

What are the benefits of having many languages?

Why is it important to have a Constitution that promotes multilingualism and language diversity?

Protecting our languages is not only about preserving our heritage. **It's more than that.**

Before the mid-20th century, negative attitudes towards multilingualism were common. Methodologically flawed and biased studies claimed that multilingualism interfered with intelligence, proper language use, and socialization. As research has become more sophisticated, however, attitudes have changed. In the past few decades, cognitive scientists, psychologists, anthropologists, linguists, and other scholars have identified numerous benefits associated with multilingualism.

There are personal benefits of knowing multiple languages, including cognitive, heuristic, and social-emotional. There are also societal benefits, such as health, economic and cultural. Our languages are thus important resources that should be safeguarded by the Constitution.

Benefits to thinking and health

Enhanced attention power on problem-solving, puzzle-solving, sorting, and other mental tasks
(Bialystok, 2003; Bialystok & Martin, 2004)

Heightened ability to monitor one's environment
(Bhattacharjee, 2012)

Better at resolving conflicting information
(Costa, Hernandez, & Sebastian-Galles, 2008)

Better at memory generalization
(Brito & Barr, 2012)

Can more efficiently switch between tasks
(Prior & Gollan, 2011)

Faster at detecting and adapting to changes in trends/patterns
(Kovacs & Mehler, 2009)

Enhanced mental flexibility and brain plasticity
(Peal & Lambert, 1962; Zou et al., 2012)

More resistant to the onset of dementia, Alzheimer's disease, and other cases of brain degeneration
(Luk et al., 2010; Kave et al., 2008; Chertkow et al., 2010)

Reduces decision-making biases
(Keysar et al., 2012)

Benefits to language learning

Faster language acquisition. Enhanced metacognitive awareness about language learning, and improved ability to learn differences in sounds, word order, stress, rhythm, intonation, and grammatical structures of new languages.
(Multilingualchildren.org; Petitto et al., 2012; Kaushanskaya & Marian, 2009)

Enhanced encoding of sound
(Krizman et al., 2012)

Can engage more neurons available for language processing
(Shalinsky et al., 2009)

Positive impact on reading and intelligence
(Bak et al., 2014)

Other personal benefits

Greater access to information
(Grin, 2004)

Greater access to cultures and cultural output. In turn, this is likely to foster greater tolerance and appreciation for cultural differences
(Grin, 2004)

Heightened creativity
(Maddux et al., 2010; Leikin, 2012)

Can express oneself in more ways and explore different facets of one's personality
(Ervin-Tripp, 1964; Koven, 1998)

Polyglots are more sought after for employment. This is particularly true for the healthcare, education, business, and travel industries.
(Grin, 2004; Boston.com, 2007)

People who speak more than one language tend to have higher salaries, wider choice of jobs, and more interesting jobs
(Grin, Sfreddo & Vaillancourt, 2013)

Benefits to sustainable development and academia

Linguistic/cultural diversity leads to different localized needs, and encourages development of diverse, locally-responsive industries
(Gorter et al., c. 2006; Onofri et al., 2010; Barron, 2012; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2004)

Various language groups have local knowledge about medicine and treatment, some of which are effective and undiscovered by mainstream science.
(McConvell & Thieberger, 2001)

Language and cultural preservation can help keep certain social systems intact that benefit community health.
(McIvor et al., 2009)

Linguistic/cultural diversity is related to ecological diversity, and the two can mutually benefit each other. Indigenous groups have deep knowledge about environmental stewardship.
(Maffi, 2001; Posey, 2001; Ellis, 2000)

Linguistic diversity informs and enriches many fields of discipline, both in the arts and sciences. Languages reveal a huge amount of information about language development, characteristics, and change (linguistics); migration and other events of human history (history, human evolutionary biology); how humans interact and think (anthropology, psychology, philosophy); etc.
(Austin, 2008; Crystal, 2002)

Benefits to culture and communication

Linguistic/cultural diversity promotes diversity of voices, opinions, ideas, and innovation
(Bokova, 2012; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002)

Languages encode unique philosophies, worldviews, and indigenous knowledge systems
(Wurm, 2001; Harrison, 2007; Boroditsky, 2011)

Linguistic/cultural diversity provides more ways for people to communicate. When languages come into contact, they borrow and feed off each other, enabling more flexible, nuanced, and inventive communication.
(Dalby, 2003)

Languages are critical mediums for learning and passing on cultural heritage such as literature, music, dance, food, etc.

Linguistic/cultural diversity enables interaction between people of different backgrounds, providing learning opportunities to tolerate, appreciate, and embrace differences
(Dalby, 2003)

Multilingualism [is] essential to crafting more inclusive human development, reflecting the needs of every society. There can be no 'one size fits all' model.

While multilingualism can be beneficial to an individual person and also to society as a whole, it partly depends on government planning. Policies that are restrictive and do not recognize or support diversity may turn multilingualism into a liability rather than an advantage. Hence, it is important that governments establish inclusive language policies.