



Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers
Association canadienne des professeurs de langues secondes

Why Learn Languages? Languages Build Economies

Second-language learning is beneficial on many levels, but to what extent? Let's look at the sixth article of the series, based on the [Literature Review on the Impact of Second-Language Learning \(2017\)](#), for the economic impacts of L2 learning.



Language Learning Boosts the Economy

Research has shown that the economic benefits of speaking a second language include higher earnings, greater job opportunities, larger social and professional networks, and, for businesses, increased competitiveness and international trade (O'Brien et al., 2017).

Languages Build Businesses

Being able to access multiple languages in business communication is good for economic growth. Conversely, companies or countries that discourage multiple-language use can suffer economically as a result (Hogan-Brun, 2017). Linguistically diverse companies have an advantage over their competitors in attracting and maintaining overseas clients due to their ability to interact, build trust, and understand customer needs.

Conteh and Fortilus (2014) argue that linguistic diversity is a vital component of Canada's economic adaptability and resilience. Cities with multiple international languages can serve as major hubs for



global services, production, and exchange. Canada's volume of commercial trade with French-speaking countries, for example, has increased significantly because of the number of Canadians who have learned French as a second language. Bilingualism and plurilingualism are assets that present cities as attractive and competitive regions for businesses because they afford greater access to global markets (Conteh & Fortilus, 2014).

Languages Build Careers

Speaking many languages also boosts career prospects. For anglophones in Canada, learning French as a second language enables communication with more people, both nationally and internationally, providing access to a greater range of jobs (Lazaruk, 2007). Many positions in Canada's federal public service – including the job of prime minister – require both official languages (Hudon, 2011).

A study of the economic incentives for learning a second official language in Canada estimated and compared the higher salaries obtained by bilinguals. These additional earnings may result from language knowledge, signalling unobservable market characteristics such as ability, cognition, perseverance, and quality of education. Bilingualism itself, however, did not indicate cognitive ability (Christofides & Swidinsky, 2010).

Overall, on a personal level, bilingual employees have a higher earning potential than their monolingual peers. On a company and societal level, bilingual employees boost economic growth, constituting significant human capital. Their L2 learning promotes creativity, innovation, and cognitive skills. According to Hardach (2018), companies actually value linguistic abilities as much as academic credentials.

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