

Join the national conversation!



SHOULD AMERICAN STUDENTS BE REQUIRED TO LEARN A SECOND LANGUAGE?

Word Generation - Unit 2.14

Focus Words

economic | multicultural | attribute | facilitate | distinct



Weekly Passage

What are the benefits of knowing two languages? Many scientific studies show that growing up bilingual is great for kids' brain development. Being bilingual may also be good for getting a job. Many businesses want to hire people who speak more than one language because they consider this skill a valuable attribute.

But most Americans do not know a second language, and those who do typically do not know the second language very well. Children who come from homes where English is not the family's native language often forget the language their parents speak.

How did we become so monolingual? Some say it is because we are a multicultural nation and it would be too confusing if every group were to use its own language. Unlike educated Americans, most educated Europeans, Asians, and Africans speak several languages, often including English. In Europe, students are required to take two distinct foreign languages in school. Most people around the world think that

knowing several languages is critical; multilinguals can participate in the political and economic activities taking place globally.

Even the U.S. government and the U.S. Armed Forces are constantly looking for speakers of other languages. Today they are seeking Arabic speakers, but very few Americans (unless they come from Arabic-speaking families) study Arabic in school or university. In 2004 the State Department reported that of the 1000 staff members at the US Embassy in Baghdad, only 10 were competent speakers of Arabic.

Knowing more than one language seems to be good for learning, employment, and maybe even national security. So how can parents, schools, and society facilitate opportunities for learning languages? Should American students all be required to learn a language in addition to English?

**Unit 2.14 -
Should American students be required to learn a
second language?
Focus Word Chart**

Word	Meaning	Forms	Examples of Use	Notes
economic	(adj.) - financial, related to money			
multicultural	(adj.) - related to more than one culture			
attribute	(n.) - skill, feature			
facilitate	(v.) - to make easy or possible			
distinct	(adj.) - different			

Unit 2.14 - Should American students be required to learn a second language? Problem of the Week



In the United States, being bilingual is an **attribute** that can **facilitate** getting a good job. Today, the U.S. has many political, **economic**, and military connections with other countries. The U.S. is also full of immigrants from around the world who speak different languages. In a **multicultural** country like the U.S., speaking more than one language is a **distinct** advantage.

Option 1: In 2006, only 33 of the 1,000 U.S. employees at the U.S. embassy in Iraq spoke Arabic. Of these 33, only six were fluent. What percentage of embassy employees spoke fluent Arabic?

- A) .006%
- B) .06%
- C) .6%
- D) 6%

Option 2: The main languages spoken in Afghanistan are Dari and Pashto. The U.S. military's Defense Language Institute is now training 200 soldiers each year to speak basic Dari and Pashto. In 2009, there were about 100,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. At the rate of 200 per year, how many years would it take to train 100,000 soldiers in basic Dari and Pashto?

Discussions Question: In our **multicultural** world, there are many languages that schools could teach. If more American soldiers knew Arabic, they would have an easier time talking to the people of Iraq. Now that China is an **economic** power, knowing Chinese is an **attribute** that might **facilitate** getting a job. Are these good reasons for teaching Arabic and Chinese in school? Or, should our political and **economic** goals be **distinct** from the reasons we teach languages? Should we choose to teach languages that will help keep our country strong? If not, how should we decide? Explain your answer.

Should American students be required to learn a second language?



I. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A Americans should speak English and only English. All immigrants and/or newcomers to the US should learn English and forget their home language.

B Americans should learn at least one language other than English. If a child speaks another language at home, he or she should be encouraged to continue using the home language.

C English should be spoken in school and governmental agencies. Other languages can be used for more informal settings.

D In addition to English, Americans should learn languages that seem important for their economic progress (like Spanish and Chinese) and national security (like Arabic, Urdu, and Farsi).

E _____

GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

...because...

I disagree with part of that...

An example might help convince me. Can you give me an example?

What part of the passage makes you think that?

2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

Unit 2.14 - Should American students be required to learn a second language? Science Activity



This activity is designed to help you practice thinking like a scientist and to use this week's focus words. Sometimes the data are based on real research, but they should never be considered true or factual.

Professors Kahn and Seemy wish all their students were learning a second language.

“Our school is **multicultural**,” says Professor Kahn. “Language instruction could help students understand and respect other cultures. Plus, it makes **economic** sense. A second language helps kids find good jobs.”

“There are **distinct** academic benefits, too,” adds Professor Seemy. “Learning a second language can **facilitate** success in school. Bilingual students often have improved memory, which is an important academic **attribute**.”

“Really?” wonders Professor Kahn. “Let’s check it out!”

Question:

Do bilingual students have better memories than monolingual students?

Hypothesis:

Bilingual students will score higher than monolingual students on a memory test.

Materials:

- ▶ 30 bilingual students
- ▶ 30 monolingual students
- ▶ Memory test

Procedure:

1. Give all 60 students the memory test.
2. Calculate the average score for bilingual students and monolingual students.

Data:

	Bilingual Students	Monolingual Students
Average Score (out of 10)	7.8	6.2

Conclusion:

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

What evidence supports your conclusion?

How would you make this a better experiment?



Focus Words

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

☐ Used 2-5 focus words

[illegible]