

America's Languages: Challenges and Promise

Executive Summary

Acceptance.

Many policy makers, educators and parents agree that there are societal and individual reasons to increase emphasis on language proficiency and language education.

Challenges.

There are historical and cultural barriers to the societal imperatives i

less from a disagreement about societal and individual needs as
ely low priority for language education when benchmarked

in the U.S. depends on both an accurate assessment of its value to
on the clear specification of the investments required. Evidence on
nunity is accumulating on an unprecedented basis. A clear

language ability that influence improved educational and employment outcomes. This extension of the language brand can lead to an broader set of stakeholders and even more likelihood of capturing the required political will for more investment in language education.

Moving Forward

The stakeholders generally know why they want more language proficiency. Arguments for responsive policy, programming and funding are strengthened through feasible action plans based on classroom and extramural delivery vehicles, the effectiveness and efficiency of which are underpinned by research and documented results.

Given the lessons of history, the likelihood for success of any national language effort in the U.S. is uncertain. Nevertheless, the odds for marked improvement over past efforts seem to be increasing, given domestic and global developments and the emergence of a broad range of stakeholders with common language interests. The ROI seems to be favorable, and the opportunity costs of not acting appear higher than ever?

Foreword

The AAAS has commissioned a set of briefing papers in order to provide the members of

Why Raise the Language Question, Again, at This Time?

Evidence of the social and economic benefits of a multilingual population and society is emerging across disciplines and in many different nations and regions of the world. Yet, despite the rising chorus of public testimonials on behalf of language, particularly now from the business sector, language enrollments in the U.S. education system remain weak. Clearly, educators and policy makers have generally failed to make the case for foreign language education in the United States as an essential part of preparing our youth for life in the 21st century.

This inconsistency is reflected in recent, major reform plans that acknowledge the need for language but have not brought forth a concrete policy and/or plan on how to advance national capacity in language through the education system.ⁱⁱ More disturbingly, language is either omitted entirely from a number of the new educational standards (e.g., the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics) or is included only in a cursory manner (e.g., the Next Generation Science Standards).ⁱⁱⁱ

only 10% say they can speak it very well. The preponderance of these who claim to speak “very well” testify to learning the language outside of school, presumably in heritage language communities.^{xii} These figures can be compared with those from the EU, where 54% of Europeans “are able to hold a conversation in at least one additional language.”^{xiii} Significantly, the U.S. numbers differ very little from a 1980 national survey by Eddy that estimated that 24% of the American public could speak a language other than English.^{xiv} A quarter of a century has passed, and one must report little sign of change.

Anemic Language Enrollments. The surging demand for language from industry and government is simply not being met by the language education system, judging from enrollments in school and university programs. The latest data on language enrollments are the following:

Grade range	Students enrolled
K–12	18%
7–12	32% ^{xv}
13–16	8% ^{xvi}

While all these numbers are weak given current demand signals, the latest MLA study of enrollments in higher education is particularly puzzling as it documents a decline of 6.7% since 2009.^{xvii} Added to this is the perception by language professionals that many K-12 language programs with enrollments fewer than those for Spanish and French are being eliminated.^{xviii} *In fact, the enrollments in foreign languages as a percentage of total enrollments in our education system has not changed two generations, mirroring the observation above concerning the number of language capable Americans now and in 1980.* These data represent the most obvious challenge to multilingualism in this country and, accordingly, direct any focus on language onto the nation’s education system.

Such enrollment statistics clearly demonstrate that there are persistent and significant challenges to language education in the U.S. These challenges include the range of issues to which we now turn.

U.S. History & Culture. While awareness of the value of multilingualism to society and its individual members is becoming more widely recognized, this awareness is countered by a dismissive neglect and even a politically active resistance that is seemingly intrinsic in this country's culture and history. Americans are advantaged by having English as their dominant language, which as the world's dominant *lingua franca* provides easy access to much global communications and which in turn encourages the under-valuing of language education. More disturbing are recurrent surges of nativism and xenophobia that feed political resistance to language education. Reliance on English is reinforced by a tradition of political and geographic isolation that characterizes the history of this country. There is striking similarity with the other English-dominant countries like Australia and the UK, where decades of concrete efforts [some systematic, some intermittent] at the national level have not met a deeply felt need for language-competent citizenry:

Competing Priorities. In spite of the rising awareness of the benefits of language study, the past decade has seen science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) attract the bulk of attention and support from political and education leaders, the press, USED, Congress, and K-12 parents—93% of which believe that STEM education should be a priority in the U.S.^{xix} *No Child Left Behind*, *Common Core* and now *Every Student Succeeds Act* have kept the focus on math and English for over a decade, while at the same time the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the nation's education report card, dropped its effort to include Spanish language before even a single administration of the assessment. A zero sum competition among “core subjects” continues to obscure the benefits of language education, even though, for example, the wave of STEM in education is not antithetical to increased emphasis on language. In fact, STEM supports a more global view of science communication, which is more and more recognized as tied to language and culture.^{xx} Every aspect of science, technology, engineering and mathematics involves communities across the globe. Even the recent evidence for the correlation of language ability and

Equal Access. In spite of strong efforts in bilingual education, the language education system as a whole is not seen as adequately addressing equal access issues in a consistent and effective manner. More specifically, language instruction remains a traditionally “nice to have” rather than a “need to have” and is more likely to be available in what might be called more “privileged” institutions. Language education has been described in the latest USED Strategic plan as “elitist,” a label that clearly runs counter to the Obama administration’s basic educational strategy.^{xxii} Equally problematic is the issue of language education as regards ethnicity and race in the school system. For example, the situation with Latino minority students represents a growing “segregation and isolation,” as 2005-2006 data show 78% of Latinos attending schools with over 50% minority population, with 40% of Latinos attending schools with over 90% non-white population.^{xxiii} As Gándara & Callahan 2014, point out, in such highly segregated contexts,

“...it is difficult to become truly biliterate due to insufficient exposure to naturally occurring academic English. At the same time, native English speakers also lose out on the opportunity to develop cross-cultural and linguistic competence and skills, isolated in socially, linguistically and culturally homogenous contexts as well. “ (p.292)

Cost & Budget Constraints. Budget considerations are always present, and education at all levels faces funding constraints. Perceptions of higher costs specifically for language programming at the tertiary level are based on smaller class sizes, even though such costs pale in comparison to equipment and facilities required for STEM education. Across the board, cost estimations of language education are behind the times. For example, they fail to consider extramural on-line language learning that increase time-on-task and thus the ROI of actual classroom instruction.

At the K-12 level, the same consideration of the increased ROI of classroom instruction due to on-line learning and use opportunities must be considered. In addition, the almost neutral cost of Dual Language Immersion programming as not requiring dedicated language courses and teachers in fact represents a major reduction in language learning budgets at the district level.

Relevance. Another factor that most likely continues to play a role in depressing language enrollments is the failure of university language programs to respond proactively to the practical needs of employers in both the private and public sectors. While at least one higher education effort, “Cultures and Languages Across the Curriculum” (CLAC)^{xxiv}, has attempted to move language instruction into

disciplines across the campus, there still exists a wide gulf between language instruction in language and literature departments and the career needs of students in disciplines more directly employment-related. Even in language departments, marketable skills like translation and interpretation are rarely taught. To be sure, the efforts of the community colleges on behalf of language hold promise of major advances on the issue of relevance.

The failure of language education, however, to align itself with employment needs in part may be due to the lack of clear demand signals from employers. Rivers cites data and studies that clearly indicate that managers of global companies overwhelmingly (93%) seek talent better able to deal with multicultural and overseas markets.^{xxv} However, these same studies show that even these companies are less understanding of the connection of that need with the language competence of their employees, as only one in ten of these companies are seeking to “fill jobs requiring language skills.”^{xxvi} These two data points reflect again the larger dilemma of language in the US: Apparently, American business is like the rest of the country in understanding the need for global communication and interaction, but companies still have not grasped the fact that the employee performance they want is undergirded by language ability, the enabler of meaningful multicultural experience.^{xxvii}

Finally, it should be noted that an emphasis on employment aspects of language does not preclude focus on the other benefits of multiple language ability, among which are: aesthetic (literature and the arts), identity (with one’s ethnic heritage and culture), and interpersonal

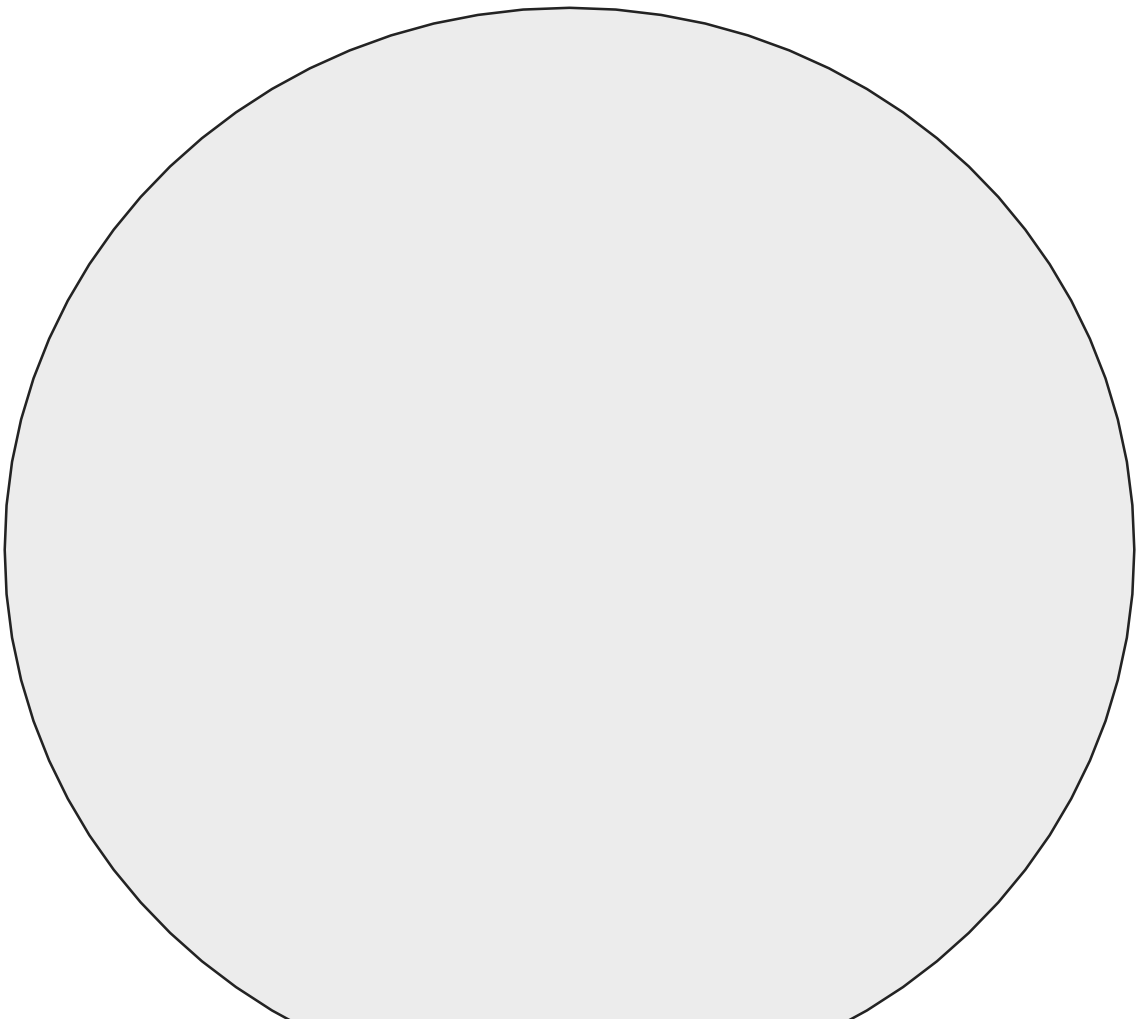
National Flagship Program show university students attaining ACTFL Superior & Distinguished /ILR 3 and above levels. A subsidiary benefit of enhancements in language instruction and

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- o Heritage community learning and use opportunities.

In different degrees and modes, these learning opportunities provide the key ingredients for language education at the K-12 level. The challenge is to find a way to assemble all the pieces of this puzzle into a coherent and recognizable map of the paths to proficiency. As a first step, data on the implementation of these programs and the number and kinds of students they reach are critical.

This challenge of extramural learning is matched by the persistent problem of secondary to tertiary articulation, including diagnosis, placement and responsive programming. Progress has been made in this area with College Board Advanced Placement tests and International Baccalaureate. Other efforts by individual universities to eliminate credit for first year Spanish and French require more dialogue between high school and university language programming. These developments are especially



Emerging Rationale for Languages at the Societal and Individual Level.

English-speaking countries around the world perennially have wrestled with the question of whether the English language is adequate for global needs and necessary for domestic cohesion. More specifically, societal rationale for language encompasses the political, economic, and social domains, both domestic and international. For example, in the last quarter century in the U.S. Congressional hearings, expert studies, and a series of GAO reports have convincingly documented language needs and deficits in defense, intelligence, diplomacy, and homeland security, resulting in significant federal investments in language training.^{xxxiii} Similarly, a myriad of studies and pronouncements from the business world have made clear the economic imperative for language, both domestically and globally.^{xxxiv} By comparison, the rationale for the domestic benefits and social good represented by

These trend data and the Eddy study document significant attitudinal shifts from 1980 to 2013, with relative stability between 2000 and 2013. Most importantly, these data show strong support for foreign language study in schools, with no conflict with English as the dominant or “official” language of the U.S.

While such data are indicative of widespread positive attitudes towards language education, they are of course moot as to willingness on the part of taxpayers and their representatives to invest the required resources. If almost two thirds of parents think their children should learn a second language in school, why are language enrollments in school and college so meager? Are the poll data indicative

Program that has set new standards for outcomes of university language programs in critical languages; Department of State National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y) and Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) programs that provide high school and university students support to study an LCTL overseas for a summer or a year; and the STARTALK, a national language “seeding” program managed by the National Foreign Language Center with funding from the National Security Agency (NSA), that funds summer language and faculty development programs across the country.

At the state level, reacting to language acquisition opportunities outside of school, almost two dozen states now grant high school credit for language competence, whether acquired in school or as a heritage language. Similarly, under guidelines established by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL), the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE), and Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) , a growing number of states and districts have established the *Seal of Biliteracy*, an acknowledgment on high school diplomas of graduates who have attained proficiency in English and another world language by graduation. Perhaps most promising is the wave of states and school districts across the national that are establishing Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs benefiting both heritage and world language learners.

An example of NGO activity is the National Examinations in World Languages (NEWL), the newly expanded portfolio of Advanced Placement language offerin(l)-4.6 a2 ()JT6(r)-4 (i)6.2 Timpn5ne ue Lvi

behaviors, like critical and creative thinking, leadership, and tolerance of ambiguity—skills in demand by all employers.^{xxxviii} In addition, there is evidence that these advantages enhance educational achievement and attainment for heritage language speakers, including Latinos, as well as native speakers of English studying a second language. This research correlating bilingual proficiency and usage with specific aspects of working memory are leading to unprecedented breakthroughs in language acquisition and education. For example, recent studies at the Center for Advanced Study of Language at the University of Maryland indicate that aspects of working memory can be diagnosed and enhanced, thus enabling language instruction to be customized to the cognitive aptitude of each learner for more effective and efficient language learning.^{xxxix}

These advances in neuroscience and cognitive psychology are providing motivation for language study beyond global access and cultural adaptability by taking language learning to a whole new level of relevance and attractiveness: educational attainment and achievement and increased qualifications for employment. Capitalizing on the maturity of the science, the National Science Foundation's Partnerships in International Research and Education has just awarded researchers at Penn State University five million dollars over five years to translate this cognitive research into K-12 education. In a similar fashion, the British Academy has awarded a significant grant to explore and document the cognitive advantages of bilingualism.^{xl}

A final point with

ingredient for language learning. Other promising second technology breakthroughs include the current blossoming movement to personalize learning through the application of “big data” analyses of learning materials and

The evidence that the language profession is able to turn out learners with this advanced language ability is itself unprecedented. On the ACTFL/ILR 0 to 5 proficiency scale, the DoD-sponsored Language Flagship Program, for example, is graduating students in critical languages with proficiency at the 3-level (ACTFL Superior) and above. This result demonstrates the progress that is possible in language programming when compared with students beginning language study in the typical colleges and university language program who attain on average 1+/Intermediate Level of proficiency produced.^{xliv} At the K-12 level, anecdotally, some schools in this country are educating pupils in language to ACTFL Intermediate High/Advanced, Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) 1+ and 2-levels. However, 1-way (total immersion in the target language) and 2-way (two target languages alternating in the instructional day) immersion programs are achieving much higher proficiencies.^{xlv} More proof of advance levels of supply are to be found in government intensive language programs; for example, the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) is turning out *ab initio* learners from the military services in moderately difficult to the most difficult languages at the 2 and 2+ levels, which is an unprecedented accomplishment for an intensive program aimed principally at high school graduates. Finally, heritage communities continue to provide the overwhelming percentage of high level critical language speakers in this country.^{xlvi} Unfortunately, here as well as in proprietary and corporate language programs there are no comprehensive data available.

Rising demand. Perhaps the clearest indicator of rising demand for language comes from the business community, where multiple studies and testimonies attest to the gap between demand and supply. By comparison, government needs are detailed in a series of GSA reports and Congressional hearings between 2006 and 2012 on language readiness in the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, and State.^{xlvii}

Finally,

The Locus of Language Policy, Planning, and Action. In the last half century, language education in this country has been a roller coaster affair with enrollments rising and falling with world events. This waxing and waning of enrollments reflect

inevitably will address specific aspects of the language challenge and enjoy incremental, but not necessarily dramatic, success.

- C. A very targeted approach that focuses on one or a few of the most innovative and/or promising developments in the profession. For example:

Dual language immersion programming at the K-12 level could be target, as it is exploding across the country due to its high proficiency outcomes, low cost and adaptability to existing school scheduling, not to mention its effect on educational achievement and attainment. By a dramatic improvement of K-12 language education, all language education, including higher, will profit, as will public and private employers.

Another example of an extremely promising target could be the translation of cognitive research into language education at all levels and in all sectors. While this process is just beginning, a major impetus could change the effectiveness and efficiency of the way language is learned in this country.

Finally, program accreditation of language education at the tertiary level could be a powerful tool in dramatically altering the position of language instruction on the nation's campuses. A ancient accreditation effort exists, still in its infancy, the intent of which is to establish a rigorous "peer review" process of language education programs across the country, leading eventually to an accreditation process on the model of the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET).^{liii} The establishment of such a movement, housed principally in the national language teachers associations, could allow economy of scale for innovation by spreading influence of best practices. There is no question that agreed upon standards and metrics will motivate higher performance across language education at the tertiary level.

- D. A comprehensive, coherent and collaborative response to a broad set of issues, undertaken by an alliance of sector stakeholders operating from a common vision, message and action plan. This approach was articulated in the "Languages for All" final report and was aimed at an essential transformation of language education and its adaptability to the needs of the nation.^{liii} Such a comprehensive and collaborative effort

is unprecedented and its success more uncertain, as it requires a long-term effort with substantial support from all the language sectors.

Of course, other discrete approaches are possible. The most realistic tactic in the current US language environment might be a blended or stepped approach, starting, for example, with C above with D as the eventual outcome.

Driving Considerations. Progress with regard to the language question in the U.S. will require consideration of the following considerations:

- A. *All of America's Languages:* All of America's languages should benefit: indigenous, post-colonial, immigrant and world languages.
- B. *Focus on the States:* As a state and local responsibility,

I. *Extension of*

effect on the K-12 language education system *per se* has been limited. With the new ESSA, any significant language education efforts will certainly be left to the state and local jurisdictions. A number of states have stepped up to fund the expansion of language education, and it is from these states that leadership can be expected.^{lvii}

Among all the positive changes making this time different, perhaps the

increased and costs driven down, suggesting that estimates against other priorities are now subject to change.

Logically, to be successful, any major effort would build on “America’s languages,” would include stakeholders across all five sectors, would focus on the states, would concentrate on improved outcomes at the K-12 level and reshaping of language education at the tertiary level, and would enjoy the unified support of the language enterprise. Furthermore, given the complexity of the challenge, such an effort would entail long-term support from multiple sources. All potential investors would have to play a role, including government, both federal and state, public and private foundations, and corporations. Finally, and critically, success would depend on a unified and concerted effort on the part of the language teaching profession.^{lxvi}

The British Academy’s recent 4-year effort on behalf of language in the UK has produced a series of important reports and a number of on-going public activities aimed at strengthening language education and keeping language prominent in the public mind.^{lxvii} It remains to be seen whether this work will have a lasting impact, but that is clearly the intent.^{lxviii} In a similar fashion, the American Academy’s commission and the times in which it is now working represent an unprecedented opportunity, but the proof of the pudding rests entirely on its long-term impact on language education in the U.S. The case for and improved ROI for language education seems to have significantly strengthened, and the opportunity costs of not acting now appear higher than ever.

^{xviii} To determine the veracity of this perception, as mentioned in footnote xv, American Councils is collaborating with

^{xxx} Cf. “Languages for All”, a white paper summarizing the results of the international conference at the University of Maryland entitled “Language for All?,” drafted by Richard Brecht with Marty Abbot, Dan E. Davidson, Hans Fenstermacher, Donald Fischer, William P. Rivers, Robert Slater, Amy Weinberg, and Terrence Wiley. In a redacted form, it has served to represent the initial concepts underlying the “Language Enterprise” alliance, which are now being further revised.

^{xxx} Cf. Global Talent Survey focuses on the failure to understand the economic (jobs) benefits of a second language, or vacillations in support of particular languages dues to changing world events.

Gail H. McGinn. “Foreign language, Cultural Diplomacy, and Global Security.” Briefing paper for the Commission on Language Learning of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. November 15, 2015

Robinson, J.P, Rivers, W. & R. Brecht. 2006. "Demographic and Sociopolitical Predictors of American Attitudes towards Foreign Language Policy," *Language Policy*, 5 (4), 421-42.

The issue of demand in business and government is taken up by Rivers and McGinn in the AAAS Commission on Language Education briefing papers cited above.

^{xlviii} Brecht, R., and Rivers, W. 2005. "Language Needs Analysis at the Societal Level," In M. Long, (ed.). *Second Language Needs Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 79-104. See also Brecht, Richard D. and William P. Rivers. 2000. *Language and National Security in the 21st Century: The Role of Title VI/Fulbright-Hays in Supporting National Language Capacity*. National Foreign Language Center; Kendall Hunt. Brecht, Richard D. and Ewa M. Golonka, Mary Elizabeth Hart, and William P. Rivers. 2007. *National Capacity on Language and Area Studies; Post 9/11: A Evaluation of the Impact on Title VI/Fulbright-*

subsystems require a “definable institutional structure” associated with a “powerful supporting idea,” a good example of a successful subsystem being environmental protection. Unfortunately, there is little evidence that such a subsystem is even being discussed, let alone that there is one within reach.

There is precedent for this kind of collaboration: In 1985 a number of foundations came together to launch the National Foreign Language Center, which then received significant government support.

^{lxii} <http://www.britac.ac.uk/policy/Languages.cfm>

^{lxiii} Cf. the latest call in the UK for a "National Languages Recovery Programme" (<http://www.publicpolicy.cam.ac.uk/news/uk-language-policy>)

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McGinn