



McNair Scholars Group 4: Lingo Ladies

Secrets to Success: The Benefits of a Second Language Requirement in K-12 Education

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Abstract

America's K-12 academic obligatory curriculum should include second language instruction to prepare our children for the world's increasing demands. In comparison to other nations around the world, Americans are behind in foreign language skills, placing us at a disadvantage. This was demonstrated by Dr. Kathleen Stein-Smith, PhD, an Adjunct Faculty member at Fairleigh Dickinson University, in her study "U.S. Foreign Language Deficit and Our National Security" (Stein-Smith, 2013). The purpose of this project is to perform a comparative analysis of K-12 classrooms in American public schools by a) conducting interviews with K-12 educators in order to assess the benefits and the detriments of second language instruction and b) to demonstrate the importance of second language instruction by comparing the GPAs of K-12 students who have received second language instruction to those who have not. America has to start preparing future multilingual leaders from the beginning of their education. As Cornell President David Skorton explained in a Forbes Magazine Article, "We need them to read and speak languages that are essential to our strategic and economic interests" (Skorton & Altschuler, 2012).

Introduction

The United States is lagging behind in a multilingual world and, as US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has stated, "We must improve language learning and international education at all levels if our nation is to continue to lead in the global economy; to help bring security and stability to the world; and to build stronger and more productive ties with our neighbors." The US should provide its citizens with a strong foundation in second language learning to meet the demands of a multilingual society (State, 2006). The aim of this study is to demonstrate that the current standards for second language instruction are not meeting the demands of educators and those of our global society thus not preparing young Americans well enough to meet those challenges once they graduate.

Literature Review

Americans are lagging behind in Second Language Instruction

Compared to other power nations, America is lagging behind in Second Language Instruction. For example in France, public school students often receive as much as six years of foreign language instruction compared to the two years received by most American public school students (Languages, n.d.). In another example, the National Centre for Languages in the United Kingdom developed a new agenda for languages after the percent of students taking a foreign language dropped from 71% in 1997 to 44% in 2008 (Languages, n.d.). U.S. students need stronger skills to compete with students from other countries, as shown in data from the U.S. Department of Education. Only 18% of public school students are enrolled in foreign language courses, and as of yet, there is no feasible way to correct this trend (Committee for Economic Development, 2006).

Unfortunately, the U.S. Department of Education has identified that foreign language instruction happens mostly in grades nine through eleven and that low numbers of students are learning a specific foreign language in the lower grades (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2004). In order to catch up with other powerful nations, it is imperative that the U.S. changes the current second language instruction standards and incorporates those into the obligatory educational curriculum in early grades based on evidence gathered from several studies (e.g., Birdsong, 1990; DeKeyser, 2000; Piske, MacKay, & Flege, 2001; Tomasello, 2003).

Elementary School is a Crucial Time for Second Language Education

The plasticity of the procedural memory for language in the human mind gradually decreases after about age five (5)" (Nikolov & Mihaljevic-Djigunovic, 2006). Therefore, it is important for language learning to start at a young age, as it has been shown that the younger the students are when they begin learning a new language, the better they are able to memorize and retain vocabulary. However, according to research conducted by Ingrid Pufahl, PhD, and Nancy C. Rhodes, MS, at the Center for Applied Linguistics, the percentage of elementary schools offering a second language, as defined by Troike (2005) as any language acquired "subsequent to learning their first [language] as young children," fell from 31% in 1997 to 25% in 2008 (Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011). In secondary schools, the percentage dropped from 86% in 1997 to 79% in 2008 (Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011). Pufahl & Rhodes attribute the

drop in foreign language programs to the No Child Left Behind Act, whose “focus on math and reading, led some school districts to cut foreign languages from their curriculum... (Manzo, 2008; Rosenbusch & Jensen, 2005, qtd. in Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011).

Ms. Marty Abbott, the Director of Education for the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, believes that the budget cuts implemented in 2001 “don't make sense, given that the U.S. Department of Defense and other agencies need to hire a larger pool of linguists and other people who have high levels of proficiency in languages” and that having students learn foreign languages in elementary or secondary school, or even college, is key to meeting the demand (Zehr, 2010). The decrease in second language learning is also a concern because the country is becoming increasingly diverse, with more than 20% of children in the U.S. growing up speaking a language other than English as their first language (U.S. Census, 2011).

Undoing Long-preserved Cultural Prejudice and Increasing Current Cultural Empathy

Arguments against the acceptance of languages other than English in the U.S go as far back as the colonial period. One of these instances can be traced back to the 1880s and 1890s when the United States was in the middle of a “cultural genocide campaign designed to ‘civilize’ Indians” (Ovando, 2003), and the “increasing fear about the importation of foreign ideologies...resulted in a call for all immigrants to be assimilated into one cultural and linguistic mold,” requiring that English be the only language taught at schools (Ovando, 2003). As time progressed, the U.S. saw the passage of the Naturalization Act of 1906, which stated that “immigrants must be able to speak English.” It was during World War I that “the teaching of German as a foreign language was eliminated in most school districts” (Ovando, 2003). Today, giving students better means to learn about foreign languages and cultures in public schools can help educators in the U.S. avoid making the same prejudiced mistakes as their predecessors. Through this, the cultural empathy of younger generations can be increased, which is not only an asset, but actually a necessity for many of them (Sahin, 2011).

It is important to acquire linguistic and cultural empathy before dealing with intercultural or international issues. Once students have it, they will be able to develop relationships in other countries that could forge bonds for the rest of their lives and present them with opportunities that they would have not otherwise encountered (Sahin, 2011). These opportunities can lead to greater economic and personal success (Skorton & Altschuler, 2012). As the leading nation in issues of global security, economy, scientific



research, education and many other areas we need to understand the diverse cultures of this world through their languages, “because language is the key to understanding the ideas and customs in a culture, learning a second language greatly increases empathy and acceptance in students” said Dr. Yusuf Sahin, Professor of Linguistics at Erciyes University, in his paper Foreign Language Learning Contributing to World Peace, “...prejudices are derived from peoples’ sense of not knowing each other...removing their prejudices...depends on their knowing about the languages and cultures of each other...” (Sahin, 2011).

Research Budget Proposal

There are 47,983,788 students enrolled in public schools across fifty states and Washington D.C. in the United States. Our research team plans to send short demographic surveys to K-12 teachers of selected school districts from a nationwide representative, followed by personal interviews from the same teachers. We plan to Skype call teachers and administrators to personally interview them. There will be 102 interviews total, two for each state and two for the District of Columbia. The interviews will be recorded and analyzed for qualitative data on teachers’ experiences with foreign language education or lack thereof in the districts that they work in, as well as quantitative data on the percentages of teachers who gave specific answers to yes or no questions such as “Do you feel that the foreign language education in the school that you work at has served your students well?”.

The following budget presents planned maximum expenses related to our research.

Travel Arrangements

Rental Car per day \$50.00 * 25 days (Car Insurance included)	\$1,250.00
Gas (1,000 miles total)/ \$.025 per mile	\$250.00
Camera for recording interviews = Staples mini-video camera -	\$50.00
Total	\$1550.00



Office Supplies

Computer Software = Access Database	\$250.00
Computer = Dell Inspiron Amazon.com	\$250.00
Paper = 1 box of paper 5,000 sheets	\$45.00
Toners Black and Color	\$200.00
Pens and Pencils	\$50.00
Total	\$795.00

American Council of Foreign Language Instruction Convention in California

(One person will travel) 2 nights

Airplane tickets (round trip)	\$500.00
Hotel	\$400.00
Transportation = Taxi from/to airport	\$100.00
Per Diem	\$50.00
Total	\$1050.00

Miscellaneous

Books/Maps	\$50.00
Parking Fees	\$50.00
Total	\$100.00

TOTAL FOR ENTIRE RESEARCH PROJECT = \$3495.00

Timeline

We expect that this research will take about a year.

March-April 2015: Begin preliminary research and drafting interview questions

May 2015: Begin IRB process--two months

September-December 2015: Send surveys and conduct interviews.

January 2016: Compile responses and data

February-March 2016: Draft research

April 2016: Submit draft for review

May 2016: Final draft completed and submitted

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National Council of State Supervisors for Languages NCSSFL is an organization of education agency personnel from all states of the United States who have the responsibility of foreign/world language education at the state level. <<http://ncssfl.org>>

U.S. Department of State: National Security Language Initiative

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