

Why should I learn a language?

'Nowadays many young people, in the UK, simply don't see the point in learning a language. After all, we can already speak, write and understand English, we even think in English, which is a very well established global language. With so many places across the globe speaking a language that young people in the UK already know, what's the point in learning a new one?'
Secondary-school student Ariella Holdcroft interviewed a diplomat, a journalist, an entrepreneur and others to find out.



Steve Eadon
Double club languages
coordinator at Arsenal FC

Steve Eadon established the Double Languages Club, a project that teaches children languages in a football environment using Arsenal related resources in order to make language learning a much more enjoyable activity for children. He went to Royal Holloway, University of London and speaks German, Spanish and French to varying degrees.

What was your experience of language learning when you were growing up?

I was a reluctant language learner, my peers and I both didn't see learning a language as 'cool' and teachers did not encourage us to pick it as a GCSE option, if we were not promised an A* on results day. Despite this, I completed my German GCSE and progressed to A Level. At this point I was very excited about the concept of dropping all language studies, only to be persuaded by my parents to continue to German A level. There were only three other students in my class and our lessons had to be held at lunchtime due to the lack of timetable space, at much annoyance to my teacher. It was at this point after completing A levels that I matured and realised languages were my strong suit, so moving into university I wanted to continue with German and learn Spanish. I began university doing joint honours, but quickly realised that this course did not suit me, and transferred to European studies. In my third year I spent a year abroad and worked at a university in Germany, which greatly improved my German skills and confidence.



What advice would you give to aspiring language learners?

Through my years of learning a language I realised that perseverance is key. Many people give up too easily, after not being a fluent speaker after only three years of learning.

How have languages benefitted you in life?

Learning a language has given me many opportunities, I met my fiancée at my university Spanish class, I have many friends in Germany and my job here at Arsenal wouldn't have been available to me, that is why I can safely say, looking back after these years, that all those lunchtime German lessons were worth it. If English is your only language then you only have an English mentality, being able to speak or comprehend a language to any extent is such a valuable life skill, it increases understanding, helps you relate to others and broadens your mind. Languages aren't just subject in school, they're an investment.

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Lizzie Fane
Founder of
ThirdYearAbroad.com

Lizzie Fane is the founder of ThirdYearAbroad.com, which she set up in 2010. It is where the most extensive network of students who study or work during their year abroad of their degree can be found. It contains information to help students throughout the whole process of their year abroad. She is a keen linguist – she speaks three foreign languages (French, Italian and Mandarin) – and feels that there is a variety of benefits that languages can have for young people. At university, she studied Italian and Art History as well as doing units in French and Mandarin.

In your opinion, why do so few young people want to study languages?

I think the decrease in young people taking languages is due to how difficult it is. It is very obvious when you haven't revised and can't string a sentence together. Secondly, students ask their parents which subject choices they should take. This current generation of parents probably didn't have very enthusiastic language teachers, and don't really understand how global the world is now, therefore they don't always encourage their children to learn a foreign language. Finally, they are often not chosen as people decide to go down a certain route, for example science and maths, and don't want to deviate from that, as those are the subjects that they believe suit their skill set, not realising that languages are vital in all future career paths.



Why would you encourage young people to take a language course at university?

What you don't really realise, and in my experience employers don't realise, is while you learn the language and the vocabulary and the grammar, you also do additional modules in literature and history and culture and all sorts of different areas that you've never studied before. You really look into the language and understand how it's constructed, the origins of words and why people phrase things the way they do, which I find really interesting.

How has studying languages helped you in your career?

Because I studied a language at university, I got to study abroad. I got to live in Italy for 15 months and I was given huge amounts of freedom, which undoubtedly improved my abilities, so now I run a business, all stemming from my year abroad. The ability to speak a language opened so many doors for me, for example I got to go and speak at the European Parliament in Lithuania. When you're marketing to different groups in different countries, you need to have the cultural knowledge to be able to sell your product to them, to gain their trust and to form relationships. Therefore as a young person with experience and knowledge of social media and language abilities you can really help a company go global.

How would you say languages can help someone develop?

When you learn another language, it's not just a language. It's understanding where people come from, their angles, their culture. That insight makes you a more tolerant person and a more global thinker, which can only make you a better person. It helps your brain power, increases the opportunities around you, and makes you a unique person.