

**Foreign Language Skills Improve Students' Personal, Academic and
Professional Lives
Academic Futures White Paper**

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The enjoyment and appreciation of the cultural products of another country, such as music, literature, film, news, cuisine etc., is a clear consequence and lifelong benefit for foreign language learners. Yet, there are much broader and equally significant results of learning a foreign language. No matter which field of study our students have chosen, or which professional and personal future they envision for themselves, studying one or more foreign languages will not only enhance their options and give them an edge over competitors, but also contribute to their ability to be respectful and thoughtful global citizens.

Learning about other cultures and how to navigate a foreign cultural/linguistic environment broadens horizons and enables our students to be successful participants in global politics and economy. This is not only true regarding the specific language a student is studying, but also with regard to any additional cultural and linguistic environment they will encounter in their futures, as learning any foreign language involves expanding one's skills in intercultural competence. At the same time, a student of a foreign language and culture will increase his/her understanding of and insights into their own culture and its past, and enable more effective, responsible and respectful participation in complex and/or multicultural societal contexts.

Learning a foreign language requires and teaches creative problem solving and communication skills, as new ways of expressing oneself, and thinking about personal, cultural or societal issues are explored. Other skills positively affected by foreign language learning include listening and reading comprehension, as well as the negotiation of meaning.

Foreign language skills also grant scholars and students access to a broader range of research and foster international scholarly exchange. Research and research fellowships, exchange programs, and internships allow students to gain essential practice in their field of study, and participate in broader scholarly and professional exchange and learning.

Knowledge of foreign languages expand a student's and employee's access to media, information and sources, making them better informed and better equipped to assess the information with which they are confronted. Foreign language speakers are better at multi-tasking, at focusing on relevant information while disregarding irrelevant points and are better at spotting misinformation.

Studying a foreign language even has important cognitive effects. A body of research suggests that foreign language learning correlates with better performance on

standardized exams such as the SAT and GRE; improved competency in English, Math and other subjects; and even with better memory.

Foreign language competency leads to more effective communication and productivity with any employer and company that has global business connections. Even when they work for foreign companies located in the US, students speaking more than one language have advanced knowledge and opportunity to adapt and integrate more successfully. Generally this will lead to added job security and professional flexibility in today's changing job market.

Aside from the mere linguistic skills themselves, language studies programs participate in analysis of authentic sources from another culture, including literature, historical or philosophical texts, but also other forms of primary materials. Such work enhances critical thinking skills and interpretive skills, allowing language learners to better comprehend abstract concepts.

Given the wide-ranging benefits of mastering multiple languages, increased language study should be an important part of our academic future.

Sources and summaries of research:

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. "What the Research Shows." <https://www.actfl.org/advocacy/what-the-research-shows>

"Why learn a foreign language? Benefits of Bilingualism." *Telegraph*, June 19th 2013. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationopinion/10126883/Why-learn-a-foreign-language-Benefits-of-bilingualism.html>