



## Benefits of Multilingualism and Study Abroad Programs in Career Development

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### Abstract

*Thanks to recent technological advances the world is changing – very quickly – into one big global market place. That means being able to communicate is crucial. Job recruiters say that being able to speak another language is important for success in today’s business environment, and will become even more critical over the next ten years. There is also a need for employees who have experienced working for businesses in other countries and who are familiar with various styles of leadership.*

*Learning another language and finding the opportunity to experience working abroad is easier than it sounds. The same modern technology responsible for today’s expanding global market place has also made it possible to learn new languages without ever leaving the comfort of your home or office. Now you can learn from a teacher who lives in another country by taking online classes. You can spend your time focusing on the “real” language native speakers use rather than yesterday’s archaic textbook version.*

*Another positive about engaging with a real teacher online is the opportunity to learn cultural tips as well, the do’s and don’ts we aren’t always privy to. If you are able to move your language study out into the world, innovative study abroad programs, internships, and immersion programs can introduce you first hand to other cultures and international business.*

*A person who is both multi-lingual and whose resume shows international work experience has a competitive edge that others just don’t share. In this paper, we will examine how multilingualism and study abroad programs can help career development.*

### 1. Introduction

Speaking a second language opens many doors to various opportunities, especially in regards to your career. The job-seeking, hiring, and career process is, to put it simply, nothing more than communicating a language. We pitch and sell ourselves as the best candidate for a position. We hire based on a person’s ability to successfully navigate scenarios and create solutions which they convey verbally and through action. We advance as professionals by showing our understanding of an instruction and our unique ability to interpret it into a measurable success. All this, over and over again, is effectively a career and it is inherently hinged upon communication. It stands to reason, therefore, that the better we communicate, the better we perform in our career. If we can open up more opportunities to communicate ourselves and our abilities by speaking additional languages and encountering other cultures, then we can enhance that career with a greater volume of opportunities. By speaking more than one language, we increase the opportunities that are available to us. Though there are many ways to learn a language these days due to the proliferation of highly interactive, mobile-ready technology, there is still no better teacher than full-immersion into a foreign culture that lives and breathes the language. This is commonly seen within a university study abroad program or work exchange program for a company or agency. International internships have become increasingly popular with the idea of learning a new language, getting international business experience and becoming an even more viable candidate for hire. The results of international experience whether that of a student or professional range from increased intellect, fluency in a foreign language, and increased abilities and career prowess.

#### 1.1 Opportunity

A person’s craft, business, trade, or art is its own type of language. But that language is completely reliant on communication. Ultimately, fluency in a language is the ability to understand more opportunities. According to the Department of Labor, approximately 25,000 jobs are expected to open up for interpreters and translators between 2010 and 2020, which is a 42% growth in this field [Kurtz]. Who has more opportunities: a skilled marketer who speaks English or a skilled marketer who speaks

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English and Mandarin? Speaking another language simply opens up additional planes to exercise our craft in an arena we did not previously have access to.

In terms of hiring, recruiters and human resourcing departments of larger, international companies are seeing more opportunities in other markets to do the very same business actions they currently perform successfully at their home office. One of the largest barriers to entry into these markets is communication. Hiring bilingual or multilingual employees has taken precedence with satellite offices and telecommuters working in other cities, states, or countries. 54% of businesses surveyed stated that they can serve a larger range of customers thanks to language training, reaching more people and communicating with them more effectively [Rosetta Stone]. Since 2000, Canada, a nation with French and English as official languages, has placed a high priority on replacing older employees facing retirement with the next generation of younger, and more importantly, *bilingual* new hires in its federal sector [Issid]. Further South, The U.S. Committee on Economic Development found that 80% of managerial executives believe their businesses would operate better overall if more internationally cultured employees were present [Conner]. This should be interpreted by students in university and those looking to ascend in the workforce as a strong argument for studying abroad, traveling, and experiencing other cultures outside their own. As the globalization of businesses continues, so does the need for employees who can operate with a global mindset. Traveling, studying, or working in another culture is an effective way to quickly enhance one's ability to make timely decisions and develop solutions - highly coveted marks for getting hired [Connington]. This same decisiveness has been recorded in bilingual children as young as a few months old. A recent study has shown that children who are exposed to multiple languages show a higher level of curiosity and understanding of communication than those who are only exposed to a single language [Dockrill]. This proves the case of increasing development earlier using multiple languages and the long term benefits that will come from increased executive decision making skills.

In addition, it has even been found that learning another language drives productivity and increases overall employee performance within the workplace. Businesses should seek opportunities to help their employees expand their language skills because overtime, it will ultimately benefit them. 71% of employees have stated that having language training has improved their job performance, ranging from the telecommunications industry to the transportation industry. Plus, 67% of business owners found that miscommunication in the workplace leads to inefficiency, 64% of employees said that their language training has made them more productive in the workplace, including working with teams, partners and vendors [Rosetta Stone].

## 1.2 Financial Reward

Studies show that a second language or multicultural experience can certainly differentiate a CV from the rest of the herd, but where does a second language or experience abroad pay off once hired? Defining a tangible value for knowing a second language has long been perceived as difficult, suggesting learning another language is better in theory than in practice. However, a recent study found that various languages pose a higher rate of return in terms of salary due to the foundational economic principle of *supply and demand*. On average, being fluent in another language can result in a 2% increase in salary compared to someone who only speaks one language. According to Salary.com, some bilingual employees can earn upwards of 5-20% more per hour than those who aren't bilingual [Spark Hire]. In addition, the study found that different languages come with higher premiums, paid out for speaking an additional language: Spanish at 1.5%, French at 2.3%, and German at 3.8% [R.L.G.]. Considering a compounded interest over several years, this can yield a sizable return from simply being equipped with another language. So how does supply and demand allow these languages to produce different yields? While most Americans seem to quickly move towards learning Spanish as a second language, the fact is that there are several million bilingual English/Spanish speakers already engaging the job market or moving up the career ladder in the U.S. While there is a greater supply of Spanish language speakers, the demand is actually higher for German speakers; considering Germany's history with trade and travel. Similar trends are being seen in comparable trade and commerce locations with the home language being in hotter demand as the business dealings increase. The private sector is not the only one to pay multilinguals more. The US government, among others, has taken measures to both attract bilingual employees and retain them with pay increases and other incentives based on their ability to speak another language. For example, the Defense Authorization Act pays an additional \$1,000 per month for bilingual language efficiency among active-duty military personnel [Morsch].



### 1.3 Getting Started

Beginning your international language and experience journey can be quite intimidating and overwhelming. Whether starting off as a student who studies abroad and mixes personal fun and academic studies or you're a business professional who is being transferred around the world to start up a new team – having a deep understanding of the language and the culture of your new location can help differentiate yourself and set you on the path to success. Having experience or knowledge of the culture can help ease the transition to living abroad from knowing the local customs to speaking local dialects, inclusion-learning can provide a solid foundation for success in the future.

Considering the future of the workforce, it's imperative to take note of Millennials and how they can grow business internationally in the future. Millennials will make up 75% of the workforce by 2025 and they are actively seeking opportunities to grow in their global career. 50% of the millennial workforce will seek international positions in their career, and 64% have improved their career prospects due to their language training [Rosetta Stone]. Getting set up on the path to career success is vital from a young age and the next generation is actively seeking opportunities to become more desirable than the current workforce.

### 1.4 Conclusion

The ability to speak a foreign language and a global awareness is highly profitable and career enhancing. The competitive edge that it provides amongst peers is second to none and companies are willing to compensate this knowledge. Those with this experience and ability are quick to advance and receive opportunities first. A recent survey for an international company discovered that upper level executives found single women who speak a foreign language are the best candidates suited for international positions [Roberts]. This finding could very well be the leverage needed to take a position abroad which could in turn become a life-changing promotion or career opportunity. Furthermore, additional language fluencies can help make you an expert with mitigation and information relay in crucial ways. Professionals with foreign language proficiency will hold a competitive advantage in scenarios where most would need a translator present to decipher business deals or spontaneous conversations and interviews, potentially leading to more opportunities ["Now You're Talking: How Language Skills Can Boost Your Career"]. Being fluent in another language and having international experience will always produce more opportunities. Proficiency with that language can take your career as far as you're willing to pursue. The opportunities are there. The compensation is there. The only question to ask yourself is "how far do you want to go?"

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