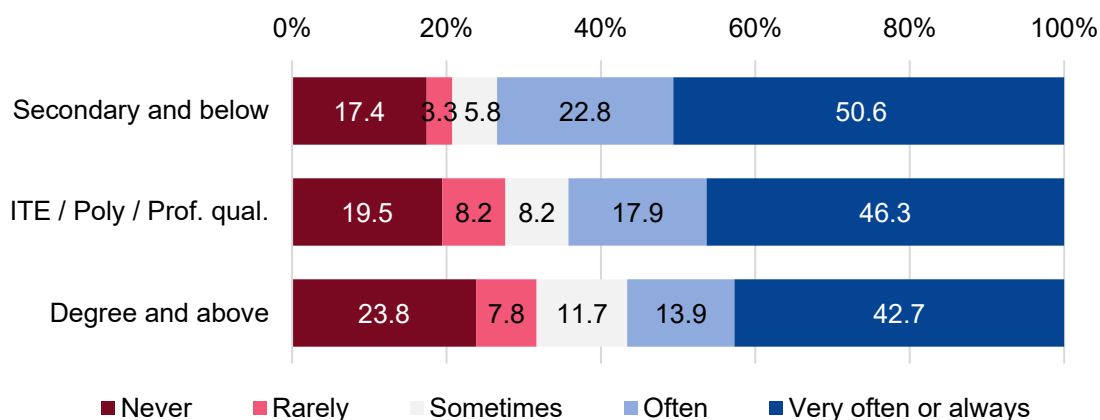
using Tamil “very often or always” increased to 46.4 per cent in 2024 (from 41.6 per cent in 2013), while the share indicating “sometimes” declined over time (from 15.9 per cent in 2013 to 8.7 per cent in 2024) (see Figure 3.4.1).



### ***3.4.2 Higher-educated Indian respondents were less likely to use Tamil frequently with friends***

Around three-quarters of Indian respondents with secondary education and below reported using Tamil with friends often, very often, or always (73.4 per cent). This proportion declined among more highly educated respondents; 64.2 per cent of those with ITE, Polytechnic, or professional qualifications and 56.6 per cent of degree holders indicated likewise. Correspondingly, degree-holding Indian respondents were more likely to report never or rarely using Tamil with friends (31.6 per cent), compared to those with secondary education and below (20.7 per cent) (see Figure 3.4.2).

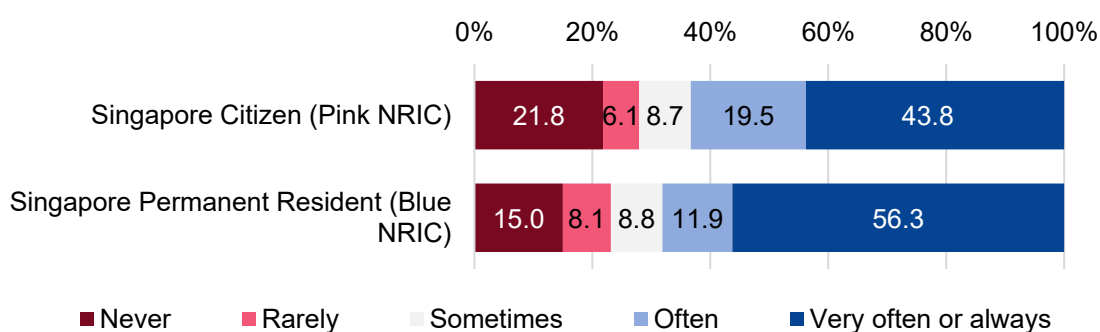
**Figure 3.4.2 Indian respondents' frequency of using Tamil socially with friends, by education level (2024)**



### **3.4.3 Indian PRs were more likely than citizens to use Tamil frequently with friends**

Close to seven in 10 Indian PRs reported using Tamil with friends often, very often, or always (68.2 per cent), compared to around three-fifths of Indian SCs (63.3 per cent). This difference was driven mainly by PRs being more likely to indicate using Tamil “very often or always” with friends (56.3 per cent, compared to 43.8 per cent among citizens), while SCs were correspondingly more likely to report never using Tamil with friends (21.8 per cent, compared to 15 per cent among Permanent Residents) (see Figure 3.4.3).

**Figure 3.4.3: Indian respondents' frequency of using Tamil socially with friends, by citizenship status (2024)**



### 3.4.4 Education level and citizenship were statistically significant predictors of frequency of Tamil use with friends

In line with the crosstabulations preceding this section, findings from the linear regression analysis of Indian survey respondents indicate that lower educated and PR Indians were more likely to use Tamil frequently with friends. Other demographic variables, including age, gender, housing type, and income, were not statistically significant predictors of Tamil use with friends (see Table 3.4.4).

**Table 3.4.4: Frequency of using Tamil with friends among Indian respondents (linear regression)**

Variables	Standardised Coefficient
Age	.074
Gender ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	.042
Education	-.123*
Housing	-.077
Average Gross Monthly Income	-.014
Citizenship ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	.147***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.038

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

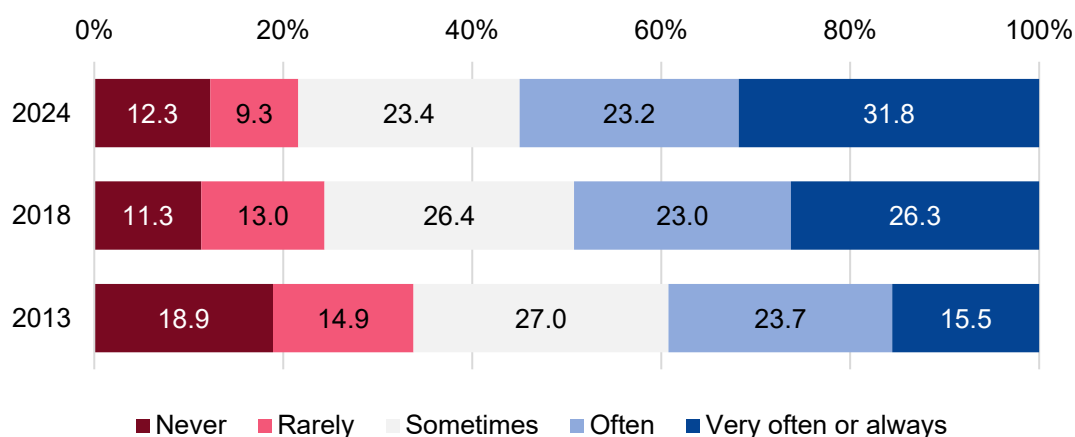
## 3.5 Singlish Use in Social Settings

This section analyses the reported frequency of using Singlish when communicating or interacting with friends, among all RRL respondents across the three waves and key demographics of interest for the latest wave. It concludes with a linear regression analysis of Singlish use among friends using the full respondent sample.

### 3.5.1 *The proportion of respondents who use Singlish frequently with friends increased from 2013 to 2024; over half reported often, very often, or always using Singlish in 2024*

In 2024, over half of respondents indicated that they use Singlish with friends often, very often, or always (55 per cent). This represents an increase from 2018 (49.3 per cent) and 2013 (39.2 per cent). This upward trend was driven mainly by a rise in the share who reported using Singlish “very often or always”, which more than doubled from 15.5 per cent in 2013 to 26.3 per cent in 2018 and 31.8 per cent in 2024. Correspondingly, smaller proportions reported never or rarely using Singlish with friends, declining from 33.8 per cent in 2013 to 24.3 per cent in 2018 and 21.6 per cent in 2024 (see Figure 3.5.1).

**Figure 3.5.1: Frequency of using Singlish socially with friends, by wave**

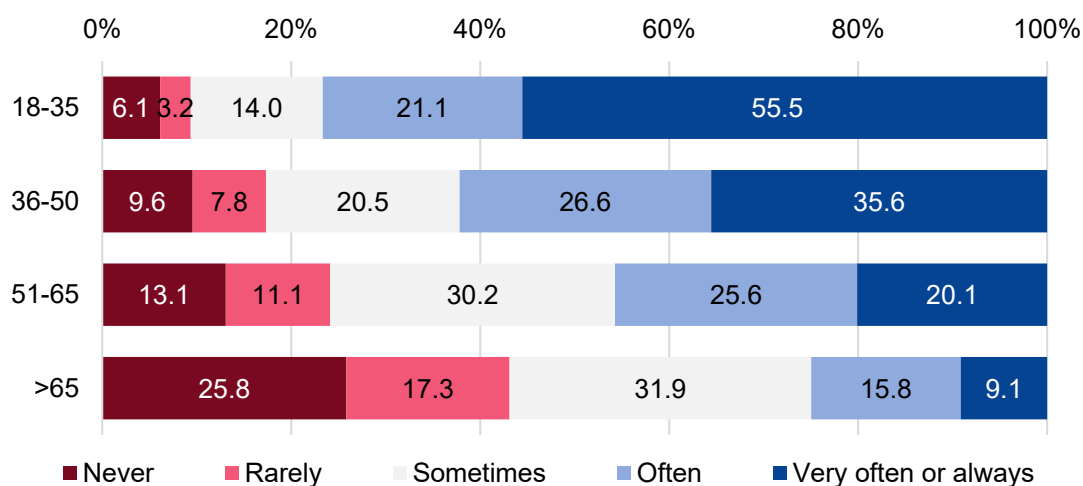


### 3.5.2 *Younger respondents were substantially more likely to use Singlish frequently with friends*

Over three-quarters of respondents aged 18–35 reported using Singlish with friends often, very often, or always (76.6 per cent), including 55.5 per cent who indicated using

Singlish “very often or always”. This proportion declined steadily among older cohorts; 62.2 per cent of those aged 36–50 and 45.7 per cent of those aged 51–65 reported using Singlish often, very often, or always with friends. Respondents aged over 65 were the least likely to report frequent Singlish use with friends (24.9 per cent) and were correspondingly more likely to indicate never or rarely using Singlish with friends (43.1 per cent) (see Figure 3.5.2).

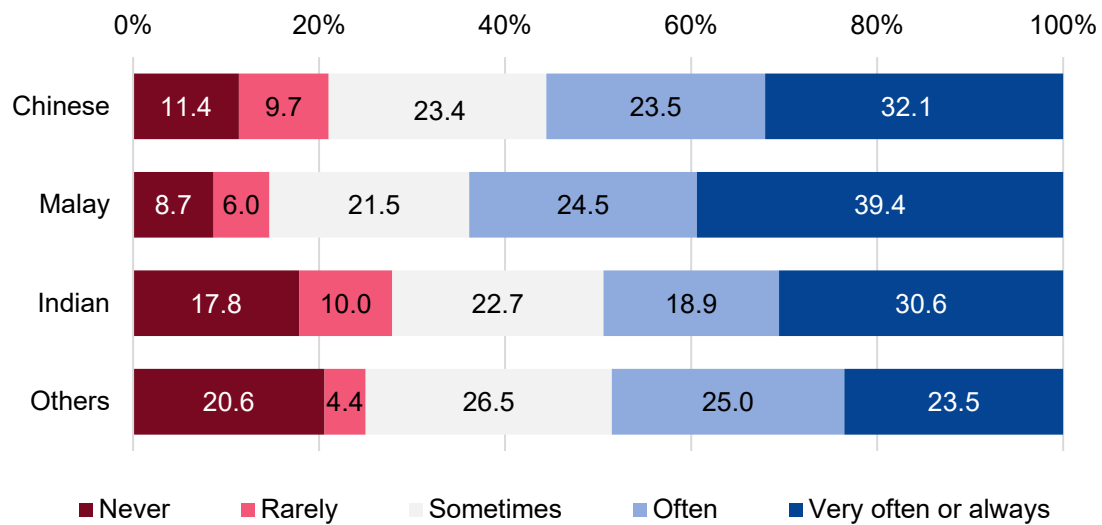
**Figure 3.5.2: Frequency of using Singlish socially with friends, by age cohort (2024)**



### ***3.5.3 Malay respondents were more likely to use Singlish frequently with their friends compared to other racial groups***

Close to two-thirds of Malay respondents reported using Singlish with friends often, very often, or always (63.9 per cent), compared to 55.6 per cent among Chinese respondents. Indian respondents were less likely to report frequent Singlish use with friends (49.5 per cent). Correspondingly, Indian respondents were more likely to indicate never or rarely using Singlish with friends (27.8 per cent), compared to Malays (14.7 per cent) (see Figure 3.5.3).

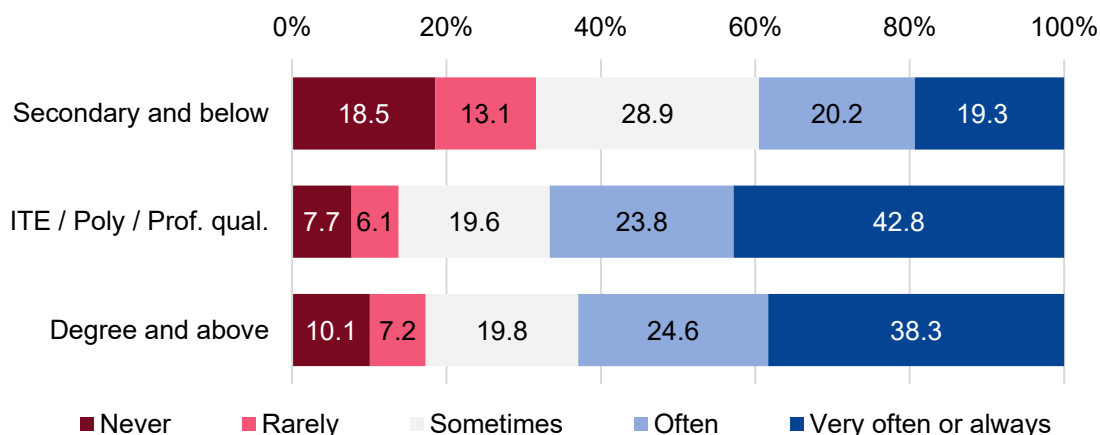
**Figure 3.5.3: Frequency of using Singlish socially with friends, by race (2024)**



**3.5.4 Higher-educated respondents were also more likely to use Singlish frequently with friends, compared to those with secondary and below qualifications**

Singlish use with friends differed markedly by education level in 2024. Around two-thirds of respondents with post-secondary qualifications reported using Singlish with friends often, very often, or always, including 66.6 per cent of those with ITE, Polytechnic, or professional qualifications and 62.9 per cent of degree holders. In contrast, under two-fifths of respondents with secondary education and below indicated frequent Singlish use with friends (39.5 per cent). This gap was driven mainly by higher-educated respondents being substantially more likely to report using Singlish “very often or always” with friends (ITE, polytechnic or professional qualifications: 42.8 per cent; degree and above: 38.3 per cent), compared to those with secondary education and below (19.3 per cent) (see Figure 3.5.4).

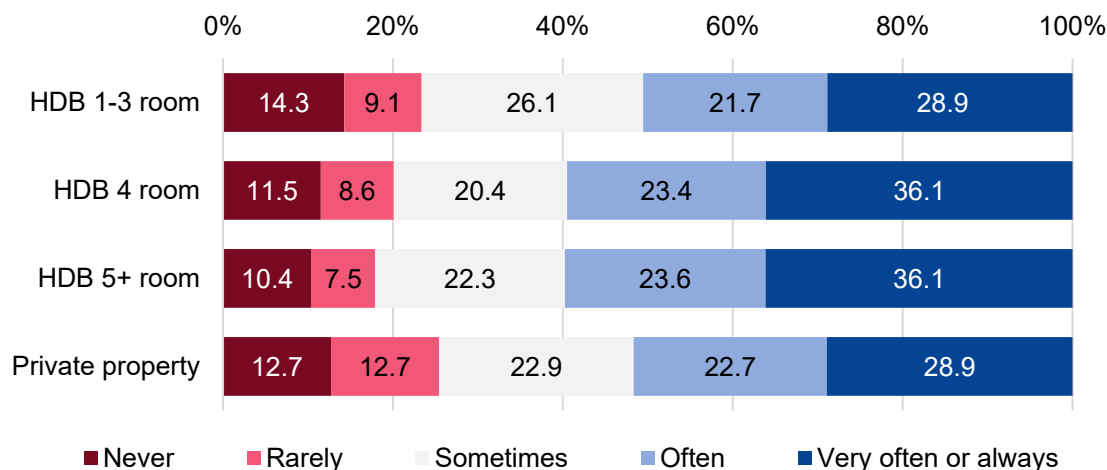
**Figure 3.5.4: Frequency of using Singlish socially with friends, by education level (2024)**



**3.5.5 Respondents in larger public housing types were more likely to use Singlish frequently with friends, compared to those in smaller HDB flats and private property**

Singlish use with friends varied by housing type, though the pattern was not linear by affluence. Around six in 10 respondents living in HDB 4 room and HDB 5+ room flats reported using Singlish with friends often, very often, or always (59.5 per cent and 59.7 per cent, respectively). In contrast, just over half of HDB 1–3 room and private property residents indicated frequent Singlish use with friends (50.6 per cent and 51.6 per cent, respectively) (see Figure 3.5.5).

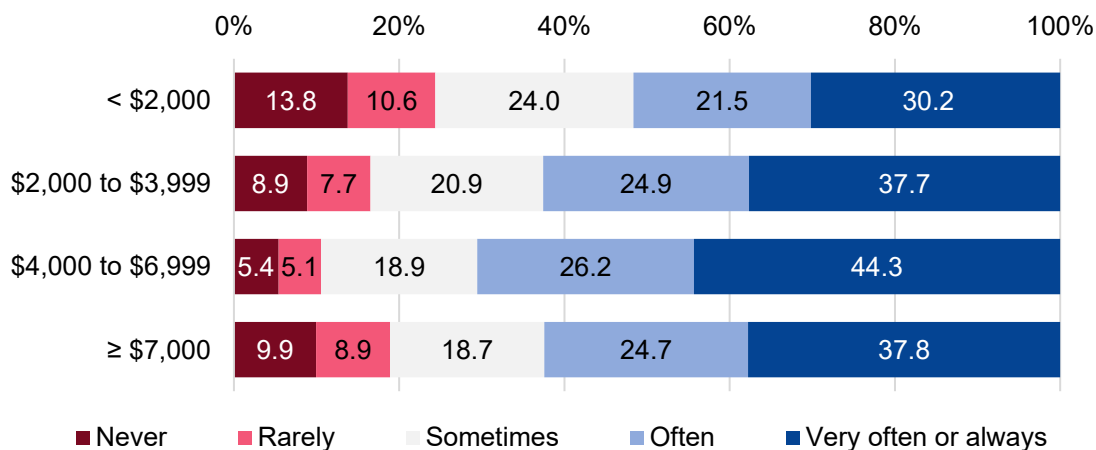
**Figure 3.5.5: Frequency of using Singlish socially with friends, by housing type (2024)**



### ***3.5.6 Middle-income respondents were more likely to use Singlish frequently with friends, compared to lower- and higher-income respondents***

Singlish use with friends varied by income level in a similar fashion with housing type. Around seven in 10 respondents earning \$4,000 to \$6,999 reported using Singlish with friends often, very often, or always (70.5 per cent), the highest proportion across income groups. Respondents earning \$2,000 to \$3,999 and those earning \$7,000 and above reported similar levels of frequent Singlish use (62.6 per cent and 62.5 per cent, respectively). In contrast, respondents earning below \$2,000 were least likely to indicate frequent Singlish use with friends (51.7 per cent). This pattern was driven mainly by middle-income respondents being more likely to report using Singlish “very often or always” with friends (44.3 per cent among those earning \$4,000 to \$6,999), compared to other income groups (see Figure 3.5.6).

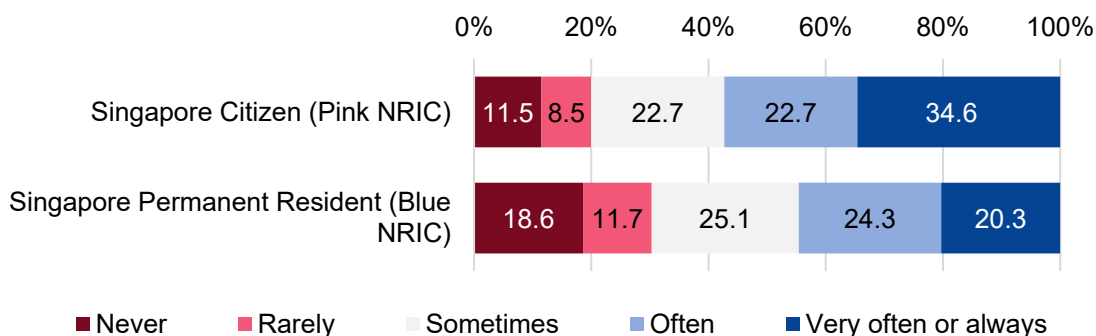
**Figure 3.5.6: Frequency of using Singlish socially with friends, by income level (2024)**



### 3.5.7 SCs were more likely than PRs to use Singlish frequently with friends

Over half of SCs reported using Singlish with friends often, very often, or always (57.3 per cent), compared to under half of PRs (44.6 per cent). This difference was driven mainly by SCs being more likely to indicate using Singlish “very often or always” with friends (34.6 per cent, compared to 20.3 per cent among PRs), while PRs were correspondingly more likely to report never or rarely using Singlish with friends (30.3 per cent, compared to 20 per cent among SCs) (see Figure 3.5.7).

**Figure 3.5.7: Frequency of using Singlish socially with friends, by citizenship status (2024)**



### 3.5.8 Race, age, gender, education level, income and citizenship were statistically significant predictors of frequency of Singlish use with friends

In line with findings from the crosstabulations preceding this section, linear regression analysis based on the full RRL sample indicates that individuals who were non-Indian, younger, male, higher educated, and who had higher incomes were more likely to use Singlish with friends frequently. Citizenship status was also a statistically significant predictor; Singapore citizens were more likely than PRs to use Singlish with friends frequently (see Table 3.5.8).

**Table 3.5.8: Frequency of using Singlish with friends (linear regression)**

Variables	Standardised Coefficient
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	.036
<b>Indian</b>	<b>-.054**</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>-.300***</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	<b>-.064***</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>.081**</b>
<b>Housing</b>	-.020
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	<b>.053*</b>
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	<b>-.141***</b>
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.147

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## 3.6 Heritage Language Use in Social Settings

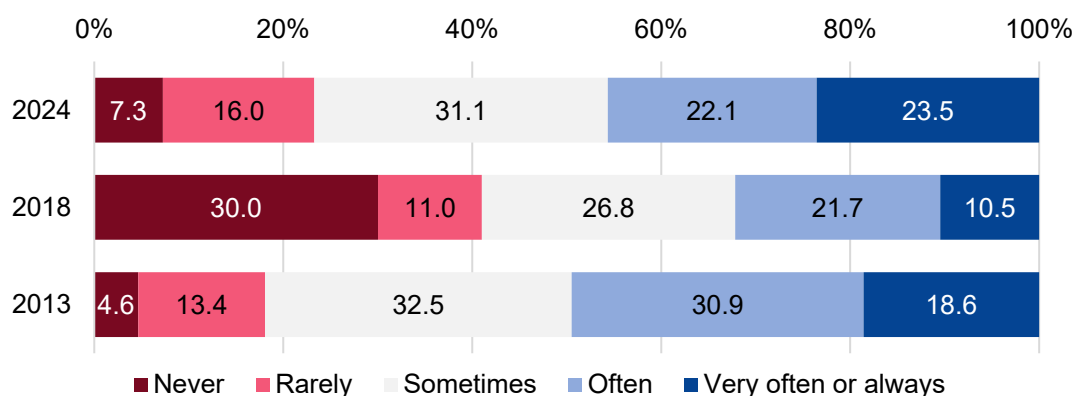
This section analyses the reported frequency of using heritage languages when communicating or interacting with friends, among all RRL respondents across the three

waves and key demographics of interest for the latest wave. It concludes with a linear regression analysis of heritage language use among friends using the full respondent sample. Overall, RRL's findings that heritage-language use with friends rebounded in 2024 should not be read as contradicting DOS data showing a long-term decline in Chinese dialects as home languages (DOS, 2021). Rather, it suggests that some heritage languages may persist or revive in selected social contexts even as they have become less dominant in households.

### ***3.6.1 The proportion of respondents who use heritage languages frequently with friends declined in 2018, but rebounded in 2024 to near 2013 levels***

In 2024, under half of respondents indicated that they use heritage languages with friends often, very often, or always (45.6 per cent). This represents a rebound from 2018 (32.2 per cent) and is close to the level observed in 2013 (49.5 per cent). This change was driven mainly by a sharp fall in the share who never used heritage languages with friends, from 30 per cent in 2018 to 7.3 per cent in 2024. Over the same period, the proportion reporting using heritage languages “very often or always” more than doubled, rising from 10.5 per cent in 2018 to 23.5 per cent in 2024. (see Figure 3.6.1).

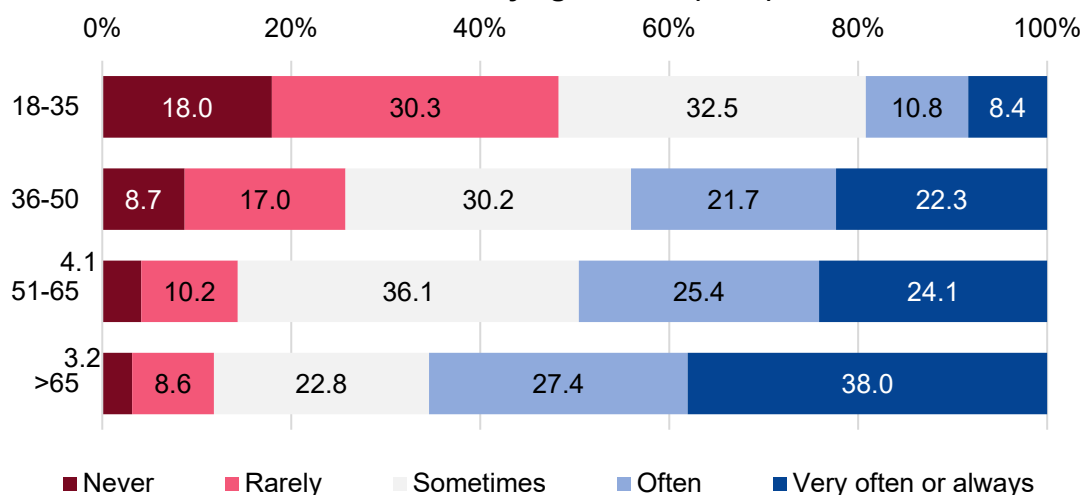
**Figure 3.6.1: Frequency of using heritage languages socially with friends, by wave**



### ***3.6.2 Older respondents were substantially more likely to use heritage languages frequently with friends, compared to younger age cohorts***

Heritage language use with friends varied markedly by age in 2024. Close to two-thirds of respondents aged over 65 reported using heritage languages with friends often, very often, or always (65.4 per cent). This proportion was significantly lower among those aged 51–65 (49.5 per cent) and 36–50 (44 per cent). Under one-fifth of respondents aged 18–35 indicated frequent heritage language use with friends (19.2 per cent), and they were correspondingly much more likely to report never or rarely using heritage languages with friends (48.3 per cent) (see Figure 3.6.2).

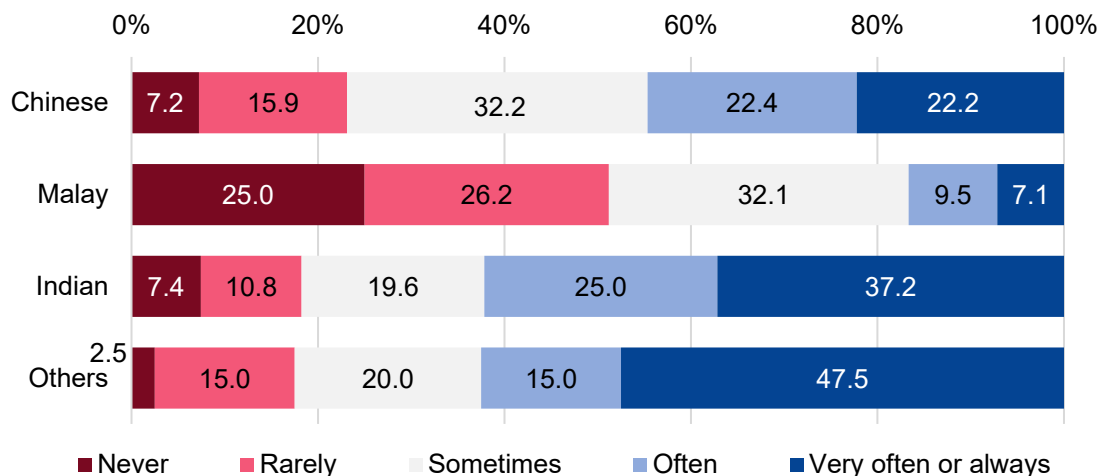
**Figure 3.6.2: Frequency of using heritage languages socially with friends, by age cohort (2024)**



### ***3.6.3 Indian respondents were more likely to use heritage languages frequently with friends, compared to Chinese and Malay respondents***

Heritage language use with friends varied markedly across racial groups in 2024. Around three-fifths of Indian respondents reported using heritage languages with friends often, very often, or always (62.2 per cent). In contrast, under half of Chinese respondents reported frequent heritage language use with friends (44.6 per cent), while Malay respondents were the least likely to do so (16.6 per cent). Correspondingly, around half of Malay respondents indicated never or rarely using heritage languages with friends (51.2 per cent), compared to 23.1 per cent among Chinese respondents and 18.2 per cent among Indian respondents (see Figure 3.6.3).

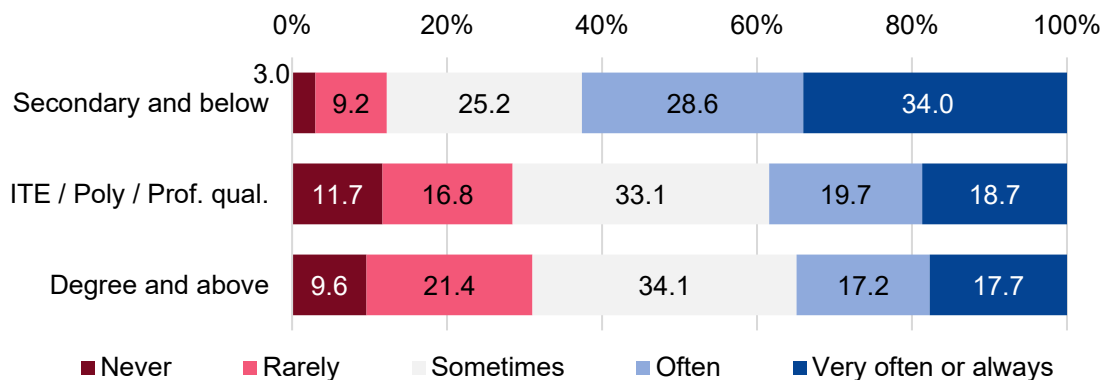
**Figure 3.6.3: Frequency of using heritage languages socially with friends, by race (2024)**



### ***3.6.4 Lower-educated respondents were more likely to use heritage languages socially***

Over six in 10 respondents with secondary education and below reported using heritage languages with friends often, very often, or always (62.6 per cent). In contrast, under two-fifths of respondents with post-secondary qualifications indicated frequent heritage language use with friends (38.4 per cent among those with ITE, polytechnic or professional qualifications and 34.9 per cent among degree holders) (see Figure 3.6.4).

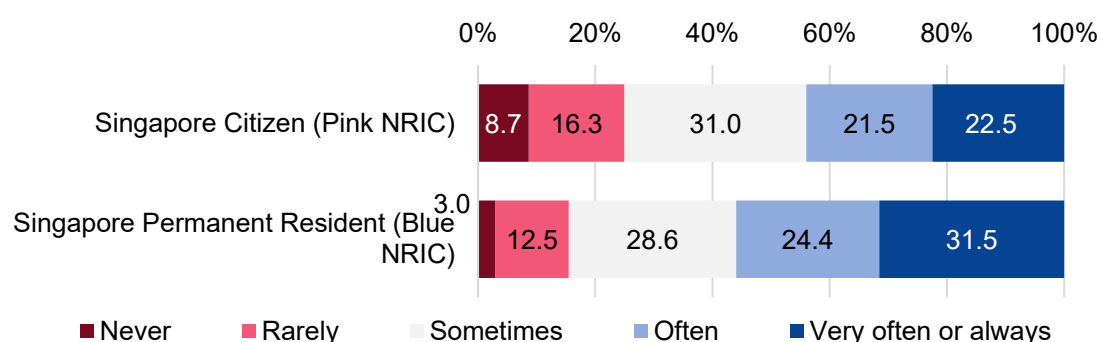
**Figure 3.6.4: Frequency of using heritage languages socially with friends, by education level (2024)**



### 3.6.5 PRs are more likely to use heritage languages frequently with friends relative to their SC counterparts

Over half of PRs reported using heritage languages with friends often, very often, or always (55.9 per cent), compared to under half of SCs (44 per cent). This difference was driven mainly by PRs being more likely to indicate using heritage languages “very often or always” with friends (31.5 per cent, compared to 22.5 per cent among SCs), while SCs were correspondingly more likely to report rarely using heritage languages with friends (16.3 per cent, compared to 12.5 per cent among PRs) (see Figure 3.6.5).

**Figure 3.6.5: Frequency of using heritage languages socially with friends, by citizenship status (2024)**



### 3.6.6 Race, age, education level, income, and citizenship were statistically significant predictors of reported frequency of heritage language use with friends

In line with findings from the crosstabulations preceding this section, linear regression analysis based on the full RRL sample indicate that respondents who are non-Malay, Indian, older, less educated, had higher incomes, and PRs were more likely to use

heritage languages with friends frequently. Gender and housing type were not statistically significant predictors (see Table 3.6.6).

**Table 3.6.6: Frequency of using heritage languages with friends (linear regression)**

Variables	Standardised Coefficient
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>-.105***</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>.059*</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>.263***</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	.026
<b>Education</b>	<b>-.164***</b>
<b>Housing</b>	-.042
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	<b>.065*</b>
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	<b>.162***</b>
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.146

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

### 3.7 Language Use at Work

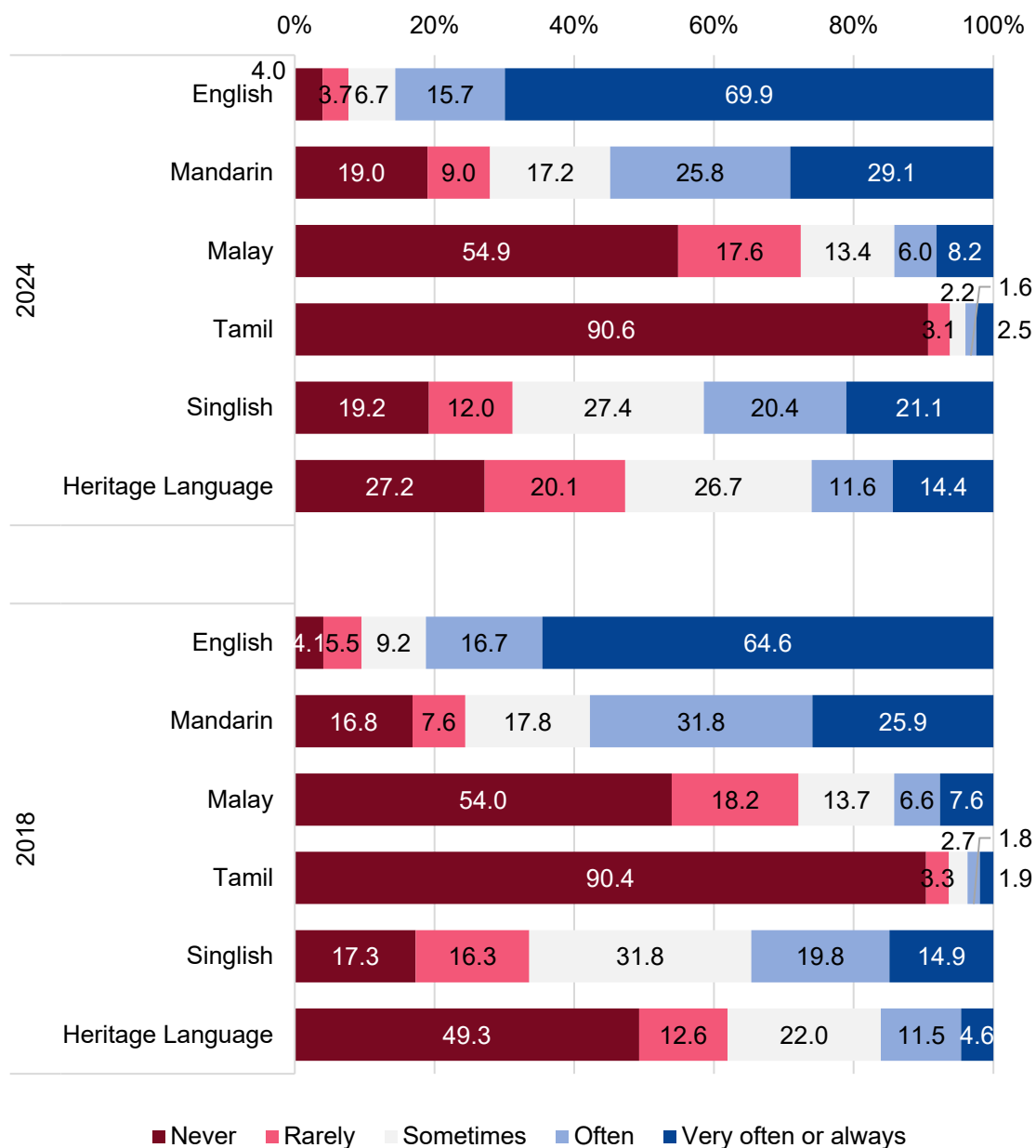
This section examines respondents' reported use of different languages when communicating with colleagues in workplace settings. As English is Singapore's official working language, these patterns provide a window into the extent to which English predominates in day-to-day work interactions, as well as the degree to which Mother Tongues, Singlish, and other heritage languages continue to be used in professional environments.

**3.7.1 English remained the dominant language used at work in 2018 and 2024; over eight in 10 respondents reported using English often, very often, or always in the workplace both 2018 and 2024**

Across the six language options, English was by far the most frequently used language at work. In 2024, 85.6 per cent of respondents indicated that they used English often or very often or always in the workplace, up from 81.3 per cent in 2018. This proportion far exceeded the next most commonly used language, Mandarin; 54.9 per cent of respondents in 2024 (and 57.7 per cent in 2018) reported using Mandarin often, very often, or always at work.

Other languages were used less frequently in the workplace, although there were increases between 2018 and 2024 for Singlish (34.7 per cent to 41.5 per cent) and heritage languages (16.1 per cent to 26 per cent) (see Figure 3.7.1).

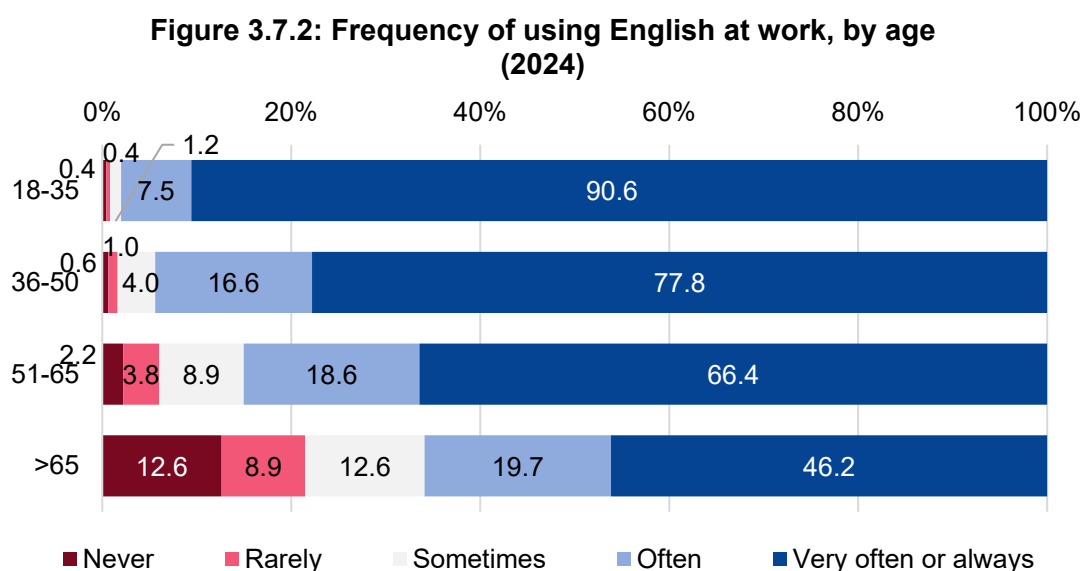
**Figure 3.7.1: Frequency of languages used at work, by wave**



### 3.7.2 Younger respondents were more likely to use English frequently at work

English use at work varied markedly by age. Almost all respondents aged 18–35 reported using English at work often, very often, or always (98.1 per cent), including 90.6 per cent who indicated using English “very often or always”. This proportion declined among older cohorts; 94.4 per cent of those aged 36–50 and 85 per cent of

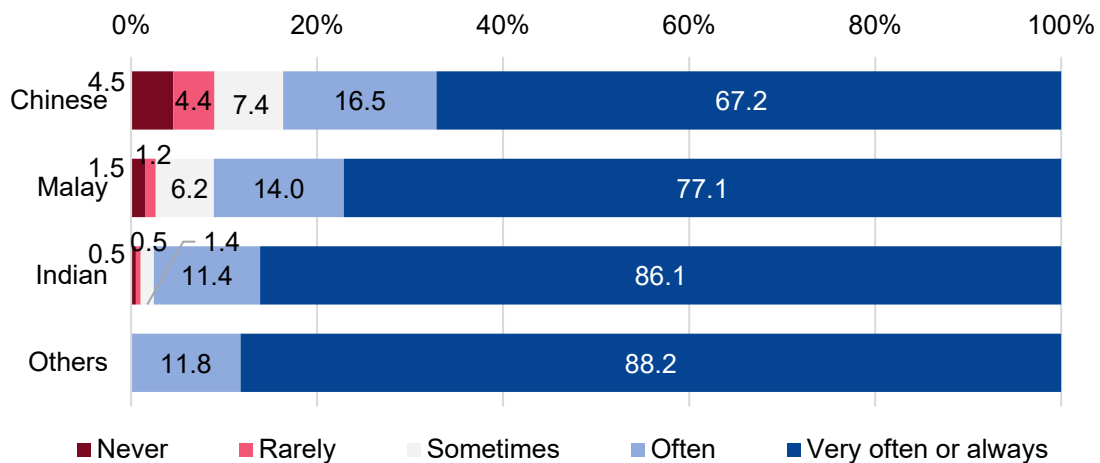
those aged 51–65 reported using English often, very often, or always at work. Respondents aged over 65 were the least likely to report frequent English use at work (65.9 per cent) and were correspondingly more likely to indicate never or rarely using English at work (21.5 per cent) (see Figure 3.7.2).



### ***3.7.3 Indian respondents were more likely to use English frequently at work, compared to Chinese and Malay respondents***

English use at work also varied across racial groups. Almost all Indian respondents reported using English at work often, very often, or always (97.5 per cent). Malay respondents also reported very high levels of frequent English use at work (91.1 per cent). In contrast, Chinese respondents were comparatively less likely to report frequent English use at work (83.7 per cent), and were correspondingly more likely to indicate never or rarely using English at work (8.9 per cent) (see Figure 3.7.3).

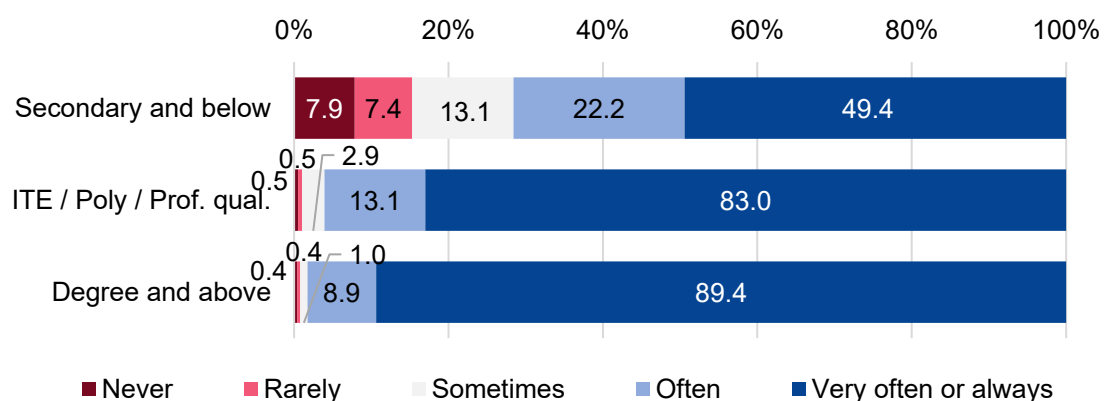
**Figure 3.7.3: Frequency of using English at work, by race (2024)**



### **3.7.4 Higher-educated respondents were more likely to use English frequently at work**

Almost all respondents with post-secondary qualifications reported using English at work often, very often, or always, including 96.1 per cent of those with ITE, Polytechnic, or professional qualifications and 98.3 per cent of degree holders. In contrast, around seven in 10 respondents with secondary education and below indicated frequent English use at work (71.3 per cent) (see Figure 3.7.4).

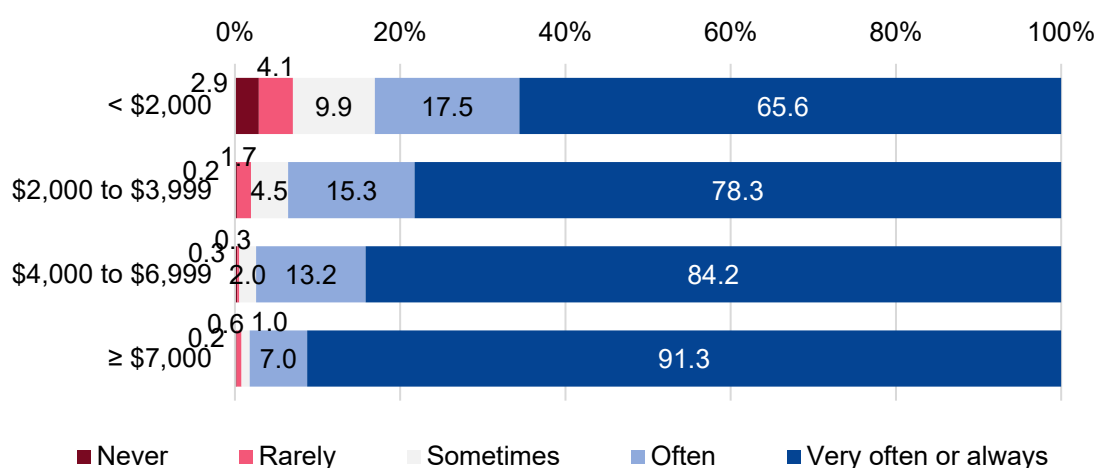
**Figure 3.7.4: Frequency of using English at work, by education level (2024)**



### 3.7.5 Higher income earners were more likely to report using English frequently at work compared to their less affluent peers

English use at work also differed by income levels in 2024. Almost all respondents earning over \$7,000 a month reported using English at work often, very often, or always (98.3 per cent), compared to over eight in 10 of those earning under \$2,000 a month (83.1 per cent) (see Figure 3.7.5).

**Figure 3.7.5: Frequency of using English at work, by income level (2024)**



### 3.7.6 Race, age, education level, income, and citizenship were significant predictors of reported frequency of English language use at work

In line with findings from the crosstabulations preceding this section, linear regression analysis based on the full RRL sample indicates that respondents who are Malay, Indian, younger, higher educated, had higher incomes, and citizens were more likely to use English at work more frequently. Gender and housing type were not statistically significant predictors (see Table 3.7.6).

Table 3.7.6: Frequency of using English at work (linear regression)

Variables	Standardised Coefficient
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>.134***</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>.138***</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>-.205***</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	-.013
<b>Education</b>	<b>.266***</b>
<b>Housing</b>	.017
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	<b>.126***</b>
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	<b>-.092***</b>
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.231

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

#### 4. APPROPRIATENESS OF SINGLISH USE

This chapter peruses responses to a series of questions on the appropriateness of using Singlish across different contexts. While Singlish is often deemed undesirable in formal situations, we query the views of RRL respondents on the use of Singlish across six scenarios to better understand the general perceptions of appropriateness in using such vernacular English as compared to “standard” English. These scenarios are listed in Table 4.1.

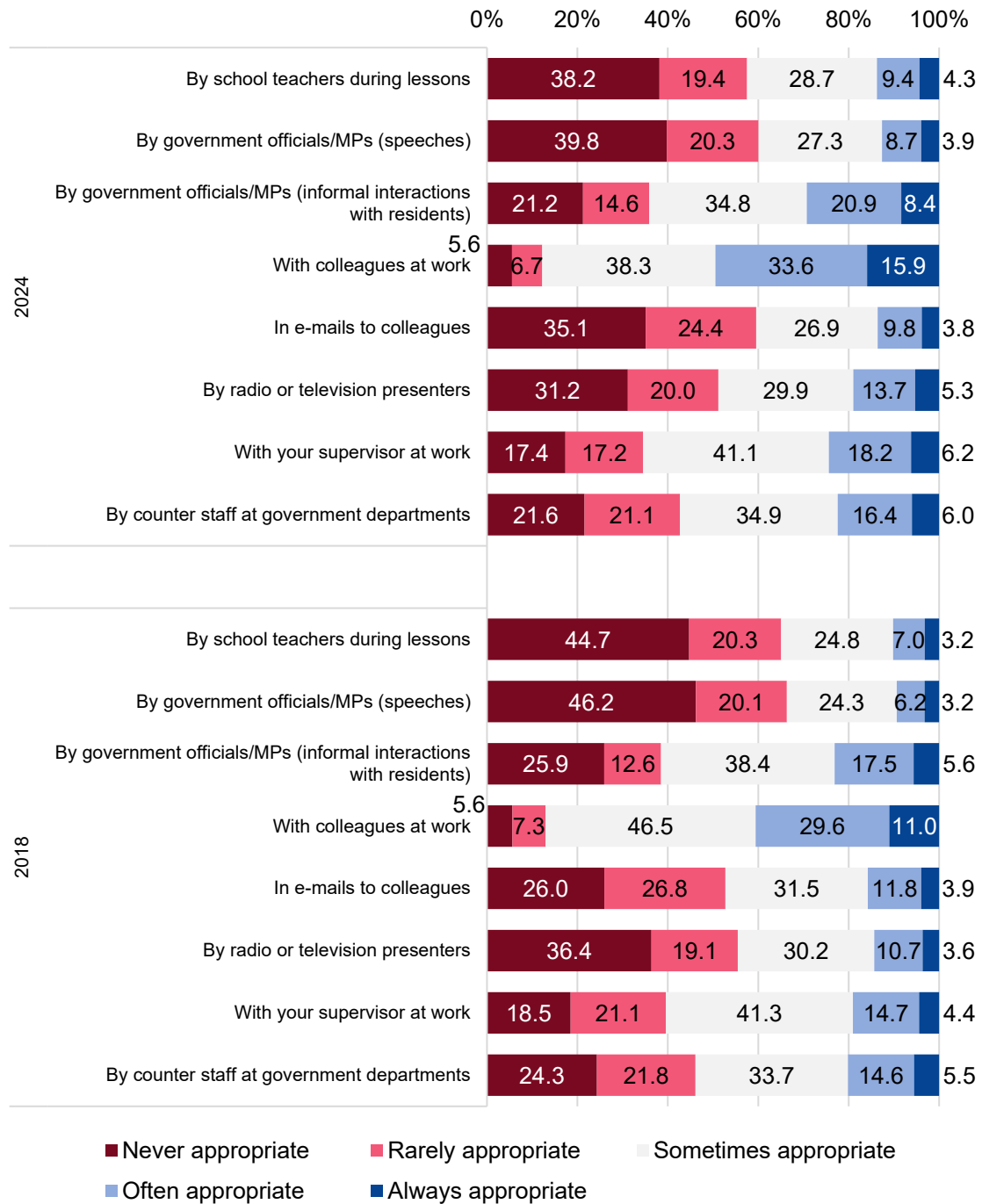
A broadly defined hierarchy of situations is assumed, ranging from the context of education whereby we assume individuals will be generally averse to the use of Singlish due to prerogatives of imparting standard English in curricula, to conversing with family or friends whereby the use of vernaculars is in keeping with the informal context.

**Table 4.1: Situations listed for indication of Singlish use appropriateness**

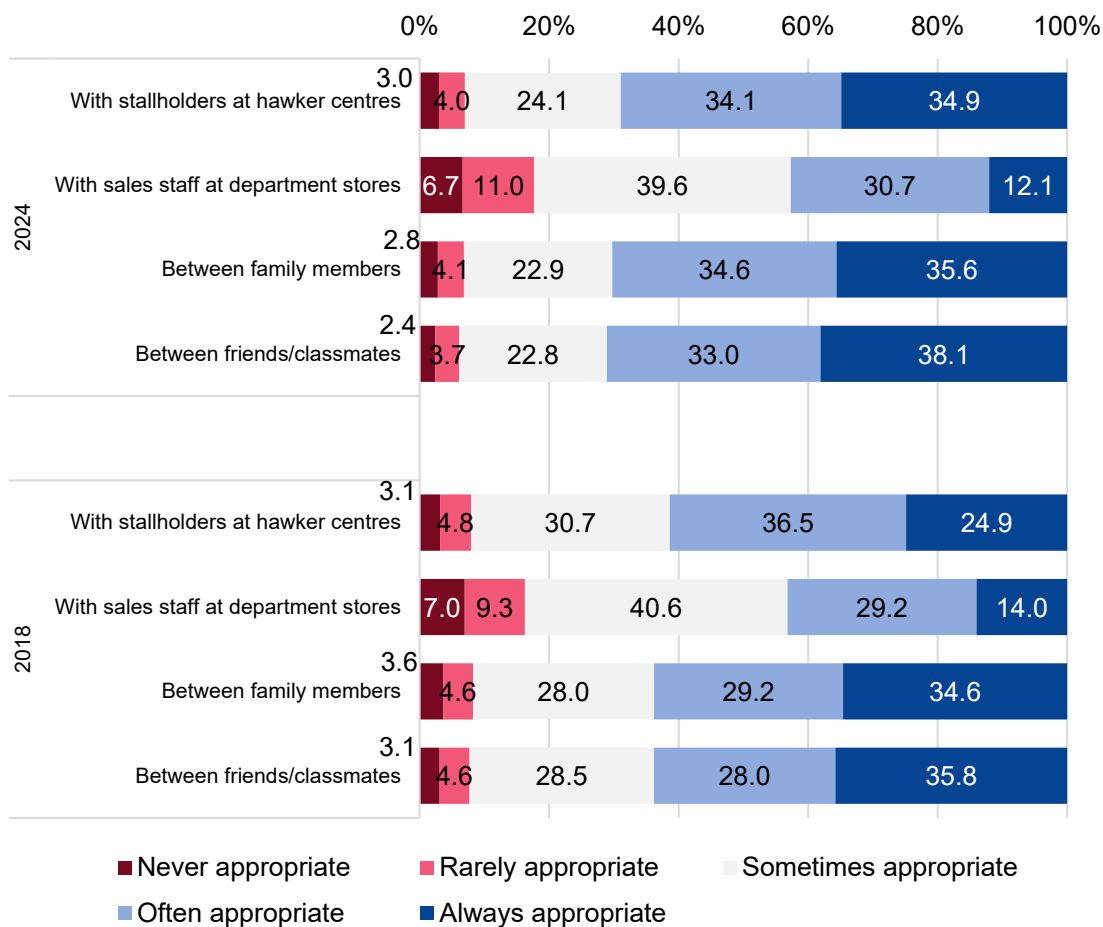
#	Situations
1	By school teachers during lessons (Professional)
2	By government officials or MPs during speeches (Professional)
3	By government officials or MPs during informal interactions with residents (Professional)
4	With colleagues at work (Professional)
5	In emails to colleagues (Professional)
6	With supervisors at work (Professional)
7	By radio or television presenters (Professional)
8	With stallholders at hawker centres or food courts (Social)
9	With sales staff at department stores (Social)
10	By counter staff at government departments (Professional)
11	Between family members (Social)
12	Between friends or classmates (Social)

The proportion of respondents who think that the use of Singlish is “Often appropriate” or “Always appropriate” is generally lower in professional settings than in social settings. Within professional settings, respondents indicated with the highest frequency that communicating with colleagues at work in Singlish is at least “Often appropriate” (49.5 per cent in 2024, 40.6 per cent in 2018), suggesting that it is viewed as a more casual communication (see Figure 4.1a). Whereas in social settings, more than 60 per cent of respondents found it ‘Often appropriate’ or ‘Always appropriate to use Singlish, with the exception of using Singlish with sales staff at department stores, where approximately four in 10 respondents in both waves found it often or very appropriate to use Singlish (see Figure 4.1b).

**Figure 4.1a: Appropriateness of the use of Singlish in professional settings**



**Figure 4.1b: Appropriateness of the use of Singlish in social settings**



### 4.1 Appropriateness of Singlish Use in Educational Contexts

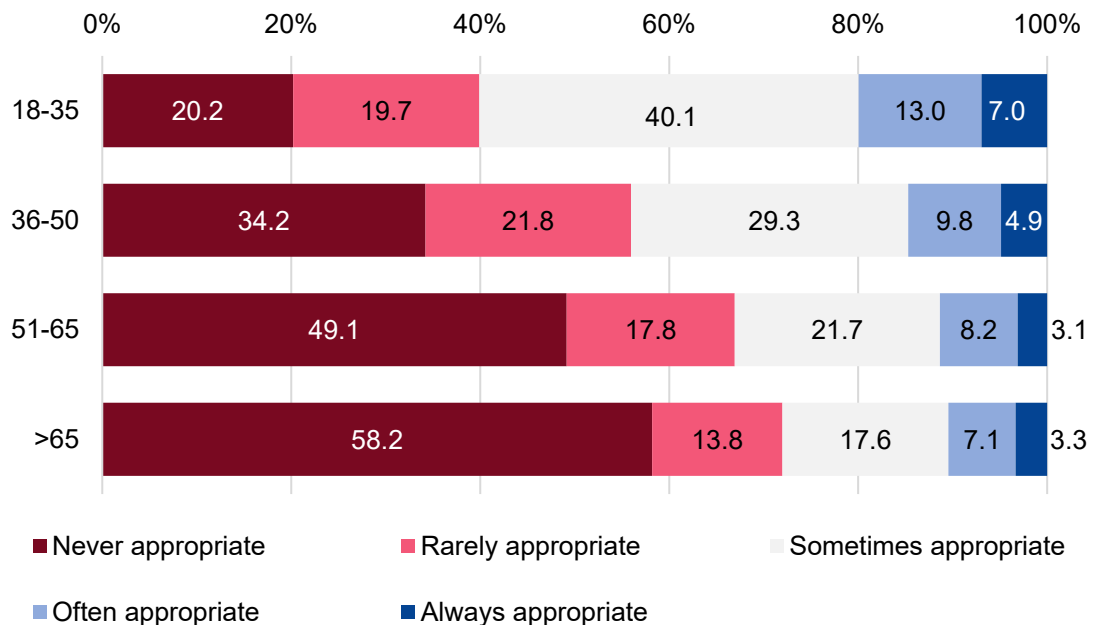
This section examines attitudes towards the appropriateness of Singlish use in educational settings, focusing specifically on whether respondents consider it acceptable for school teachers to use Singlish during lessons. It presents variations in perceptions across key demographic groups, including age, race, and education level, to assess whether acceptance of Singlish in classrooms is patterned by cohort, ethno-linguistic background, or socio-educational profile. Taken together, these findings provide a window into the extent to which Singaporeans view the classroom as a

domain where Standard English norms should be upheld more strictly, as compared to more informal settings.

#### 4.1.1 Younger respondents were more accepting of Singlish use in educational contexts

The acceptance of the use of Singlish by teachers in class is negatively correlated to age. Respondents aged 18-35 were the most likely (20 per cent) to think that it is often or always appropriate for teachers to use Singlish during lessons. In contrast, only 10.4 per cent of respondents aged above 65 indicated likewise. Correspondingly, only 39.9 per cent of respondents aged 18-35 feel that this is rarely or never appropriate, as compared to 72 per cent of respondents above 65 (see Figure 4.1.1).

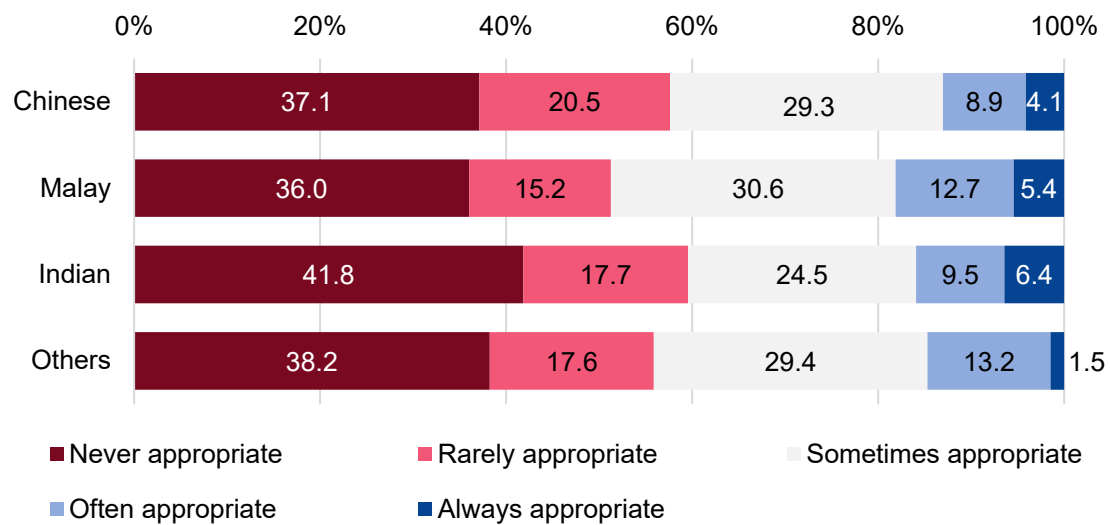
**Figure 4.1.1: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish by school teachers during lessons, by age (2024)**



#### 4.1.2 Respondents had similar perceptions of acceptability of Singlish use in educational contexts across races

Approximately four in 10 respondents across the races find Singlish use “never appropriate” in educational contexts (see Figure 4.1.2).

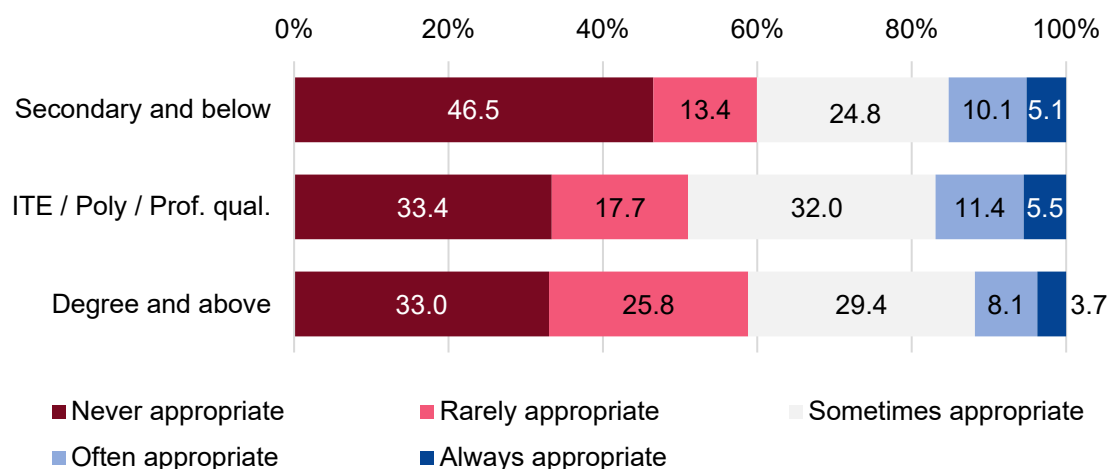
**Figure 4.1.2: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish by school teachers during lessons, by race (2024)**



#### 4.1.3 Appropriateness of Singlish use by school teachers remained similar across education levels

Overall, acceptance of Singlish use by teachers during lessons remained low across education groups. Respondents with ITE, polytechnic, or professional qualifications were somewhat more likely to find such use often or always appropriate (16.9 per cent), but a majority across all education groups still viewed it as rarely or never appropriate (see Figure 4.1.3).

**Figure 4.1.3: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish by school teachers during lessons, by education (2024)**



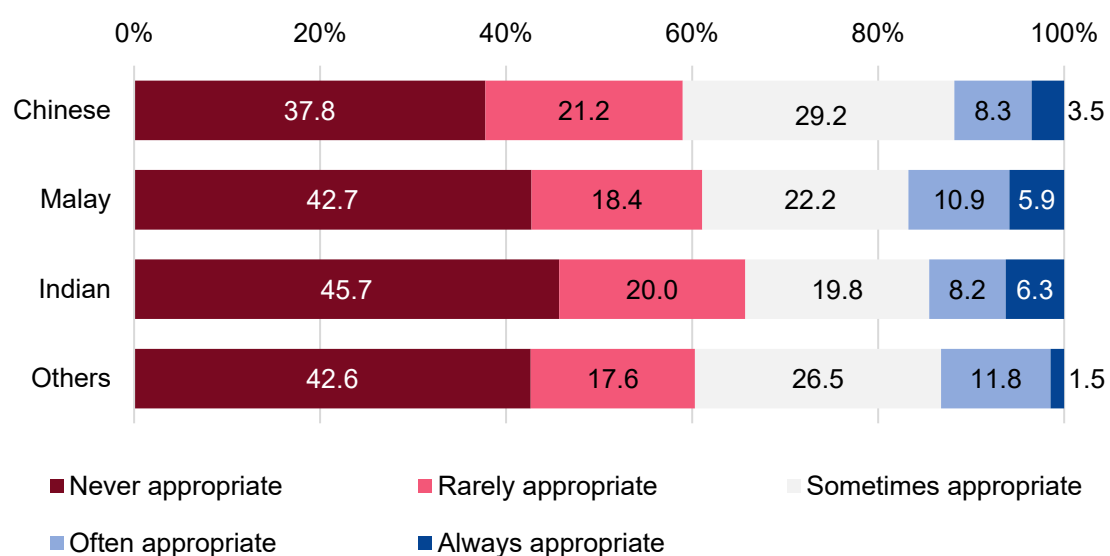
## 4.2 Appropriateness of Singlish Use in Government Communications

In this section, we examine perceptions of the appropriateness of Singlish use in government-related communications, spanning more formal settings as well as frontline interactions. Specifically, it assesses whether respondents find Singlish acceptable when used by government officials or Members of Parliament (MPs) during speeches, during informal interactions with residents, and when used by counter staff at government departments. The subsection then profiles how these views vary across key demographic groups (age, race, and education level), to surface whether certain segments are more receptive to Singlish as a tool for approachability and rapport, or prefer government communications to adhere more strictly to Standard English norms.

### 4.2.1 Respondents had similar views on the use of Singlish by government officials during speeches across races

Over one in 10, or 16.8 per cent, of Malay respondents perceive the use of Singlish by government officials during speeches to be “often” or “always” appropriate, the highest of all the races. However, given that more than 10 per cent of all the other races indicated likewise, the differences between races are not pronounced (see Figure 4.2.1).

**Figure 4.2.1: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish by government officials during speeches, by race (2024)**



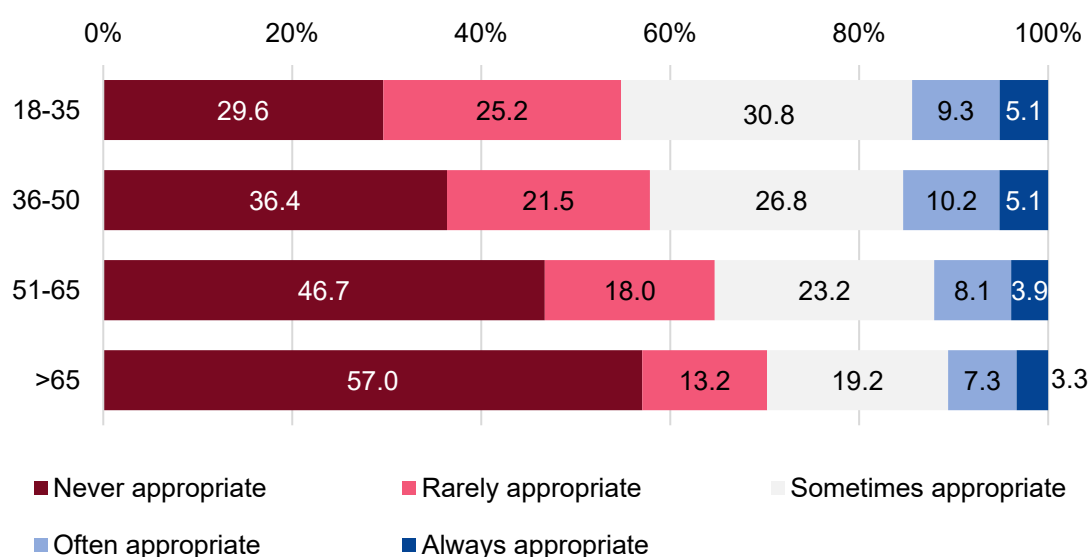
#### ***4.2.2 Younger respondents generally found the use of Singlish by government officials during speeches more appropriate***

Respondents aged 36-50 had the largest percentage that found the use of Singlish by government officials during speeches to be “often appropriate” or “always appropriate” (15.3 per cent), which is higher than the respondents aged 18-35 (14.4 per cent). However, as with all the percentages with regards to these options, the differences are mainly marginal. When looking at respondents who indicated that they find the use of Singlish by government officials during speeches to be “never appropriate” or “rarely appropriate”, the relationship between age and perceived appropriateness is far

clearer. With age, a higher percentage of respondents will view Singlish use in this context to be unacceptable.

Beyond the two extreme options of “never” and “always” appropriate, we further noted that younger respondents are more likely than older ones to say that Singlish is “sometimes appropriate” in speeches. This proportion suggests that they are more open to Singlish when it is used selectively and in the right context, rather than rejecting or endorsing it outright (see Figure 4.2.2).

**Figure 4.2.2: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish by government officials during speeches, by age (2024)**

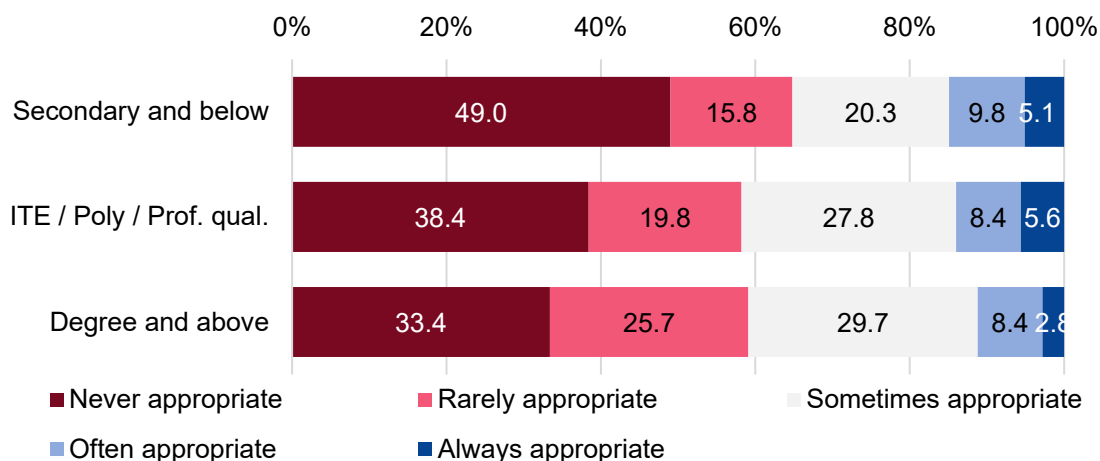


#### ***4.2.3 Less highly educated respondents were marginally more accepting of the use of Singlish by government speeches***

When it comes to the use of Singlish in speeches by government officials, 14.9 per cent of respondents who had a secondary and below education found it often or always appropriate. This was marginally higher compared to respondents with ITE, polytechnic or professional qualifications, or degree holders. Regardless,

approximately six in 10 respondents across education levels still found it rarely or never appropriate for the use of Singlish in government official speeches (see Figure 4.2.3).

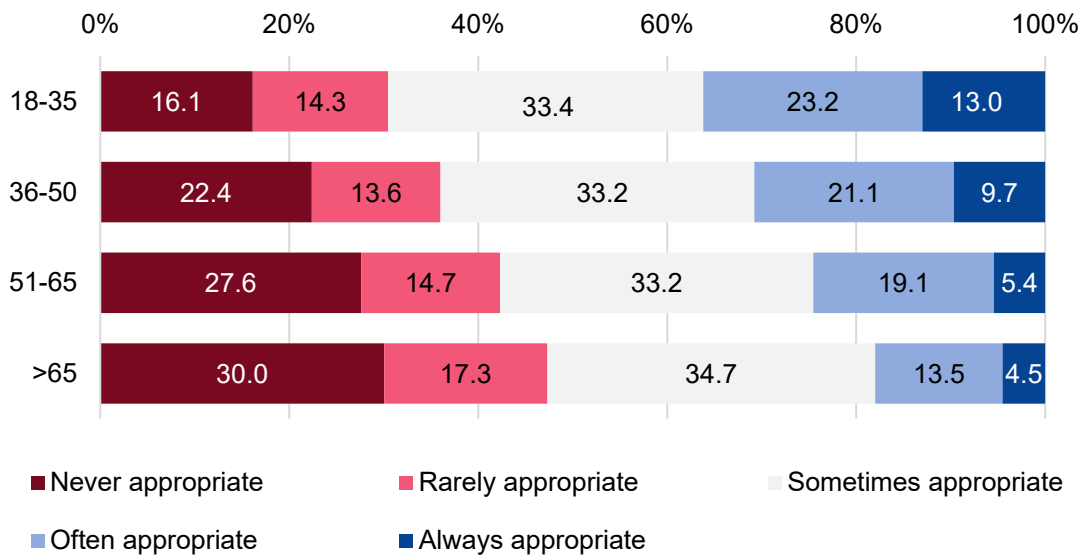
**Figure 4.2.3: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish by government officials during speeches, by education (2024)**



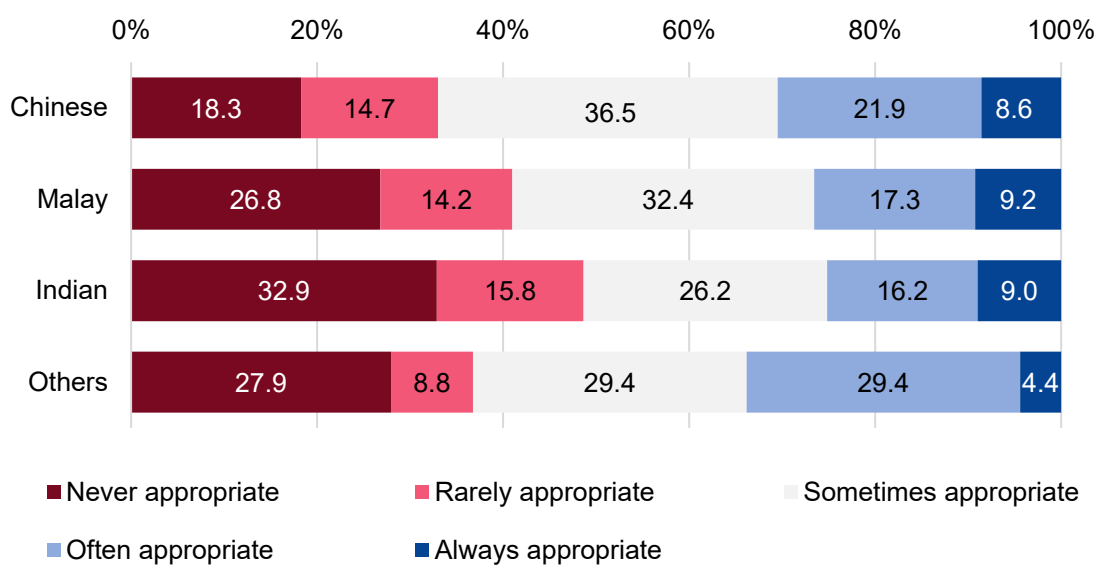
#### ***4.2.4 Respondents who are older, Indian, or have lower educational qualifications were less accepting of Singlish use by government officials or MPs in informal interactions with residents***

The acceptance of the use of Singlish by government officials in informal settings is negatively correlated to age and positively correlated to education levels. Furthermore, Indian respondents were the least likely (25.2 per cent) to think that it is often or always appropriate for government officials to interact informally with residents in Singlish, as compared to other races (30.5 per cent of Chinese and 26.5 per cent of Malay respondents) (see Figure 4.2.4a-c).

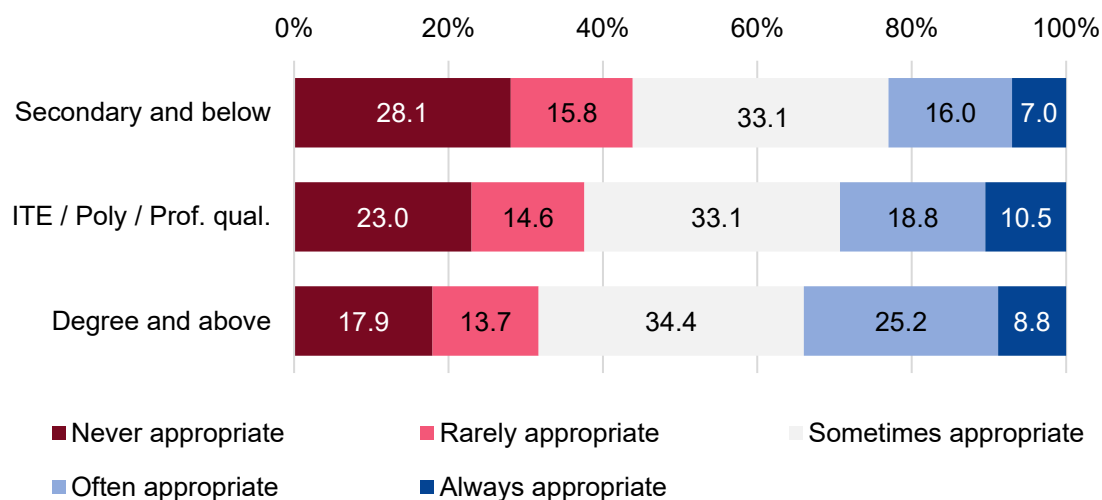
**Figure 4.2.4a: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish by government officials during interactions, by age (2024)**



**Figure 4.2.4b: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish by government officials during interactions, by race (2024)**



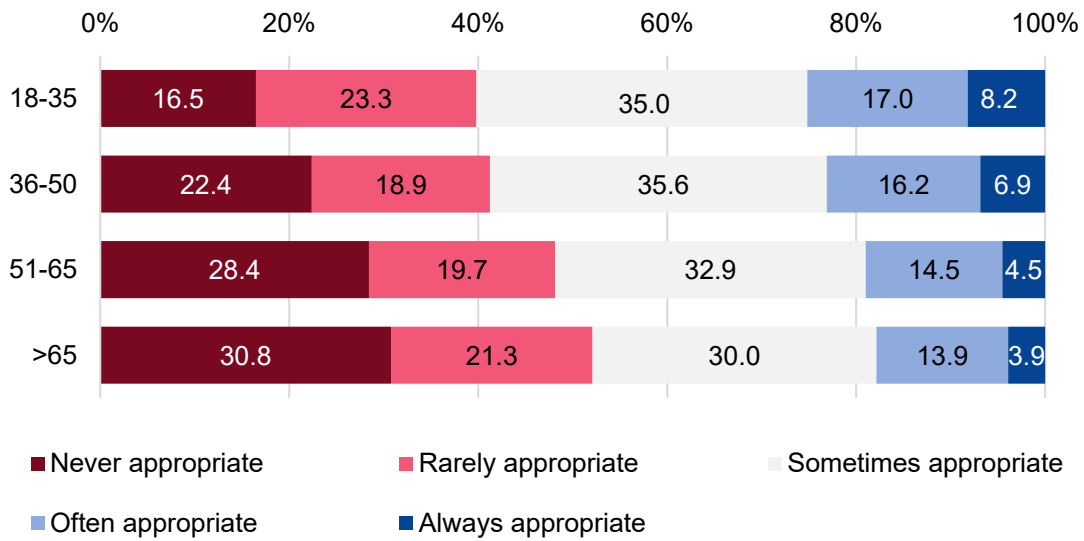
**Figure 4.2.4c: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish by government officials during interactions, by education (2024)**



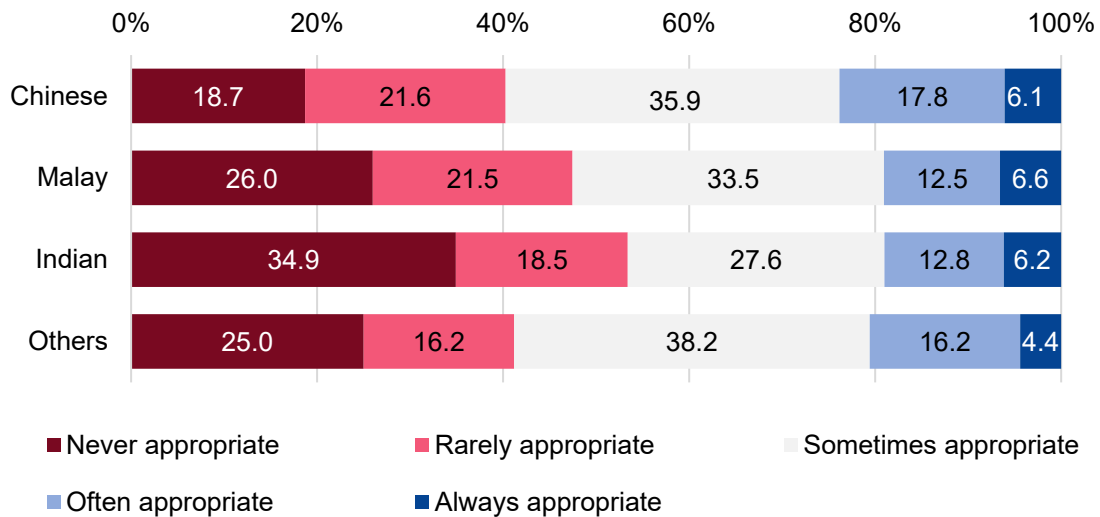
**4.2.5 Younger respondents were more likely to find the use of Singlish at a government counter to be appropriate; Indian respondents were the least likely to find the use of Singlish in this context to be appropriate**

While 25.2 per cent of respondents aged 18-35 found the use of Singlish at a government counter to be “often” or “always” appropriate, this percentage dropped to 17.8 per cent for respondents aged above 65 (see Figure 4.2.5a). While the percentage of respondents who found using Singlish at a government counter to be at least “often” appropriate remains relatively unchanged across races, more Indian respondents felt that using Singlish in such a context was “never” or “rarely” appropriate (53.4 per cent) (see Figure 4.2.5b).

**Figure 4.2.5a: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish at Government Counter, by age (2024)**



**Figure 4.2.5b: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish at Government Counter, by race (2024)**



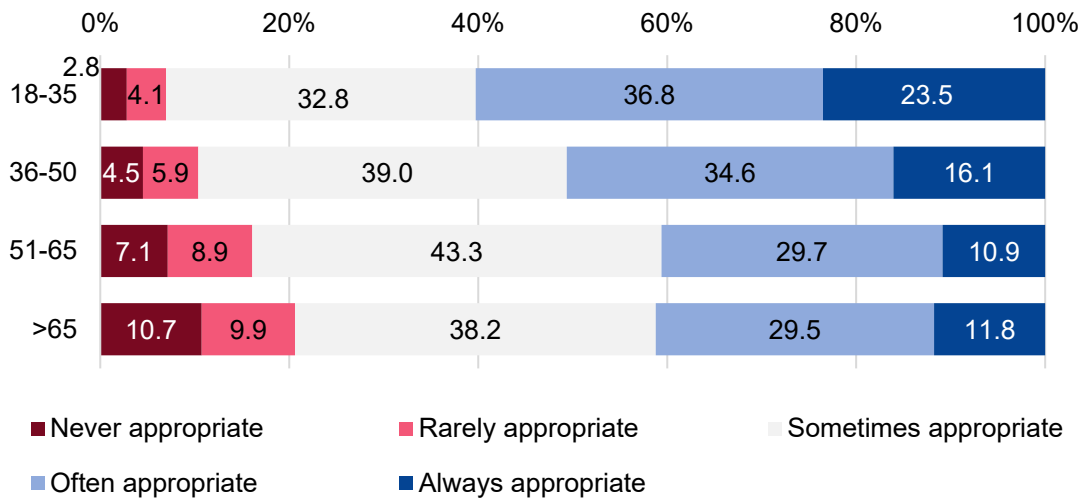
### **4.3 Appropriateness of Singlish Use in the Workplace**

This section examines perceptions of the appropriateness of Singlish use in workplace settings, where norms of professionalism may compete with informal rapport and team culture. It focuses on three common scenarios: 1) using Singlish with colleagues in general workplace interactions, 2) in emails to colleagues, and 3) with supervisors at work, to assess how far Singlish is viewed as acceptable within hierarchical and written versus spoken contexts. Each subsection then analyses differences across key demographic groups, including age, race, and education level, to identify whether younger cohorts, particular racial groups, or higher educated respondents draw stricter boundaries around Singlish use at work.

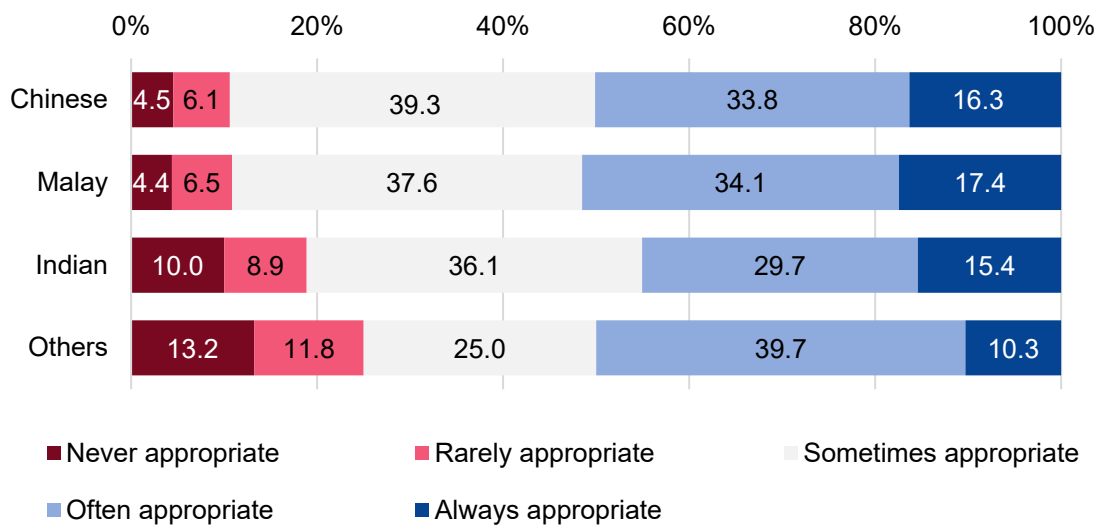
#### ***4.3.1 Younger respondents found it more appropriate to use Singlish with colleagues as compared to their older counterparts; Indian respondents were less likely to find it appropriate to communicate with colleagues in Singlish***

The acceptance of the use of Singlish when communicating with colleagues is also associated with age and ethnicity. Unlike the use of Singlish by government officials in informal settings, it has little association with education (see Figure 4.3.1c). Younger respondents find it more appropriate to use Singlish with colleagues as compared to their older counterparts. Similar to the acceptance of Singlish use by government officials in informal settings, Indian respondents are least likely to think that the use of Singlish with colleagues is often or always appropriate, compared to other races (see Figures 4.3.1a-b).

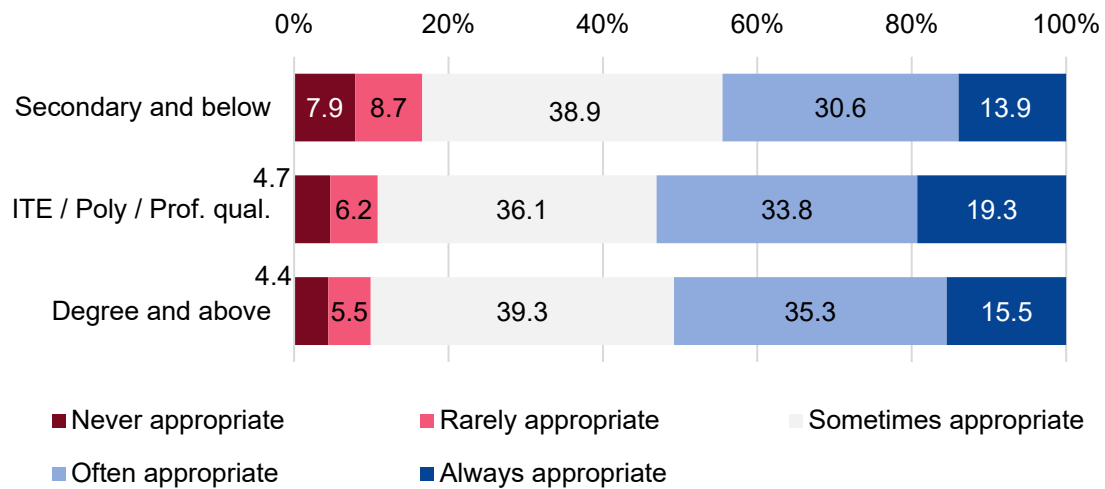
**Figure 4.3.1a: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish with colleagues, by age (2024)**



**Figure 4.3.1b: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish with colleagues, by race (2024)**



**Figure 4.3.1c: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish with colleagues, by education (2024)**

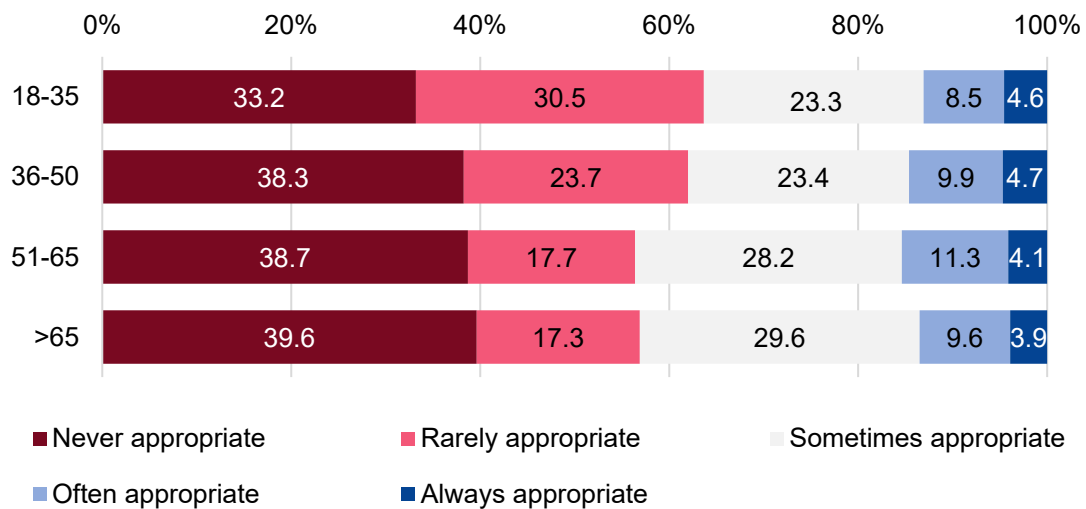


**4.3.2 Older respondents were slightly more likely to find using Singlish with colleagues in emails appropriate; Indian and university-educated respondents found it the least appropriate to write emails to colleagues in Singlish**

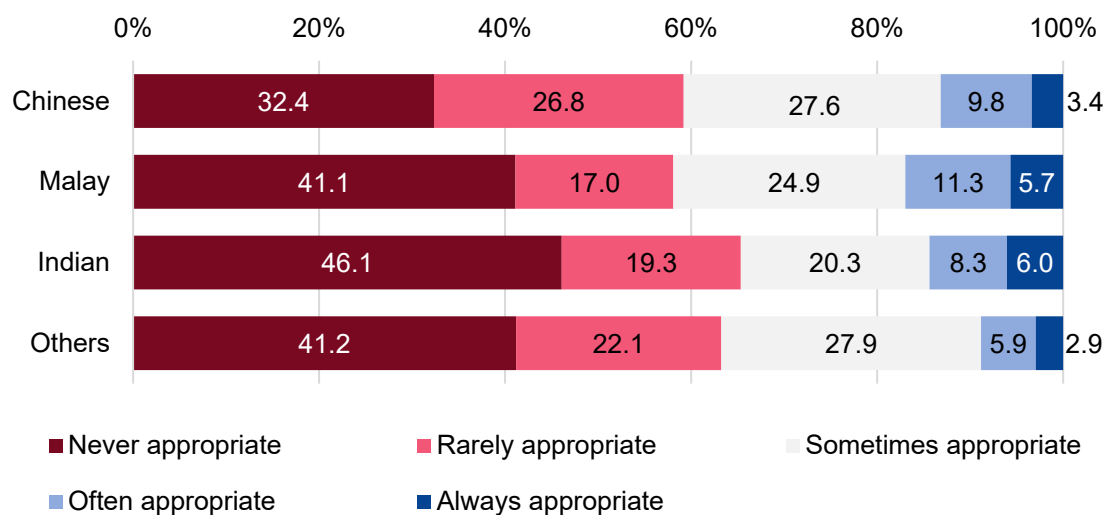
There is a split between those aged 18-50 and 51 and above in terms of views towards the use of Singlish with colleagues in emails. More than 60 per cent of respondents in the younger group find using Singlish with colleagues in emails to be “never” or “rarely appropriate, as compared to approximately 56 per cent of the older groups who feel the same way. Still, more than half of respondents across all age groups find this use of Singlish largely unacceptable (see Figure 4.3.2a). Following the trend of other uses of Singlish, Indian respondents have the largest proportion of those who find the use of Singlish in emails to be never or rarely appropriate (65.4 per cent) (see Figure 4.3.2b).

The higher the level of education the respondent has, the less likely they are to find the use of Singlish in this manner to be “often” or “always appropriate too; 16.7 per cent respondents with secondary and below as their highest achieved education level feel this way compared to 10.9 per cent of those with a degree or higher (see Figure 4.3.2c).

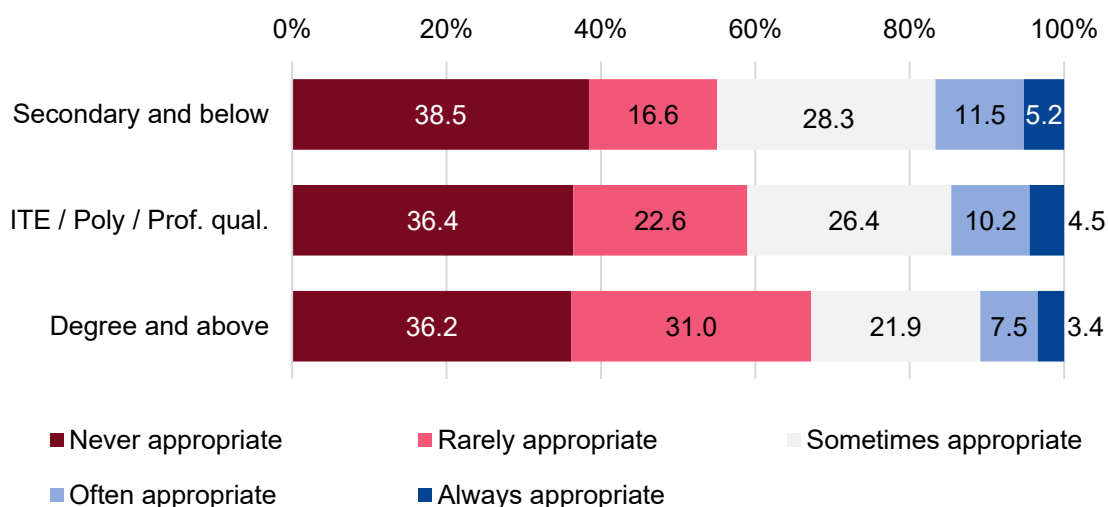
**Figure 4.3.2a: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish with colleagues in email, by age (2024)**



**Figure 4.3.2b: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish with colleagues in email, by race (2024)**



**Figure 4.3.2c: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish with colleagues in email, by education (2024)**



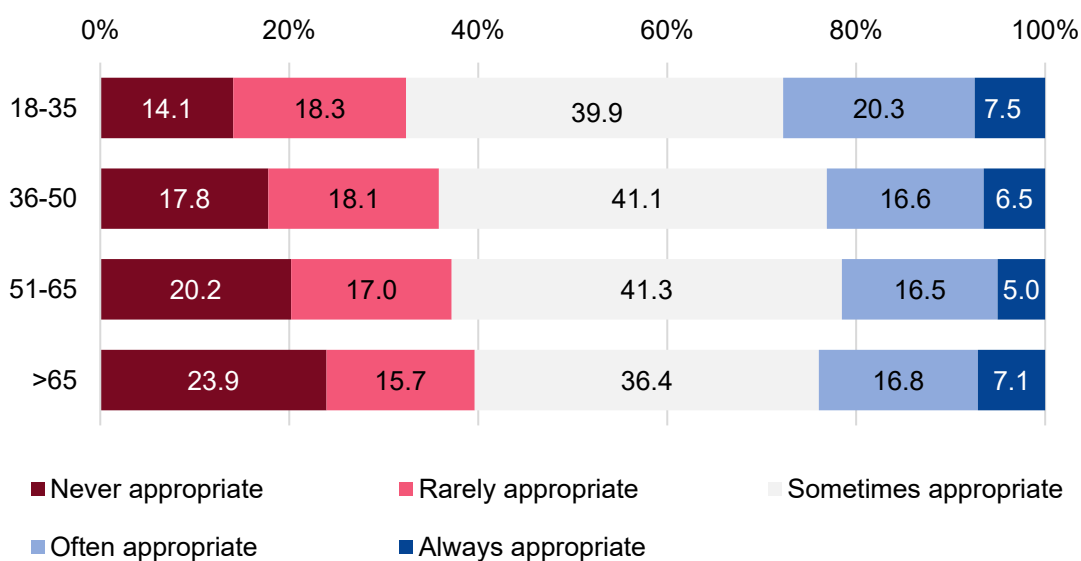
### **4.3.3 Older, Indian, and higher educated respondents were more likely to find the use of Singlish with supervisors at work to be inappropriate**

Across groups, respondents most commonly viewed using Singlish with supervisors as “sometimes appropriate”. A smaller but meaningful minority regarded it as often or always appropriate (roughly a quarter overall), while about one-third to almost half felt it was never or rarely appropriate, depending on subgroup. By age, there is however a clear gradient in perceived inappropriateness. Younger respondents were more permissive; among those aged 18–35, 27.8 per cent said Singlish is often or always appropriate with supervisors, compared with 21.5 per cent among those aged 51–65. Older respondents were more likely to say it is never appropriate, rising from 14.1 per cent for 18–35-year-olds to 23.9 per cent for those over 65 years of age (see Figure 4.3.3a).

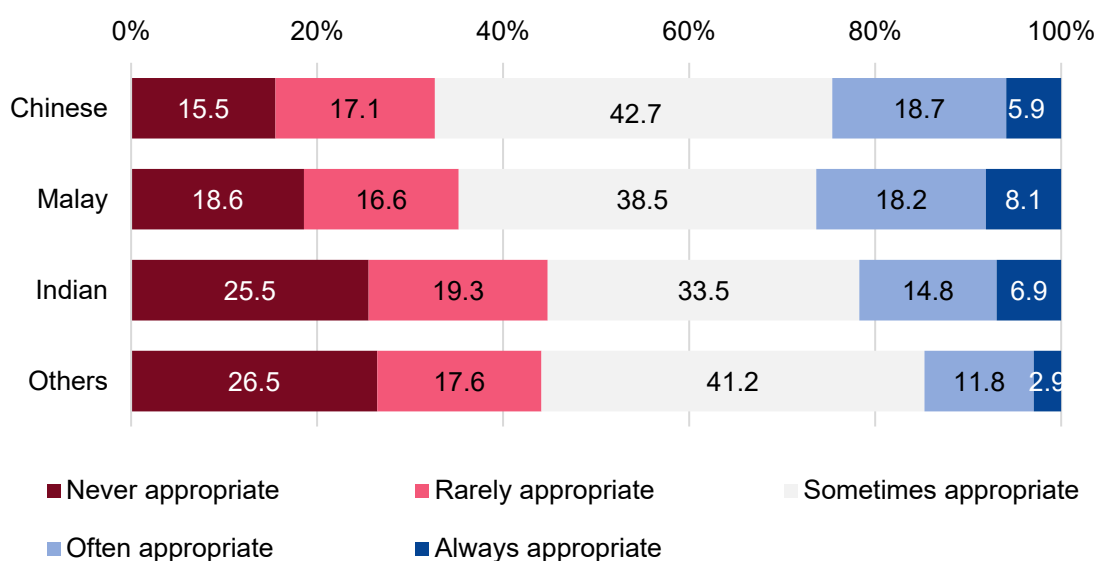
By race and education, differences are present but not stark. Indian respondents were more likely to deem the use of Singlish with supervisors inappropriate (44.8 per cent)

as compared to approximately one-third of Chinese (32.6 per cent) and Malays (35.2 per cent) (see Figure 4.3.3b). Across education levels, degree holders were slightly more likely to say Singlish is rarely or never appropriate (38.7 per cent) as compared to those with secondary and below education (33.8 per cent) (see Figure 4.3.3c).

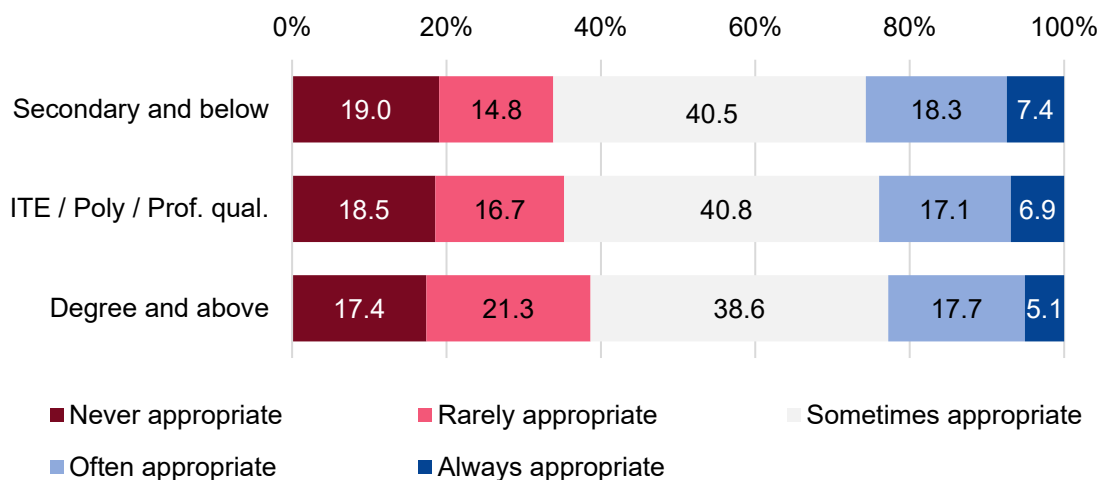
**Figure 4.3.3a: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish with supervisors at work, by age (2024)**



**Figure 4.3.3b: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish with supervisors at work, by race (2024)**



**Figure 4.3.3c: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish with supervisors at work, by education (2024)**



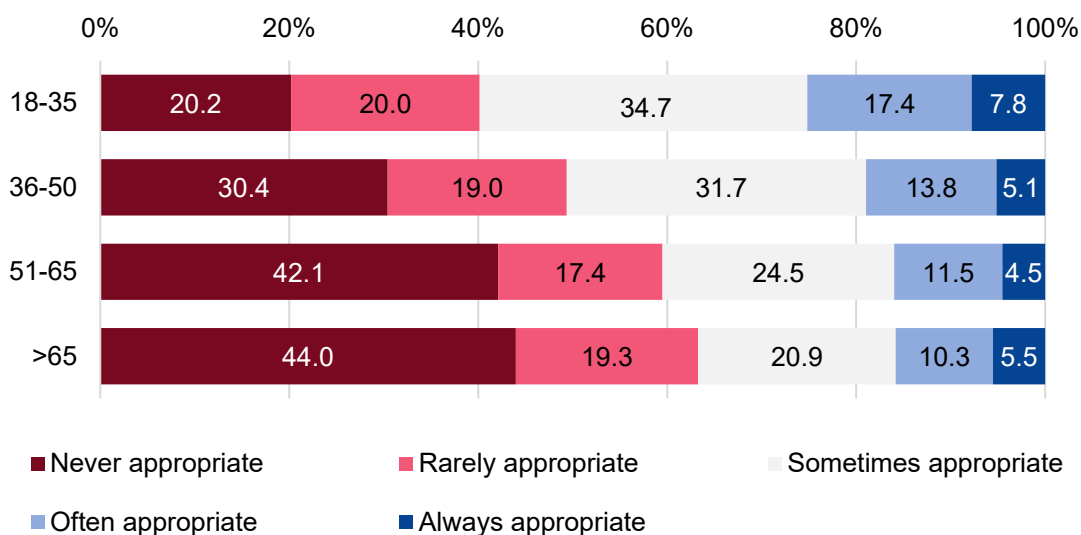
#### 4.4 Appropriateness of Singlish Use in Other Daily Settings

Section 4.4 examines perceptions of the appropriateness of Singlish use in everyday, non-government and non-workplace settings that range from semi-public encounters to private interactions. It covers attitudes toward Singlish being used by radio or television presenters, in service interactions such as hawker centres and department stores, and in more intimate domains including within families and among friends. The subsections then compare how these views vary across key demographic groups (age, race, and education level) to assess where Singlish is most widely accepted as a marker of informality and local rapport, and where respondents continue to draw firmer boundaries around “appropriate” speech.

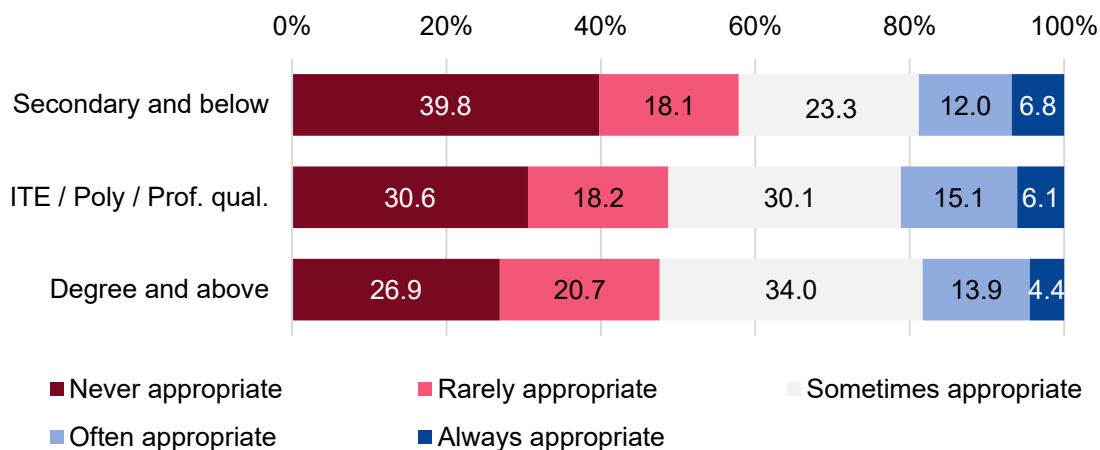
##### ***4.4.1 Older and lower-educated respondents were more likely to find the use of Singlish by radio or television presenters to be inappropriate***

As the age of respondents increased, so did the percentage of those who found the use of Singlish by radio or television presenters to be “never” or “rarely” appropriate. While 40.2 per cent of those in the youngest age group indicated they feel this way, and this proportion increased to 63.3 per cent for those in the oldest age group (see Figure 4.4.1a) While respondents who had at least an ITE / Poly / Professional qualification had similar views on the use of Singlish in this context, respondents whose highest education level was secondary and below were more disapproving, with 57.9 per cent of them finding it “never” or “rarely” appropriate (see Figure 4.4.1b).

**Figure 4.4.1a: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish by radio or television presenters, by age (2024)**



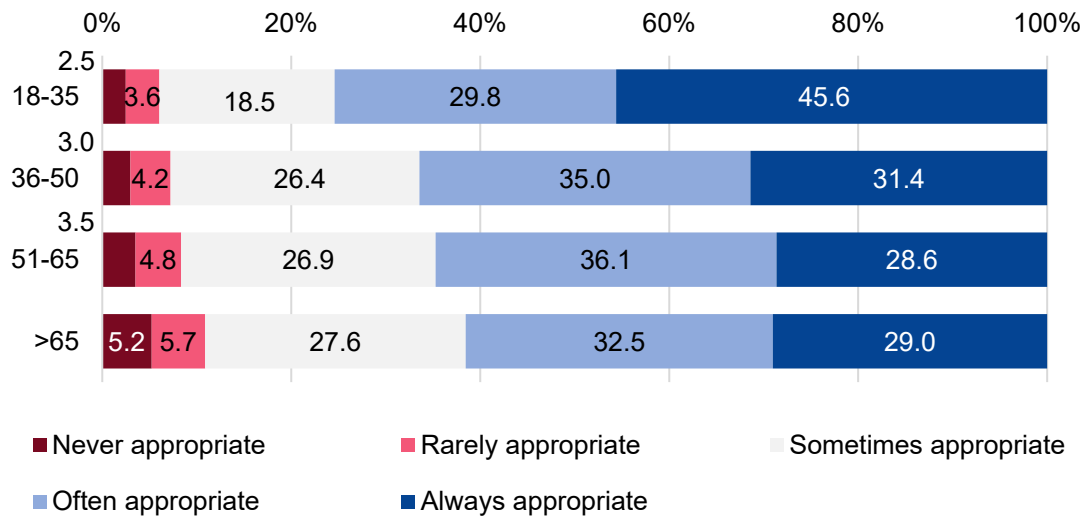
**Figure 4.4.1b: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish by radio or television presenters, by education (2024)**



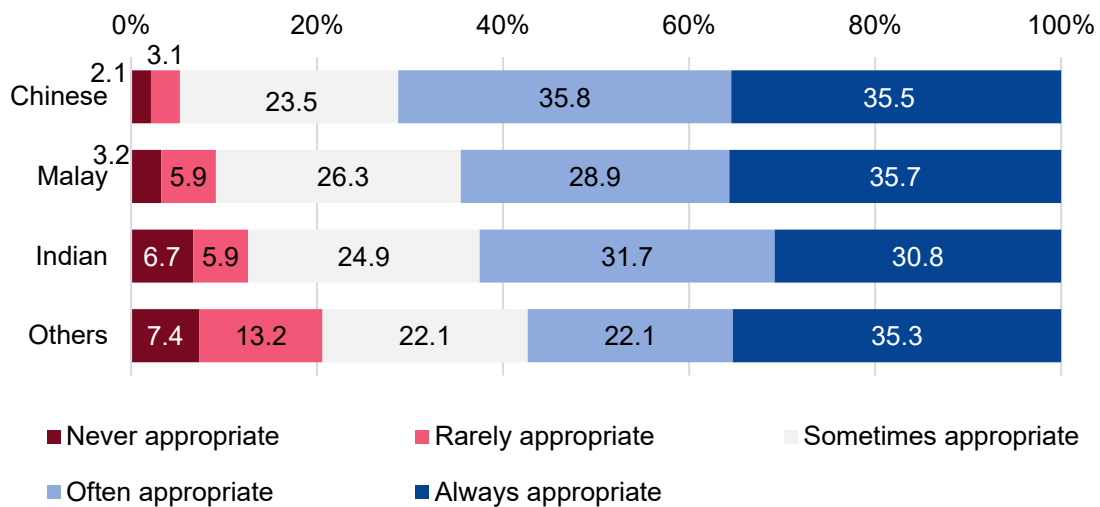
**4.4.2 Overall, respondents found the use of Singlish in a hawker centre appropriate; younger, Chinese and more highly educated respondents were marginally more likely to hold this sentiment**

More than half of respondents found the use of Singlish in a hawker centre to be “often” or “always” appropriate. Respondents aged 18-35 were marginally more likely to believe so (75.4 per cent) (see Figure 4.4.2a). Meanwhile, 71.3 per cent of Chinese respondents found the use of Singlish at a hawker centre to be “often” or “always” appropriate, slightly higher than other races (see Figure 4.4.2b). As education level rose, so too did the respective percentage of respondents who found the use of Singlish at a Hawker centre to be “often” or “always” appropriate (see Figure 4.4.2c).

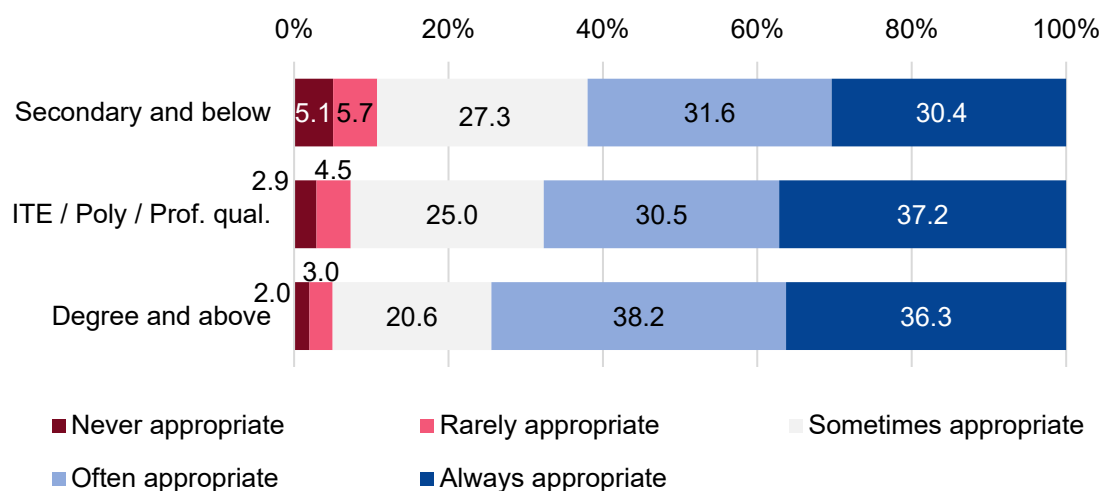
**Figure 4.4.2a: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish at hawker centres, by age (2024)**



**Figure 4.4.2b: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish at hawker centres, by race (2024)**



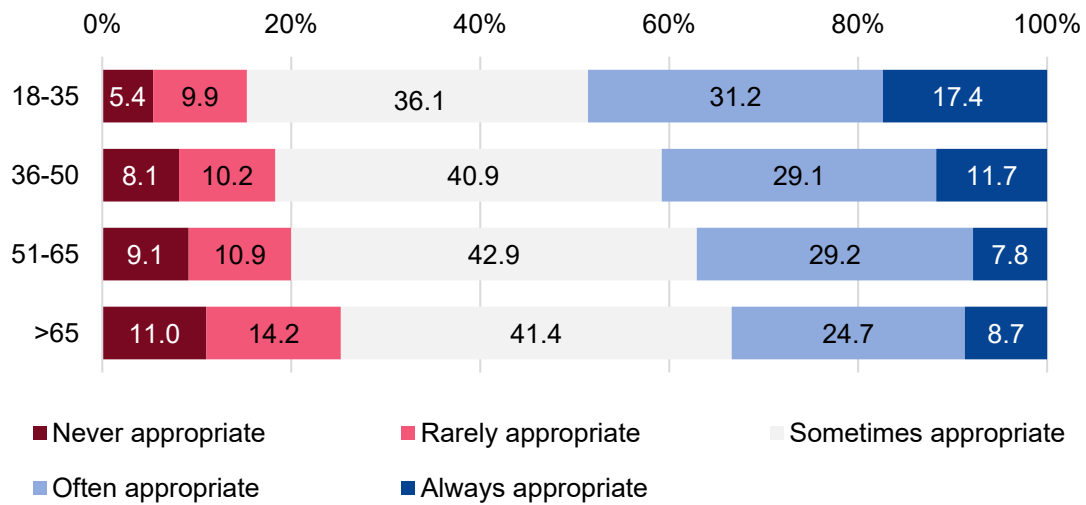
**Figure 4.4.2c: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish at hawker centres, by education (2024)**



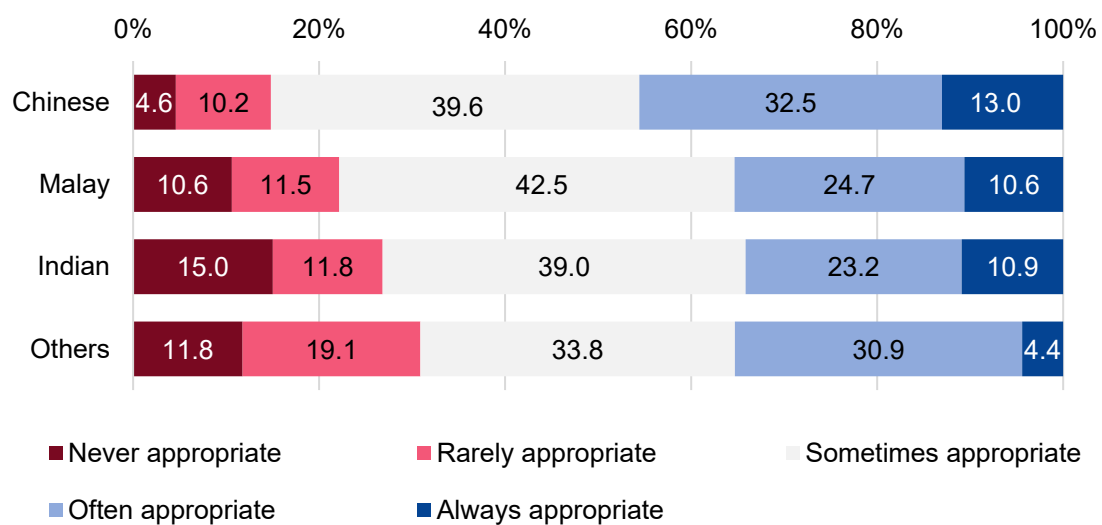
**4.4.3 Younger, Chinese, and more highly educated respondents were more likely to find the use of Singlish at a department store to be appropriate**

As the age of the respondent increased, the percentage of those who find the use of Singlish “often” or “always” appropriate decreased (48.6 per cent for the youngest group, to 33.4 per cent for the oldest) (see Figure 4.4.3a). Chinese respondents had both the highest percentage of those who found the use of Singlish at department stores to be “often” or “always” appropriate (45.5 per cent) as well as the lowest percentage of those who found it to be “never” or “rarely” appropriate (14.8 per cent) (see Figure 4.4.3b). As the education level of respondents rose, so too did the likelihood that the respondent would find the use of Singlish in this context to be “often” or “always” appropriate (see Figure 4.4.3c). Overall, respondents seemed a bit more ambivalent on this issue, with the majority of respondents across demographics finding Singlish use to be “sometimes” or “often” appropriate, therefore, leaving room for interpretation based on the situation they find themselves in.

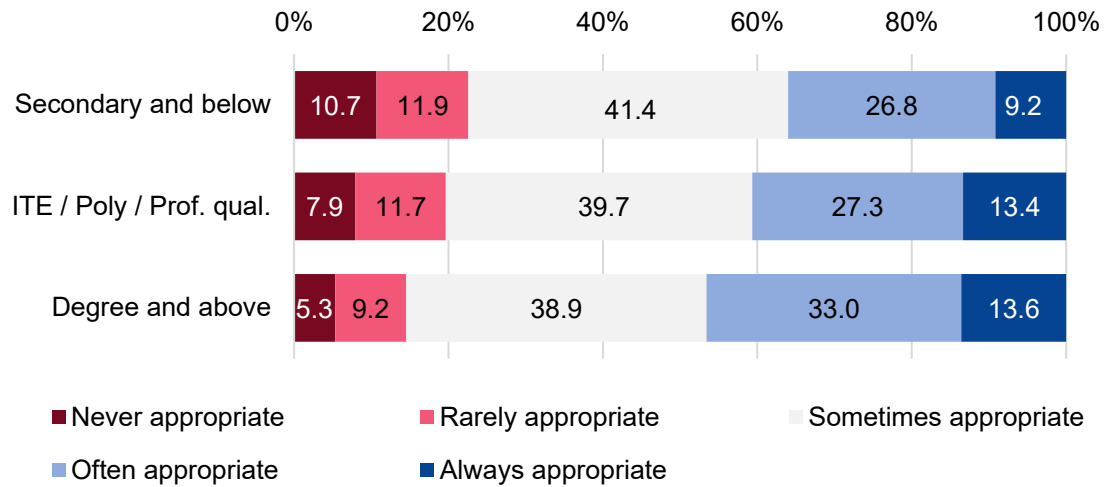
**Figure 4.4.3a: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish at department stores, by age (2024)**



**Figure 4.4.3b: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish at department stores, by race (2024)**



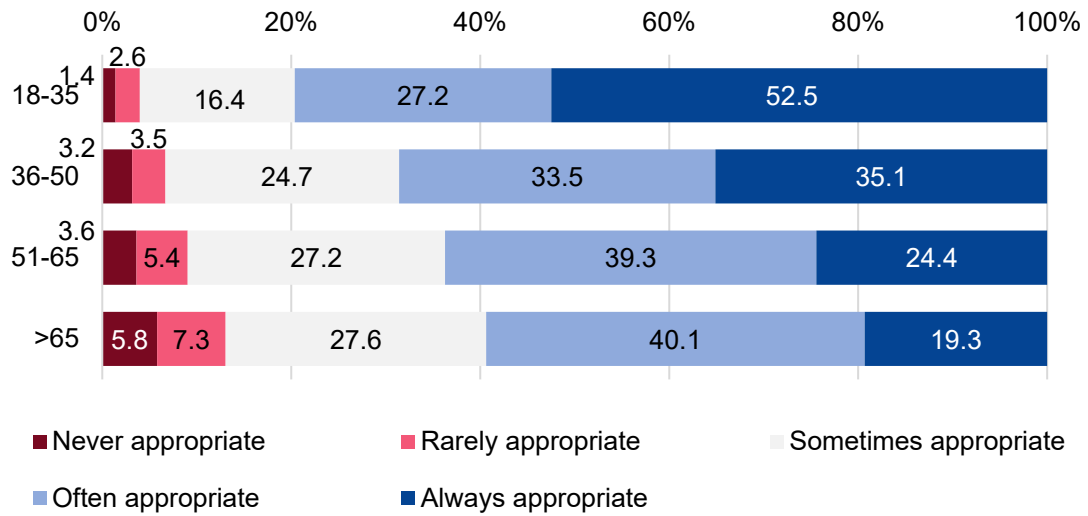
**Figure 4.4.3c: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish at department stores, by education (2024)**



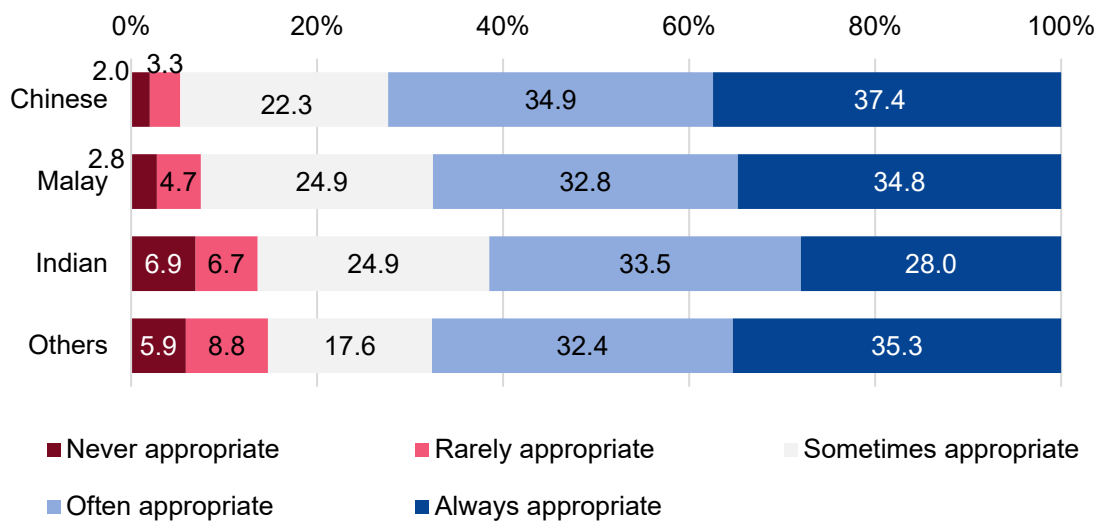
**4.4.4 Younger and higher-educated respondents were more likely to deem the use of Singlish in informal, familial settings as appropriate**

The acceptance of the use of Singlish in informal, familial settings is negatively correlated to age and positively correlated to education levels. Furthermore, Indian respondents were the least likely to find the use of Singlish with family often or always appropriate (61.5 per cent), while Chinese respondents were the most likely to believe so (72.3 per cent) (see Figures 4.4.4a, 4.4.4b, and 4.4.4c).

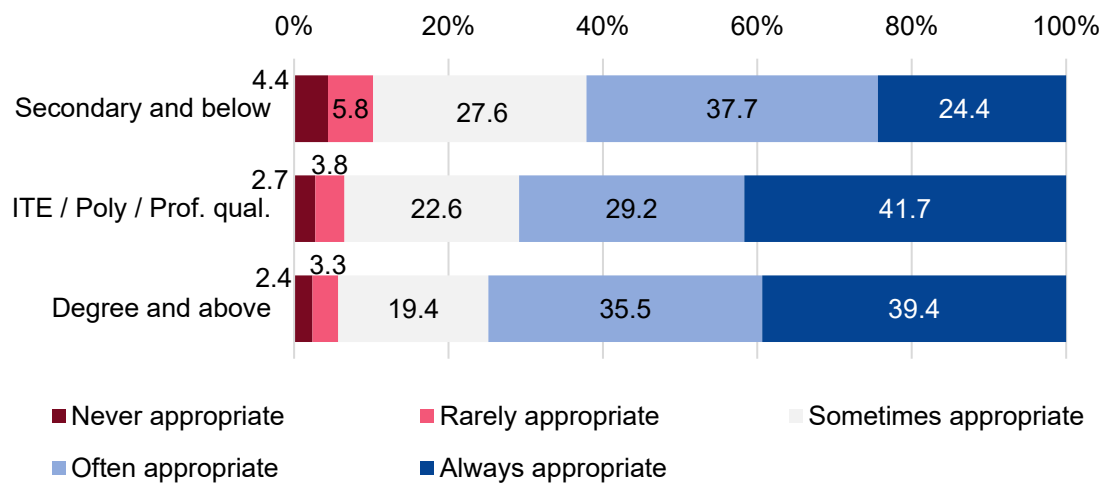
**Figure 4.4.4a: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish with family, by age (2024)**



**Figure 4.4.4b: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish with family, by race (2024)**



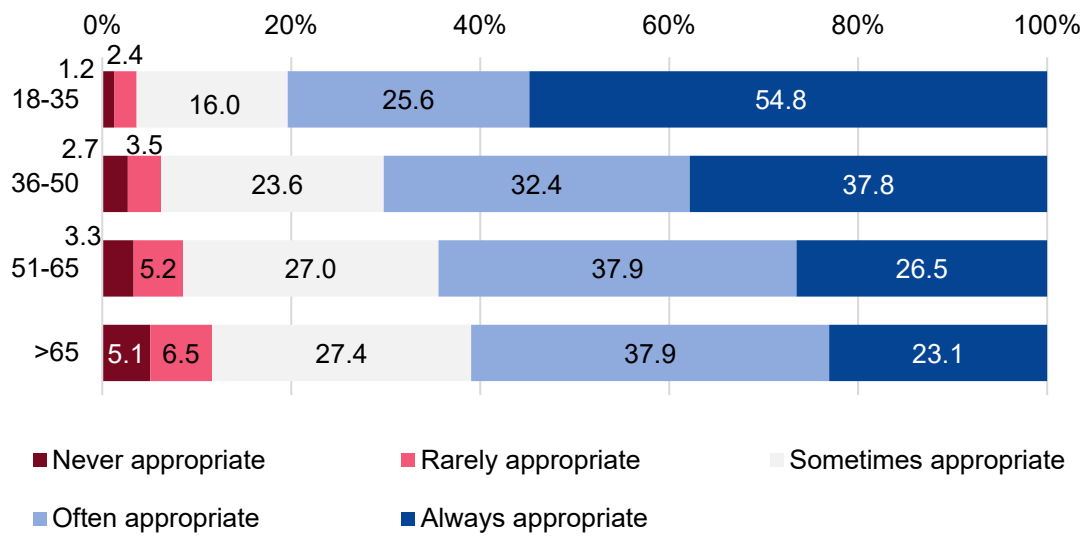
**Figure 4.4.4c: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish with family, by education (2024)**



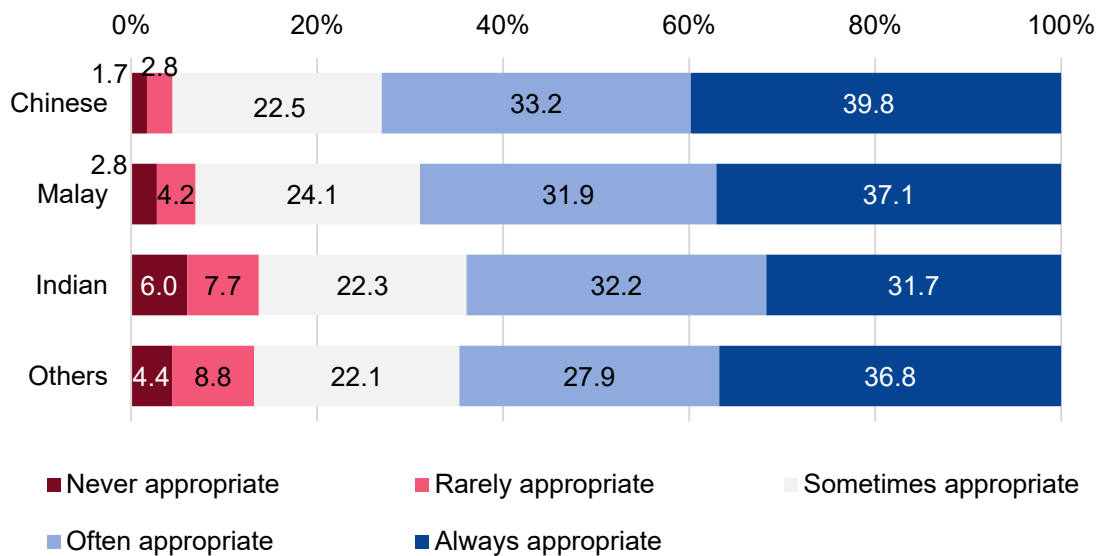
**4.4.5 Younger and more educated respondents were more likely to deem the use of Singlish with friends to be appropriate; Indian respondents were more likely to feel otherwise**

While 80.4 per cent of 18–35-year-old respondents deemed the use of Singlish with friends to be “often” or “always” appropriate, this proportion drops to 61 per cent when looking at respondents aged above 65 (see Figure 4.4.5a). There is a similar linear relationship with education level. While 75.7 per cent of respondents with a degree and above find the use of Singlish with friends at least as “often” appropriate, only 63.6 per cent of respondents whose highest education level is secondary or below feel likewise (see Figure 4.4.5c). Meanwhile, 63.9 per cent of Indian respondents found the use of Singlish amongst friends to be “often” or “always” appropriate, lower than the Chinese and Malay respondents, of which approximately seven in 10 felt the same way (see Figure 4.4.5b).

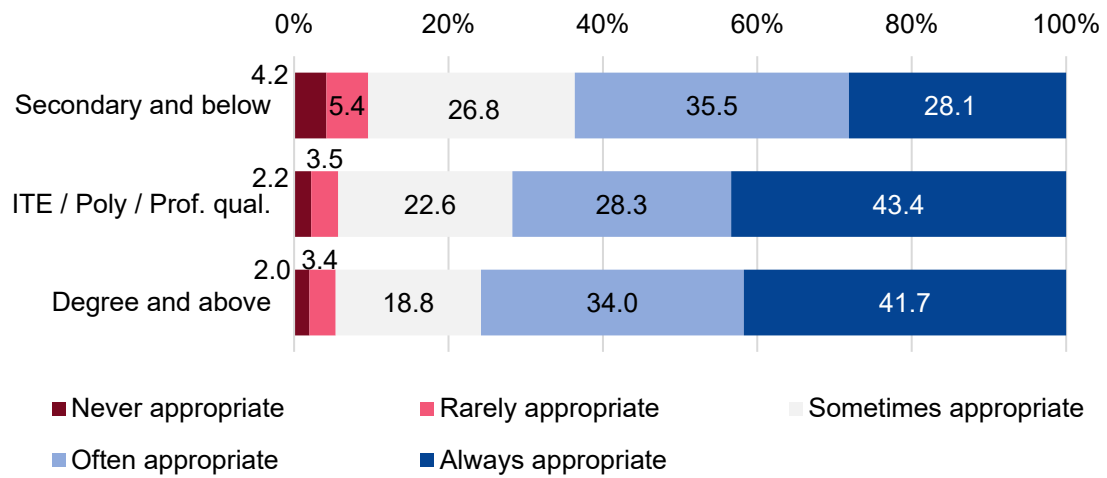
**Figure 4.4.5a: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish with friends, by age (2024)**



**Figure 4.4.5b: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish with friends, by race (2024)**



**Figure 4.4.5c: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish with friends, by education (2024)**



## 5. LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

As a diverse country whose language landscape has shifted quite rapidly in a relatively short amount of time, language and identity are a pressing topic. On top of the Mother Tongue policy being implemented to try and maintain ties to an “Asian” identity, Singapore’s emphasis on the English language has also had an impact. This impact is not as simple as contributing to an “East-West” binary, but instead, brings up questions of what it means to be Singaporean. In 2023 a woman came under fire for complaining about a supermarket employee who could not speak English. This incident sparked discussions on the role of English in the Singaporean identity, questioning if it was “core to Singaporean identity” (Low, 2023). Still there has also been a creeping fear that Singapore is becoming a “monolingual [English-speaking] nation,” which will put the Singaporean identity of being a multicultural and multiracial immigrant society at risk (Yeo, 2024).

It is in this context that this section of the survey aims to examine language identity in Singapore, and to document the types of languages that resonated most with respondents of various backgrounds. To capture this, our survey offered respondents several options: English, their official Mother Tongue, Singlish, their father’s heritage language, and their mother’s heritage language. There was also an option to fill in a language other than the above.

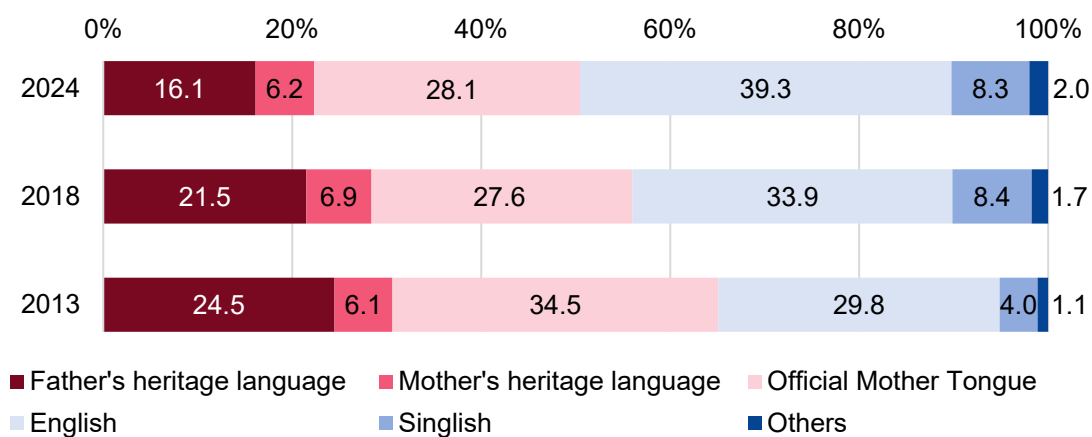
## 5.1 Language Identity and Distinctiveness in Singapore

Section 5.1 examines how language functions as a marker of identity and distinctiveness in Singapore. It first tracks which language respondents feel they identify with most; spanning English, official Mother Tongues, Singlish, and parents' heritage languages; and how these patterns have shifted across the three RRL waves. It then considers the alignment between identity and everyday practice by comparing respondents' stated language identity with the language they use most frequently, highlighting the extent to which Singaporeans' linguistic self-conceptions are converging with, or diverging from their day-to-day language habits.

### ***5.1.1 From 2013 to 2024, the proportion of the populace identifying most with English increased, while the proportions identifying most with parents' heritage languages or official Mother Tongue dropped***

Over the years, the proportion of respondents identifying most with their parents' heritage language or their official Mother Tongue has decreased from 65.1 per cent in 2013 to 50.4 per cent in 2024. In contrast, the proportions identifying most with English or Singlish increased from 33.8 per cent in 2013 to 47.6 per cent in 2024 (see Figure 5.1.1).

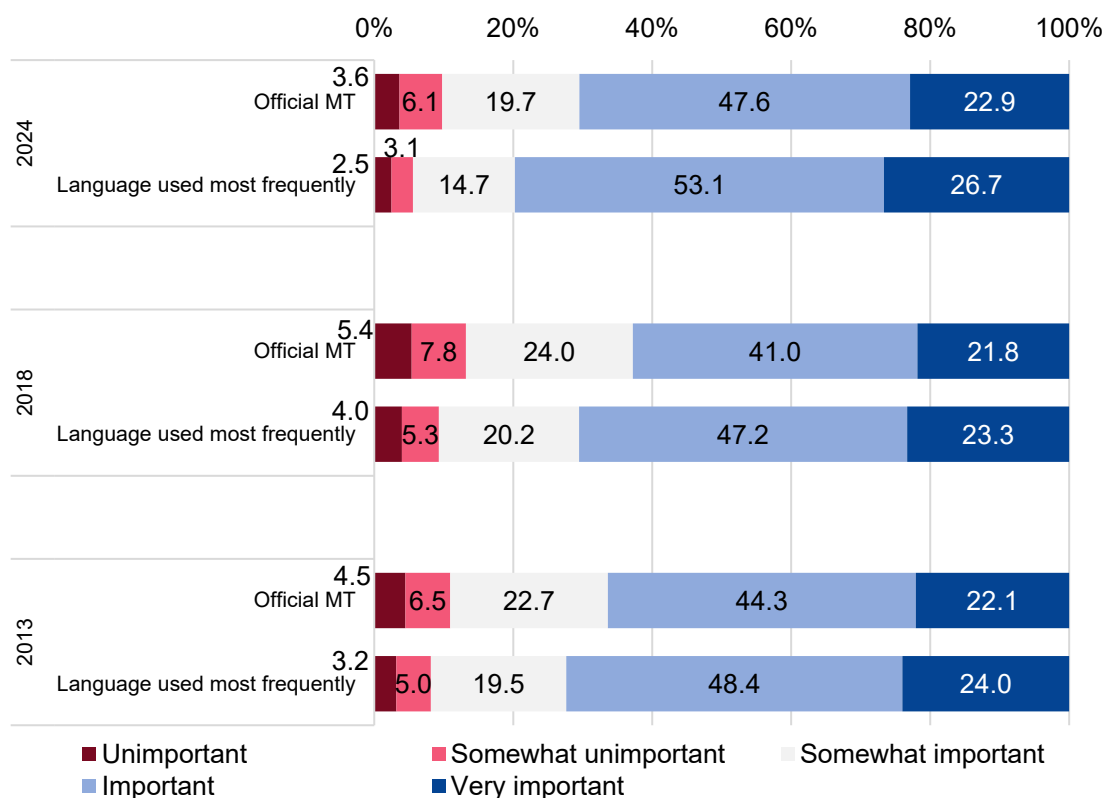
**Figure 5.1.1: Which language do you identify with most?**



***5.1.2 The gap in respondents' preference between official Mother Tongue and most frequently used language has increased marginally over the years***

The gap between the proportion who regarded their official Mother Tongue as important to identity and the proportion who regarded their most frequently used language as important widened slightly, from 6.0 percentage points in 2013 to 9.3 percentage points in 2024 (see Figure 5.1.2).

**Figure 5.1.2: How important are each of the following items below to your overall sense of identity?**



## 5.2 Singlish as Part of Singaporean Identity and Culture

As much as Singlish has been derided, it has also been called “the key linguistic marker of Singaporean national identity” (Seilhamer & Kwek, 2021, p. 754), and credited as playing a “role in the formation and reinforcement of a ‘real local’ identity” (Goh, 2016, p. 752). This paper will not be assessing the validity of the claims but looking at how Singaporeans perceive the link between Singlish and identity. This link has been explored in a previous IPS study on national identity which saw respondents citing it as a distinguishing feature of identity (Mathew et al., 2025b). That study found that older respondents were less likely to view speaking Singlish as important to national identity, a key trend that continues in this survey (Mathew et al., 2025b, pp. 36-37).

Building on this literature, Section 5.2 examines whether Singlish continues to resonate as a shared marker of “Singaporean-ness” in the eyes of residents, and whether this sentiment has shifted over time. It first tracks overall agreement across waves on three identity-related statements; 1) Singlish as a source of national identity, 2) as a cultural resource worth retaining, and 3) as a language variety that people are not overly concerned about relative to Standard English. It then unpacks how these views vary across key demographic groups such as age, race, and citizenship status, and uses regression analyses to assess which differences remain salient after accounting for other factors simultaneously.

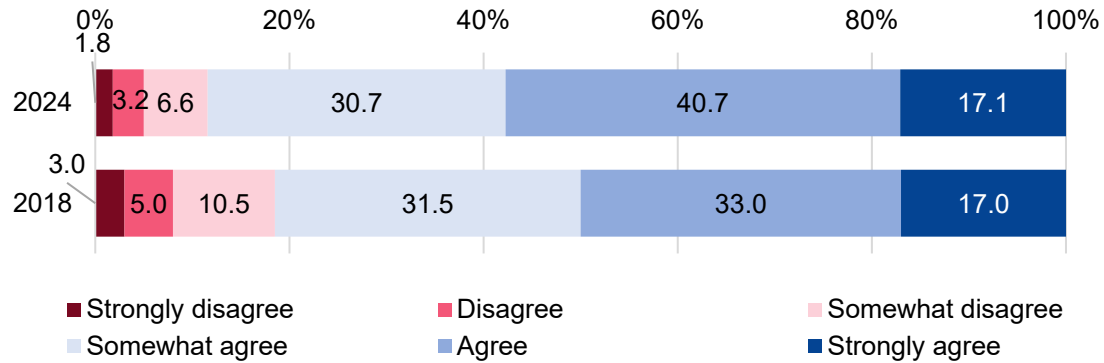
### ***5.2.1 A majority of respondents believe that Singlish is important for Singaporean identity and culture and support its use alongside standard English***

Across three question items perusing responses on Singlish and identity, we note that views towards Singlish have remained broadly positive between 2018 and 2024. In both waves, around half or more respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Singlish is tied to Singaporean identity, forms an important part of local culture worth retaining, and is generally not something people get hung up about relative to Standard English; shifts across the two waves were incremental rather than dramatic.

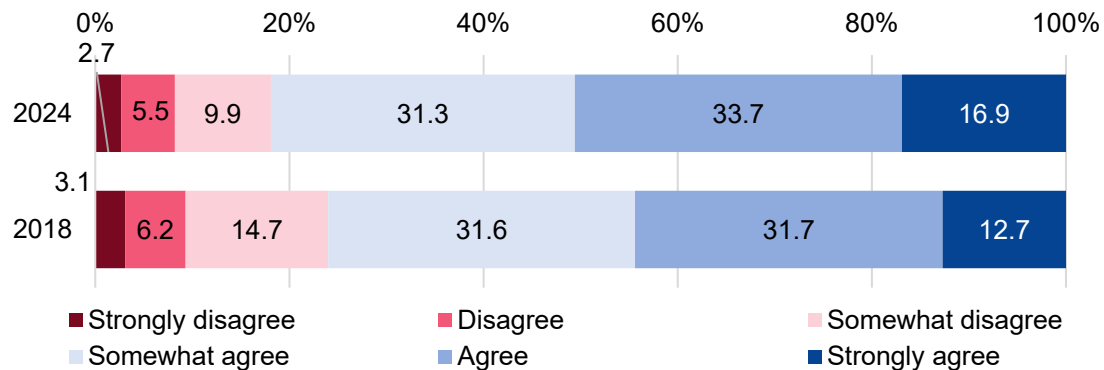
The balance of opinion moved in a more pro-Singlish direction in 2024. The share who agreed or strongly agreed on the impact and importance of Singlish rose by about five percentage points or more for all three items: from 50 per cent to 57.8 per cent for “Singlish gives Singaporeans a sense of identity”; from 44.4 per cent to 50.6 per cent for “Singlish is an important part of our culture that I hope will not be lost over time”; and from 50.0 per cent to 55.0 per cent for “people do not really bother if someone

speaks Standard English or Singlish”. These increases were accompanied by a corresponding dip in outright disagreement (see Figures 5.2.1a to c).

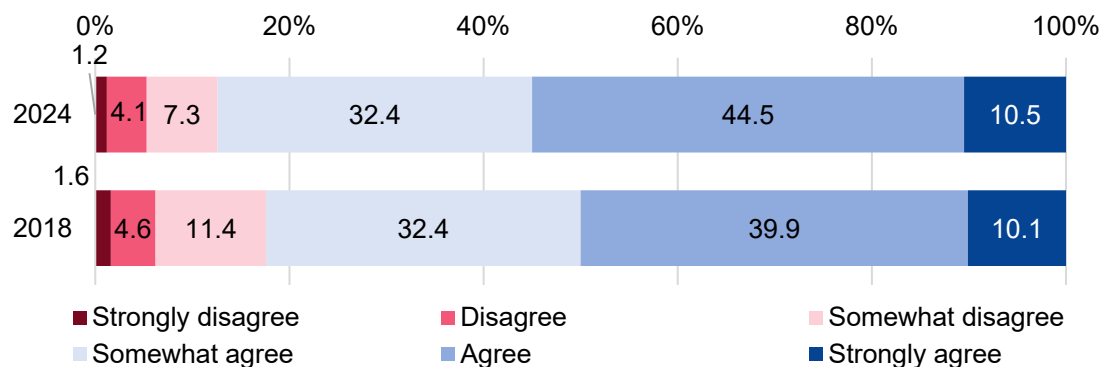
**Figure 5.2.1a: Speaking Singlish gives Singaporeans a sense of identity, by wave**



**Figure 5.2.1b: Singlish is an important part of our culture and I hope it will not be lost over time**



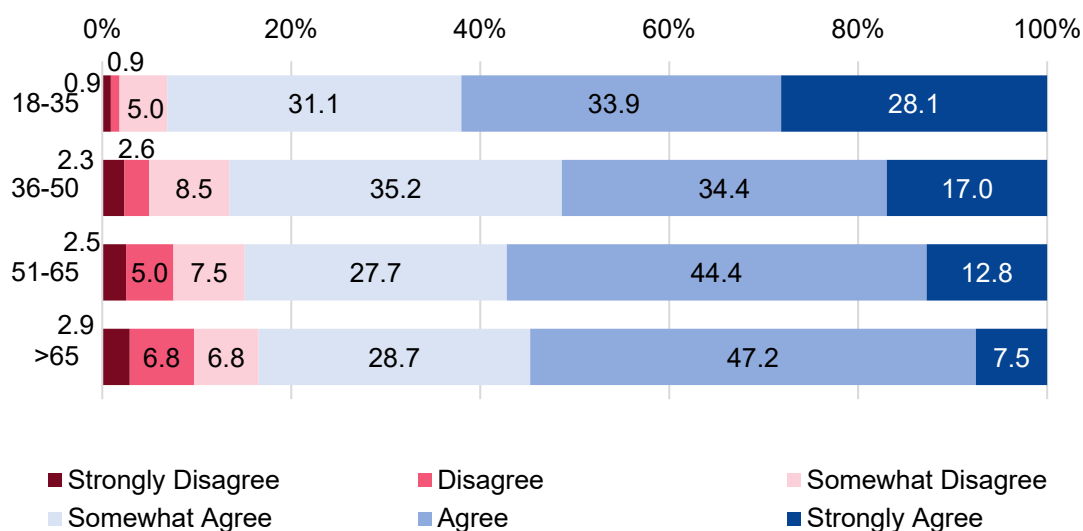
**Figure 5.2.1c: In Singapore, people do not really bother if someone speaks Standard English or Singlish**



### 5.2.2 Older respondents were less likely to feel that speaking Singlish contributes to a sense of identity

Overall, 93.1 per cent of younger respondents aged 18-35 agreed to varying extents that speaking Singlish contributes to a sense of identity, and this proportion decreased with age. Among the older respondents aged above 65, only 83.4 per cent indicated likewise (see Figure 5.2.2).

**Figure 5.2.2: Speaking Singlish gives Singaporeans a sense of identity, by age (2024)**

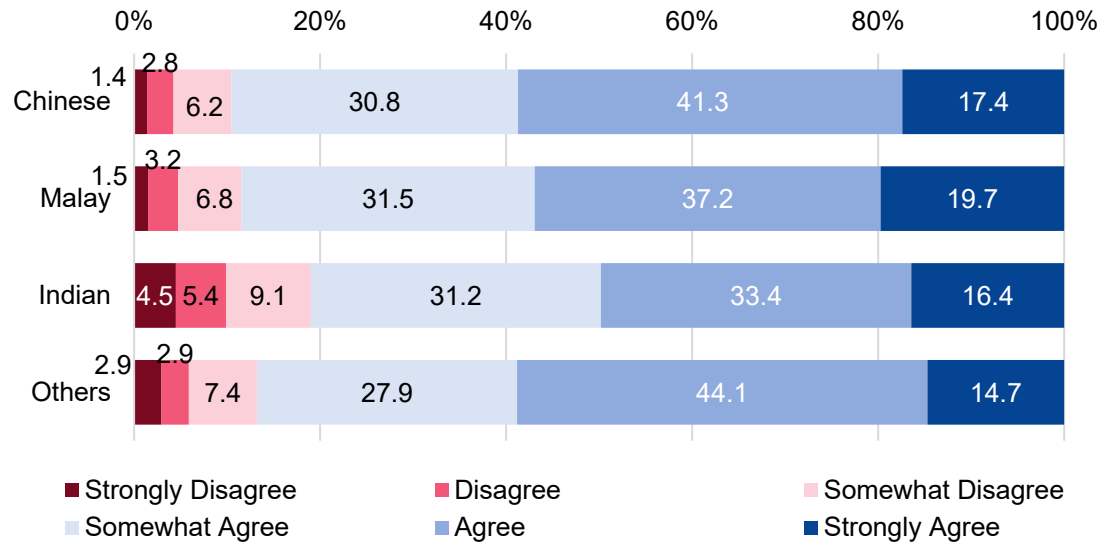


### 5.2.3 Indian respondents were less likely to feel that speaking Singlish contributes to a sense of identity

We also examined respondents' perceptions on whether speaking Singlish gives Singaporeans a sense of identity, with reference to ethnicity. Just 49.8 per cent of Indian respondents agreed or strongly agreed that speaking Singlish contributes to a sense of identity, compared to 58.7 per cent of Chinese respondents and 56.9 per cent of Malay respondents (see Figure 5.2.3). One potential reason could be the relatively

heavier incorporation of Chinese vernaculars and Malay vocabularies and syntax in Singlish, compared to Tamil.

**Figure 5.2.3: Speaking Singlish gives Singaporeans a sense of identity, by race (2024)**



#### ***5.2.4 Race, age and citizenship were statistically significant predictors of perceptions that Singlish contributes to a sense of identity***

In tandem with the crosstabulations presented, linear regression analysis indicates that non-Indian, younger, and SC respondents were more likely to agree that speaking Singlish gives Singaporeans a sense of identity. Gender, education level, and affluence were not statistically significant predictors (see Table 5.2.4).

**Table 5.2.4: “Speaking Singlish gives Singaporeans a sense of identity” (linear regression)**

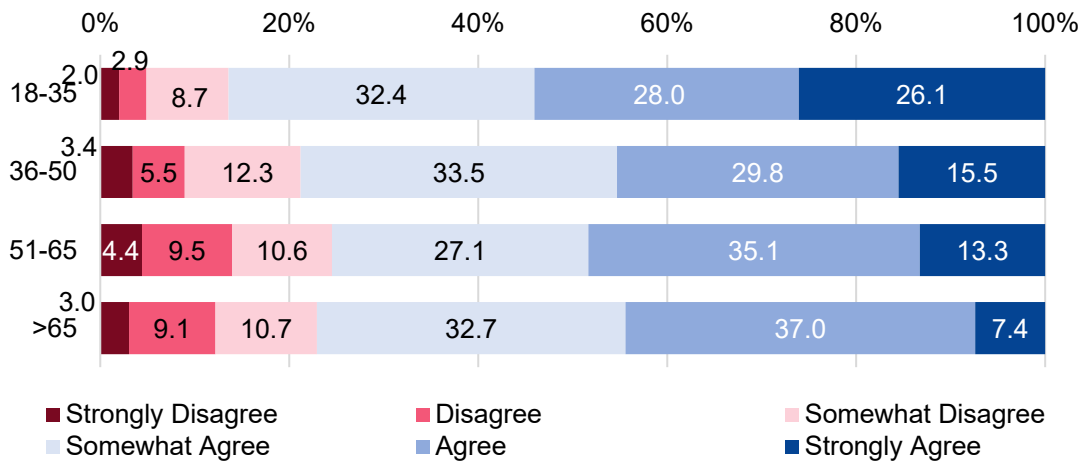
Variables	Standardised Coefficient
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	-.027
<b>Indian</b>	<b>-.083***</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>-.120***</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	-.028
<b>Education</b>	.020
<b>Housing</b>	.006
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	-.023
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	<b>-.074***</b>
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.025

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

### **5.2.5 Younger respondents were marginally more likely to agree that Singlish is an important part of their culture**

When asked, 54.1 per cent of respondents age 18-35 at least “agree[d]” that Singlish was an important part of their culture that they hope will not be lost over time. Still, the relationship between age and this sentiment is not a simple linear one, with the next highest proportion of respondents who feel the same belonging to those in the 51-65 years old group (see Figure 5.2.5).

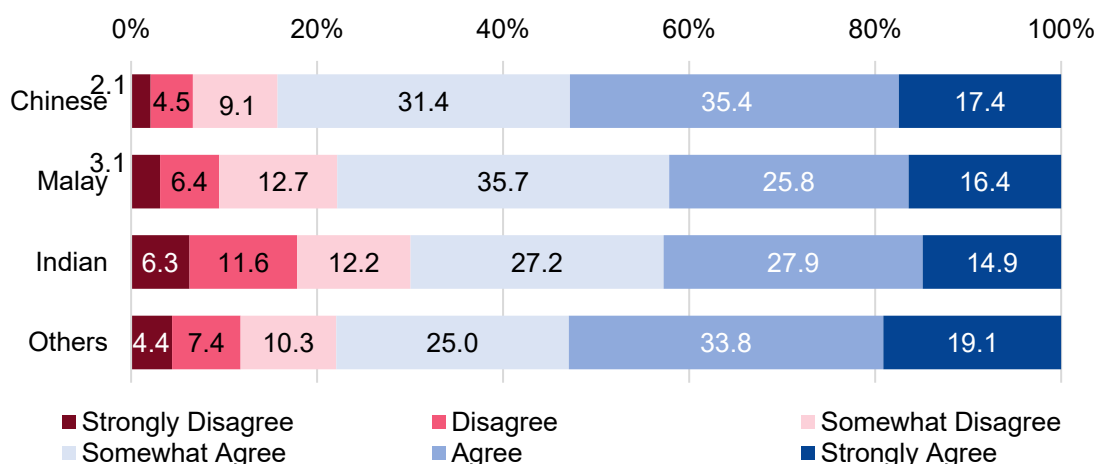
**Figure 5.2.5: Singlish is an important part of our culture that I hope will not be lost over time, by age (2024)**



### 5.2.6 Indian respondents were the least likely to agree that Singlish is an important part of their culture

Across racial groups in 2024, agreement that Singlish is an important part of culture worth preserving outweighed disagreement. Chinese respondents expressed the strongest endorsement: 52.8 per cent agreed or strongly agreed, as compared to over four in 10 Malays (42.2 per cent) and Indians (42.8 per cent) (see Figure 5.2.6).

**Figure 5.2.6: Singlish is an important part of our culture that I hope will not be lost over time, by race (2024)**



**5.2.7 Race, age, and citizenship were statistically significant predictors of perceptions that Singlish is an important part of culture that should be retained**

In tandem with the crosstabulations presented, linear regression analysis indicates that Chinese, younger, and SC respondents were more likely to agree that Singlish is an important part of culture that they hope will not be lost over time. Other variables, including gender, education level, housing type, and income were not statistically significant predictors (see Table 5.2.7).

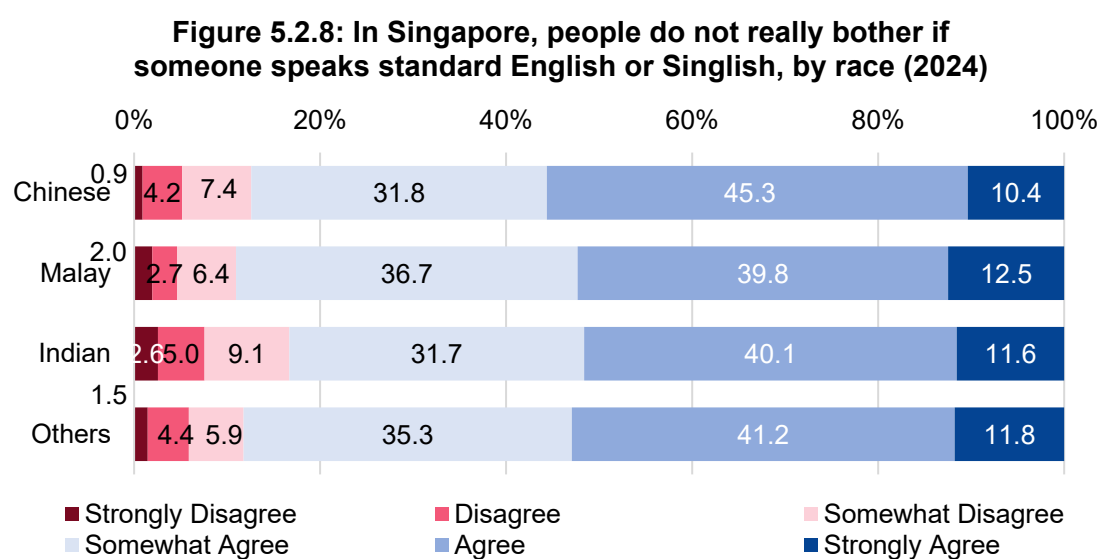
**Table 5.2.7: “Singlish is an important part of our culture that I hope will not be lost over time” (linear regression)**

Variables	Standardised Coefficient
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>-.102***</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>-.115***</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>-.152***</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	-.015
<b>Education</b>	-.007
<b>Housing</b>	-.032
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	-.014
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	<b>-.074***</b>
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.041

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**5.2.8 Indian respondents were more likely to disagree that people do not really bother if someone speaks standard English or Singlish in Singapore**

Disagreement with the statement “people do not really bother if someone speaks Standard English or Singlish” was generally low across all racial groups in 2024, but was highest among Indian respondents. The latter were most likely to express some form of disagreement, with 16.7 per cent indicating that they strongly disagreed, disagreed, or somewhat disagreed with the statement as compared to 12.5 per cent of Chinese respondents and 11.1 per cent among Malay respondents (see Figure 5.2.8).



### ***5.2.9 Race and gender were statistically significant predictors of respondents' views towards whether people in Singapore are bothered if someone speaks standard English or Singlish***

The linear regression analysis indicates a small but statistically significant gender difference; female respondents were less likely than male respondents to agree that people in Singapore “do not really bother” whether someone speaks Standard English or Singlish (see Table 5.2.9).

**Table 5.2.9: “In Singapore, people do not really bother if someone speaks standard English or Singlish” (linear regression)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	-0.009
<b>Indian</b>	<b>-0.044*</b>
<b>Age</b>	-0.013
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	<b>-0.047*</b>
<b>Education</b>	-0.039
<b>Housing</b>	-0.026
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	.011
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	.019
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.003

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## 6. COHESION AND DIFFERENTIATION

While speaking certain languages can increase linguistic capital, they also can result in language-based discrimination considering the multilingual space and differential access to language learning especially for earlier generations. A previous survey conducted by IPS in collaboration with OnePeople.sg found that the most common form of discrimination at work was language discrimination (Mathew et al., 2025a, p. 6). Against this backdrop, this chapter proceeds to explore these two sides of language use in Singapore: its ability to generate social capital, and its ability to divide.

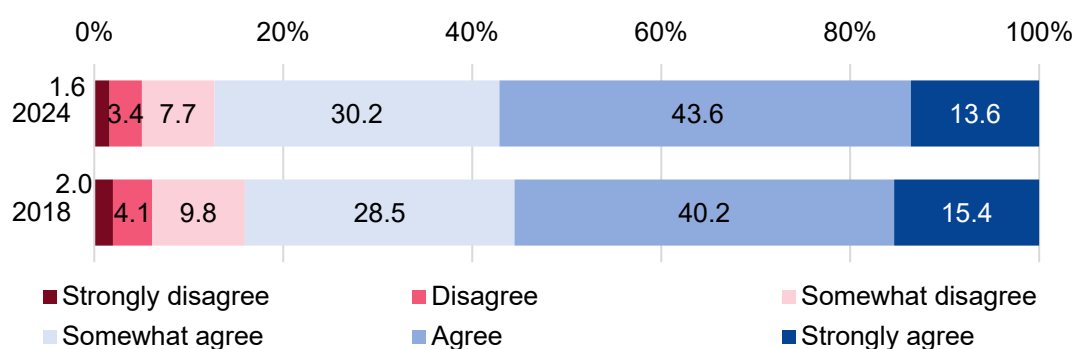
### 6.1 Linguistic Capital

This section examines perceptions of linguistic capital in Singapore; specifically, whether respondents believe that being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well confers advantages in work and business, both locally and internationally. It first tracks overall agreement across survey waves, and then profiles differences by key demographic groups in 2024 such as age, race, education, and socio-economic indicators. The section concludes with regression analyses to assess which demographic patterns remain associated with these perceptions after accounting for other factors simultaneously.

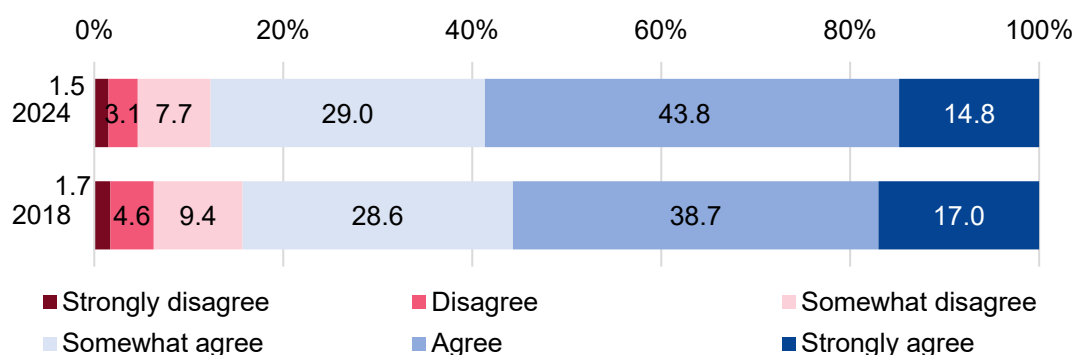
#### ***6.1.1 Almost six in 10 respondents agreed that being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well would be advantageous in work and business locally and abroad in 2024, a slight increase from 2018***

There was a slight increase in the proportion of respondents indicating that it is advantageous in work and business locally and abroad, to be able to speak an official Mother Tongue well. In 2024, 57.2 per cent and 58.6 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that it is advantageous in Singapore and internationally, as compared to 55.6 per cent and 55.7 per cent in 2018 (see Figures 6.1.1a, 6.1.1b).

**Figure 6.1.1a: "Being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives you an advantage in work and business in Singapore"**



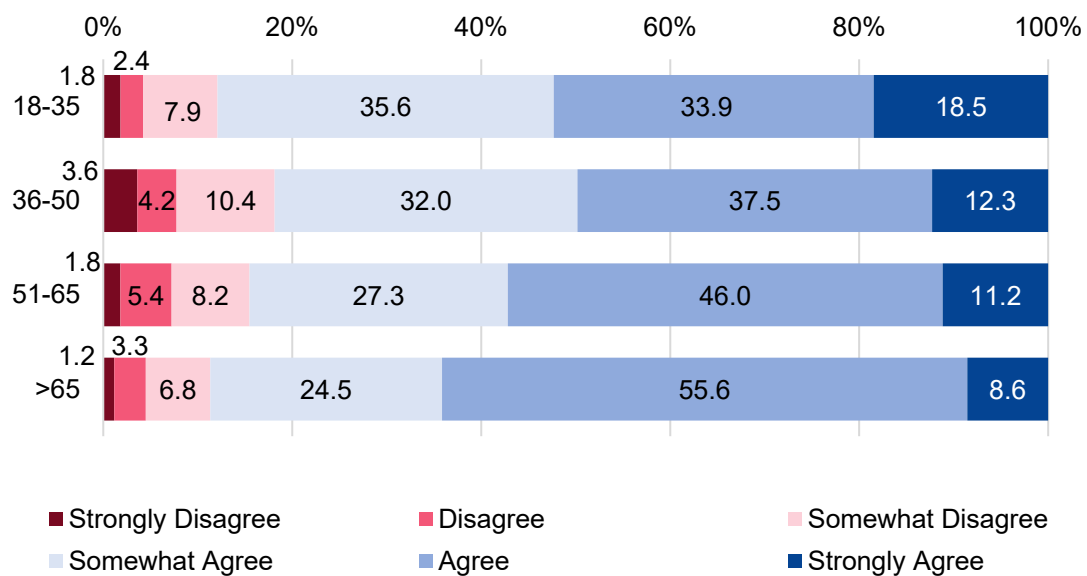
**Figure 6.1.1b: "Being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives you an advantage in work and business internationally"**



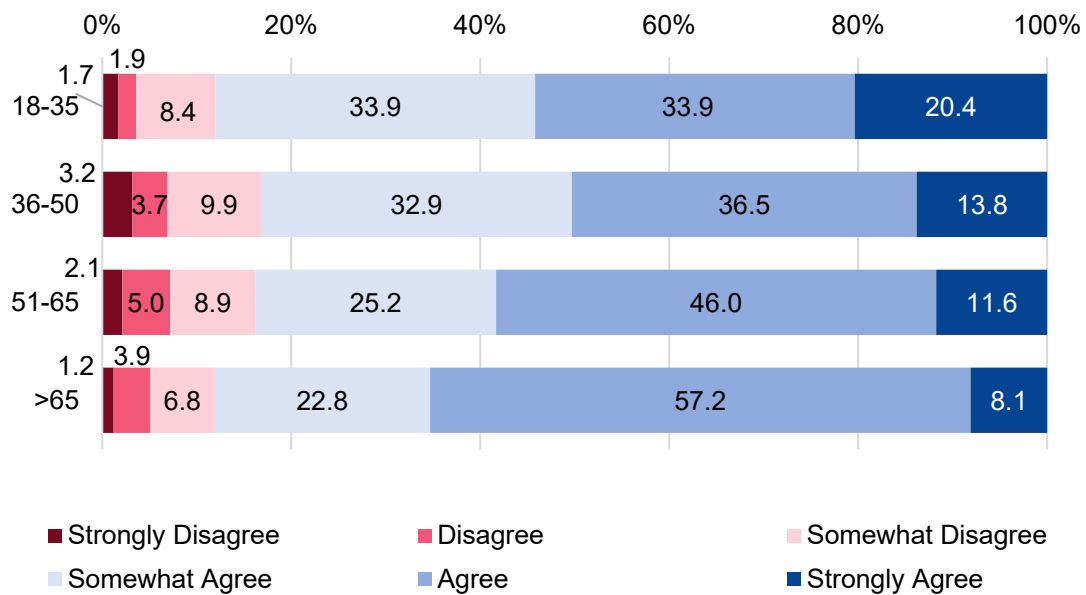
**6.1.2 Respondents in the oldest age cohorts were most likely to agree or strongly agree that speaking an official Mother Tongue is advantageous in the Singapore and international contexts**

Overall, 52.4 per cent and 54.3 per cent of 18–35-year-old respondents agreed or strongly agreed that being able to speak an official Mother Tongue gives them an advantage in work and business in Singapore and internationally, respectively. This proportion drops for the next age bracket of 36–50, and then begins to rise again, hitting its peak at 64.2 per cent and 65.3 per cent with those aged above 65 years old, respectively (see Figures 6.1.2a, 6.1.2b).

**Figure 6.1.2a: "Being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives you an advantage in work and business in Singapore", by age (2024)**



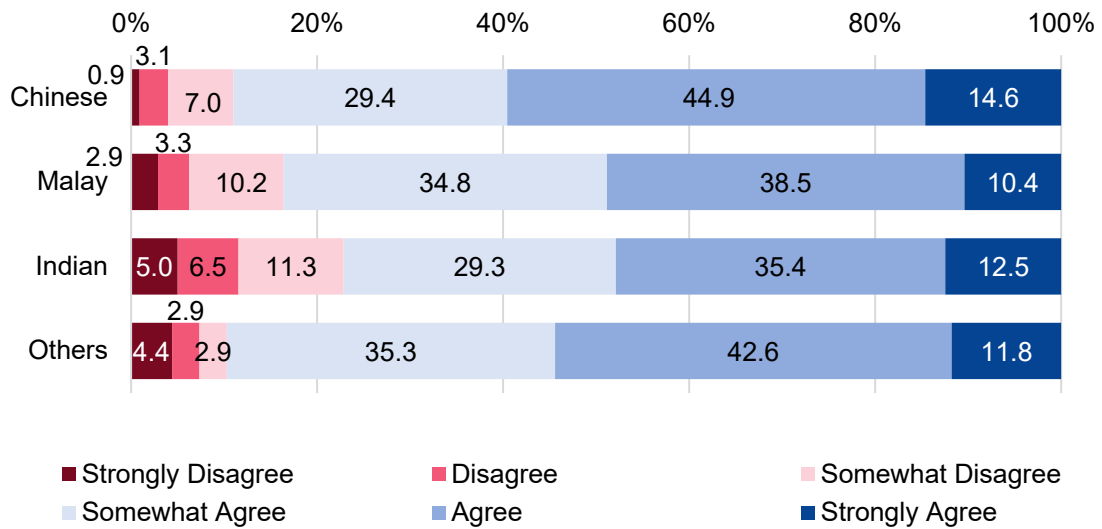
**Figure 6.1.2b: "Being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives you an advantage in work and business internationally", by age (2024)**



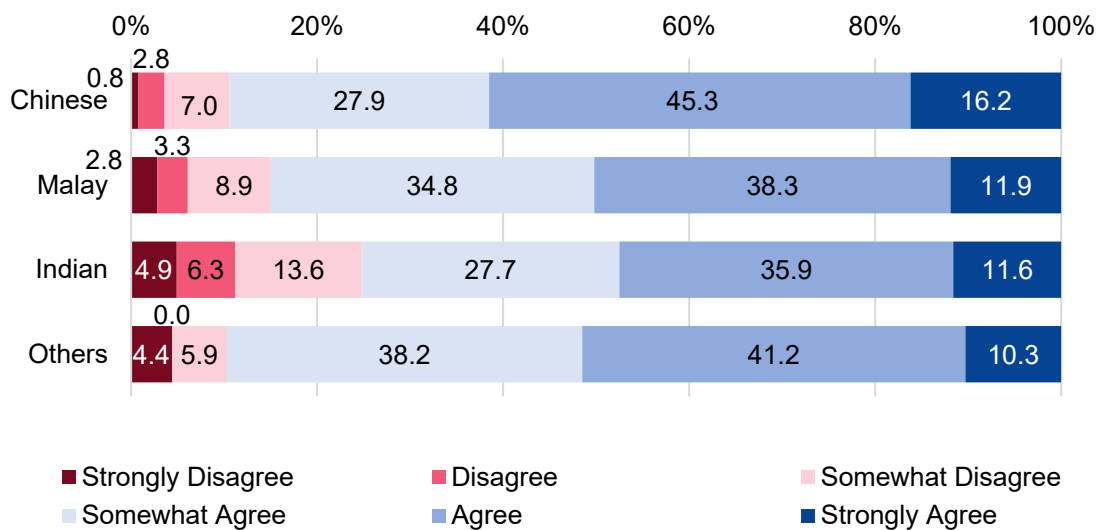
**6.1.3 Chinese respondents were most likely to agree that being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well would be advantageous in work and business locally and abroad**

While 59.5 per cent of Chinese respondents indicated that they “agree” or “strongly agree” that being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives one an advantage in work and business in Singapore, 61.5 per cent of Chinese respondents indicated likewise for the use of Mother Tongue for business in an international context, the highest amongst all the four races (see Figures 6.1.3a, 6.1.3b).

**Figure 6.1.3a: "Being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives you an advantage in work and business in Singapore", by race (2024)**



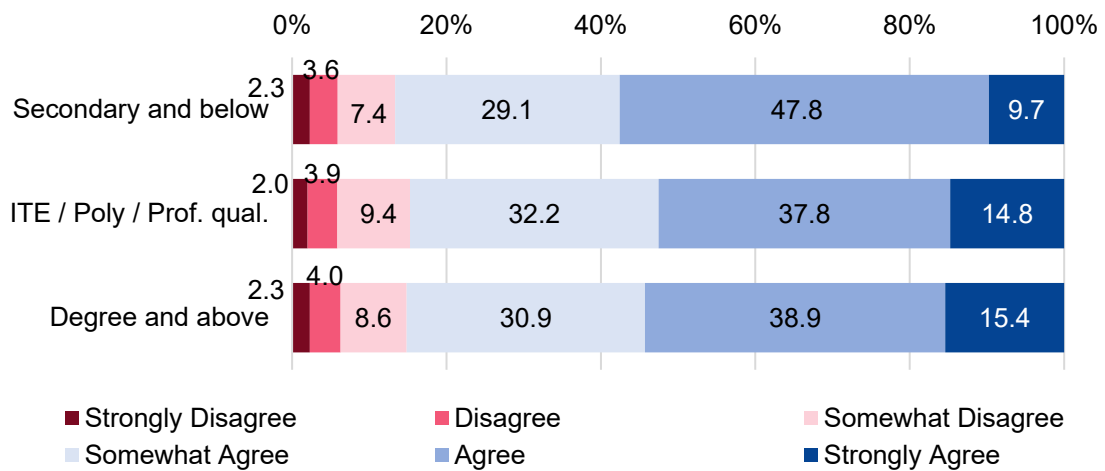
**Figure 6.1.3b: "Being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives you an advantage in work and business internationally", by race (2024)**



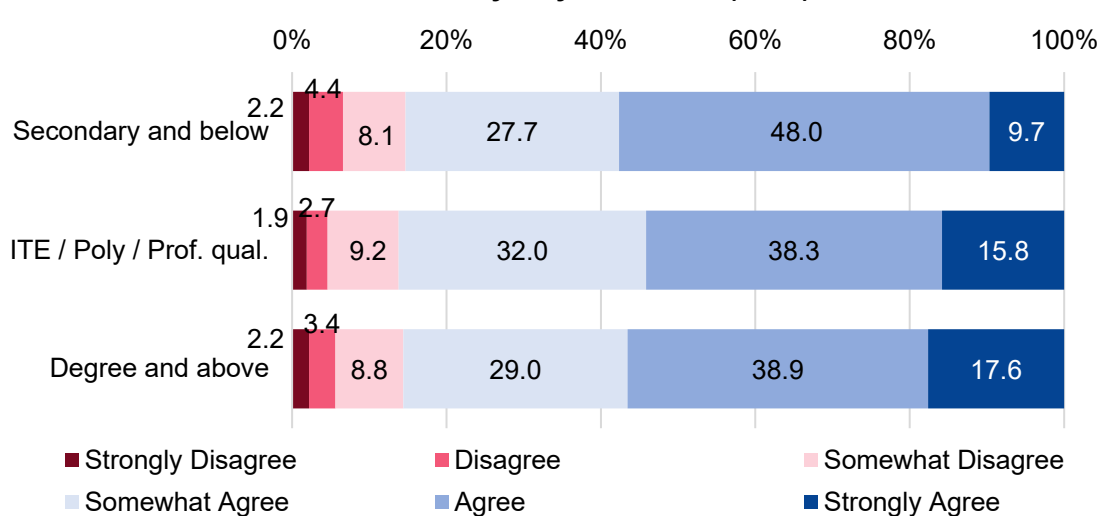
**6.1.4 Over half of the respondents agreed that speaking an official Mother Tongue well gives them an advantage in work and business in Singapore and in international contexts across education levels**

There is no strong difference between the proportion of respondents with different educational backgrounds who “agree” or “strongly agree” that being able to speak an official Mother Tongue gives them an advantage in work and business in Singapore and abroad. Those with secondary and below as their highest level of education are only marginally more likely to believe so (approximately 57 per cent) compared to those with higher educational qualifications (see Figures 6.1.4a, 6.1.4b).

**Figure 6.1.4a: "Being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives you an advantage in work and business in Singapore", by education (2024)**



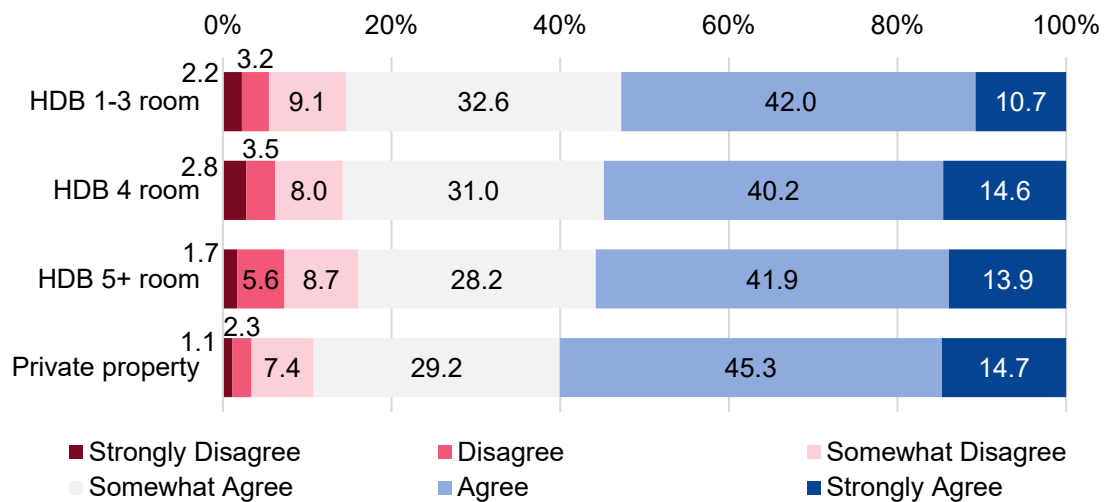
**Figure 6.1.4b: "Being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives you an advantage in work and business internationally", by education (2024)**



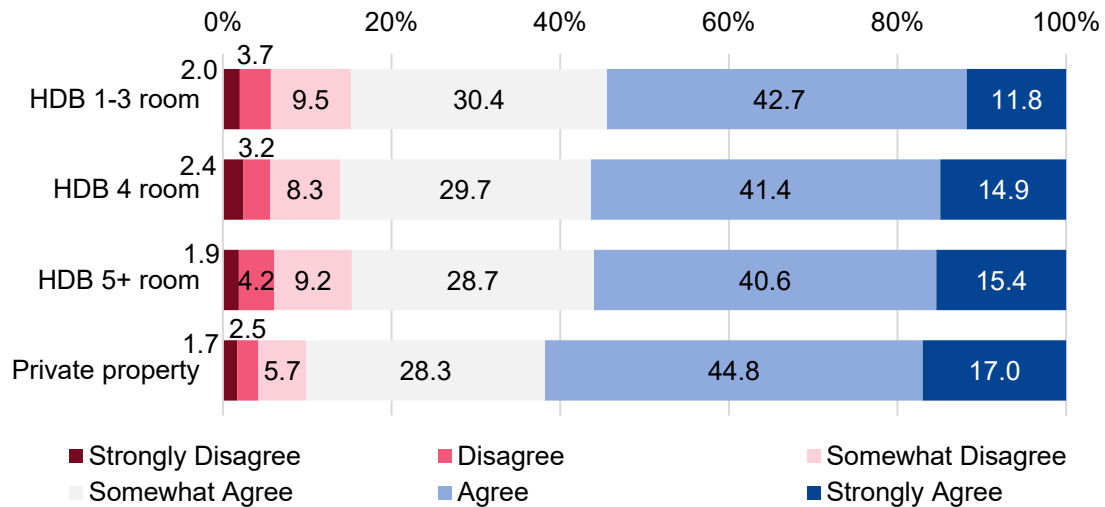
**6.1.5 Private property dwellers were more likely to agree that being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives them an advantage in work and business in Singapore and abroad**

About six in 10 private property dwelling respondents reported that they “agree” or “strongly agree” that being able to speak an official Mother Tongue gives them an advantage in work and business in both Singapore and international contexts, higher than the other respondents living in HDB flats (see Figures 6.1.5a, 6.1.5b).

**Figure 6.1.5a: "Being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives you an advantage in work and business in Singapore", by housing type (2024)**



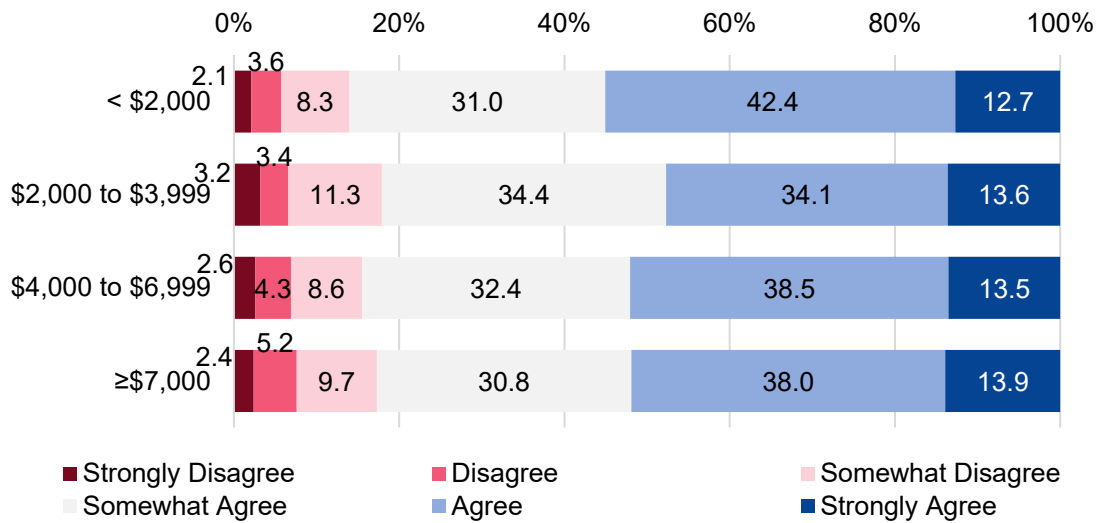
**Figure 6.1.5b: "Being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives you an advantage in work and business internationally", by housing type (2024)**



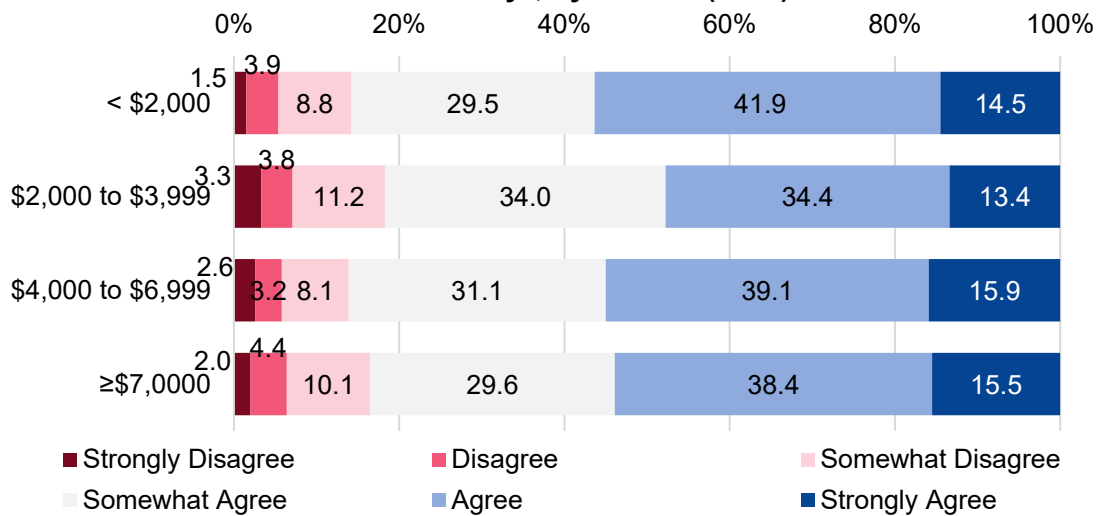
**6.1.6 Respondents earning between \$2,000 and \$4,000 were least likely to agree that being able to speak an official Mother Tongue gives them an advantage in work and business in Singapore and overseas**

Approximately 48 per cent of respondents with an income of \$2,000 to \$3,999 indicated that they “agree” or “strongly agree” that being able to speak an official Mother Tongue gives them an advantage in work and business in Singapore and overseas, lower than the over half of respondents in other income brackets who feel likewise (see Figures 6.1.6a, 6.1.6b).

**Figure 6.1.6a: "Being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives you an advantage in work and business in Singapore", by income (2024)**



**Figure 6.1.6b: "Being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives you an advantage in work and business internationally", by income (2024)**



**6.1.7 Race and age were statistically significant predictors of perceptions that speaking an official Mother Tongue well confers an advantage in work and business in Singapore**

Against the backdrop of crosstabulations presented, linear regression analysis indicates that race and age were statistically significant predictors of agreement that

being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives one an advantage in work and business in Singapore. The negative coefficients suggest that Chinese and younger respondents were more likely to perceive such an advantage. Other variables, including gender, education level, housing type, income, and citizenship status were not statistically significant predictors (see Table 6.1.7).

**Table 6.1.7: “Being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives you an advantage in work and business in Singapore” (linear regression)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>-.086***</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>-.108***</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>-.041*</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	.006
<b>Education</b>	.023
<b>Housing</b>	.010
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	-.039
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	-.013
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.016

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**6.1.8 Race, age, and citizenship were statistically significant predictors of perceptions that speaking an official Mother Tongue well confers an international advantage**

Linear regression analysis further indicates that respondents who were Chinese, younger, and SCs were more likely to agree that being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives one an advantage in work and business internationally. In particular, while the crosstabulations show relatively high agreement among both the youngest and oldest cohorts, the regression results suggest that, after accounting for other demographic factors, younger respondents were more likely to perceive official Mother Tongue proficiency as advantageous. Gender, education level, housing type, and income were not statistically significant predictors in the regression model. (see Table 6.1.8).

**Table 6.1.8: “Being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives you an advantage in work and business internationally” (linear regression)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>-0.082***</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>-0.132***</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>-0.061**</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	0.013
<b>Education</b>	0.044
<b>Housing</b>	0.021
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	-0.031
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	<b>-0.041*</b>
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.028

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## 6.2 Perceptions of Linguistic Discrimination

Section 6.2 examines perceptions of linguistic discrimination and prejudice in Singapore, focusing on two related dimensions. First, it assesses respondents' acceptance of unfamiliar languages in different public-facing settings, including everyday social environments, public speeches, and service encounters where English is not used. Second, it explores perceptions of how language prejudice has changed over time, by asking respondents whether language-based prejudice today is less, about the same, or more prevalent compared to five years ago. Where relevant, the section profiles differences across key demographic groups and uses regression analyses to assess which patterns persist after accounting for other factors simultaneously.

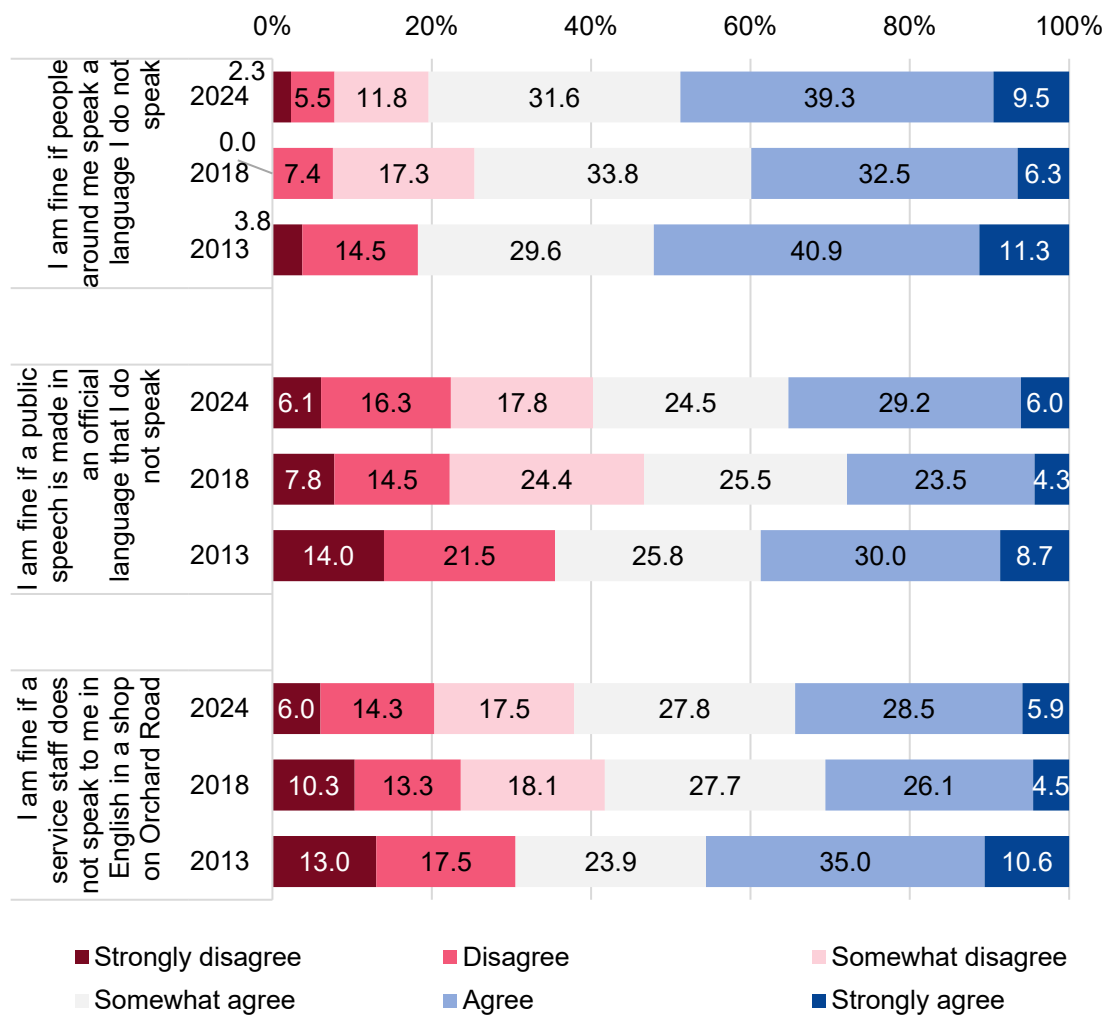
### ***6.2.1 Acceptance of the use of unfamiliar languages in different settings increased from 2018 to 2024***

From 2018 to 2024, respondents became more accepting of the use of languages they do not speak across all three scenarios examined in the survey. The proportion who agreed or strongly agreed that they were fine if people around them spoke a language they did not speak rose from 38.8 per cent in 2018 to 48.8 per cent in 2024. Similarly, the proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that they were fine if a public speech was made in an official language they did not speak increased from 27.8 per cent to 35.2 per cent. However, proportions who disagreed or strongly disagreed that they would be fine with public speeches being made in a language that they did not speak were also higher (22.4 per cent in 2024) than proportions indicating likewise for people around them speaking a language they did not speak (7.8 per cent in 2024).

A similar pattern was observed for the scenario involving a service staff member not speaking to the respondent in English in a shop on Orchard Road. The proportion who

agreed or strongly agreed that they were fine with this rose from 30.6 per cent in 2018 to 34.4 per cent in 2024, although proportions disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement were also higher (20.3 per cent) (see Figure 6.2.1).

**Figure 6.2.1: Perceptions of linguistic discrimination in various scenarios, by wave\***



\*The 2013 wave used a different response scale from the 2018 and 2024 waves, and is therefore not directly comparable. The 2013 response proportions are shown in Figure 6.2.1 for completeness only and are not discussed in the main text.

**6.2.2 Age and education level were statistically significant predictors of whether respondents are fine with people around them speaking a language they do not speak**

Linear regression analysis indicates that younger and lower-educated respondents were more likely to agree that they are fine if people around them speak a language they do not speak. Other variables, including race, gender, housing type, income, and citizenship were not statistically significant predictors (see Table 6.2.2).

**Table 6.2.2: “I am fine if people around me speak a language I do not speak” (linear regression)**

Variables	Standardised Coefficient
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	-.027
<b>Indian</b>	.004
<b>Age</b>	<b>-.068***</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	-.012
<b>Education</b>	<b>-.050*</b>
<b>Housing</b>	-.029
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	-.021
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	.023
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.005

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

### **6.2.3 Race, age, gender and housing type were statistically significant predictors of acceptance of public speeches made in an official language respondents do not speak**

Linear regression analysis indicates that non-Malays, younger, males, and those residing in smaller housing types were more likely to agree that they would be fine if a public speech is made in an official language that they do not speak. Education level, income, and citizenship status were not statistically significant predictors in the regression model (see Table 6.2.3).

**Table 6.2.3: “I am fine if a public speech is made in an official language that I do not speak” (linear regression)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>-.042*</b>
<b>Indian</b>	-.016
<b>Age</b>	<b>-.045*</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	<b>-.056**</b>
<b>Education</b>	.006
<b>Housing</b>	<b>-.071***</b>
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	.006
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	.003
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.008

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

#### **6.2.4 Race, education level, and housing type were statistically significant predictors of acceptance of service staff not speaking English in a shop on Orchard Road**

Linear regression analysis indicates that respondents who were Chinese, lower educated, and residing in smaller housing types were more likely to agree that they would be fine if a service staff does not speak to them in English in a shop on Orchard Road. Other variables, including age, gender, income, and citizenship were not statistically significant predictors (see Table 6.2.4).

**Table 6.2.4: “I am fine if a service staff does not speak to me in English in a shop on Orchard Road” (linear regression)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>-.155***</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>-.156***</b>
<b>Age</b>	-.022
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	-.029
<b>Education</b>	<b>-.068**</b>
<b>Housing</b>	<b>-.052**</b>
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	.005
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	.031
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.041

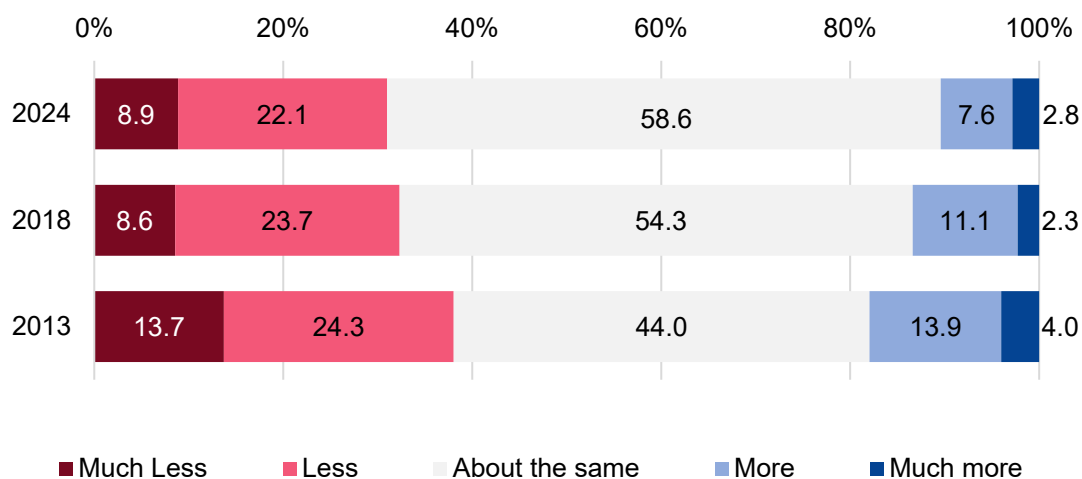
\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

### **6.2.5 Respondents were more likely to feel that language prejudice has remained the same compared to five years ago in 2024 as compared to 2013**

When looking across three waves, respondents were the most polarised in 2013, as that year compared to others had the highest percentage of respondents who found language prejudice compared to five years ago to either be “much less” or “less” (38 per cent) or the other side of the coin of being “more” or “much more” (17.9 per cent). By 2024, the percentage of respondents finding themselves on either of these ends dropped to 31 per cent for those who think there is “much less” or “less” language prejudice compared to five years ago, and 10.4 per cent for those who feel it is “more” or “much more”. What grew instead was the percentage of respondents who felt that there is “about the same” level of language prejudice compared to five years ago, with

58.6 per cent of respondents in 2024 holding this sentiment, compared to 44 per cent in 2013 (see Figure 6.2.5).

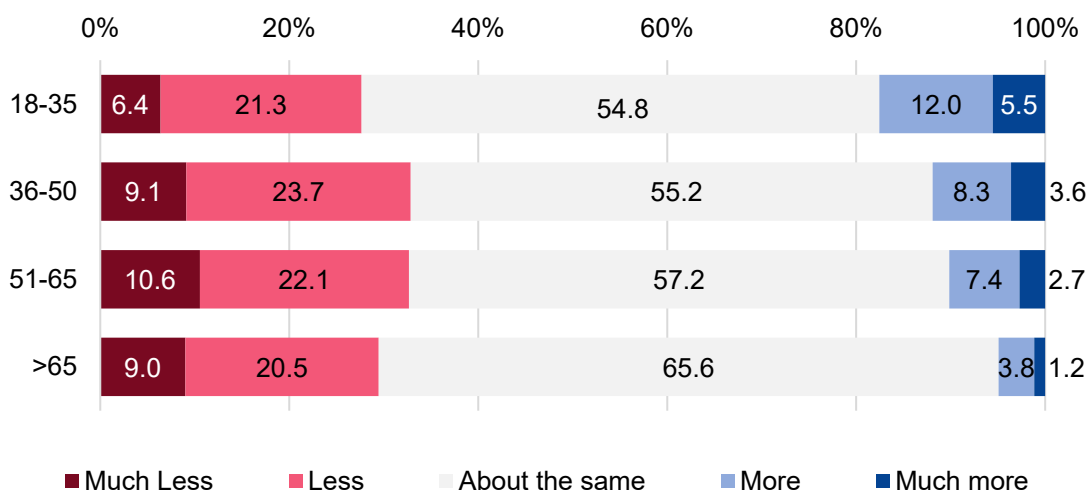
**Figure 6.2.5: Language prejudice compared to 5 years ago, by wave**



### **6.2.6 Younger respondents were more likely to think that language prejudice has worsened as compared to five years ago**

Compared to 5 per cent of respondents aged above 65, 17.5 per cent of respondents in the youngest age cohort indicated that there is “more” or “much more” language prejudice than five years ago. However, respondents in the youngest age cohort were the least likely to perceive that language prejudice has remained consistent relative to five years ago (54.8 per cent indicating “about the same”) compared to their older counterparts (65.6 per cent for respondents above 65 years) (see Figure 6.2.6).

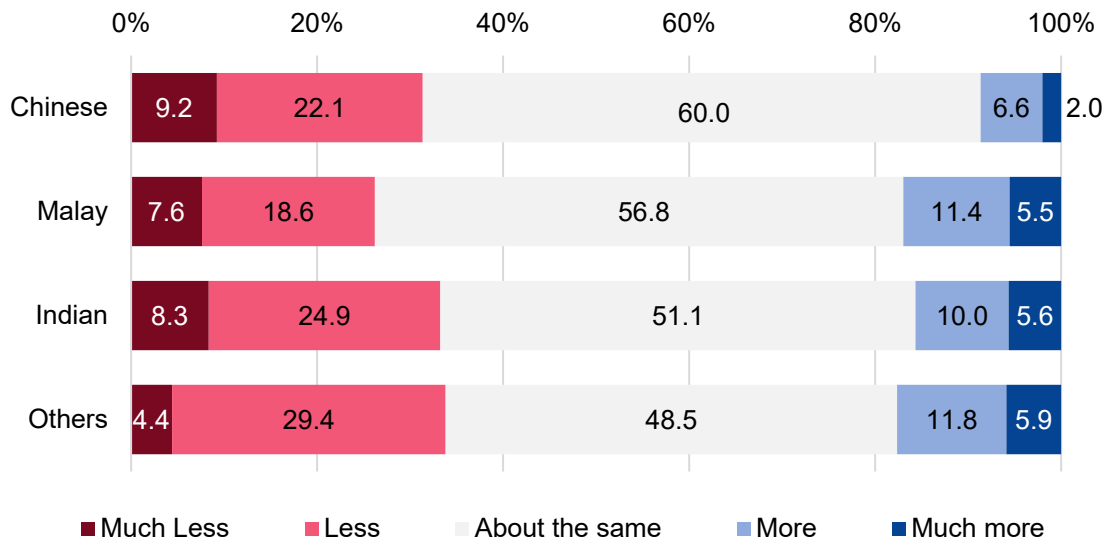
**Figure 6.2.6: Language prejudice compared to 5 years ago, by age (2024)**



**6.2.7 Chinese respondents were the least likely to believe that language prejudice has gotten worse; Malay respondents were the least likely to believe that language prejudice has lessened**

In total, 8.6 per cent of Chinese respondents indicated that they believe language prejudice compared to five years ago has gotten “more” or “much more”, lower than the other races (approximately 15 per cent of respondents belonging to other races). At the same time, 26.2 per cent of Malay respondents reported that they find that language prejudice compared to five years ago has gotten “less” or “much less”, lower than the approximately 30 per cent of respondents from other racial groups (see Figure 6.2.7).

**Figure 6.2.7: Language prejudice compared to 5 years ago, by race (2024)**



**6.2.8 Race and age were statistically significant predictors of perceptions of how language prejudice has changed compared to five years ago**

Against the backdrop of crosstabulations presented, linear regression analysis indicates that Malay and younger respondents were more likely to perceive that language prejudice today has worsened compared to five years ago. No other demographic indicators were statistically significant predictors (see Table 6.2.8).

**Table 6.2.8: Perceptions of language prejudice today as compared to 5 years ago (linear regression)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>.060**</b>
<b>Indian</b>	.028
<b>Age</b>	<b>-.103***</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	.000
<b>Education</b>	.008
<b>Housing</b>	-.032
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	.006
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	-.038
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.016

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## **7. PERCEPTIONS OF LANGUAGE POLICIES**

Policy has been crucial in shaping Singapore's linguistic landscape, particularly in institutionalising English and the official Mother Tongue Languages within education and public life. However, the reception of these policies has been far from straightforward, as seen in the continued use of heritage languages and Singlish in everyday life. Scholars have also highlighted the unintended consequences of such language policies, including the entrenchment of class distinctions (Tang, 2022a) and the erosion of cultural and linguistic heritage (Jain & Sachde, 2021).

Against this backdrop, this chapter examines how Singaporeans view the Government's role in shaping the language environment, spanning questions of fairness, regulation, preservation, and promotion. Section 7.1 considers whether respondents feel the Government has maintained a fair system or policy for everyone regardless of language proficiency. Section 7.2 examines whether respondents think the Government should do more to curb the use of Singlish. Section 7.3 turns to views on preserving the languages of new immigrants in Singapore. Section 7.4 finally considers whether respondents support a more active Government role in promoting proficiency in English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil, rather than leaving such matters largely to society.

### **7.1 Perceptions of Fairness vis-à-vis Language Policies**

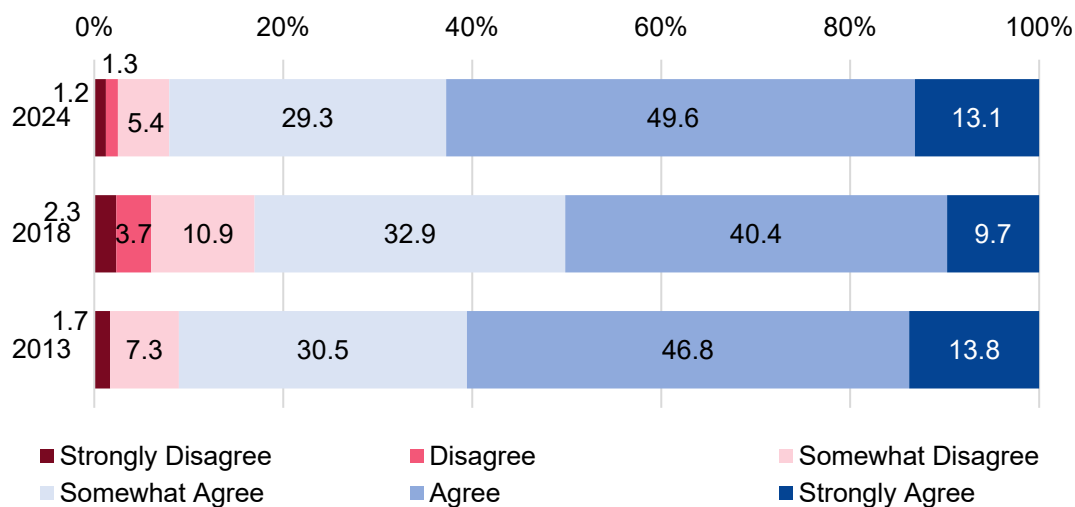
This section examines how Singaporeans perceive the fairness of the Government's language system and policies, focusing on whether respondents feel that a fair

approach has been maintained for everyone regardless of language proficiency. It first traces overall shifts in perceptions between 2018 and 2024, before examining how views in 2024 varied across key demographic groups such as age, race, and education level. The section concludes with a regression analysis to assess which of these patterns remain significant after accounting for other factors simultaneously.

***7.1.1 Proportions of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that the Government has maintained a fair system or policy for everyone regardless of language proficiency increased from half in 2018 to over six in 10 in 2024***

Perceptions that the Government has maintained a fair system or policy for everyone in Singapore, regardless of language proficiency, became more positive from 2018 to 2024. The proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with this statement increased from 50.1 per cent in 2018 to 62.7 per cent in 2024. This shift was driven by increases in both the share who selected agree and those who selected strongly agree, alongside a corresponding decline in disagreement (see Figure 7.1.1).

**Figure 7.1.1: "The government has maintained a fair system/policy for everyone in Singapore, regardless of their language proficiencies", by wave\***

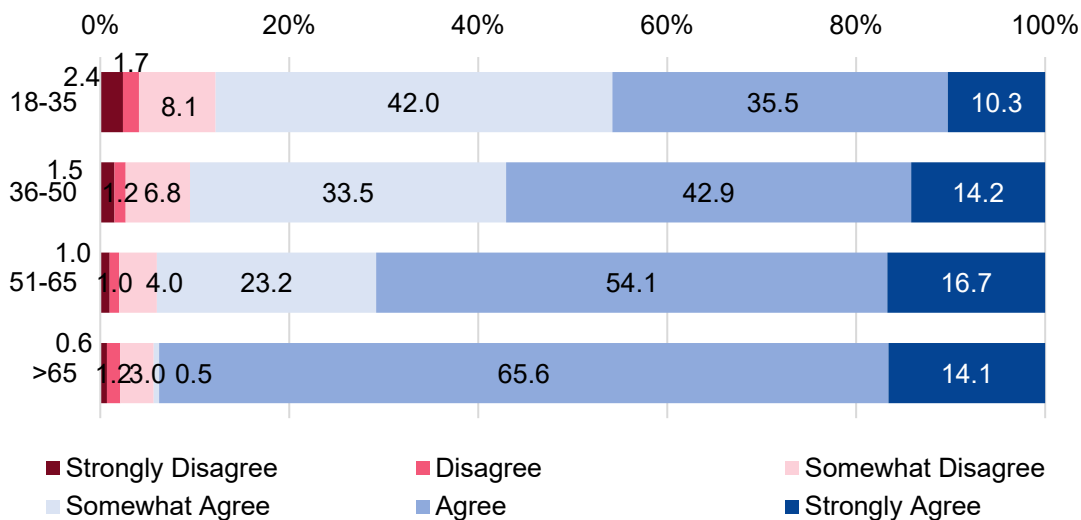


\*The 2013 wave used a different response scale from the 2018 and 2024 waves, and is therefore not directly comparable. The 2013 response proportions are shown for completeness only and are not discussed in the main text.

### **7.1.2 Older respondents were more likely to perceive the system as fair regardless of language proficiency**

Perceptions of fairness varied markedly by age in 2024. Under half of respondents aged 18–35 agreed or strongly agreed that the government has maintained a fair system or policy for everyone in Singapore, regardless of their language proficiencies (45.8 per cent). This proportion increased steadily with age, rising to 57.1 per cent among those aged 36–50 and 70.8 per cent among those aged 51–65, before reaching 79.7 per cent among respondents aged over 65 (see Figure 7.1.2).

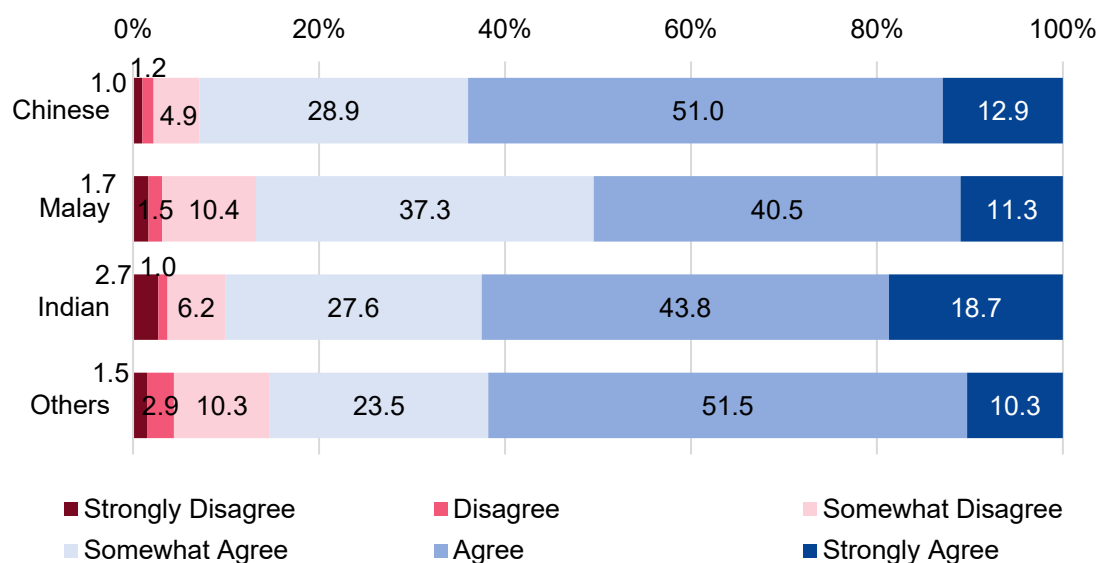
**Figure 7.1.2: "The government has maintained a fair system/policy for everyone in Singapore, regardless of their language proficiencies", by age (2024)**



### **7.1.3 Chinese and Indian respondents were more likely to perceive the system as fair regardless of language proficiency**

The study also looked at respondents' perceptions of whether the government has maintained a fair system or policy for everyone in Singapore, regardless of language proficiency, analysed by respondents' ethnicity. Perceptions of fairness also varied across racial groups in 2024. Around three in five Chinese and Indian respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the government has maintained a fair system or policy for everyone in Singapore, regardless of their language proficiencies (Chinese: 63.9 per cent; Indian: 62.5 per cent). In contrast, only 51.8 per cent of Malay respondents indicated agreement or strong agreement (see Figure 7.1.3).

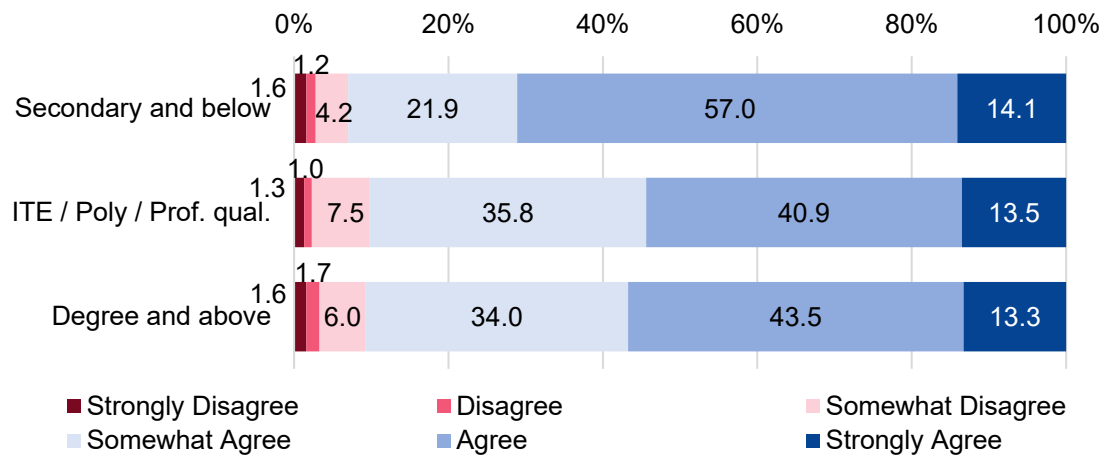
**Figure 7.1.3: "The government has maintained a fair system/policy for everyone in Singapore, regardless of their language proficiencies", by race (2024)**



#### ***7.1.4 Respondents with secondary education and below were more likely to perceive the system as fair regardless of language proficiency***

Over seven in 10 respondents with secondary education and below agreed or strongly agreed that the government has maintained a fair system or policy for everyone in Singapore, regardless of their language proficiencies (71.1 per cent). In contrast, only around half of respondents with post-secondary qualifications indicated the same (ITE/ Polytechnic/ professional qualifications: 54.4 per cent; degree and above: 56.8 per cent) (see Figure 7.1.4).

**Figure 7.1.4: "The government has maintained a fair system/policy for everyone in Singapore, regardless of their language proficiencies", by education (2024)**



***7.1.5 Race and age were statistically significant predictors of perceptions that the system is fair regardless of language proficiency***

Linear regression analysis indicates that non-Malays and older respondents were more likely to agree that the government has maintained a fair system or policy for everyone in Singapore, regardless of their language proficiencies. Gender, education level, housing type, income, and citizenship were not statistically significant predictors in the regression model (see Table 7.1.5).

**Table 7.1.5: “The government has maintained a fair system/policy for everyone in Singapore, regardless of their language proficiencies” (linear regression)**

Variables	Standardised Coefficient
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>-.052**</b>
<b>Indian</b>	.000
<b>Age</b>	<b>.134***</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	-.032
<b>Education</b>	-.039
<b>Housing</b>	.006
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	.039
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	.026
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.024

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

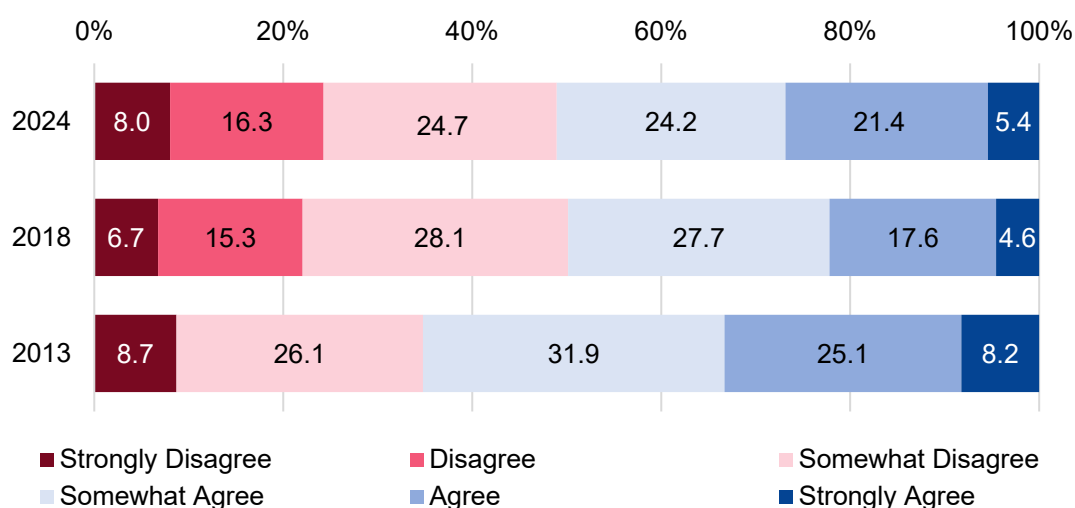
## 7.2 Policy Perceptions vis-à-vis Singlish Use

Section 7.2 examines respondents’ policy attitudes towards Singlish, focusing on whether Singaporeans feel the Government should take a more active role in curbing its use. It first traces overall shifts in support between 2018 and 2024, before examining how views in 2024 varied across key demographic groups such as age, race, and education level. A regression analysis ensues to assess which of these patterns remain significant after accounting for other factors simultaneously.

### **7.2.1 Proportions of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that the Government should do more to curb the use of Singlish increased slightly from 2018 to 2024**

Views on whether the Government should do more to curb the use of Singlish in Singapore remained broadly stable from 2018 to 2024, albeit with a slight increase in proportions of respondents in agreement or strong agreement with the statement (from 22.2 per cent in 2018 to 26.8 per cent in 2024). This was accompanied by a small decline in the share selecting somewhat disagree, suggesting a mild shift towards greater support for stronger Government action on Singlish (see Figure 7.2.1).

**Figure 7.2.1: "The government should do more to curb the use of Singlish in Singapore", by wave\***



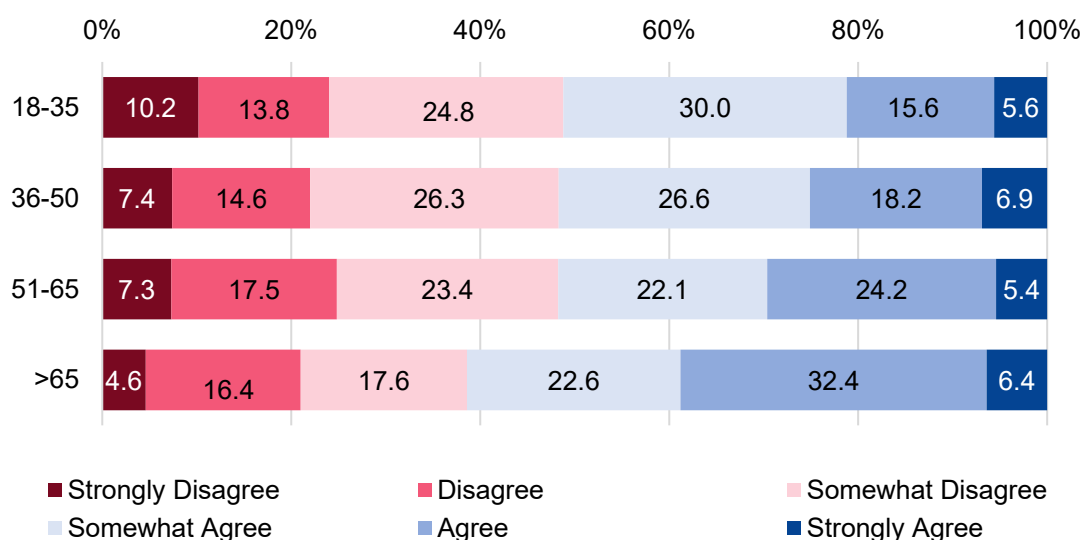
\*The 2013 wave used a different response scale from the 2018 and 2024 waves, and is therefore not directly comparable. The 2013 response proportions are shown for completeness only and are not discussed in the main text.

### **7.2.2 The older a respondent, the more likely they were to agree that the government should do more to curb the use of Singlish in Singapore**

Based on the survey responses, 21.2 per cent of respondents aged 18-35 reported that they "agree" or "strongly agree" that the government should do more to curb the use of Singlish in Singapore, the lowest amongst all age groups. This percentage

increases, reaching its highest of 38.8 per cent for respondents aged above 65 (see Figure 7.2.2).

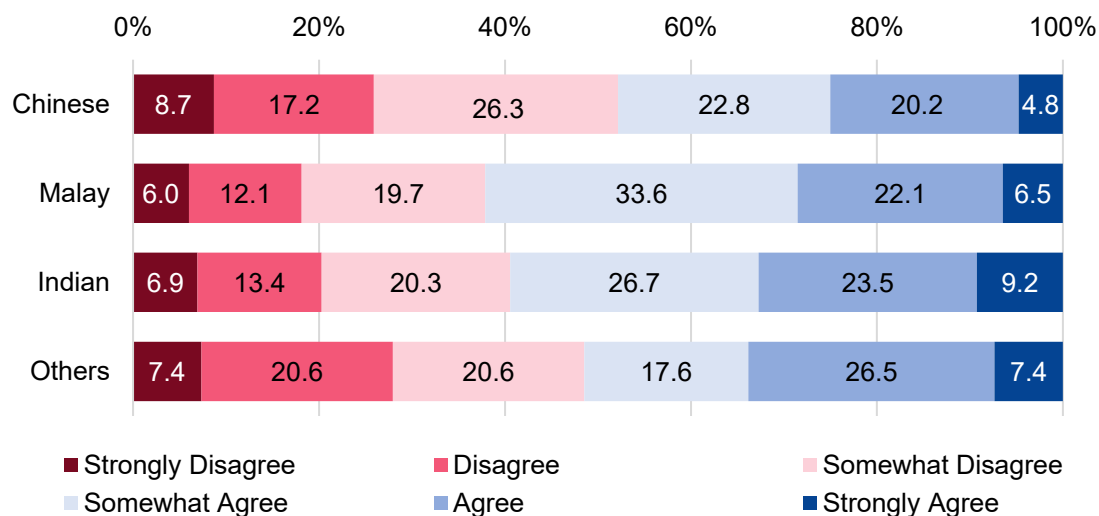
**Figure 7.2.2: "The government should do more to curb the use of Singlish in Singapore", by age (2024)**



### ***7.2.3 Minority-race respondents were more supportive of Government action to curb the use of Singlish***

When examining responses by race, we note that minority-race respondents were more likely to agree to varying extents that the Government should do more to curb the use of Singlish in Singapore. Indian respondents were most likely to agree or strongly agree (32.7 per cent), followed by Malays (28.6 per cent) and Chinese (25.0 per cent). When including those who somewhat agreed as well, approximately six in 10 Malay respondents (62.2 per cent) and Indian respondents (59.4 per cent) indicated support for this statement as compared to under half of Chinese respondents (47.8 per cent) (see Figure 7.2.3).

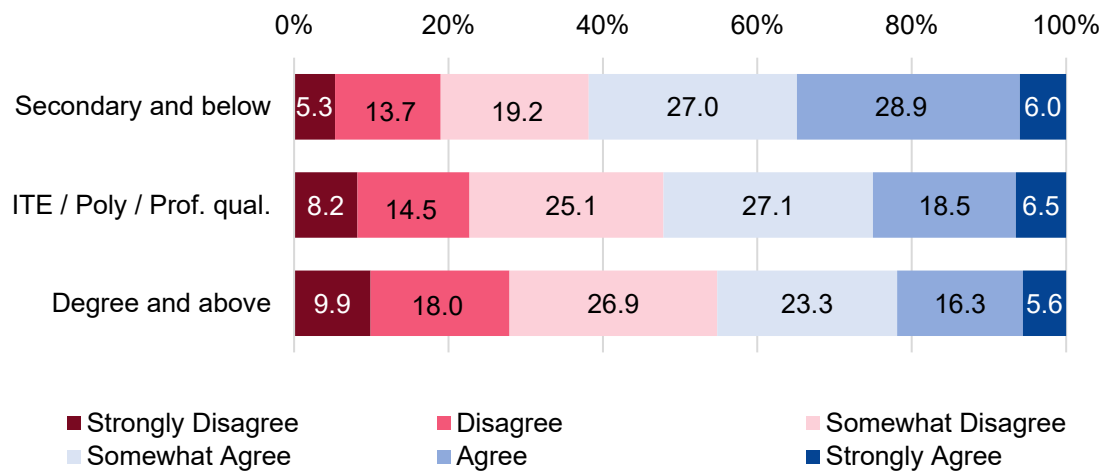
**Figure 7.2.3: "The government should do more to curb the use of Singlish in Singapore", by race (2024)**



#### ***7.2.4 Less highly educated respondents were more likely to indicate that the Government should do more to curb the use of Singlish***

Views differed by education level in 2024. Around one-third of respondents with secondary education and below agreed or strongly agreed that the Government should do more to curb the use of Singlish in Singapore (34.9 per cent). This proportion was lower among those with post-secondary qualifications, including 25 per cent of respondents with ITE, Polytechnic, or professional qualifications and 21.9 per cent of degree holders (see Figure 7.2.4).

**Figure 7.2.4: "The government should do more to curb the use of Singlish in Singapore", by education (2024)**



**7.2.5 Race, education level and citizenship were statistically significant predictors of attitudes towards whether the Government should do more to curb Singlish**

Linear regression analysis indicates that race, education level and citizenship status were statistically significant predictors of agreement that the Government should do more to curb the use of Singlish in Singapore. Specifically, minority races, lower-educated, and PR respondents were more likely to agree with this question item. Other variables, including age, gender, and affluence were not statistically significant predictors (see Table 7.2.5).

**Table 7.2.5: “The government should do more to curb the use of Singlish in Singapore” (linear regression)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	<b>.076***</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>.054**</b>
<b>Age</b>	.029
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	.027
<b>Education</b>	<b>-.085***</b>
<b>Housing</b>	-.009
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	-.035
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	<b>.111***</b>
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.034

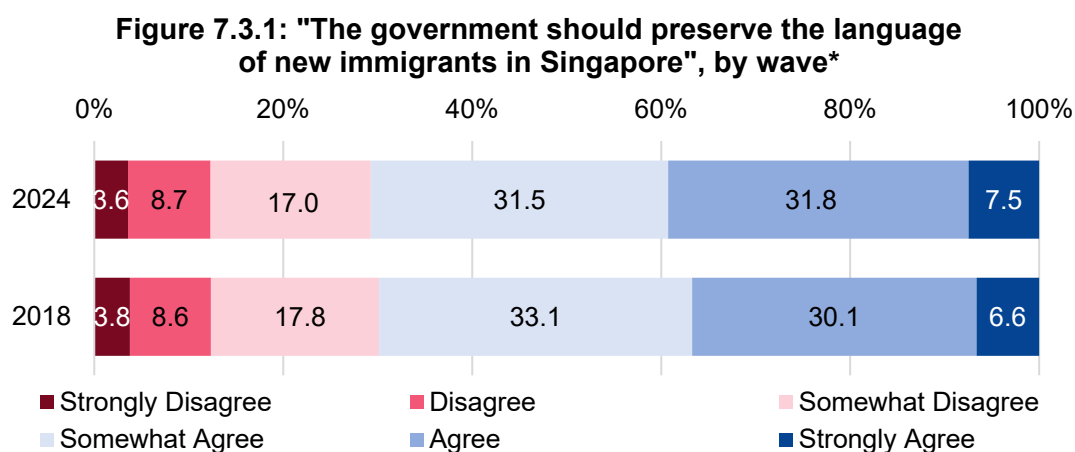
\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

### **7.3 Policy Perceptions vis-à-vis Preserving New Immigrant Languages**

This section examines respondents’ views on whether the Government should preserve the languages of new immigrants in Singapore, shedding light on how Singaporeans think about linguistic diversity in relation to integration and the wider language environment. It begins by tracing overall shifts in support between 2018 and 2024, before examining how views in 2024 varied across key demographic groups such as age, education level, and citizenship status. The section concludes with a regression analysis to assess which of these patterns remain significant after accounting for other factors simultaneously.

### 7.3.1 Proportions of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that the Government should preserve the language of new immigrants in Singapore increased slightly from 2018 to 2024

Views on whether the Government should preserve the language of new immigrants in Singapore remained broadly stable from 2018 to 2024, with a slight increase in the proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with this statement (from 36.7 per cent in 2018 to 39.3 per cent in 2024) (see Figure 7.3.1).

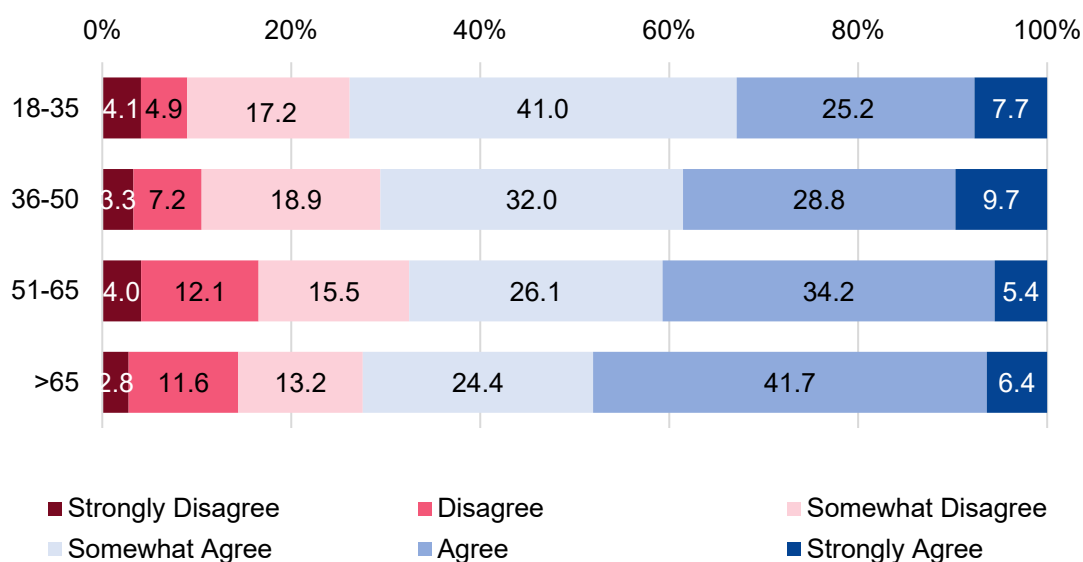


### 7.3.2 Older respondents were more likely to support the view that the Government should preserve the languages of new immigrants; disagreement peaked among those aged 51–65

Support for preserving the languages of new immigrants increased with age in 2024. Around one-third of respondents aged 18–35 agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (32.9 per cent), rising to 38.5 per cent among those aged 36–50 and 39.6 per cent among those aged 51–65, before reaching 48.1 per cent among respondents aged over 65. At the same time, disagreement (strongly disagree or disagree) was

highest among those aged 51–65 (16.1 per cent) and was also relatively elevated among respondents aged over 65 (14.4 per cent) (see Figure 7.3.2).

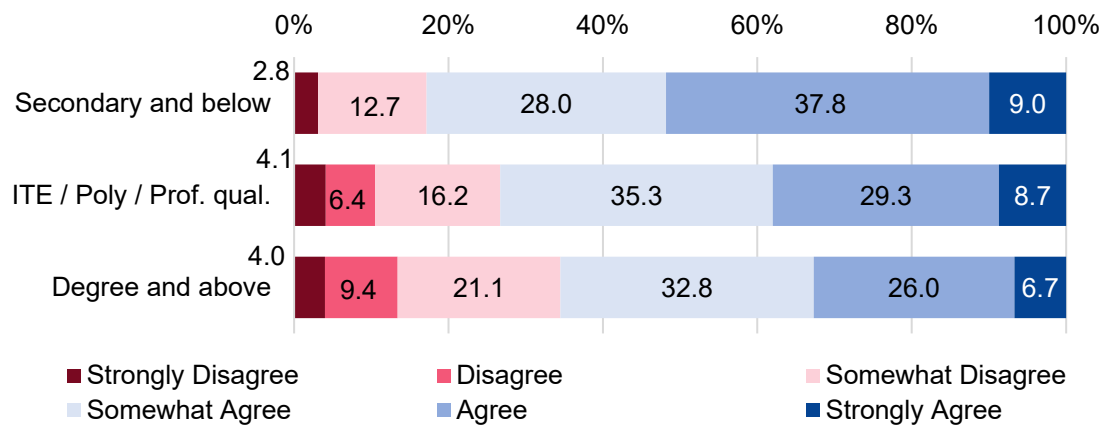
**Figure 7.3.2: "The government should preserve the language of new immigrants in Singapore", by age cohort (2024)**



### ***7.3.3 Less highly educated respondents were more likely to support the view that the Government should preserve the language of new immigrants***

Nearly half of respondents with secondary education and below agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (46.8 per cent). This proportion was lower among respondents with post-secondary qualifications, including 38 per cent of those with ITE, Polytechnic, or professional qualifications and 32.7 per cent of degree holders (see Figure 7.3.3).

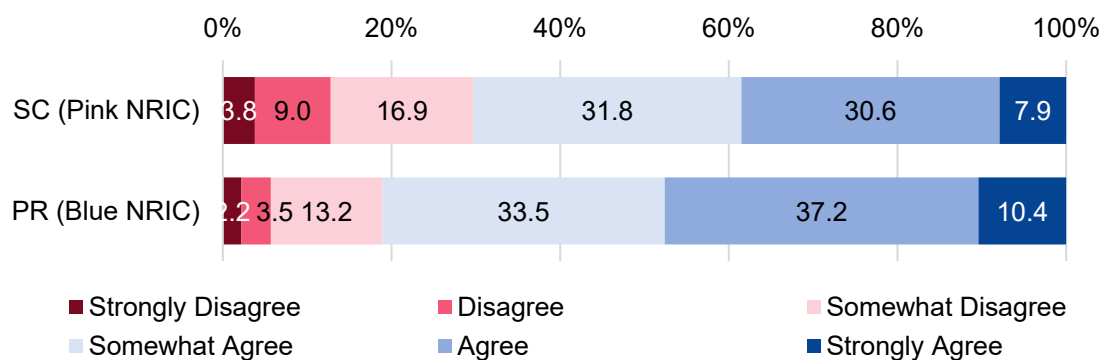
**Figure 7.3.3: "The government should preserve the language of new immigrants in Singapore", by education level (2024)**



#### **7.3.4 SCs were less likely to agree that the government should preserve the language of new immigrants in Singapore**

Overall, 38.5 per cent of SCs indicated that they “agree” or “strongly agree” that the government should preserve the language of new immigrants in Singapore, while 47.6 per cent of PRs indicated likewise (see Figure 7.3.4).

**Figure 7.3.4: "The government should preserve the language of new immigrants in Singapore", by citizenship status (2024)**



### 7.3.5 Education level and citizenship status were statistically significant predictors of support for preserving the language of new immigrants

Linear regression analysis indicates that respondents who were lower educated and PRs were more likely to agree that the Government should preserve the language of new immigrants in Singapore. Other variables, including race, age, gender, housing type, and income, were not statistically significant predictors (see Table 7.3.5).

**Table 7.3.5: “The government should preserve the language of new immigrants in Singapore” (linear regression)**

Variables	Standardised Coefficient
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	-.014
<b>Indian</b>	.029
<b>Age</b>	-.026
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	-.004
<b>Education</b>	<b>-.113***</b>
<b>Housing</b>	-.024
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	-.023
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	<b>.079***</b>
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.019

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

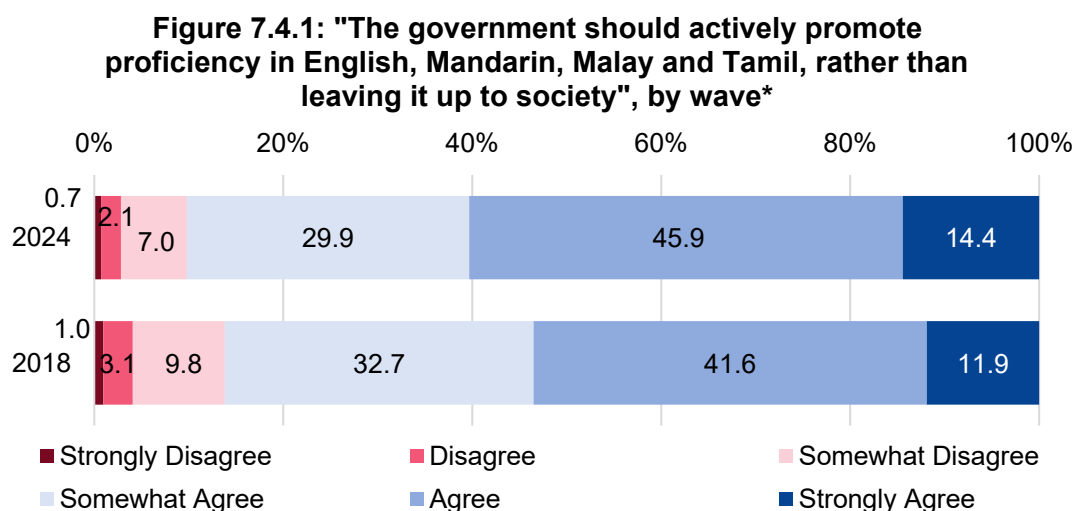
## 7.4 Policy Perceptions vis-à-vis Promotion of Language Proficiency

This final section examines whether Singaporeans feel the Government should take an active role in promoting proficiency in the four official languages (English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil) as opposed to leaving language learning and norms largely to societal forces. It begins by tracing overall shifts in support between 2018 and 2024,

before examining how views in 2024 varied across key demographic groups such as age, education level, and race. The section concludes with a regression analysis to assess which of these remain significant after accounting for other factors.

#### **7.4.1 Support for active Government promotion of proficiency in English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil increased modestly from 2018 to 2024**

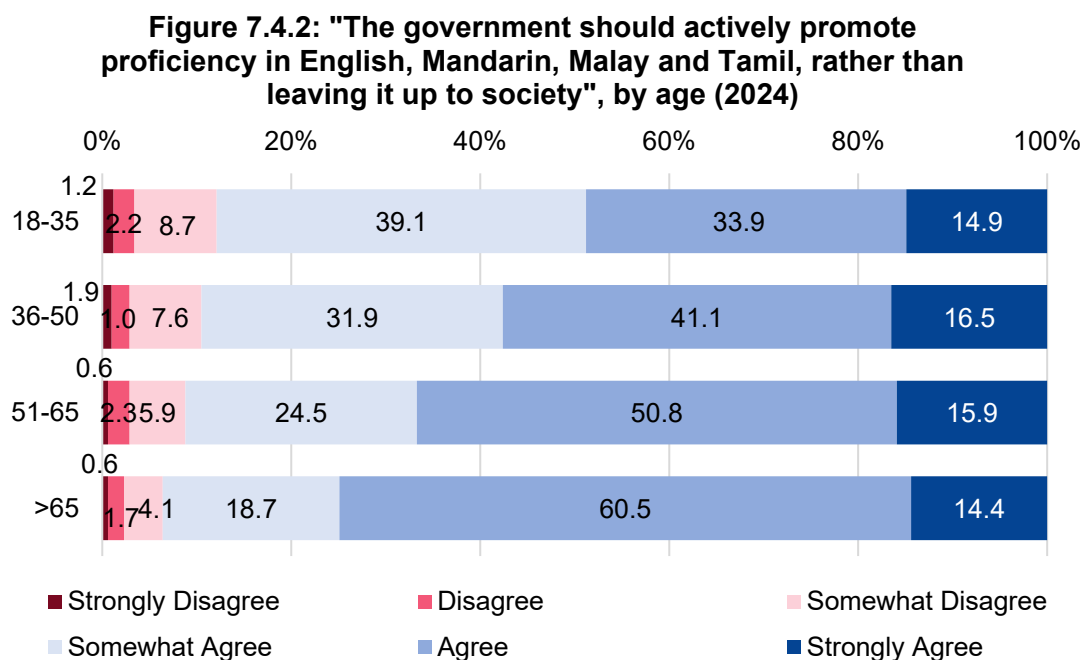
Support for active Government promotion of proficiency in English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil increased modestly from 2018 to 2024. The proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with this statement rose from 53.5 per cent in 2018 to 60.3 per cent in 2024, indicating a broader shift towards support for a more active state role in promoting proficiency in the official languages (see Figure 7.4.1).



\*Question item not asked in 2013.

#### **7.4.2 Older respondents were more likely to indicate that the government should actively promote proficiency in English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil, rather than leaving it up to society**

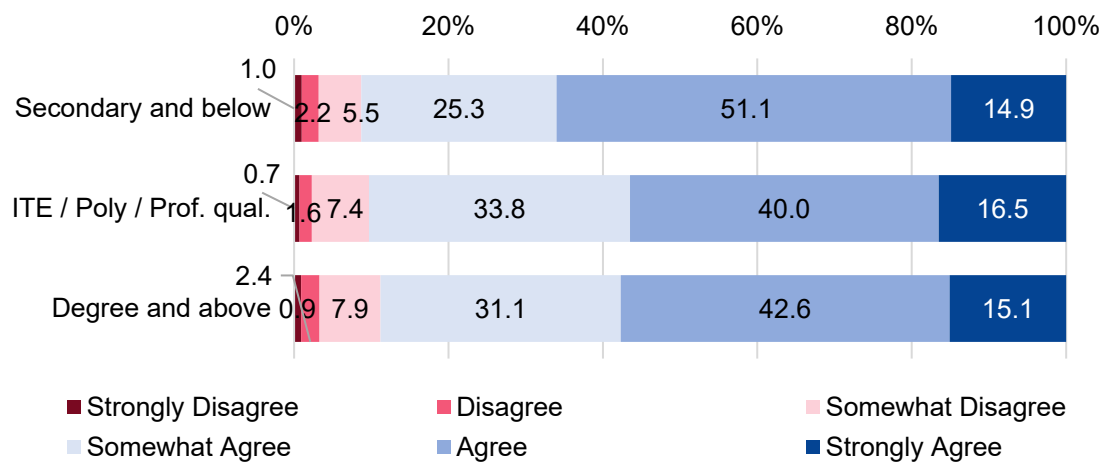
Support for active Government promotion increased with age in 2024. Just under half of respondents aged 18–35 agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (48.8 per cent). This proportion rose steadily across older cohorts, reaching 74.9 per cent among respondents aged over 65 (see Figure 7.4.2).



### ***7.4.3 Respondents with secondary and below education were more likely to support active Government promotion of proficiency in the official languages, rather than leaving it up to society***

Two-thirds of respondents with secondary education and below agreed or strongly agreed that the Government should actively promote proficiency in English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil (66 per cent). This proportion was lower among respondents with post-secondary qualifications, including 56.5 per cent of those with ITE, polytechnic, or professional qualifications and 57.7 per cent of degree holders (see Figure 7.4.3).

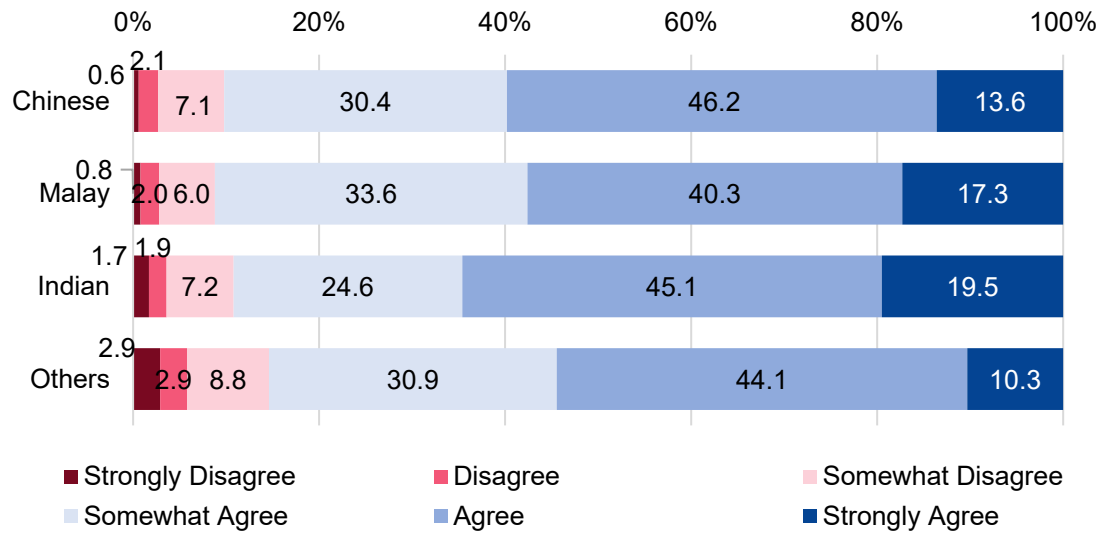
**Figure 7.4.3: "The government should actively promote proficiency in English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil, rather than leaving it up to society", by education (2024)**



**7.4.4 Indian respondents were more likely to support active Government promotion of proficiency in English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil rather than leaving it up to society**

Support for active Government promotion also varied across racial groups in 2024. Indian respondents were the most likely to agree or strongly agree with the statement (64.6 per cent). This proportion was lower among Chinese (59.8 per cent) and Malay respondents (57.6 per cent) (see Figure 7.4.4).

**Figure 7.4.4: "The government should actively promote proficiency in English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil, rather than leaving it up to society", by race (2024)**



**7.4.5 Age was a statistically significant predictor of respondents' views on the government promoting proficiency in the official languages rather than leaving it up to society**

Linear regression analysis indicates that older respondents were more likely to agree that the Government should actively promote proficiency in English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil rather than leaving it up to society. Other variables, including race, gender, education level, housing type, income, and citizenship status, were not statistically significant predictors (see Table 7.4.5).

**Table 7.4.5: “The government should actively promote proficiency in English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil, rather than leaving it up to society” (linear regression)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	.039
<b>Indian</b>	.031
<b>Age</b>	<b>.129***</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	-.028
<b>Education</b>	.045
<b>Housing</b>	-.022
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	.018
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	-.021
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.014

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## 8. MOTIVATION TO SPEAK ENGLISH WELL

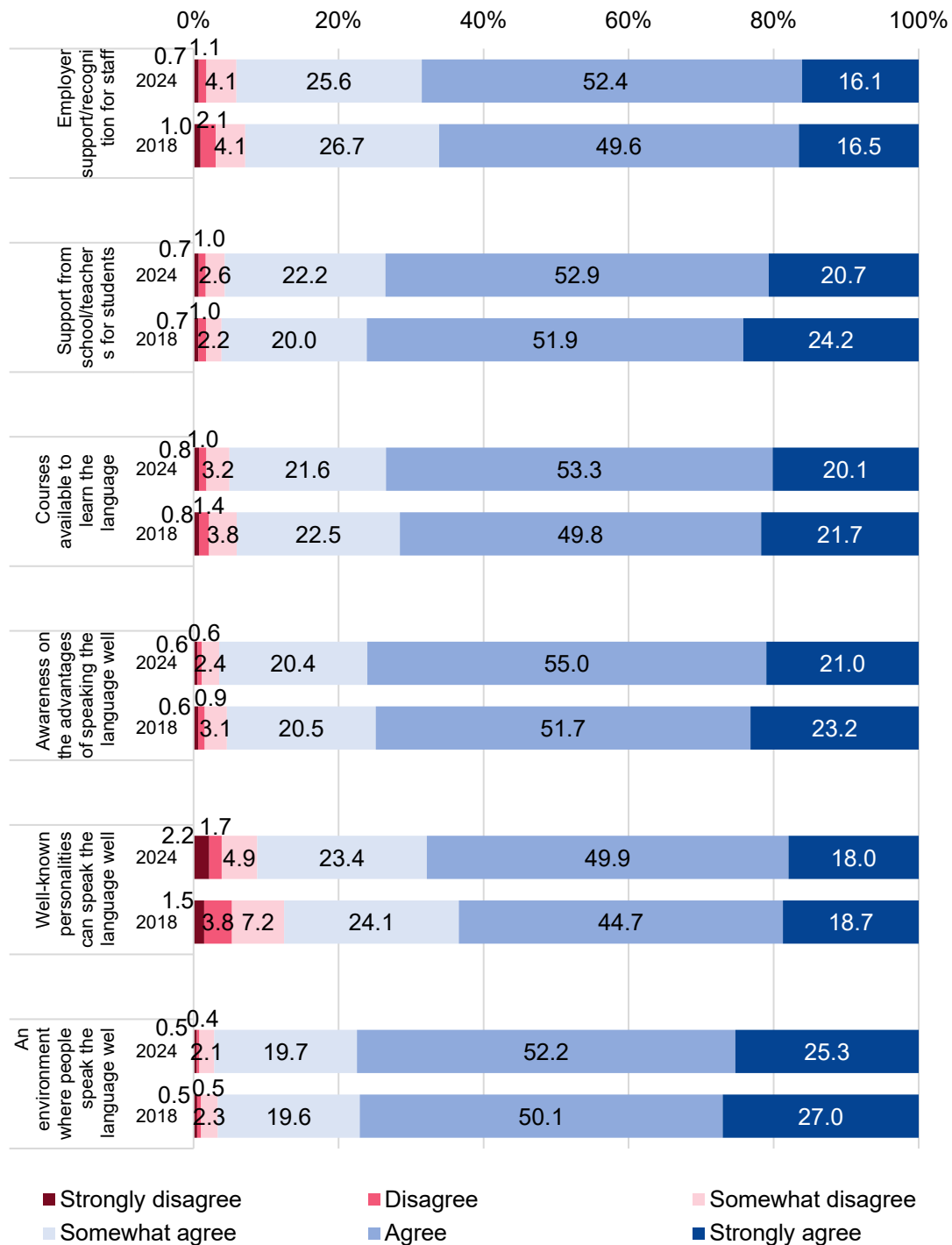
This chapter examines what motivates Singapore residents to speak English well, focusing on the relative importance of social cues and institutional supports. It considers a range of potential motivators; these include being surrounded by people who speak English well, employer recognition or support for staff, support from schools or teachers, the availability of courses to learn English, greater awareness of the advantages of strong English proficiency, as well as the influence of well-known personalities whom respondents admire. Taken together, these items capture both informal mechanisms of language socialisation through one's environment, and more formal levers that shape learning and sustained language use across different life stages.

Overall, respondents expressed high levels of agreement across all items in both 2018 and 2024; roughly seven in 10 or more agreed or strongly agreed that each measure would motivate them. Views were largely stable between waves, with only modest shifts. The most notable change from 2018 to 2024 was a stronger tendency to say that admired well-known personalities who speak English well would be motivating; agreement rose from 63.4 per cent to 67.9 per cent. In contrast, support for school or teacher support for students declined slightly (76.1 per cent to 73.6 per cent), driven mainly by a lower share selecting "strongly agree"; other items, including environmental influence, workplace support, courses, and awareness of advantages, shifted only marginally (see Figure 8.1).

The remainder of the chapter unpacks these patterns in greater detail. Section 8.1 focuses on environmental influence and awareness as motivators; Section 8.2

examines workplace support and recognition; Section 8.3 covers education-related supports, including schools/teachers and the availability of courses; Section 8.4 considers media and role-model effects, focusing on admired public personalities.

**Figure 8.1: Respondents' perceptions of whether various measures would motivate them to speak English well**



## **8.1 General Environment and Awareness as Motivation**

This first section focuses on broad, upstream motivators that operate through social norms and individual perceptions, rather than through specific institutional interventions. It examines whether respondents feel they would be motivated to speak English well when they are surrounded by others who speak English proficiently, and whether greater awareness of the advantages of strong English proficiency would encourage them to do so. The section then uses regression analyses to identify which demographic differences remain associated with these perceptions after accounting for other factors simultaneously.

### ***8.1.1 Race and education level were statistically significant predictors of perceptions on whether an environment with people proficient in English would motivate respondents to speak English well***

Regression analysis on the survey responses illustrates that Indians and higher educated respondents were more likely to agree that an environment where people speak English well would motivate them to speak English well. Age, gender, housing type, income, and citizenship were not statistically significant predictors in this model (see Table 8.1.1).

**Table 8.1.1: “An environment where people speak English well would motivate me to speak English well” (linear regression)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	-.036
<b>Indian</b>	<b>.040*</b>
<b>Age</b>	.034
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	.011
<b>Education</b>	<b>.092***</b>
<b>Housing</b>	.011
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	.035
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	-.029
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.015

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**8.1.2 Similarly, race and education were statistically significant predictors for respondents’ views on whether awareness about the advantages of speaking English well will encourage them to speak it well**

Linear regression analysis also indicates that Indians and higher educated respondents were more likely to agree that greater awareness of the advantages of speaking English well would encourage them to speak English well. Other demographic variables were not statistically significant predictors (see Table 8.1.2).

**Table 8.1.2: “Awareness of the advantages of speaking English well will encourage me to speak English well” (linear regression)**

Variables	Standardised Coefficient
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	-.003
<b>Indian</b>	<b>.054**</b>
<b>Age</b>	.032
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	.024
<b>Education</b>	<b>.053*</b>
<b>Housing</b>	.011
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	.034
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	.017
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.007

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

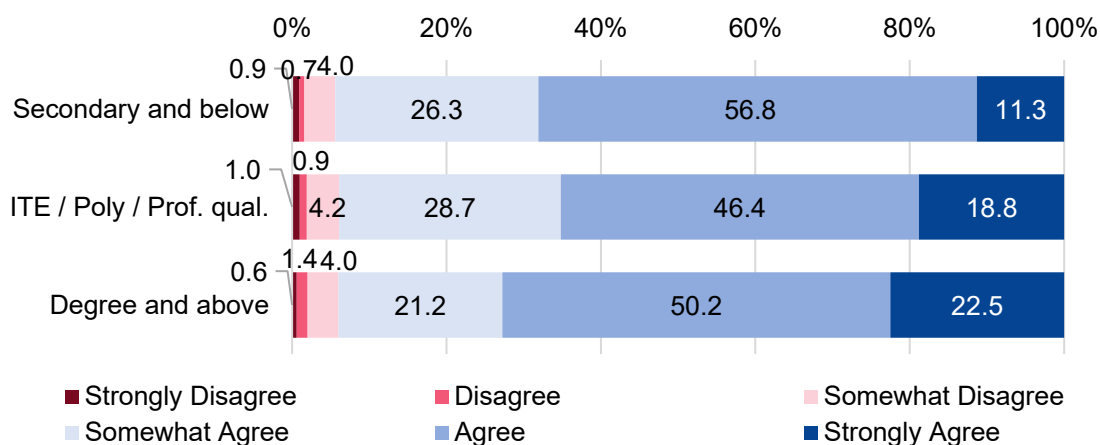
## 8.2 Motivation at the Workplace

Section 8.2 examines workplace-based levers that may motivate respondents to speak English well, focusing on whether employer support or recognition for staff is perceived as an effective incentive. It first profiles differences in agreement across key demographic groups in 2024, particularly age and education level, and then uses regression analysis to assess which demographic correlates remain significant after accounting for other factors simultaneously.

### **8.2.1 Respondents with degree-level education were more likely to indicate that employer support or recognition would motivate them to speak English well**

Views differed modestly by education level in 2024. Around seven in 10 respondents with secondary education and below (68.1 per cent) and those with a degree and above (72.7 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that employer support or recognition for staff would motivate them to speak English well. Respondents with ITE, Polytechnic, or professional qualifications were slightly less likely to indicate agreement (65.2 per cent) (see Figure 8.2.1).

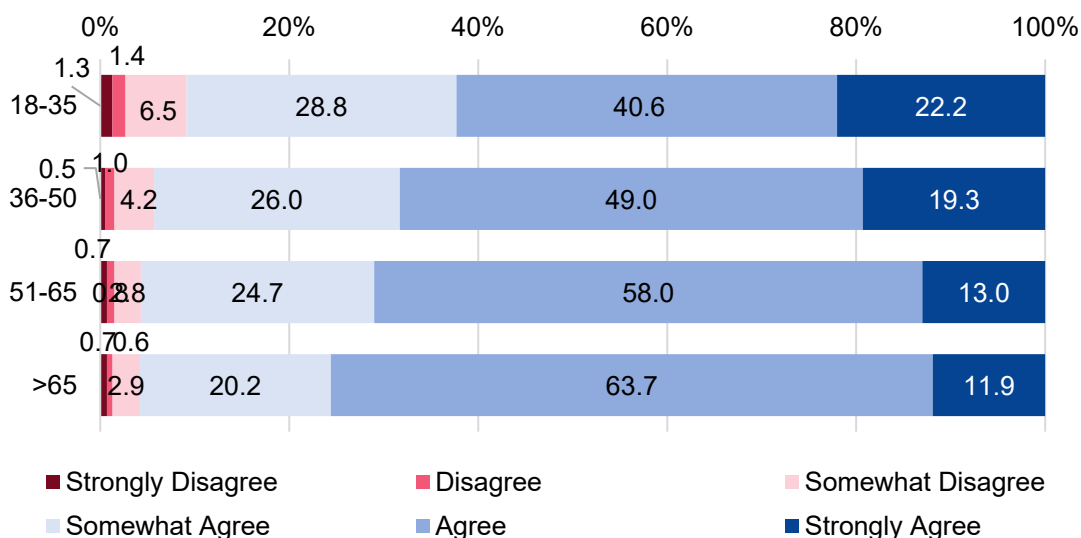
**Figure 8.2.1: "Employer support or recognition for staff would motivate me to speak English well", by education level (2024)**



### **8.2.2 Older respondents were more likely to indicate that employer support or recognition would motivate them to speak English well**

Over three-quarters of respondents aged over 65 agreed or strongly agreed that employer support or recognition for staff would motivate them to speak English well (75.6 per cent). Agreement was lower among younger respondents, at 62.8 per cent among those aged 18–35, and rose with age across the intermediate cohorts (36–50: 68.3 per cent; 51–65: 71 per cent) (see Figure 8.2.2).

**Figure 8.2.2: "Employer support or recognition for staff would motivate me to speak English well", by age (2024)**



**8.2.3 Race, age, gender, education and income were all statistically significant predictors of respondents' views on whether employer support or recognition for staff would motivate them to speak English well**

Augmenting the crosstabulations perusing responses across education level and age, we note from linear regression analysis that, Indian, older, female, higher educated, and higher income respondents were more likely to agree that employer support or recognition for staff would motivate them to speak English well (see Table 8.2.3).

**Table 8.2.3: “Employer support or recognition for staff would motivate me to speak English well” (linear regression)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	.027
<b>Indian</b>	<b>.072***</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>.049*</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	<b>.042*</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>.076**</b>
<b>Housing</b>	-.002
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	<b>.048*</b>
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	.026
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.014

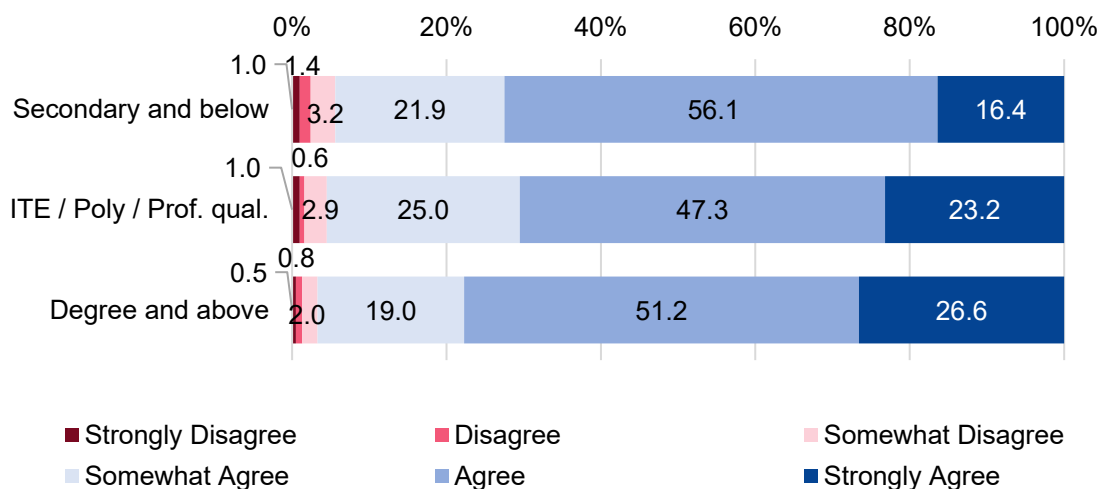
\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

### **8.3 Motivation through Education**

#### ***8.3.1 Higher-educated respondents were more likely to indicate that school or teacher support would help them to speak English well***

In 2024, over seven in 10 respondents across all education levels agreed or strongly agreed that support from school or teachers for students would help them to speak English well. This proportion was highest among respondents with a degree and above (77.8 per cent), compared to 72.5 per cent among those with secondary education and below and 70.5 per cent among those with ITE, Polytechnic, or professional qualifications (see Figure 8.3.1).

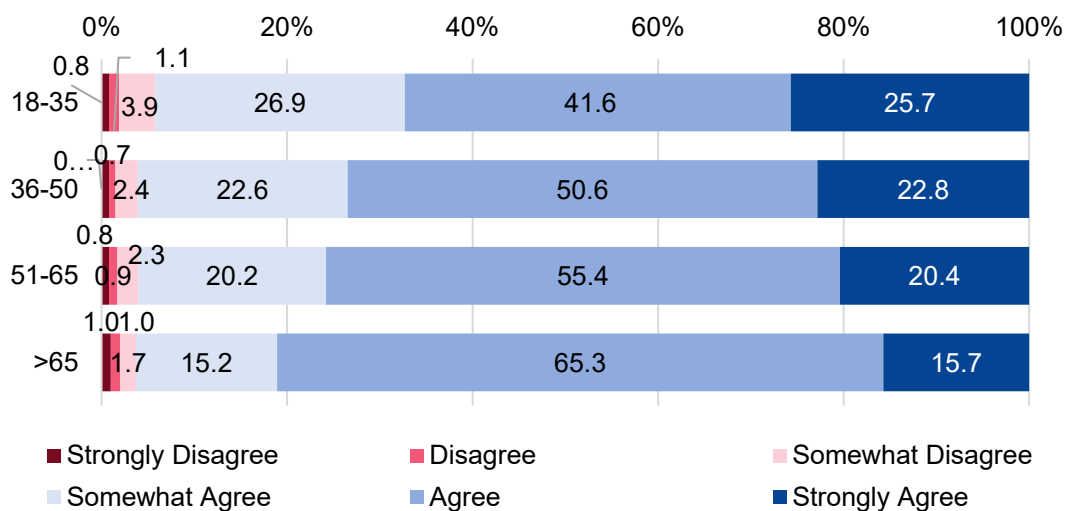
**Figure 8.3.1: "Support from school or teachers for students will help me to speak English well", by education level (2024)**



### **8.3.2 Older respondents were more likely to indicate that support from school or teachers for students will help them to speak English well**

Views on the role of schools and teachers varied by age in 2024. About two-thirds of respondents aged 18–35 reported that they “agree” or “strongly agree” that support from school or teachers for students will help them to speak English well (67.3 per cent). This proportion increased steadily with age, rising to 73.4 per cent among those aged 36–50 and 75.8 per cent among those aged 51–65, before reaching 81 per cent among respondents aged over 65. Notably, the increase with age was driven mainly by higher shares selecting “agree”, even as the proportion selecting “strongly agree” declined across older cohorts (see Figure 8.3.2).

**Figure 8.3.2: "Support from school or teachers for students will help me to speak English well", by age cohort (2024)**



**8.3.3 Race, age and education were statistically significant predictors of respondent's view on whether support from school or teachers for students will help them to speak English well**

According to the results from the linear regression, Indian, older, and higher educated respondents were more likely to agree that support from school or teachers for students will help them to speak English well (see Table 8.3.3).

**Table 8.3.3: “Support from school or teachers for students will help me to speak English well” (linear regression)**

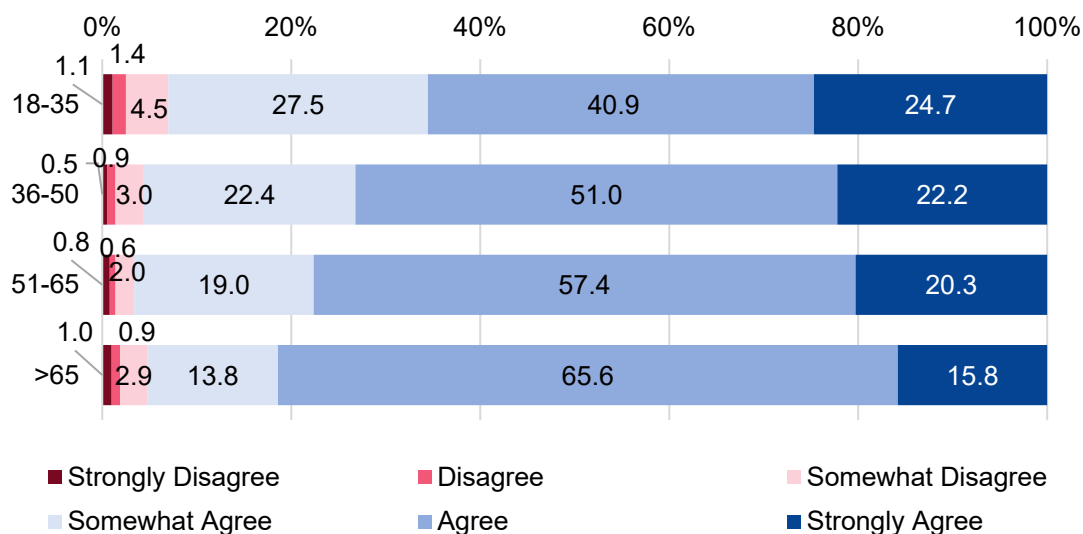
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	.012
<b>Indian</b>	<b>.056**</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>.050*</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	.025
<b>Education</b>	<b>.090***</b>
<b>Housing</b>	.007
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	.040
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	.008
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.012

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

#### **8.3.4 Older respondents were more likely to agree that English learning courses would help them to speak English well**

In 2024, 65.6 per cent of respondents aged 18–35 agreed or strongly agreed that courses available to learn English would help them to speak English well. This proportion increased with age, reaching 81.4 per cent among respondents aged over 65 (see Figure 8.3.4).

**Figure 8.3.4: "Courses available to learn English will help me to speak English well", by age cohort (2024)**



**8.3.5 Race, age and gender were statistically significant predictors of respondents' views on whether courses available to learn English will help them speak English well**

According to the results from the linear regression, Indian, older, and female respondents were more likely to agree that courses available to learn English will help them to speak English well (see Table 8.3.5).

**Table 8.3.5: “Courses available to learn English will help me to speak English well” (linear regression)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	.014
<b>Indian</b>	<b>.059**</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>.066**</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	<b>.043*</b>
<b>Education</b>	.044
<b>Housing</b>	-.001
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	.038
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	.023
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.008

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## **8.4 Motivation by Media or Public Personalities**

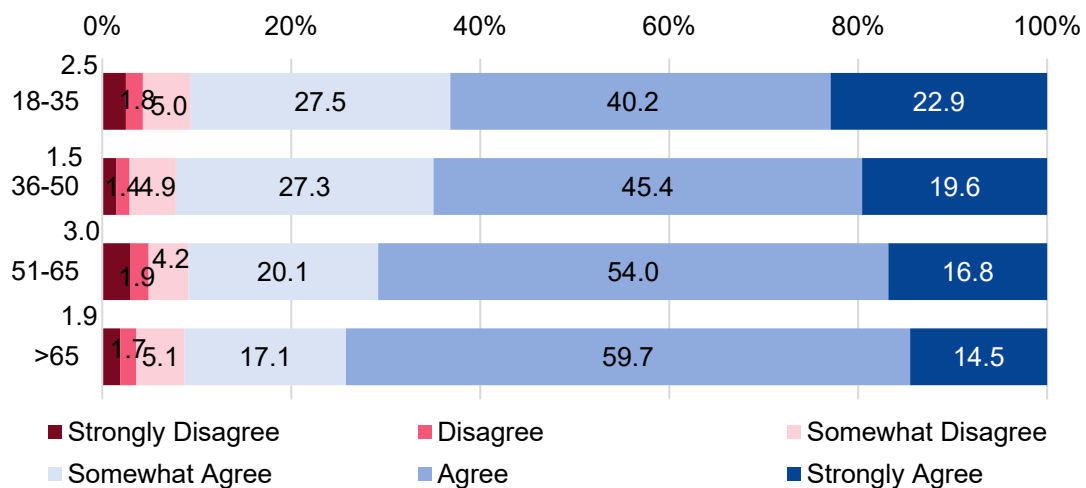
This final section focuses on whether media influences and role-model effects shape motivation to speak English well; in particular, the perceived impact of admired well-known personalities who speak English proficiently. It profiles differences in agreement across age groups in 2024 and then uses regression analysis to assess which demographic patterns remain significant after accounting for other factors simultaneously.

### **8.4.1 Older respondents were more likely to indicate that well-known personalities whom they admire who can speak English well would motivate them to speak English well**

Over six in 10 respondents aged 18–35 indicated that they “agree” or “strongly agree” that well-known personalities who can speak English well would motivate them to

speak English well (63.1 per cent). Agreement rose with age, increasing to 65 per cent among those aged 36–50, 70.8 per cent among those aged 51–65, and 74.2 per cent among respondents aged above 65. This pattern was likewise driven mainly by a larger share selecting “agree” among older respondents, while “strongly agree” was more common among younger respondents (see Figure 8.4.1).

**Figure 8.4.1: "Well-known personalities whom you admire who can speak the language well will motivate me to speak English well", by age (2024)**



#### ***8.4.2 Race, age and gender were statistically significant predictors of a respondents' views on whether admired well-known personalities who speak English well would motivate them to speak English well***

According to the results from the linear regression, Indians, older, and female respondents were more likely to agree that admired well-known personalities who speak English well will encourage them to similarly do so (see Table 8.4.2).

**Table 8.4.2: “Well-known personalities whom you admire who can speak the language well will motivate me to speak English well” (linear regression)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficient</b>
<b>Race</b> ( <i>Chinese as reference group</i> )	
<b>Malay</b>	-.001
<b>Indian</b>	<b>.049*</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>.052*</b>
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>males as reference group</i> )	<b>.056**</b>
<b>Education</b>	.032
<b>Housing</b>	.018
<b>Average Gross Monthly Income</b>	.024
<b>Citizenship</b> ( <i>SCs as reference group</i> )	.011
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.007

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## **9. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

The findings from the 2024 RRL survey suggest that Singapore's language landscape is not merely shifting from one language to another. It is becoming more layered, more differentiated, and in some respects, more demanding to manage. English has deepened its place across proficiency, use, and identity; yet this has not produced a simple monolingual order. Mother Tongues remain salient, heritage languages have not disappeared, and Singlish has grown in both everyday use and symbolic force. The overall picture of language in Singapore is therefore one of sorting: different languages occupying different domains of work, family, memory, culture, mobility, and belonging.

### **9.1 English as an Asian Lingua Franca and Common Civic Platform**

The continued prevalence of English use in Singapore requires careful interpretation. English is sometimes viewed as a marker of Westernisation, or as a language that competes with Asian cultural inheritance. This view though is incomplete. In much of Asia today, English is also a working language of commerce, diplomacy, technology, higher education and regional exchange. The ASEAN Charter itself states that the working language of ASEAN shall be English. In that sense, English in Singapore is not simply a Western inheritance. It is also an Asian lingua franca.

This distinction matters because at the time of Singapore's independence, only 1.8 per cent of the population spoke English. The decision to make English central to public life offered Singapore a common platform that did not belong, at least historically, to any one local ethnic group. In a society where language, race, religion and class could

easily have hardened into separate camps, English helped create a shared civic medium.

Furthermore, English also served as a language of equalisation. It allowed citizens from different linguistic backgrounds to study, work and participate in public life on more common terms than might otherwise have been possible. However, this pursuit of equalisation is not automatic. The 2024 findings show that English proficiency remains unevenly distributed by age, education and socio-economic background. Nearly all respondents aged 18–35 reported high English proficiency, compared to about six in 10 respondents above 65. English use also tends to be stronger among younger, better-educated and more affluent respondents. There is therefore a paradox at the heart of English in Singapore. It is our common platform, but not all stand on it with equal ease. The policy task is to preserve English as a shared civic language without allowing it to become an instrument of exclusion.

## **9.2 Bilingualism, Mother Tongue, and Asian Cultural Anchoring**

Singapore's adoption of English was never meant to stand in isolation; the bilingual policy paired English with Mother Tongue languages so that Singaporeans would have both a common working language and an anchor to Asian cultural identities. In this formulation, English would open doors outward, while Mother Tongues would preserve roots inward. The findings from the current survey support such a formulation by illustrating how Mother Tongue languages remain important even as English becomes more dominant. Mandarin and Malay proficiency remained broadly stable among Chinese and Malay respondents respectively. Tamil proficiency also remains high among Indian respondents of Tamil descent, even though aggregate figures for all

Indian respondents must be read with care because of the linguistic diversity of the Indian community.

Still, there are clear anxieties vis-à-vis Mother Tongue standards. In 2024, only 39.2 per cent of respondents felt written Mother Tongue standards had improved, and 36.5 per cent felt spoken Mother Tongue standards had improved. Roughly a quarter perceived deterioration. These concerns were especially salient among younger, higher-educated and more affluent respondents. This suggests a continuing policy challenge. Mother Tongues remain valued, but value does not automatically translate into regular use, confidence or competence. A language can be cherished and yet seldom spoken. The more practical aim is to create meaningful domains where these languages remain alive, valued and transmissible.

This is especially relevant given broader regional developments. Mandarin Chinese connects Singaporeans to Chinese-speaking economies and communities. Malay connects Singapore to the region in which it is geographically situated. Tamil and other Indian languages connect Singaporeans to India and the wider Indian diaspora. These languages have cultural value, but they also have strategic value. It would be unwise to speak of them only as ancestral ornaments, as they are also instruments of regional understanding.

### **9.3 Heritage Languages and New Immigrant Languages**

The role of heritage languages is more complicated. Earlier language policies, including the Speak Mandarin Campaign and the prioritisation of official Mother Tongue languages, contributed to the decline of many heritage languages. Chinese dialects, sub-ethnic Malay languages, and non-Tamil Indian languages do not occupy

the same formal position as English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. Many have retreated from the home and from public life. Yet the findings highlighted by this paper complicate any simple obituary for such languages because they have not disappeared. Older respondents, Indian respondents, and those who were not Singapore citizens by birth tended to report stronger heritage language proficiency. Among Chinese respondents who identified a Chinese dialect as their heritage language, overall proficiency dipped slightly, even as the proportion who reported speaking it very well increased. The pattern is uneven: fewer may use such languages regularly, but pockets of strong proficiency remain.

This matters because heritage languages carry more than communicative function. They hold family histories, humour, foodways, rituals, idioms and ways of seeing. A dialect phrase used by a grandparent may carry more intimacy than a polished sentence in a language of school or state. The maintenance of heritage languages should therefore be understood as part of Singapore's multicultural depth.

The same broad principle applies to new immigrant languages. Support for preserving the languages of new immigrants increased slightly from 36.7 per cent in 2018 to 39.3 per cent in 2024, with PRs more likely than citizens to support this. These findings suggest that Singaporeans are still negotiating how far linguistic diversity should be accommodated in a society where English remains the common language.

It would be neither practical nor desirable to accord every immigrant language the same status as the four official languages. But integration should not be equated with linguistic erasure either. New immigrants should be able to participate in Singapore society through English, while retaining appropriate space for their own languages in homes, community networks, religious life and cultural activities.

This is the broader compact: English provides the common platform; Mother Tongues preserve historical cultural anchors; heritage and immigrant languages add texture to the lived diversity of Singapore society. The policy challenge is to keep this balance workable without flattening the country's linguistic inheritance into a narrow, administratively convenient scheme.

#### **9.4 Singlish, Code-Switching, and Singaporean Identity**

Singlish occupies a singular place in Singapore's language landscape. It is not an official language. It has often been discouraged in formal settings. It is not usually the language of legal documents, examinations or official speeches. And yet, it is one of the clearest markers of local identity.

The 2024 findings reinforce this. Singlish proficiency increased from 46.8 per cent in 2013 to 57.8 per cent in 2024. Frequent Singlish use with friends rose from 39.2 per cent in 2013 to 55.0 per cent in 2024. Agreement that Singlish gives Singaporeans a sense of identity rose from 50.0 per cent in 2018 to 57.8 per cent in 2024, while agreement that Singlish is an important part of culture that should not be lost rose from 44.4 per cent to 50.6 per cent.

This is not surprising. Singlish does things that Standard English cannot easily do. It signals ease, familiarity, humour, solidarity and local belonging. It carries the cadences of hawker centres, army camps, classrooms, void decks, workplaces and family gatherings. It is not merely broken English; nor is it simply local colour sprinkled on Standard English. It is one manifestation of English being indigenised and reshaped by Singapore's multilingual history.

At the same time, Singaporeans are not naïve about Singlish. They continue to draw boundaries around its use. Singlish is considered most appropriate in informal settings, such as with family, friends and at hawker centres. Standard English remains strongly preferred in classrooms, official government speeches, formal workplace communication and written correspondence.

This suggests a mature public instinct for code-switching. Many Singaporeans know that Singlish can build rapport, but they also know that Standard English is needed for clarity, accessibility and international intelligibility.

Singlish should not be made to bear more weight than it can carry. It cannot substitute for Standard English where precision, fairness and wider intelligibility are required. But Standard English need not demand the banishment of Singlish from local life. A confident language policy should be able to say both things plainly.

## **9.5 Language Hierarchies and Uneven Trends Across Society**

The findings also show that language trends are not uniform across society. English proficiency and use are strongly stratified by age. Singlish proficiency and use are more common among younger respondents. Heritage language proficiency and use are stronger among older respondents. These patterns point to a society where language change is not arriving evenly, but by cohort, class, race, citizenship status and life stage.

There are other differences too. Indian respondents were less likely than Chinese and Malay respondents to agree that Singlish gives Singaporeans a sense of identity. PRs were more likely to report stronger heritage language proficiency and more likely to

support preserving new immigrant languages. Higher-educated respondents were more English-oriented in some domains, but also more exacting in their views on Mother Tongue standards. Respondents continue to see official Mother Tongue proficiency as advantageous, but English remains the core language of mobility.

Yet, languages are not only repositories of culture but also currencies; English gives access to education, employment, public services and global opportunity. Meanwhile, Mandarin Chinese, Malay, Tamil and other languages may provide access to community, region, commerce and family memory. Singlish may provide social ease and local belonging. But when linguistic capital is unequally distributed, language hierarchies can harden into social hierarchies.

This must be guarded against. English should remain the common language of opportunity, but it should not become a gatekeeping device that disadvantages older residents, lower-income residents, or those whose home environments are less English-dominant. Similarly, Mandarin's regional and economic value should be recognised, especially given China's continued importance, but Mandarin proficiency should not become an implicit requirement for full participation in workplaces where English is meant to be the working language. That would risk creating quiet forms of linguistic assimilation incompatible with Singapore's multiracial compact.

A multilingual society must be careful not only about which languages it promotes, but also about whom its language norms privilege.

## **9.6 English Standards, Adult Literacy and the Bilingual Policy**

The findings on English proficiency are broadly encouraging, even if they are based on self-reports. They should not, however, lead to complacency. Singapore depends heavily on English for public communication, work, digital participation, education and global competitiveness. Weakness in English proficiency can therefore have practical consequences for access, confidence and mobility.

At the same time, the findings should not be read as evidence that bilingualism has failed. Rather, they show the demanding nature of Singapore's bilingual model. Singapore has chosen not to be a monolingual English-speaking society. Citizens are expected to acquire English while also learning and maintaining a Mother Tongue language. This is a more ambitious model than simple English-medium education alone.

The policy implication is that bilingualism must be supported across the life course. For younger cohorts, the challenge is to deepen both English and Mother Tongue competence, rather than allowing bilingualism to become increasingly English-centric. For older cohorts, the challenge is to provide continued support for functional English literacy, especially as more services, workplaces and public communications become digital and text-heavy. For less advantaged groups, the challenge is to ensure that strong English proficiency is not simply inherited through family background and educational privilege.

The motivations examined in the 2024 survey are useful here. Respondents expressed broad support for several motivators for speaking English well, including supportive environments, employer recognition, school and teacher support, English courses, awareness of the advantages of speaking English well, and admired public personalities who speak English well. This suggests that language improvement

should not be left only to schools. It should be supported by workplaces, families, media, community institutions and public culture.

## **9.7 Language Management Moving Forward**

The findings show that language policies continue to shape attitudes, proficiencies and behaviours in Singapore. This remains one of the achievements of Singapore's statecraft: language has been managed not as an afterthought, but as part of nation-building itself. Still, the next phase will be more complex than the last.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is likely to become an important force in language management. AI-assisted translation, speech recognition, writing tools and personalised tutors may reduce barriers across English, Mandarin, Malay, Tamil, heritage languages and new immigrant languages. This could enhance inclusion, especially for older residents, lower-English-proficiency groups, new citizens, PRs and migrant communities. It could also create new spaces for language practice and preservation that would have been difficult to sustain through traditional campaigns or classroom instruction alone.

But AI should not be treated as a magic lantern because language in Singapore is tied to identity, culture, class, ethnicity and citizenship. Tools that perform well in Standard English but poorly in Malay, Tamil, heritage languages, Singlish or code-switched speech could reinforce existing hierarchies. AI translation may reduce communication barriers, but it should not become a substitute for language learning. Singapore's bilingual policy rests not only on comprehension, but also on shared civic participation through English and cultural rootedness through Mother Tongue languages.

An interesting possibility is that AI could help Singapore sustain a more flexible multilingualism by supporting functional English learning among older residents; helping students practise Mother Tongues in less punitive ways; documenting and transmitting heritage languages through oral archives, chat interfaces and community resources; and even improving recognition of Singlish and code-switching (not to formalise them as official languages, but to better reflect how Singaporeans actually speak).

There are policy questions here that deserve closer study. Will AI-enabled translation reduce the practical need for multilingual proficiency, or make human bilingual and bicultural competence even more valuable? How well will emerging technologies handle Singapore's actual linguistic practices, including Singlish, dialects and mixed-language speech? Will digital tools narrow language inequalities or widen them? How should schools teach language when students can increasingly outsource drafting, translation and correction to machines?

In the final analysis, Singapore's language story is unlikely to be one of English replacing everything else. Nor is it likely to be a simple tale of decline, where Mother Tongues and heritage languages fade quietly into nostalgia. It is more likely to be a story of negotiated coexistence: English as a common linguistic platform, Mother Tongues as cultural anchors, heritage languages as vessels of memory, immigrant languages as part of lived diversity, and Singlish as the unruly but beloved vernacular of local belonging.

No language in Singapore is an island entire of itself. Each bears the marks of contact: of family and school, migration and memory, market and state, intimacy and aspiration, and in recent times, AI and technology. The task ahead is to ensure that Singapore remains not merely multilingual in policy, but meaningfully multilingual in everyday life.

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## APPENDIX 2: ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**MATHEW** MATHEWS is Head of IPS Social Lab and Principal Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore. He also leads the IPS Programme on Race, Religion and Intergroup Cohesion. To date, Mathews has led over 80 research projects, most of them addressing social policy issues. These have included research using both quantitative and qualitative methods on race, religion, immigrant integration, family, ageing and poverty. He also studies the impact of social programmes and has been involved in a number of evaluations on the usefulness of various government initiatives. Mathews has taught courses on social policy and has published them in a range of outlets. He currently sits on various boards including OnePeople.sg.

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Melvin **TAY** is Research Fellow in the Institute of Policy Studies' Social Lab. His research interests lie at the intersection of politics and society, with a focus on societal faultlines, their significance, and their management via policy instruments and community platforms. He has scoped, managed, and contributed to several public sector-commissioned projects on race, religion, immigration, class, sexuality, age and education – key faultlines in the Singapore context. Prior to his time at IPS, Melvin was a corporate strategist at a top management consulting firm. He worked directly with the MD to drive formulation of market strategy across Asia-Pacific markets, run strategic alignment workshops for C-suite clients and internal stakeholders, and contribute to the delivery of external strategy and visioning projects for key public sector agencies.

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