

# ENGLISH LEARNING REPORT *2019*

**VOL.1 THE WORLD OF ENGLISH**

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## Introduction

*English Learning Report 2019: The World of English* is the first installment in a planned series of reports providing the global community with a perspective and framework for thinking about English learning.

We hope this report will stimulate strategic thinking by highlighting the importance of English in an increasingly connected and interactive world.

We are motivated to produce this report for the sake of the next generation. Our goal is to encourage decision makers—in government, business, and education—to think and plan for the long term so that negative futures do not occur and positive ones have a better chance of unfolding.

We believe governments have a vested interest in the success of the next generation and English can be a vital part of that success. Demonstrable English language capability in the work force becomes a national resource and competitive differentiator in an increasingly competitive world.

Every global-minded business will readily appreciate the importance of English learning. Business most certainly has a stakeholder interest in the success of the next generation.

The education community has a keen interest to better understand how English, whether English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL) should be taught, because they know English can be a transforming agent in the life of an individual person.

In terms of their influence on the success of the next generation, the most important decision makers are parents. The decisions they make today will directly impact what can or cannot happen tomorrow.

Should they invest in English learning for their child? What will that investment get them? What is the value of learning English compared to music lessons, sports practice, and other languages? What investment today will help them to be as prepared as possible for the future so that they might be successful and fulfilled, and positively contribute to society?

This report attempts to look at the importance of English from the perspective of these multiple stakeholder communities. This report about the global language is intended for the global community.

## Foreword

# The Growing Importance of English

Billions of people around the globe are desperate to learn English. For the vast majority, English is not thought to be a nice-to-have luxury. Rather, English is perceived, rightly so, to be a valuable, even essential, tool for life improvement. For people on every continent, English is like a passport giving them right of entry to a world of greater opportunities.

Why the great interest in English? And why is that interest found everywhere? In other words, English is valuable not just for those for whom it is a foreign language (EFL) or where it is a second language (ESL). The value of English is readily understood even for those who have had the good fortune to be born in a country where the lingua franca is the first language—because even in these countries there is a striving for greater fluency and command of the language.

Though its allure is global, the value of English is perhaps most readily appreciated in emerging economies such as Brazil, China, and Russia, where English is not the official language. In these countries, the possession of a pure, spoken English can be a life-changer. In a world of greater opportunity and greater competition, English opens the door to completely new opportunities for individuals, and ultimately even for nation states.

This report is intended to stimulate thinking about how English learning will affect who flourishes on many social levels. It will take the position that English is arguably more important today than ever before while considering the perspective of various stakeholder communities. Who will benefit from having English? We look at this question through the eyes of individuals around the world.

Finally, if English is so valuable and sought after, it's important to understand how it might best be acquired. This report looks at how the brain works with respect to language learning. And in a related vein, it looks at the ideal environment for language learning.

*“English has become the second language of everybody. It's gotten to the point where almost in any part of the world to be educated means to know English.”*

Mark Warschauer  
University of California, Irvine

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Section 1 >>>>

# Why English

A look at the world of English  
—why English is of such critical importance, today and tomorrow

## English Stands Alone in Value

Hindi and Mandarin are the first languages of billions of people. Without doubt, proficiency in either of these languages is a great asset and life skill.

Spanish is the world's second most spoken language, behind Mandarin. Being able to communicate in Spanish is tremendously valuable.

Given their reach and practical utility, all these languages are most certainly worth learning, and our point is not to diminish or under-value them in any way.

Yet consider the following:

- A Chinese businessperson communicating with someone anywhere in Europe is likely going to do so using English.
- An Indonesian person desiring to study at advanced levels pretty much anywhere in the world will likely find their course materials to be in English.
- And someone in Russia connecting on social media with someone pretty much anywhere outside Russia is likely going to be using English as the language medium.

In terms of value, English stands alone. It's referred to as the bridge language. A bridge for what exactly? A bridge for anyone to communicate with . . . almost anyone.

Indisputably, English is the preeminent language of business, science, the Internet, learning—and life. It's the glue connecting diverse cultures and nationalities, friends and colleagues and business associates around the world.

English has assumed an extremely important role, touching virtually every culture and every aspect of society. With the explosion of the Internet, English has become an irresistible force, a phenomenon shaping and changing the world. It's the bridge that can bring a person in any country to almost anywhere she might want to go. It's safe to say that we live in a *World of English*.

## Global Currents

The rapid pace of globalization has unleashed an entirely new set of opportunities and competition that impose themselves, like it or not, on everyone's life.

Globalization is changing the landscape of our world, and with that change comes an entirely new set of opportunities for those who recognize and anticipate the implications.

At the same time, the rapid pace of change is going to bring competition where previously there was no competition.

For families, for business, and for government, it's going to create a new set of situations in which some will be positioned to capitalize, and others, frankly, will miss out and be left behind, and worse—*possibly unable to catch up*.

As the world becomes more global, it's safe to predict that the global language—the increasingly essential medium of communication—becomes even more important.

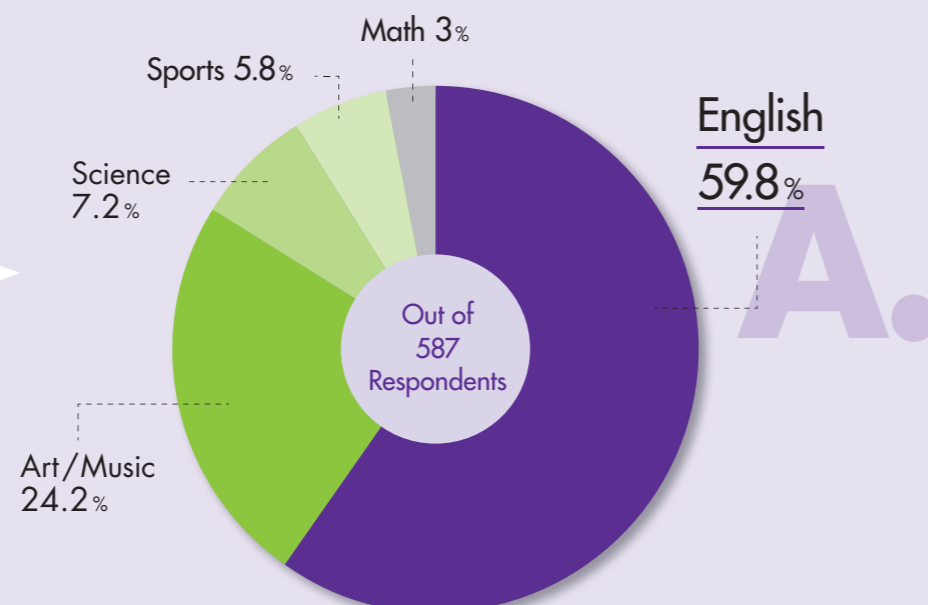
As the world becomes more connected, it's safe to predict that language—which makes our connections meaningful—becomes even more important.

As the world becomes bigger, it's safe to predict that the world's bridge language, English, becomes even more important.

Globalization has cemented the preeminence of the English language. As English flourishes, native languages can be better bridged and understood. This report will expound upon leading methodologies and the benefits of bilingualism in Section 3.



In preparing my child for success in life, which of the following offers the best **Return On Investment?**



Source: WeChat survey of 1,668 parents in China, March 2019

*“Similarly, the most resilient societies will likely be those that unleash and embrace the full potential of all individuals—whether women and minorities or those battered by recent economic and technological trends. They will be moving with, rather than against, historical currents, making use of the ever-expanding scope of human skill to shape the future.”*

Office of the Director of National Intelligence  
Global Trends, The Paradox of Progress, 2018

## To Invest or Not to Invest? A Tale of Two Individuals

Consider two people, identical in every respect, the one difference being their access to English learning.

Person A	Person B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No investment in English</li> <li>• Language muscles unused</li> <li>• Sees peers advance in English</li> <li>• Limited academic growth</li> <li>• Limited job opportunities</li> <li>• Ceiling on career potential</li> <li>• Struggles in the modern world</li> <li>• Locally limited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receives English training</li> <li>• Language muscles develop</li> <li>• Confidence grows</li> <li>• Unlimited academic potential</li> <li>• Unlimited job opportunities</li> <li>• Wide-open career potential</li> <li>• Capable in the modern world</li> <li>• Internationally mobile, elite</li> </ul>

The aforementioned example is imaginary, but worth considering. Could it be that an investment in English is in fact the gift that keeps on giving? Is it an investment in a stock sure to take off?

If we view English learning as a direct investment in a person, what will be the return on that investment? As the example suggests, the benefits keep accruing and perhaps build on themselves in a compounding fashion. The ultimate return on investment is nothing less than a life-changing opportunity for those who are privileged to *have been the recipient of such investment*.

And what about a missed opportunity to invest? Sadly, some will miss out. They will have unrealized potential, a loss to them personally, a loss to society.

Might the ultimate smart investment for an individual be an investment in English learning?

## To Invest or Not to Invest? A Tale of Two Countries

Consider two countries, identical in every respect, the one difference being their willingness to invest in English learning.

Country A	Country B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No investment in English platform</li> <li>• Lose out on global opportunities</li> <li>• Investors less interested</li> <li>• Limited growth</li> <li>• Ceiling on opportunities</li> <li>• Limited GDP potential</li> <li>• Struggles in the global world</li> <li>• Locally limited, in many ways an island</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invests in English platform</li> <li>• Development of national resource</li> <li>• Development of investment lure</li> <li>• Globally capable population</li> <li>• Opportunities abound</li> <li>• Unlimited GDP potential</li> <li>• Player in the modern world</li> <li>• Economically and culturally ascendant</li> </ul>

The aforementioned example is imaginary, but worth considering. Could it be that an investment in English is in fact the gift that keeps on giving for nations? Is it an investment in a stock sure to take off?

If we view English learning as a direct investment in a nation, what will be the return on that investment? As the example suggests, the benefits keep accruing and perhaps build on themselves in a compounding fashion.

Political leaders must have the vision to see what's coming. They also need the discipline to do what's necessary today to position their nation for success in the future.

Sadly, some nations will fail to fully capitalize on the opportunity. They will have unrealized potential, a loss to them individually, and a loss to the world.

Might the ultimate smart investment for nations be an investment in English learning?

# Did you know?

**T**here are more people who have learned English as a second language than there are native speakers.

**E**nglish is the third most spoken native language in the world, after standard Chinese and Spanish.



**E**nglish is the world's most widely used language in newspaper publishing, book publishing, international telecommunications, scientific publishing, international trade, mass entertainment, and diplomacy.

**A**ccording to the British Council, by 2020 two billion people will be studying English.

## Section 2 >>>>

# Who Benefits

A look at the world of English  
—as seen through the eyes of global stakeholders

The British Council has noted that by 2020 a staggering two billion people—one out of every four people on the planet—will be studying English.

English is not a nice-to-have luxury but something that introduces tangible and enduring benefits to individuals and societies. In this section, we look at how English is affecting individuals and nations.

National leaders understand they need to do something for English language learning, but how is this best accomplished? Some countries are putting together policies designed to bring up the level of English; yet others are not.

Abundant research suggests there is a significant return on investment for studying English. This return can be looked at for nations and for individuals. Statistics tell part of the story, but so do individual stories.

This section looks at the return on investment for English from the standpoint of various stakeholders in various countries. It is by no means a comprehensive overview, and it's fair to say that among the two billion people studying English in 2020 there will be two billion unique reasons for each person doing so. What's clear is that there is a powerful drive, globally, to learn the global language.

Certainly there are economic returns, and these have been quantified in multiple studies for different regions around the world.

Abundant research also suggests that certain parts of the world are doing better than others in terms of gaining English proficiency. At the risk of gross generalization, it seems that Europe is doing extremely well, Asia is doing OK, and Latin America is lagging behind.

The common denominator for every people group is that English is something they desperately want.

Let's look at why this is the case and at whom exactly English is benefitting. Let's look at things through the eyes of individual English learners.

## Spotlight on China

**China is ascending as a superpower, and English is ascending in China as the super language. What happens with English learning in China is going to have enormous geopolitical and economic ramifications.**

In China, speaking English is regarded as the “entrance ticket to the working world” and a “passport to better paid employment.”<sup>1</sup>

Based on the national ‘Survey of the Language Situation in China’, which is the most comprehensive survey of foreign languages in China, 390 million people have studied English in China.<sup>2</sup> Yet among these 390 million people, there is huge variance in degree of proficiency. The implications of what happens with English learning in China are profound, from a geopolitical standpoint as well as in terms of the economic return on investment for individuals and the country.

While a large number of people are learning English, an often-cited complaint is that the standard of classes are poor and that the teachers themselves are not fluent in English. Native Chinese English teachers often have poor English pronunciation, while foreign English language teachers lack training in English as a second language. Another common complaint is that rote memorization is the norm when learning English, in which students read English texts aloud for hours without producing their own sentences. This produces huge variability in the capacity to speak English and to obtain an economic return from communicating in English.

In the face of an overwhelming demand for English language among the population, some have argued that over-emphasizing English skills will have negative effects on students’ development of Chinese skills. This is reflected in the Chinese expression—*yingyu weixie lun* (literally “the threat of English language”).<sup>3</sup>

However, recent findings suggest that both English and Chinese language skills have positive effects on wages—and that what is needed may be some re-evaluation of the manner in which English is taught.<sup>4</sup> Tandem or second-language learning need not be a displacement of language but rather strengthening of the brain.

Could it be that China needs more people who have higher levels of proficiency in English rather than more people who simply know some English?



<sup>1</sup> Johnson, A. 2009. The rise of English: The language of globalization in China and the European Union.

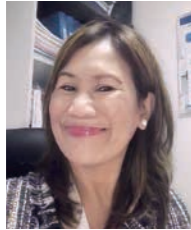
<sup>2</sup> Wei, R and Su, J. 2012. The statistics of English in China. English Today.

<sup>3</sup> Pan, L. and Seargent, P. 2012. Is English a threat to Chinese language and culture? English Today.

<sup>4</sup> Wang et al, 2015. The Economic Returns to Proficiency in English in China.



# The World of English: The Perspective of a United Nations Official



**Emma Eblahan**

Emma Eblahan has served in the United Nations in various capacities in Africa and the Middle East. She previously served in the Philippine Armed Forces as well as with the Philippine National Police. Presently she serves at the United Nations in Iraq.

At the United Nations, respect for diversity is extremely important. Every day in my work, I am required to interact with colleagues from all backgrounds; it's vitally important to understand diverse points of view. And it's absolutely essential I be able to communicate with my colleagues clearly. Fluency in English is a fundamental requirement.

Looking back with a humble heart of gratitude, I can say that English has played a major role in shaping my professional life and personal development. It has opened up opportunities for me to participate in training courses and to operate with ease in situations that would have been difficult, if not impossible, for someone lacking the necessary English language skills.

As an example of the opportunities that came from having English, I was able to participate in various training courses abroad, including in Australia, Canada, and Thailand. English factored into the selection process. But also, because of my English, it was not difficult for me to handle the courses compared to other students.

During my early years in school, English education was not as readily accessible to the students as it is now. But I'm glad I worked very hard to improve in the language, focusing on communication skills. This work paid off and helped me to later earn a college degree in criminology and go to law school for three years.

And, of course, the ability to communicate in the English language has helped me achieve my potential in my country's military and police service as well as in my work overseas with the United Nations.

Today in the Philippines, English stands alone as the language of business, engineering, and law.

The focus on English language as a medium of instruction in the Philippines's education system has no doubt contributed greatly to the human and professional development of the country. I believe these benefits will surely extend far into the future, with the greatest benefits going to the next generation.



## Societal Benefits: Spotlight on the Philippines

### Why has the Philippines been so successful in English learning?

Travel pretty much anywhere in Asia and you'll meet Filipino people. And it's likely you'll be able to converse with them easily in the world's language, English. Why is this the case for the Philippines and less so for other Asian nations?

To attribute the comparative proficiency of the Philippines to American influence would be too simplistic an explanation. The nation's proficiency obviously has something to do with getting a head start, so to speak.

Could the Philippines's success have to do with how the country views learning English?

In China, Japan, and Korea, at least in recent decades, English has been viewed as a school subject—largely isolated to the classroom.

In the Philippines, by contract, English is viewed as a means of communication. English learning in the Philippines is not something reserved for the classroom. Television and radio commonly use English. Road signs

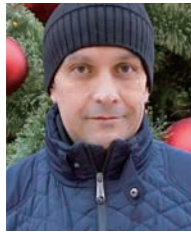
are often in English. And almost all higher education is in the English language.

Among other things, this approach to English learning, by intention or mere circumstances, has contributed to the development of international call centers and downstream businesses in the Philippines. Who has benefited from this? The entire population.

As the Philippines continue to develop, it's safe to predict that the country's investment in English will continue to produce positive returns for society.



## The World of English: Hopes and Dreams of a Russian Father



**Kropotkin Oleg**

Oleg Kropotkin lives in a small town outside Moscow. He and his wife are proud parents of a son and twin daughters. They like to travel to different countries. Though he himself has no English, his daughters who have studied English have no problem conversing in English in their travels.

### Why have I invested in English learning for my daughters?

It's simple, really. I believe the English language will be increasingly important in our multinational and multicultural society. Learning a foreign language means broadening our minds and having a great opportunity to engage with another culture. Last summer we traveled to Spain, and my seven-year-old daughters could easily converse in English.

More than anything, I want my two daughters to be happy and successful, able to achieve their dreams and make wonderful careers in any field they choose. I believe the English language is absolutely necessary for my daughters to grow into their full potential.



## Land of Potential: Spotlight on Russia

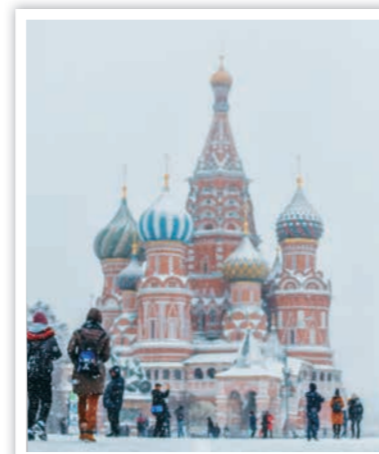
Russia is a land of tremendous geographic diversity, staggering natural beauty, and proud cultural traditions.

Russia borders 14 countries and is blessed with massive natural resources.

What does the future hold for this nation?

What resources will Russia choose to invest in for the future?

Might the development of English language in the next generation become one of the country's great human resources, helping Russia grow into her full potential?



## The World of English: Through the Eyes of a Dutch Businessman



**Theo De Groot**

Theo De Groot is co-founder of Bridge Legal and Finance, a Dutch firm that has helped scores of foreign companies build connections into Europe over the past 20 years.

### How important is English for Europeans?

I think the importance of English for a European these days cannot be overstated. As I was getting my start in the business world, it was perhaps an option to get by with little English, though it would certainly have limited one's options and ability to be successful. Nowadays, English is no longer an option—it's a necessity for doing business successfully in Europe.

### In your opinion, why have the Dutch distinguished themselves in global trade?

I think it's partly a mind-set that goes back to our seafaring days. We have that history of exploring new lands and engaging with other cultures. Moreover, we are a welcoming and curious people, too, willing to engage with the world. And of course we have benefitted from the largest port in Europe, Rotterdam.

### It's hard to find a Dutch person who isn't proficient in English. Why is this the case?

I think it has to do with our global mind-set, as mentioned. But also, we take what I'd call a practical approach to language learning. Our children are naturally exposed to English language as a communication medium early on. And we don't stress over it—it's fun!



## Spotlight on the Netherlands

This business-friendly country has always been a land of entrepreneurs, with the Dutch mastering the English language to compete on the global market. The Dutch East India Company was founded in 1602 as the first multinational company in the world, and today many global companies like IKEA, Unilever, and Philips have their European headquarters in the Netherlands.



# The World of English: Through the Eyes of a Panamanian-American Doctor



Mayra Troya-Nutt

Born in Panama to a teacher and a bi-vocational Panama Canal laborer and gentleman farmer, Mayra Troya-Nutt started as a maid in home health in the United States and became an American medical doctor. She has delivered more than 1,000 babies in Panama, France, and the United States.

## How has proficiency in English helped you in your education, career, and life?

It is hard to achieve your dreams in America without English. Proficiency in English was needed prior to U.S. training. To be able to live in the United States and be successful in my career as an obstetrician and gynecologist required English.

Moreover, there is great satisfaction in being able to communicate with my in-laws, who do not speak Spanish, and in being able to use English in other countries.

## In your opinion, what role will English learning play in the development of the next generation in Central America?

The government of Panama is doing everything possible to have English as an official second language. It is imperative for every nation to integrate English into their curricula. This will help the children and youth to achieve their potential in Panama and all of Central America. As we know, English is an international language for business and communication. Schools with English programs will prepare students for a lifetime of success through English language learning.



## Spotlight on Central America

The man-made 82-kilometer waterway cutting across Panama in Central America is a proud testament to human determination to connect the world.

The Panama Canal stretches 82 kilometers across Panama, connecting the Atlantic and the Pacific, and the United States to Asia for shipping. Considered one of the seven wonders of the modern world, the canal has served as a testament to the human desire to connect the world for more than a hundred years.

Might English learning be what connects Latin Americans to a future where their potential might be fully realized?



## A Closer Look at Latin America

With respect to English learning, how is Latin America doing?

Are schools and other educational institutions in the region providing a solid foundation that will position Latin American workers favorably for employment opportunities in an increasingly globalized and interdependent world?

These are not easy questions to answer, but the limited information available suggests that English language learning in Latin America is deficient, even while the benefits seem to be clearly known. For example,

- 80% of job listings in Mexico require English proficiency; only 20% of professionals master the language.<sup>5</sup>
- In Colombia, market growth and new policies have resulted in an increase of foreign companies established in the country. Growing sectors include tourism and financial services, both industries that often require human talent with mastery of the English language.<sup>6</sup>

Yet there is hope that Latin American governments are recognizing the business community's need for an English-proficient workforce—and the importance of English for national productivity, integration into the global economy, and overall international competitiveness.

- In Colombia, the national strategy *Colombia Bilingue* seeks to improve students' English abilities, granting them greater mobility as well as access to better job opportunities.<sup>7</sup>
- Chile's *National English Strategy* seeks to strengthen English proficiency to "accelerate the integration of Chile into a global world and therefore improve [the nation's] competitiveness."<sup>8</sup>
- Peru's plan to implement a national English program considers English proficiency as a way to attract foreign investment, which would then help to increase productivity and competitiveness.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Latin Business Today, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> ProColombia 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia.

<sup>8</sup> Ministerio Secretaría General de la Presidencia, Ministerio de Educación, & Ministerio de Economía, Fomento y Turismo, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Ministerio de Educación Perú, 2016.

# The World of English: Through the Eyes of a Vietnamese School Owner



**May Nguyen**

May Nguyen is the founder and owner of True Colors English Center in Hanoi, Vietnam. She started the center in 2016, working with parents and staff to earn a reputation for high-quality instruction and a fun, friendly atmosphere. In just a few years, the center has grown to three campuses with over 280 students.

Nowadays, English is an essential tool for people to communicate worldwide and to develop their career; therefore, we don't consider English as a subject at school but a mandatory language that all children must know.

In Vietnam, parents are well aware of the benefits English affords the next generation. Moreover, from the experience of their own generation, they understand the disadvantages of not being able to speak the language well. As a result, they want to invest in their children learning English from a very young age.

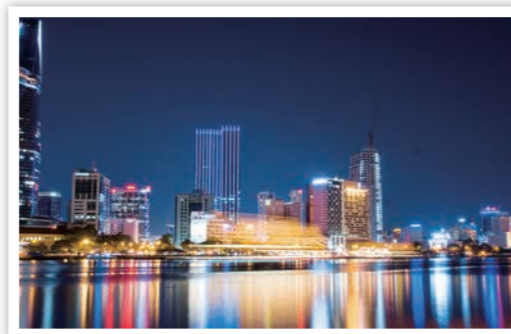
At our school, True Colors, we are very happy to help families achieve their goals. We want to help as many students as possible have a better future through English.

## Vietnam: Spotlight on a Rising Star

Vietnam has transformed itself from a poor country to a hub for foreign investment and manufacturing in Southeast Asia.

Vietnam's spectacular economic rise can surely be attributed to multiple factors, but one has been the country's significant investment in primary education in recent decades.

As the country approaches the milestone of 100 million inhabitants, it will be fascinating to watch how this nation might continue to transform itself. What role might English play in the country's onward development?



## Parent Motivation



Why did you decide to invest in English learning for your child?

(Please choose only one.)

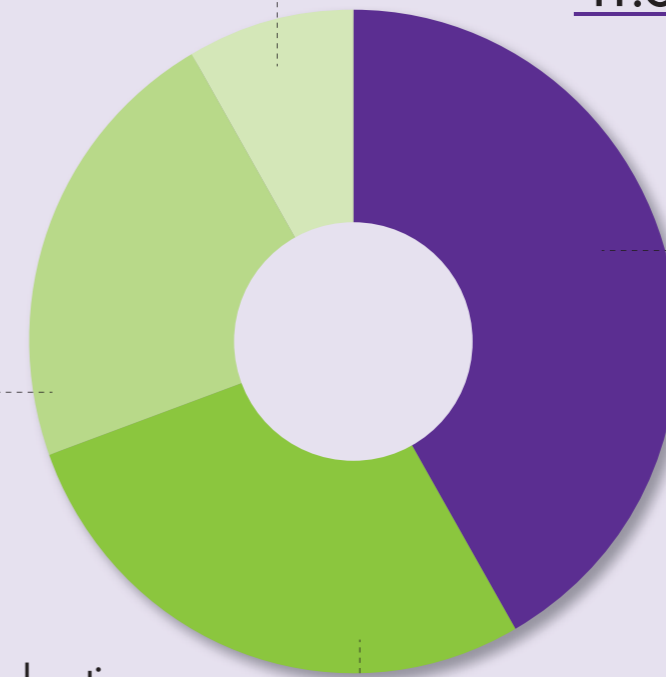
Help my child become a better person  
8.33%

Expand my child's knowledge of the world

41.67%

Improve education opportunities for my child  
22.22%

Increase future opportunities for my child  
27.78%



Survey of parents in Korea, Russia, and Vietnam, March 2019

Section 3 >>>>

# How English is Best Acquired

A look at the world of English  
—through the lens of science, research, and educational practice

So far this report has looked at why English learning is so important. And it's looked at who benefits, through the eyes of just a handful of stakeholders among the more than two billion people now learning English.

A safe conclusion is that an investment in English learning brings wonderful benefits to individuals and even nation states.

But if English is so important and so valuable, isn't it also worthwhile to look at how the language is best acquired? Is there an efficient methodology? What does experience teach us? What does science inform us? What does research say?

This section looks at these worthwhile questions.

## Neuroscience and Language Learning



**Dr. Judy Willis** M.D., M.Ed.

Dr. Judy Willis practiced neurology for 15 years before obtaining her teaching credential and Master of Education. She taught in elementary and middle school for 10 years before dedicating her time to giving presentations and conducting workshops for educators and parents nationally and internationally.

### **On brain research and the classroom**

The past three decades have provided extraordinary progress in our understanding of the nature of learning. Never before have neuroscience and classroom instruction been so closely linked. Because advances in technology enable us to view the working brain as it learns, educators can now find evidence-based neuroimaging and brain-mapping studies to determine the most effective ways to teach.

Brain research not only drives the learning process but also allows educators to energize and enliven the minds of their students.

### **On the benefits of repetition for fluency**

All new memory construction involves connecting the new to the known (i.e., using existing memory networks). Optimal brain engagement, understanding, and storage occur when new information is identified as being related to an existing memory pattern. When children recall prior related memories, these circuits activate in long-term memory storage, making it more likely that the new information will be encoded in the hippocampus (where new memories are linked to existing ones).

Strategies for forming these linkages include predicting what will happen in a narrative, making personal connections to interests and experiences, relating the reading to what the reader already knows, and taking time to evaluate diagrams, pictures, graphs, and so on that accompany the text.

### **On multi-sensory learning environments**

One of the really good ways to help a child memorize information is by letting them review it, practice it, use it, and learn it in multiple sensory ways. Information is stored in the part of the brain based on the sense which it came through. The more sensory modalities in which the information is processed, the more each part of the brain will store the information and remain connected to each other. When a visual child is recalling information, a network is ignited in the visual cortex, which sends out cues. What they heard, what they moved, what they touched, and what they made will also come online. They will be recalling a much richer memory and associated memories. That's multi-sensory learning.

### On affective filtering

All learning starts as sensory input and must pass through the amygdala, the brain's emotional filter, to reach memory construction and storage. In a neutral or positive emotional state, the amygdala directs information into and out of the prefrontal cortex, the highest cognitive and reflective region of the brain. This can promote and sustain successful engagement, learning, and memory.

Relatedly, we've learned that connections to and from the prefrontal cortex are vital to input to and from the executive function networks therein that direct more considered responses (top-down control) and make more extensive connections among stored memories (think transfer). On the flip side, when a mammal is in a state of actual or perceived stress, new information does not freely pass through the amygdala's filter and gain access to the prefrontal cortex. Instead, input is diverted to the lower, reactive brain, which has a limited set of behavioral responses that can be summarized as fight, flight, or freeze.

When learners are anxious, sad, frustrated, bored, hurt, or angry, the survival reactions can take over. While valuable for survival in the wild, in classrooms, these reflexive survival instincts can undermine the most carefully designed lessons. To be blunt, neither thought-provoking essential questions, authentic performance tasks, nor inspired teaching will realize their full intended effects if students are overly stressed, fearful, bored, or feeling rejected.

## Identifying the Key to Successful Learning



**Brad Oostindie** Clinical Director, Ready to Focus

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Children learn best when the topic is interesting to them and interesting people teach them the topic. This includes all aspects of learning, including English as a second language as a subject. Although educators and leaders in the field have intuitively known this fact, recent research findings clearly point to the connection between the influences of positive emotions and effective learning.

An interesting study recently published in the *Frontiers in Psychology* journal examined the impact of emotion as a substantial influencer on the learning process (Tyng, Amin, Saad, & Malik, 2017). This study found that emotion plays a strong role in an individual's level of attention, memory, encoding of information, and retrieval. These are all essential functions of the learning process. While positive emotions regarding the subject and learning process enhance long-term memory retention, negative emotions inhibit it. This is due to the physical structures of the brain associated with emotion and learning.

The region of the brain associated with emotion is called the amygdala. Recent neuro-imaging studies indicate effective learning occurs when the amygdala cooperates with another brain structure called the prefrontal cortex, an area responsible for planning, executive functioning, and decision making. In working together, the amygdala and prefrontal cortex process new information and encode it into the memory center of the brain (called the hippocampus) for long term memory retention. A positive emotional experience originating in the amygdala helps the process, and conversely, a negative emotional experience originating from the amygdala inhibits it.

What does this mean to the teacher of ESL and the parent of a child learning ESL? Simply put, if you want ESL training to be successful and long-lasting, make it fun! The positive experience and emotions while learning English in a fun and interactive environment will aid the child in processing new information and storing it in the long-term memory centers of the brain. Another point to consider includes the negative impact on a child's ESL learning process if an emotionally negative learning environment exists. If learning is not fun and associated with positive emotions, the child may be inhibited in gaining new ESL knowledge.

In summary, by making ESL learning fun, the child is the winner because not only does he or she develop excellent ESL skills, he or she has fun in the process and education is joyful and enjoyable.

# Are There Disadvantages to Bilingualism?

Some have advanced the argument that a Korean mother should only speak Korean to her child; or the child should only speak English in school and Korean at home.

This thinking has largely been dismissed as a myth, and science has shown that **bilinguals outperform monolingual children**.<sup>10</sup>

Multiple research studies put forward the case for and benefits of bilingualism.

- The benefits of bilingualism appear to extend well beyond merely being able to communicate in the second language. People who are bilingual are likely to be **more empathetic and better communicators**; they have a better understanding of others' perspectives.<sup>11</sup>
- Bilinguals demonstrate better executive control than monolinguals; in children, executive control is central to academic achievement;<sup>12</sup> and in adults executive control supports activities such as **high-level thought, multi-tasking, and sustained attention**.<sup>13</sup>
- Bilingualism is also associated with a delay in the onset of dementia.<sup>14</sup>

*“Language can be used to transmit information, but it also serves many other purposes: to establish relations among people, to express or clarify thought, for play, for creative mental activity, to gain understanding, and so on.”*

Noam Chomsky, Linguist

# Advantages of a Bilingual Brain



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Tracy Trautner has a master's degree from Walden University in the field of early childhood education. She serves on the Early Childhood Education team for MSU Extension, which presents information on topics such as literacy, social emotional development, science, mindfulness for children, and more.

## Teaching young children a second language is beneficial in many ways.

Why would we want young children to learn a second language while they are focused on learning their primary one? It may seem like this would be learning overload at a time when they are also learning how to be friends, count, play on the playground, and so much more. However, this is a time in our lives when acquiring a second language comes very naturally.

Between the ages of zero and three, the brains of young children are uniquely suited to learn a second language when the brain is in its most flexible stage. In fact, bilingually exposed infants excelled in detecting a switch in language as early as six months old. They can learn a second language as easily as they learned to walk and learn their primary language. According to the University of Washington News, the U.S. census shows that 27 percent of children under the age of six are now learning a language other than English. Learning a second language does not negatively impact the child's native language.

As adults, we have to consider grammar rules and practice, but young children absorb sounds, structures, intonation patterns, and the rules of a second language very easily. Up until the age of eight, young learners benefit from flexible ear and speech muscles that can detect differences between the sounds of a second language.

If youth can learn multiple languages, why not teach them? Exposure to two languages over one language has many benefits, according to “What's Going on Inside the Brain of a Bilingual Child?” from KQED News. Bilingual children may have a superior ability to focus on one thing and change their response, easily indicating cognitive flexibility. Both traits require self-control, a very desirable trait in the early childhood classroom as well as life. When a bilingual toddler attempts to communicate, the languages in the brain compete to be activated and chosen. The child must select one and suppress the other, which requires attention and the ability for the brain to be flexible, which is possible at this early age. The interference forces the brain to resolve internal conflict, giving the mind a workout that strengthens its cognitive muscles.

Bilingual children are also more adept at solving certain kinds of mental puzzles. A 2004 study by psychologists Ellen Bialystok and Michelle Martin-Rhee found that bilingual youth were more successful at dividing objects by shape and color versus their monolingual peers, who struggled when the second characteristic (sorting by shape) was added. This

<sup>10</sup> Sigman, M. *The Secret Life of the Mind: How Your Brain Thinks, Feels and Decides*, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Fan, S. P., et al. *The Exposure Advantage: Early Exposure to a Multilingual Environment Promotes Effective Communication*, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Best J. R., et al. *Relations between executive function and academic achievement from ages 5 to 17 in a large, representative national sample*.

<sup>13</sup> Bialystok, E., et al. *Bilingualism, aging, and cognitive control: evidence from the Simon task*. *Psychol. Aging*. 2004; 19:290–303.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*



suggests the bilingual experience improves the brain's command center, thus giving it the ability to plan, solve problems, and perform other mentally demanding tasks. These tasks include switching attention from one thing to another and holding information in mind, like remembering a sequence of directions when getting ready for school in the morning or, for adults, driving a car.

While it may be easier for young children to pick up a second language, there are benefits for adults as well. Researchers found that young adults who knew two languages performed better on attention tests and had better concentration compared to those who only spoke one language. They also respond faster or more accurately than their monolingual peers, according to Kapa and Colombo (2013). This is largely because of the workout our brains receive while switching back and forth between one language and another when deciding how to communicate. It allows us to focus better during lectures and remember relevant information.

Learning a second language can protect against Alzheimer's disease as well. Recent brain studies have shown that bilingual people's brains function better and for longer after developing the disease. On average, the disease is delayed by four years compared to monolinguals.

Do not fear that learning two languages will confuse or distract your child. Remember, their brains are flexible, and the skills develop beyond learning a second language are immeasurable. Bilingual children learn that an object stays the same even though the object has a different name in a different language (object permanence). For example, a foot remains a foot in English and French. Studies have also repeatedly shown that foreign language learning increases critical thinking skills, creativity, and flexibility of mind.

## Creating a Successful Learning Experience



**Kelly Young** Global Head of Curriculum Development, GrapeSEED

Kelly Young serves as Global Head of Curriculum Development at GrapeSEED. Previously, she worked at Pearson Learning as a regional delivery executive. After serving in the US Navy, Kelly spent 20 years in public education, both as a teacher and administrator. She has a Master of Science in Education Leadership from the University of Nebraska.

### **Learning English is a big goal with big rewards, and yet you often talk about small success steps. What do you mean by this?**

One of the topics that we focus on with teachers is the progression of learning. We want to build those small steps to success for students in the classroom so that they know they aren't expected to be perfect from the beginning. Rather, every attempt along the way is recognized and celebrated. In this way, we build a platform for continuing success so the children can gain a sense of accomplishment and be proud of the risks they're taking.

### **Why is it important that language learning be fun and engaging?**

In language learning it is very important to have an experience for students that is fun and engaging. When students are enjoying themselves, they can lose themselves in the experience and not even know that they are learning. Because fun is not a high-risk activity like learning is, their affective filter is lowered and the opportunity for receiving new information is much better. Students will stay much more engaged when they aren't self-conscious about what they are doing or worried about doing it correctly. A fun and engaging atmosphere helps to create a culture of success and enjoyment for students.

### **What's the relevance of this for parents and teachers?**

This is important for parents who want to provide a good language learning experience for their children. They want them to have fun because it is so much easier when their children want to go to class and they don't have to be forced. It is the same way for teachers. For them, it is much easier to teach in a classroom where the students are engaged and having fun. Classroom management problems decrease, and everyone has a much more enjoyable experience. It's the best of both worlds really—a fun experience that yields the best results. Language acquisition becomes a joy for all involved in the process.

## Parents: Don't miss the opportunity



**Paul Liabenow**

The Executive Director of the Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principal Association, President of the Center for Educational Improvement

Paul Liabenow is the executive director of the Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principal Association and president of the Center for Educational Improvement. He served for 30 years as a teacher, principal and superintendent in the U.S. public school system.

Success is something we all strive for as human beings, and it's a good thing. We're made to succeed—and we are all capable of succeeding, no matter our circumstances or starting point.

I would define success not in monetary terms but as simply living out our human potential and purpose, individually and collectively. Success allows for us to share our influence and wealth to assist others to improve their quality of life.

My wife Bonnie and I were always intent to provide the best education possible for our children. We spoke often of their individual talents and a bright future. We intentionally invested in them with an eye to their futures.

We're tremendously proud of all our children and to have seen, in each of their unique lives, what I'd call the compounding effects of the investments of time, education, and discipline we made.

The benefits of acquiring English are pretty clear. For many people in the developing economies, it's a ticket to better circumstances. And in the United States, we've seen that success in English can lead to success in other academic areas. The child who succeeds in English grows the confidence to try new things and become more skilled, articulate, and knowledgeable.

Whether it's a child in a developing country or an advanced country, becoming proficient in English leads to better opportunities. As a result, their contribution to society and their personal fulfillment will be far greater.

My advice to parents everywhere is simple: Don't miss the opportunity. Be intentional. Provide as many growth opportunities and experiences as possible for your children. The future isn't some fixed thing your children are moving toward. It is something parents have the opportunity to actually create now. Believe me, your children will thank you someday.

## Looking Forward

# What Does the Future Hold for English?

As has been outlined in this report, political, business, and education leaders—and families—are desperate for a way to take hold of the English language for the many benefits it offers.

As the world becomes closer and more connected, this demand is sure to intensify.

Nations that build the capability of their young children to be multilingual will rise through the value chain faster and more profitably than those that don't.

Language effectiveness is the key to the business efficiency factor in the global competitive arena. The more proficient multilingual workers a nation has, the more revenues related to “new money” will flow into the country.

Some will be successful in accessing these benefits; some will not be successful. There is an accelerant effect at work, as the successful are comparatively more likely to increase their success. This effect will hold true in the life of an individual, but

there is also, importantly, an onward generational impact—compelling for individual families as well as nation states.

English has assumed a dominant position and its momentum, notwithstanding the importance of Mandarin, Hindi and Spanish, among other languages, is virtually unstoppable. English is likely

to become even more dominant, pushed by the demand from socioeconomic and cultural groups everywhere.

One human desire is always to be improving, and parents will continue to want something better for their children. English can deliver much—connecting the strategic interests of government and business to a brighter future, and connecting the dreams and aspirations of parents to a brighter future for the planet's most precious resource, the next generation.

*“By 2115, it is predicted that only about one tenth of today's 6,000 languages will remain, making English even more dominant around the world.”*

**“What the World will Speak in 2115”**  
John H. McWhorter, Wall Street Journal, 2015

# Summary and Conclusions

It's clear we are now living in a *World of English*. It's the ticket to a better future, one of greater opportunities, one where an individual's potential might be fully realized.

This report has looked at the benefits of English learning from the perspective of multiple stakeholder communities. And this report has looked at how English is best acquired.

We can summarize as follows:

## English Learning is Vitally Important

- Governments that take a proactive approach to English learning are equipping their nations with a competitive advantage.
- An ability to operate seamlessly in an increasingly connected world is essential for personal and professional success.
- The next generation, no matter where they are geographically, will cooperate with and compete with individuals everywhere on the planet. English will be even more important.

## Multiple Stakeholder Communities Benefit from English

- English is a ticket to success, a doorway to new opportunities. And those learning English now are holding a passport to a better future.
- For others, English is a ticket they are reaching for, a way to improve their lives or, perhaps even more compellingly, the lives of their children.
- Informed by science, some will discover the best way to take hold of English learning and put it to use.

## Brain Research Gives Good Indicators How Language Is Best Acquired

- A positive emotional state in the learner's mind is essential.
- An intentionally positive learning environment is essential.
- Success doesn't just happen but is the result of positive action.

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For more than 50 years, GrapeSEED has been committed to helping the next generation succeed in language learning and in life. We are passionate about transforming children's and teachers' lives by empowering them with excellent English oral language instruction and skills.

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