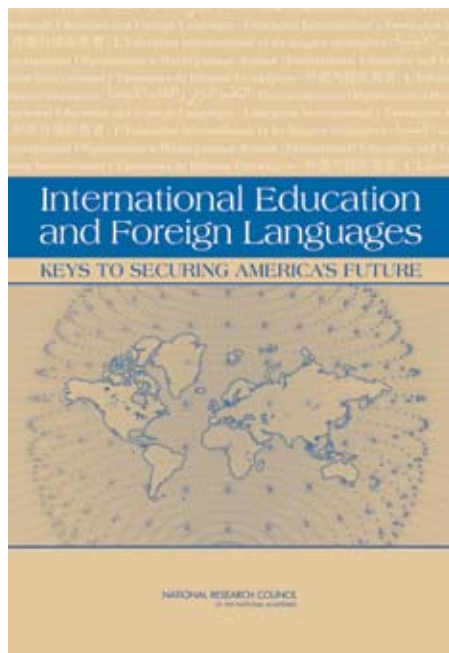


INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Keys to Securing America's Future

Focusing on a Comprehensive Educational Strategy



Knowledge of foreign languages and cultures is increasingly critical for the nation's security and its ability to compete in the global marketplace. Language skills and cultural expertise are needed for federal service, for business, for such professions as law, health care, and social work, and for an informed citizenry. Two sets of programs, the Title VI programs of the Higher Education Act and the education component of the Fulbright-Hays Act, are designed to help meet that need.

At the request of Congress, the National Research Council conducted a review and published a report on those programs. *International Education and Foreign Languages: Keys to Securing America's Future* concluded that the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays

programs have made significant contributions to international and foreign language education. However, given their relatively small funding and broad, higher education-focused mission, these programs cannot be expected to meet the nation's rapidly expanding needs for knowledge of foreign languages and cultures across the educational system. Meeting those needs requires an integrated, comprehensive national strategy for language and international education that extends from kindergarten through graduate study. This report brief focuses on this aspect of the committee's report¹ given its overall importance to the nation.

¹For a complete list of the report's conclusions and recommendations, see page 6.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO A COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATIONAL STRATEGY

- The Department of Education should increase incentives in the application process for National Resource Centers and Language Resource Centers to collaborate with schools or colleges of education on their campuses in the development of curriculum, the design of instructional materials, and teacher education.
- The Department of Education should consolidate oversight of its international education and foreign language programs under an executive-level person who would also provide strategic direction, and consult and coordinate with other federal agencies. The position should be one that requires presidential appointment and Senate confirmation.
- Congress should require the secretary of education, in consultation and coordination with the departments of State and Defense, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, and other relevant agencies to submit a biennial report outlining national needs identified in foreign language, area, and international studies, plans for addressing these needs, and progress made. This report should be made available to the public.
- The federal government should contract for a new National Foreign Language Assessment and Technology Project. The initial focus should be on the research and development needed to design and implement a range of new technology-based methods for (1) assessing language proficiency and (2) supporting language instruction through the development of common platforms.

The Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs have helped to increase coherence in foreign language and international education. They have served as a foundation for an international focus in higher education and have developed varied methods for reaching out to the system from kindergarten through high school (K-12), particularly to K-12 teachers. The programs have developed a variety of instructional and assessment materials for all education levels, from elementary through college.

However, a comprehensive educational strategy to address the nation's significant and growing needs for foreign language and international education requires attention far broader than the Title VI and Fulbright Hays programs.

RESOURCES NEEDED

To realize a comprehensive approach, other Department of Education programs—such as the Foreign Language Assistance Program and components of the Fund for the Improvement of Education, which provide resources to K-12 systems—must also be engaged. The Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education can also play a role. Similarly, given the substantial state and local resources that are dedicated to education, school systems need to recognize the teaching of foreign language and cultures as priorities. In addition, school systems across the country need to help maintain the existing language capacities in their heritage communities. Finally, programs in other federal departments must be strategically aligned with those of the Department of Education.

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The Department of Education has initiated some efforts to stimulate foreign language study for children at an earlier age than is currently done, particularly for critical languages. However, for a sustained national approach, the department needs to make international education and foreign languages a strategic, department-wide priority that engages all the relevant resources. Key to such an approach is the consolidation of all relevant programs in the department under an executive-level position. The person in that new position should lead the development of a comprehensive educational strategy with the involvement of all the relevant stakeholders, including the K-12 and higher education systems and other federal departments.

NEED FOR CAPACITY IN A BROAD RANGE OF LANGUAGES

Recent federal funding priorities have focused on the teaching of a limited number of “critical” languages, which are defined in the National Security Language Initiative as Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Russian, and the Indic, Iranian and Turkic language families. However, the National Research Council committee concluded that it would be more prudent to maintain a national capacity in a broader range of both commonly (e.g. Spanish, French) and less commonly taught languages. Such broad capacity is needed to prepare the United States for unforeseen challenges that may emerge in various world regions, maintain competitiveness across the globe, and be responsive to the nation’s diversity.

EXAMPLES OF RELEVANT PROJECTS

Michigan State University, the Dearborn public school system, and the substantial local Arabic-speaking community are collaborating to expand and strengthen Arabic instruction in their public schools, with support from the Departments of Education and Defense. The partners are developing curricula and aligned assessments and establishing a professional development and Arabic teacher certification program in keeping with Michigan state requirements. The program also provides scholarships for Dearborn students with advanced Arabic skills for further study at the university.

The Portland [Oregon] Public Schools (PPS) created a Chinese immersion program in 1997 in response to interest from the local Chinese heritage community. From kindergarten through high school, students spend half of the school day learning language and content in Mandarin Chinese. Now, with support from the Departments of Education and Defense, the partners are strengthening and expanding the program to create the nation’s first K-16 Chinese Flagship Program. The program will provide scholarships for qualified high school graduates to the University of Oregon, where they will advance their Mandarin Chinese while earning a degree in a field of their choice.

San Diego State University’s Title VI-funded Language Resource Center has collaborated with local heritage communities to expand language teaching and learning in Arabic, Kurdish, Tagalog/Filipino, Punjabi, and other locally spoken languages. The center has also developed an online assessment to evaluate the Spanish skills of future teachers preparing for a summer language immersion experience in Mexico and helped to develop California state certification for teachers of Tagalog/Filipino.

TIME REQUIREMENTS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

Mastering a foreign language takes extensive study and practice suggesting that language learning should begin with young children. For example, to develop general professional-level proficiency, State Department employees are enrolled in highly intensive daily instruction for almost 6 months (24 weeks) in a language similar to English (e.g., French or Spanish), about 10 months (44 weeks) for a “hard” language (e.g., Russian), and at least 2 years for the most difficult languages (e.g., Arabic, Chinese, and Korean). In higher education, where instruction is usually much less intense, developing general proficiency takes much longer—an estimated 6 years for a language similar to English.

LIMITED K-12 LANGUAGE ENROLLMENT

Although the time required for fluency in a second language means that language instruction should begin with young children, such early teaching rarely occurs. In 2000, only 23 percent of K-12 students were enrolled in foreign language classes. Moreover, most of them were studying Spanish and French; less than 1 percent were learning more difficult languages, including Russian, Japanese, Arabic, and Chinese. Even where schools do have elementary school language programs, they are rarely continued in an articulated approach at the middle and high school levels. Along with this lack of attention to foreign languages, recent surveys indicate that

young Americans’ knowledge of foreign countries and cultures is weak.

LACK OF TRAINED TEACHERS AND RESOURCES

For young people to learn foreign languages and cultures, trained teachers and high-quality instructional materials and assessment are critical. The National Research Council committee concluded that the lack of teachers with foreign language and international expertise is one of the major hurdles in improving the current situation.

A greater number of state assessment and certification systems are needed to guide colleges of education in developing specialized curriculum to prepare future language teachers. And, greater collaboration among schools of education and language, international, and area studies departments could contribute to better trained teachers.

The quality of texts, on-line courseware, and other materials for geography, culture, and language instruction is difficult to judge. The committee found that there are no uniform scholarly standards for instructional materials. Although there are widely accepted “best practice” approaches to materials development that are disseminated by professional associations and journals, many teachers and curriculum developers lack the time and resources to make use of them.

ASSESSMENT

To assess student achievement in languages—as is true for all assessment—tests that are appropriate for their specific uses, measure what students have been taught, and otherwise conform to accepted technical standards, are needed. Such tools are often not available for foreign language assessment. Some assessments used to measure language skills have not been evaluated for alignment with professional testing standards. In addition, there is no commonly accepted metric for language assessment that can be used as a national measure for K-12 education. And assessments are not even available in some languages, particularly at the K-12 level.

CONCLUSION

The Department of Education needs to develop and implement an integrated strategy for foreign language and international education involving both K-12 and higher education, and ideally additional resources. In carrying out this strategy, the department should work closely with its federal partners, state and local education officials, higher education, and national experts, and engage all of its relevant programs, including the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs, the Foreign Language Assistance Program, and other Department programs related to foreign language and international education. Such an integrated strategy is needed to enhance national security, help U.S. businesses compete in an increasingly global economy, and broadly educate and inform the nation's citizens.

ALL RECOMMENDATIONS, INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES:

Keys to Securing America's Future

- The Department of Education should increase incentives in the application process for National Resource Centers and Language Resource Centers to collaborate with schools or colleges of education on their campuses in the development of curriculum, the design of instructional materials, and teacher education.
- The Department of Education should modify its policy guidelines to encourage overseas study by Foreign Language and Area Studies fellows.
- The Department of Education should stop using its current self assessment approach and develop an alternative approach to measuring foreign language proficiency with demonstrated reliability and validity.
- The Institute for International Public Policy should redesign its activities in order to increase graduation rates and facilitate entry in careers in international service.
- The Department of Education should encourage Title VI and Fulbright-Hays grantees to actively recruit minority members.
- The Department of Education should ensure that its new data system provides greater standardization, allows comparison across years and across programs, and provides information to all grantees and to the public.
- The Department of Education should commission independent outcome and impact evaluations of all programs every 4 to 5 years.
- The Department of Education should work with universities to create a system of continuous improvement for Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs. The system would help develop performance indicators and other improvement tools and should include networks of similar centers (National Resource Centers, Language Resource Centers, Centers for International Business Education and Research) and university officials with overall responsibilities in language, area, and international studies.
- The Department of Education should make its award selection process more transparent, including making successful applications publicly available via the Internet.
- The Department of Education should consolidate oversight of its international education and foreign language programs under an executive-level person who would also provide strategic direction, and consult and coordinate with other federal agencies. The position should be one that requires presidential appointment and Senate confirmation.
- Congress should require the secretary of education, in consultation and coordination with the departments of State and Defense, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, and other relevant agencies to submit a biennial report outlining national needs identified in foreign language, area, and international studies, plans for addressing these needs, and progress made. This report should be made available to the public.
- The federal government should contract for a new National Foreign Language Assessment and Technology Project. The initial focus should be on the research and development needed to design and implement a range of new technology-based methods for (1) assessing language proficiency and (2) supporting language instruction through the development of common platforms.

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Copies of International Education and Foreign Languages: Keys to Securing Americas's Future are available for sale from the National Academies Press at (800) 624-6242 or (202) 334-3133 (in the Washington, DC metropolitan area) or via the NAP homepage at **www.nap.edu**. Full text of the report, a free pdf copy of the Executive Summary, and this report brief, are also available at www.nap.edu.

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This study was funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Education.

Additional information about the Department of Education Title VI and Fulbright Hays programs can be found at www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oie/iegps/index.html

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