THE IMPORTANCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN MODERN SOCIETY

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https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24015239

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the importance of foreign language learning in modern society and its influence on personal, educational, cultural, and professional development. It examines how learning foreign languages contributes to communication skills, cognitive abilities, intercultural understanding, and career opportunities. Based on existing research and academic literature, the article highlights the benefits of multilingualism in an increasingly interconnected world. It also emphasizes the importance of foreign language education in preparing individuals for international communication and professional success.

Keywords: foreign language learning, multilingualism, communication, cognitive development, intercultural competence, career opportunities, education.

INTRODUCTION

In today's information age, where technology is developing rapidly and international communication is becoming increasingly important, knowing foreign languages is a valuable skill. Learning a foreign language broadens a person's horizons, increases self-confidence, and provides opportunities to become familiar with different cultures. It also helps individuals communicate with people from other countries and participate more actively in international activities.

There are many benefits to learning a foreign language, including establishing meaningful relationships, improving educational opportunities, and developing professional skills. One of the most obvious advantages is the ability to communicate with people who speak different languages. This can be particularly useful when travelling, studying abroad, or conducting business internationally.

According to the Council of Europe (2020), language education plays an important role in developing plurilingual and pluricultural competence. These competences enable individuals to use their linguistic and cultural knowledge in different communication situations. Therefore, foreign language learning is not only a means of communication but also an essential part of personal and social development.

The benefits of learning foreign languages

Learning a second language can positively influence the way individuals understand and use languages. When people study another language, they become more aware of grammatical structures, vocabulary, and expressions. This awareness may also improve their understanding of their native language. Moreover, previous language-learning experience can provide useful strategies for acquiring additional languages.

Foreign language learning also provides access to a wide range of international literature, films, music, historical documents, and educational materials. Many important works of literature and art were originally created in languages other than English. For example, reading Pablo Neruda's poetry in Spanish, studying

Homer's works in Ancient Greek, or watching Japanese films in their original language can offer a deeper appreciation of their cultural and artistic meanings.

Another important benefit is the development of cognitive abilities. Learning a foreign language requires concentration, memory, attention, and regular practice. Students must remember new words, understand grammatical rules, and apply their knowledge in different situations. These activities can encourage mental flexibility and the development of language-related cognitive skills.

Adesope et al. (2010), in their systematic review and meta-analysis, identified positive associations between bilingualism and certain cognitive abilities, particularly attentional control and metalinguistic awareness. Their findings suggest that bilingual experience may be associated with cognitive advantages in specific areas, although these benefits may vary among individuals.

Furthermore, Bialystok et al. (2012) discussed the relationship between bilingualism and cognitive functioning throughout life. Their research suggests that bilingual experience may contribute to cognitive reserve in older adulthood. However, the relationship between bilingualism and cognitive abilities is complex, and learning an additional language does not automatically guarantee improvements in all areas of cognitive performance.

In addition to cognitive development, learning foreign languages can increase confidence and encourage personal growth. Language learners often make mistakes while communicating, especially during the early stages of learning. These mistakes are a natural part of the learning process. By overcoming communication difficulties and practising regularly, learners can gradually become more confident and independent.

Foreign language learning and cultural understanding

Language and culture are closely connected. Learning another language means becoming familiar with the traditions, customs, beliefs, and social practices of the people who speak it. This process allows learners to compare different cultures and develop a broader understanding of the world.

Byram and Wagner (2018) emphasize that foreign language education should develop not only linguistic knowledge but also intercultural competence. According to their approach, learners need the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to communicate effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, language teaching should prepare students for meaningful intercultural interaction rather than focusing only on grammatical accuracy.

Knowing a foreign language can also make travelling more enjoyable and meaningful. Travellers who understand the local language can communicate with residents, read signs, ask for directions, and learn more about local traditions. Instead of depending entirely on translation services, they can communicate more independently and participate more actively in everyday situations.

For example, a person who speaks Turkish while visiting Türkiye may find it easier to communicate with local people, understand cultural traditions, and explore places outside popular tourist areas. Similarly, learning English provides access to communication with people from many different countries.

Foreign language learning may also encourage respect, tolerance, and empathy. When individuals become familiar with different cultural perspectives, they can develop a better understanding of people whose lifestyles and experiences differ from their own. Consequently, foreign language education can contribute to intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding.

The role of foreign languages in professional development

In today's globalized economy, foreign language skills are becoming increasingly valuable in many professional fields. International businesses, educational institutions, tourism organizations, and other sectors often require employees who can communicate with people from different linguistic backgrounds.

Knowledge of a foreign language can increase employment opportunities and help individuals develop professional relationships with international partners. For instance, English is widely used in international business, science, technology, and academic communication. Other languages, such as German, French, Chinese, Arabic, and Spanish, can also provide important opportunities depending on the professional field and geographical region.

According to a report published by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2019), 90% of the 1,200 U.S. employers surveyed reported relying on employees with language skills other than English. The report also highlighted the growing demand for multilingual employees in the workplace.

This finding demonstrates the professional importance of foreign language competence. Employees who speak more than one language may be better prepared to communicate with international customers, participate in cross-border projects, and work in multicultural environments.

Foreign language knowledge is particularly useful for individuals working in education, tourism, business, healthcare, and international relations. For example, teachers may use foreign languages to access international educational resources, while healthcare professionals can benefit from communicating with patients from different linguistic backgrounds.

Furthermore, students who possess foreign language skills may have greater opportunities to participate in international exchange programmes, apply for scholarships, and continue their education abroad. Thus, foreign language learning can support both academic achievement and long-term career development.

The importance of foreign language education in modern society

The importance of foreign language education has increased significantly due to globalization and technological development. Today, people can communicate, study, and work with individuals from different countries through digital platforms. As a result, foreign language competence has become an important part of modern education.

Educational institutions play a significant role in encouraging students to learn foreign languages from an early age. Developing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills helps learners become more effective communicators. In addition, classroom activities such as discussions, role-plays, presentations, and group projects can make language learning more practical and engaging.

Learning foreign languages also promotes independent learning. Students can access educational websites, online courses, academic articles, and international learning materials that may not be available in their native language. This access can help them expand their knowledge and become more active participants in the educational process.

Although foreign language learning requires time, dedication, and consistent practice, its long-term benefits make it a worthwhile investment. Individuals who continue improving their language skills can become more confident in international communication and better prepared for the demands of modern society.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, foreign language learning plays an important role in modern society by contributing to personal, intellectual, cultural, and professional development. It enables individuals to communicate with people from different countries, develop their understanding of other cultures, and gain access to international educational and professional opportunities.

Research also suggests that bilingual experience may be associated with certain cognitive benefits, including metalinguistic awareness and attentional control. Furthermore, foreign language competence can increase employability and prepare individuals for participation in an increasingly interconnected world.

Therefore, learning foreign languages should be considered an important component of modern education and lifelong personal development. By developing foreign language skills, individuals can expand their knowledge, improve communication, and create new opportunities for their future.

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