

The Economic Benefits of Multilingualism

College Enrollment

Students who obtained the Seal of Biliteracy are more likely to attend college and to enroll in a four-year university, according to recent research.^{1,2}

The Seal of Biliteracy³ is available in all 50 states and Washington, D.C., and serves as a credential demonstrating a student's proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening in *two or more languages*.



Earnings

Employers value multilingualism and reward employees. According to two research studies, multilingual individuals **earn \$2–3K more on average**.^{4,5,6}



Multilingualism allows employees to excel in their workplace by, for example, enabling them to communicate with more people, access a wider range of information, and create products that resonate with a larger audience.

Employment opportunities

The demand for bilingual employees is increasing.^{7,8}

A 2017 study found that bilingual employment opportunities were concentrated in the **banking, healthcare, and telecommunications** sectors.

Over 68 million people in the U.S. speak a language other than English,⁹ underscoring a need for multilingualism in the workforce. A few of the top occupations advertised for bilingual workers were customer service and sales representatives, retail salespersons, registered nurses, and financial services agents. Such languages as Spanish, Chinese, French, Arabic, and Korean were mentioned most often in job postings.



CAREER SPOTLIGHT: INTERPRETERS AND TRANSLATORS

Multilingual individuals can join the workforce as interpreters and translators, a career field that is projected to increase by 4% between 2022 and 2032 according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.^{10,11,12}

MEDIAN PAY:
\$57,090 in 2023—higher than the median wage for all workers

EDUCATION:
A **bachelor's degree**

NUMBER OF JOBS:
Almost **69,000** interpreter/translator jobs in the country in 2022



Government-sponsored opportunities for multilingual individuals

The United States government sponsors several opportunities to support individuals to develop language fluency and build job-ready skills for government work.

- Arabic
- Azerbaijani
- Chinese • Hindi
- Indonesian
- Japanese • Korean
- Persian • Portuguese
- Russian • Swahili
- Turkish • Urdu

Critical Language Scholarship Program¹³

Offers summertime, overseas foreign language instruction and cultural enrichment experiences in 13 critical need languages for U.S. students in higher education. The program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State.

Department of State Study Abroad Program¹⁶

The U.S. Department of State offers programs and scholarships for students and educators through the USA Study Abroad Program.



National Security Education Program¹⁴

Part of the Defense Language and National Security Education Office, within the U.S. Department of Defense, the National Security Education Program offers eight programs. The goal of these programs is to develop proficiency in critical languages and build job-ready skills for the future defense workforce.

- David L. Boren Scholarships
- David L. Boren Fellowships
- Regional Flagship Languages Initiative
- The Language Flagship
- Project Global Officer (Project GO)
- English for Heritage Language Speakers
- Language Training Centers
- National Language Service Corps

The English for Heritage Language Speakers program¹⁵

Provides professional English language instruction to citizens who are native speakers of critical languages. Individuals who participate agree to work in public service in the government for at least one year.

Note: Additional opportunities for study abroad programs and scholarships may be available through foreign embassies and consulates.

References and resources:

- ¹ Mihaly, K., Arellano, B., & Prier, S. (2022). Biliteracy seals in a large urban district in New Mexico: Who earns them and how do they impact college outcomes? (REL 2023-140). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Publication/100913>
- ² Davin, K. J., Cruz, K. R., & Hancock, C. R. (2024). An examination of the postgraduation benefits of earning a Seal of Biliteracy. *Foreign Language Annals*, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12753>
- ³ The Seal of Biliteracy. <https://sealofbiliteracy.org>
- ⁴ Agirdag, O. (2014). The long-term effects of bilingualism on children of immigration: Student bilingualism and future earnings. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 17(4), 449-464.
- ⁵ Rumbaut, R. (2014). English plus: Exploring the socio-economic benefits of bilingualism in Southern California. In R. Callahan & P. Gándara (Eds.). *The bilingual advantage: Language literacy and the US labor market*, (pp.1-27), Bristol, United Kingdom: Multilingual Matters.
- ⁶ Other research studies have found no statistically significant effects of multilingualism on earnings. Some research suggests that the benefits of multilingualism operate differently in local labor markets. See Chiswick, B. R. & Miller, P. W. (2016). Does bilingualism among the native born pay?, " IZA Discussion Papers 9791, Institute of Labor Economics (IZA) and Robinson-Cimpian, J. (2014) Labor market differences between bilingual and monolingual Hispanics. In R. Callahan & P. Gándara (Eds.). *The bilingual advantage: Language literacy and the US labor market*, (pp.1-27), Bristol, United Kingdom: Multilingual Matters.
- ⁷ *Not Lost in Translation: The Growing Importance of Foreign Language Skills in the U.S. Job Market*. (2017). New American Economy. https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/NAE_Bilingual_V9.pdf; The study found that the number of listings targeting bilingual individuals increased from around 240,000 to around 630,00 between 2010 and 2015. See this report for information about the national demand for language skills.
- ⁸ ACTFL. (2019). Making languages our business: Addressing foreign language demand among US employers. https://www.actfl.org/uploads/files/general/MakingLanguagesOurBusiness_FullReport.pdf; Survey data cited in this report revealed that a majority of employers said their need for foreign languages has increased over the past five years. See this report for information about the national demand for language skills.
- ⁹ Dietrich, S. & Hernandez, E. (2022). *What Languages Do We Speak in the United States?* U.S. Census. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/12/languages-we-speak-in-united-states.html>
- ¹⁰ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Interpreters and Translators, at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/media-and-communication/interpreters-and-translators.htm>
- ¹¹ More information on what interpreters and translators do can be found here: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/media-and-communication/interpreters-and-translators.htm#tab-2>
- ¹² Information on how to become an interpreter or translator can be found here: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/media-and-communication/interpreters-and-translators.htm#tab-4>
- ¹³ More information on the Critical Language Scholars program can be found here: <https://clscholarship.org/>
- ¹⁴ More information on the Defense Language and National Security Education Office (DLNSEO) and programs can be found here: <https://dlnseo.org/>
- ¹⁵ More information on the English for Heritage Language Speakers program can be found here: <https://www.ehlsprogram.org/>
- ¹⁶ More information on the English for Heritage Language Speakers program can be found here: <https://studyabroad.state.gov/>