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Benefits of Learning a Foreign Language

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It's undoubtedly true that there are numerous benefits for children who learn a foreign language. There are no negative consequences of children expanding their knowledge of language. Common arguments against children learning a foreign language are that there are not enough qualified teachers and there are some districts that cannot afford to hire take on additional curriculum. However, elementary schools should teach foreign languages due to the valuable benefits to the students. Not only is it easier to learn a foreign language at a younger age, but it also helps increase progress in academics as well as creative thinking skills.

It may appear that adding another class to a coursework is overwhelming, but it actually improves the critical skills needed in successful education. "Learning languages helps increase listening ability, memory, child's creativity and critical thinking- all of which are thinking processes that increase learning in general," says Redmond, former president of the National Network for Early Language Learning. All of these abilities are useful and necessary later on in higher lever courses in middle school and high school. Research shows that children who learn a foreign language at a young age also do better on standardized tests than children who do not. Children who have studied a foreign language in elementary school achieve expected gains and even have higher scores on standardized tests in reading, language arts and mathematics than those who have not. While learning foreign languages, children will also gain an understanding of other cultures. Children learning English as their second language are also successful learning another foreign language. When asked when children should begin learning a foreign a language, Emilia Marks, an OU modern language professor said, "When they are babies, but if not, as soon as possible, kindergarten, elementary school - when their brains want to learn." It is easier to learn a language at a younger age then when an individual is closer to adulthood.

Not all districts are fortunate enough to have the money to hire a new teacher and start a foreign language program. However, there are alternative methods of resolving a situation such as this. According to Mary Lynn Redmond, parents can advocate a foreign language program in their children's schools. To teach foreign language at an elementary level, a teacher does not necessarily need to be fluent in their respective language. By showing television shows such as "Dora the explorer" or "Sesame Street" or a foreign language cartoon program such as "Muzzy" in conjunction with fundamental teaching methods, foreign language can be taught at an introductory level. Creativity plays a big part in successful teaching.

There is funding available for elementary schools if they choose to apply. For example, the government has over \$6,000,000 that they award each year to fund elementary school programs for teaching foreign languages. There are also volunteer programs where students attending some universities work on creating and

instructing these programs. These programs can be utilized at no cost to the schools. Pam Andrews, coordinator of gifted services for Athens City Schools, and Barbara Reichenbach, Ohio University modern languages professor, have set up a program using volunteer students from Ohio University. This program is designed to bring foreign language to the classroom. By getting the community involved, the schools are able to overcome the money barrier.

Elementary schools should implement programs to teach their students a foreign language. The earlier children are taught a new language, the easier it will be for them to learn and understand it. There are also many different ways of funding foreign educations so in this case money cannot be an excuse for not providing children with additional education and little financial burden.

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