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# 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?

### TEACHER

#### Reading Comprehension/Discussion Questions:

- ▶ What are some of the benefits of knowing two languages?
- ▶ What are the differences between the US and Europe in language study and language use?
- ▶ Should Americans be required to learn a second language other than English? Why?

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

Word	Meaning	Forms		
		Inflectional	Basic Word Classes	Prefixes/Suffixes
economic	(adj.) - financial, related to money	economical economically	economy	economics economize economizing uneconomical
multicultural	(adj.) - related to more than one culture	multiculturally	culture	multiculturalist multiculturalism cultural
attribute	(n.) - skill, feature	attributes (pl.) attribute (v.) attributes (v.) attributed attributing		misattribute misattribution
facilitate	(v.) - to make easy or possible	facilitates facilitating facilitated		facilitation facilitator facilitative
distinct	(adj.) - different	distinctly		indistinct distinctness distinctive distinction

## 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?

**Answer:** 500 years

**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.

(n.a.) (2007, February 9). Pentagon ramps up training to cut language gap. NPR. Retrieved on October 23, 2010 from <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7299421>.

(n.a.) (2006, December 7). Six of 1,000 speak Arabic fluently at U.S. embassy in Iraq. *World Tribune.com*. Retrieved on October 23, 2010 from <http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/06/front2454077.074305556.html>

# Should American students be required to learn a second language?

## Debating the Issue



# GO!

## 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** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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:

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### TEACHER

Whatever the debate format, ask students to use academically productive talk when arguing their positions. In particular, students should provide reasons and evidence to back up their assertions. It may be helpful to read these sample positions to illustrate some possibilities, but students should be encouraged to take their own positions about the issue at hand.

## 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!”

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### 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?

Supported

What evidence supports your conclusion?

Bilingual students earned a higher average score on the memory test.

How would you make this a better experiment?

Encourage students to consider sample size, number of trials, control of variables, whether the procedure is a true measure of the question, whether the experiment can be repeated by other scientists, data collection and recording systems, and other potential explanations for the outcome. Students should understand that these simple experiments represent the beginning of an exploration, not the end. If time permits, have students suggest how the experiment could be strengthened, emphasizing the use of the target words in the discussion.

**TEACHER****Real Research**

-The study of 60 children, ages 7 – 13, cited below found that bilingual children exhibited better memory skills than their monolingual peers.

Kormi-Nouri, R., Moniri, S., & Nilsson, L. (2003). Episodic and semantic memory in bilingual and monolingual children. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 44(1), 47-54. from PsycINFO database.

**Classroom Discussion**

Summarize the real research. (Bilingual children scored higher on memory tests than monolingual children.) Are students surprised by this finding? Why or why not? How does the finding connect to this week's topic? Which side(s) of the debate could it support?



## Focus Words

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

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TEACHER

Ask students to write a response in which they argue a position on the weekly topic.

Put the writing prompt on the overhead projector (or the board) so that everyone can see it. Remind students to refer to the word lists in their Word Generation books as needed.

Check off what you accomplished:

- ☐ Stated my own position
- ☐ Included 1 focus word

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1-2 focus words

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1 counterargument
- ☐ Used 2-5 focus words

Put the writing prompt on the overhead projector (or the board) so that everyone can see it. Remind students to refer to the word lists in their Word Generation books as needed.

[illegible]