



Language & Innovation

The United States stands to derive a tremendous benefit in economic growth, productivity, leadership and entrepreneurship by investing in language education and promotion for its citizens.

Economic growth and productivity can be facilitated by expanding the portion of Americans that can competently operate in cross-cultural settings in business as well as research. Specifically in the category of research and innovation, it is imperative that Americans in those fields possess the intercultural knowledge and language ability to converse and collaborate with their foreign peers as they explore and innovate. To an ever-increasing degree, English is no longer the sole or dominant language of exploration and research, and our sector leaders will be cut off from valuable developments around the world if they are unable to communicate and understand their global counterparts, resulting in declining competitiveness as well as cooperation.

Innovation and entrepreneurship are facilitated by language study. Research has demonstrated that language learning and bilingualism include cognitive benefits such as improved problem solving and creativity, skills essential for entrepreneurs and innovators. Foreign language study will allow American students to cultivate these skills and prepare them to participate in the global market place, corroborating with international colleagues and developing new systems and technologies.

In an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world where American jobs and exports are more dependent than ever on foreign markets; where Americans are engaged diplomatically and militarily around the globe as never before; and where issues such as the environment, health and disease, poverty, development, and government instability are increasingly defined as global problems that require international understanding and cooperation, the ability to communicate in languages and with cultures other than one's own has never been more vital. Even within our nation's own borders, a growing foreign-born population has far-ranging implications on the need for employees with linguistic and intercultural skills.

Yet Americans remain glaringly deficient in language skills. Although the United States is a nation of immigrants, only 9% of Americans speak a foreign language while just 18% of K–12 students and 8% of college students study a foreign language. Moreover, a decreasing number of schools are teaching languages and only 10 states require a foreign language for graduation. Monolingual Americans are graduating into a global marketplace where 22 out of 25 industrialized nations begin language studies in Grades K–5 and where 22 European Union countries mandate that students have had a minimum of 9 years of at least one foreign language. As Leon Panetta, Former Secretary of Defense, stated in 2000, “The United States may be the only nation in the world where it is possible to complete secondary and postsecondary education without any foreign language study whatsoever.”

The global economy needs American innovators who can speak other languages and thrive in multicultural environments; and America needs citizens who can access that global economy in order to keep pace with competitors and contribute to international cooperative innovation. Monolingualism will cause the U.S. to fall behind unless we act to ensure that all Americans have the opportunity to study at least one language in addition to English.

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