

Cognitive Benefits of Language Learning

Progress Report, No. 1

University College London

December 2016

Wishing you all a very happy holiday season and new year!

PROJECT UPDATE

The project is progressing well, and we have so far analysed just under 400 studies (amongst some 800 studies) related to cognition and language learning, as well as the related topics of bilingualism, learning across the lifespan, and cultural, employability, fiscal, and other benefits associated with language learning. At present our focus has been largely on academic studies, but we are now beginning to extend our reach to assess media and online reports. The writing-up has just begun, and we will soon be registering the systematic review through PROSPERO.

The literature we have processed so far show varied results from studies on different populations. Papers included in the systematic review examine the effectiveness of second language teaching methods on cognitive and academic outcome (Adair-Hauck, Willingham-McLain, and Youngs, 2000), and the impact of immersion schooling on cognitive control and intelligence (Woumans, Surmont, Struys, and Duyck, 2016).

At present, we have found very few studies focused specifically on the cognitive benefits of language learning, as opposed to bilingualism, and there is a definite need for further research. There is also a dearth of literature exploring language learning benefits for less advantaged children. In general, preliminary analyses show that there can be cognitive improvement in the short term with second-language learning, particularly amongst school-age children, but more evidence for long-term effects are needed to provide stronger evidence of cognitive benefit.



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Date of the second advisory committee meeting now scheduled

The second advisory committee meeting will be held on Thursday 2 February 2017 at the DCAL Library, from 10am to 2pm. Lunch will be provided. Please contact Claudia for travel, and accommodation reimbursement information, and details of any dietary needs. A meeting agenda will be sent out in January. We look forward to seeing you in the new year!

QUESTIONNAIRE

We have designed and distributed a questionnaire investigating the (mis)match between perceived and evidence benefits of language learning. We have so far received 700+ responses to the adult questionnaire, but we still need to push the children's questionnaire.

A preliminary analysis of the questionnaire shows that most adult respondents do perceive improved cognitive, cultural, fiscal, and employment benefits related to language learning, however demographic analysis shows some bias as 75% of respondents claim to be fluent in other languages, and the majority of participants are aged 30+, with 63% working in the Education sector.

It would be useful to the study to find monolingual participants located outside of London, and would like to ask you to please continue referring people to the questionnaire, particularly the children's one. We are hoping to have a pool of 1,000+ respondents to analyse in the coming months.

SUBMISSIONS TO ISB11

We have submitted proposals for a paper and poster to the 11th International Symposium on Bilingualism, which will be held at the University of Limerick, Ireland on 11-15 June 2017. Please see the conference proposals attached to the accompanying email.

SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE / CORPUS

The systematic analysis of literature is helping us to compile the project's research corpus, and we are currently liaising with various information teams to determine the best database tools to construct the final catalogue. We plan for it to be automatically updatable using key word search terms, supporting research in this field in future.

LINKS WITH OTHER PROJECTS

We have established contacts with the recently launched AHRC OWRI projects, the DfE-funded Mandarin Excellence Programme, as well as other relevant projects funded by the research councils and the British Academy, including the math anxiety project. Our project is also helping the UCL team to set up spin-off projects such as an ongoing staff survey of languages.

NEXT MEETING OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Arrangements are being made for the second meeting of the advisory committee on Thursday 2 February, 2017. We will be discussing the various categories for research we have identified, and questions to answer in the upcoming focus interviews.

The first progress report on the British-Academy-funded Cognitive Benefits of Language Learning project.

Prof. Bencie Woll

University College London
DCAL Research Centre
49 Gordon Square
London. WC1H 0PD
United Kingdom

Prof. Li Wei

University College London
Institute of Education
20 Bedford Way
London. WC1H 0AL
United Kingdom

Ms. Claudia Yogeswaran

University College London
DCAL Research Centre
49 Gordon Square
London. WC1H 0PD
United Kingdom



Project website: www.ucl.ac.uk/cognitive-benefits-language-learning



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