

## Foreign Language Acquisition: A Key to America's Success

The ability to speak multiple languages is an art as well as a great intellectual accomplishment. Foreign language acquisition is a valuable investment that should be taken more seriously by the United States. Presently, foreign languages are being taught in most, if not all, middle schools and high schools. However, it is safe to say that a majority of elementary and pre-schools are yet to adopt the teaching of foreign languages into their curricula. Additionally, a significant portion of American schools opt to only include a limited amount of languages into their programs of study. It is typical for schools to offer Spanish, and some times French or German. But there are many other languages in this world that need to be studied. These are languages that are rarely spoken or understood; such as Arabic, Chinese, Farsi and Russian. For the most part, these languages are not offered in American school systems, which is a great shame. America needs people who can speak foreign languages, especially the less popular ones, so that it can better itself economically, politically, and socially. Thus, the decision not to begin teaching our youth a variety of foreign languages at an earlier age is placing our great nation at a significant disadvantage with the rest of the developing world. There are several benefits to acquiring a second language at an early age. Firstly, it would force our American youth to exercise their brains in a different way. It would surely stimulate their minds in such a way that would increase their overall academic performance. Secondly, by requiring our children to learn another language would be helping to prepare for their future as well as the future success of our country. Foreign languages are spoken every where, especially in the business world and the political arena.

So then, why should the United States be unlike any other country in respect to acquiring foreign languages? Yes, it is true that English is the most commonly used language when it comes to international politics, business, and economics. But this does not mean that Americans should be excused from learning languages other than their own. Other nations expose their youth to the English language so that they can communicate with native speakers of this language. Americans should enforce the same notion in their schools systems. After all, a significant amount of them can expect to establish international contacts at some point during their lifetime.


Learning a language earlier in life would prevent the loss of precious time. Many scholars have said (including my own linguistics professors at Mount Holyoke College) that true language acquisition and comprehension can only be attained before ages twelve to and fourteen. After this age, the chances for an individual to acquire a native speaking ability are very slight. Consequently, children are at a great advantage when it comes to becoming skilled at language acquirement. This is because they have an innate ability to learn language skills. Their brains are like sponges; whatever they hear, they repeat. Likewise, it is easier for school age children to learn a foreign language because they have more time than adults to devote to studying. Therefore, it should not be acceptable for any individual to just begin studying a second language when they enter the eighth grade. In eighth grade most children are already thirteen years old. At that age, they are almost too old to acquire a native speaking ability in a foreign language.

It is one thing to study a language and to actually speak it. In my opinion, it is essential for Americans to gain the capability to fluently speak at least one foreign language. My reasoning for this is because there are so many words and cultural nuisances that can be lost in

translation. In other words, not everything is translatable from one language to another. By completely relying on a translator or an interpreter, diplomats and business people, in particular, could be missing out on key factors of their transactions. By acquiring the ability to speak another language fluently, American business and political endeavors would benefit significantly. Not only would their business and political agreements be better understood, they would also attain a level of higher respect. International leaders would see Americans' desire to speak their native language as a sign of reverence and genuine interest in the success of their development. Moreover, American diplomats, business people, and individuals in the armed forces would be at an additional advantage because they would better understand the cultures of their fellow politicians and clients. Knowing another's language would better prepare Americans to avoid embarrassing situations in which they would not know how to properly behave.

In short, requiring Americans to learn a second language at an early age would guarantee the social, political, and economical advancement of our nation. As children, Americans would have an easier time learning a foreign language; which in turn would better prepare them for their careers. Likewise, our country would have a greater understanding of foreign powers and business transactions. Simply put, through foreign language acquisition America would be better able to solidify its international relationships.

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