

THE IMPORTANCE OF COGNITIVE SKILLS IN LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN HIGH SCHOOL

The importance of foreign language study is best realized by studying one. The accomplishing feeling you get on learning a foreign language, the enrichment in you that the language brings, can be felt only by experience. There are many reasons why one should learn a foreign language. Some of the benefits of learning a foreign language in high school are that it improves knowledge in the native tongue, increases cognitive skills, and meets requirements for entry to any educational establishment. Moreover, these studies tend to expand comprehension of other cultures, make travel to areas where the language is spoken richer and more enjoyable, and can benefit a career. Learning in high school also means students have a chance to study more intensively from the point of view of professional aspect of mastering a foreign language.

Cognitive skills are improved by learning a foreign language in high school. Different researches show that students who pursue this path are likelier to become stronger thinkers.

"We have strong evidence today that studying a foreign language has a ripple effect, helping to improve student performance in other subjects." - *Richard Riley, U.S. Secretary of Education under Bill Clinton*

Because learning a language involves a variety of learning skills, studying a foreign language can enhance one's ability to learn and function in several other areas. People who have learned foreign languages show greater cognitive development in areas such as mental flexibility, creativity, and higher order thinking skills, such as problem-solving, conceptualizing, and reasoning.

Cognitive skills are like any other skill; they develop with practice. Cognitive skills are not easy to see or recognize through casual observation. They function behind the scenes as you process the information received from every possible source - sound, touch, sight, and even information received from yourself while thinking, speculating, or recalling. *Cognitive*: the process of obtaining knowledge through thought, experience, and the senses. From Latin “to consider” — it means to think deeply on... knowing or apprehending by the understanding of something. A person's cognitive skill set is made up of several cognitive skills including auditory processing, visual processing, short and long term memory, comprehension, logic and reasoning, and attention skills. Each of these can also be divided into identifiable sub-skills. For example, memory consists of short-term, long-term recall, and working memory.

Cognitive skills are the essential but often overlooked fundamental tools of *effective learning*. Learning is not about how much you know, but how effectively you process or handle the information you receive. Cognitive skills are the mental mechanisms that process incoming information, they are not the subjects taught in classrooms, and those are academic skills or disciplines. Academics consist of an accumulation of knowledge, rules, and systems concerning different subjects like algebra, biology, history, and foreign language. Actually, there is a significant difference between cognitive and academic skills. Cognitive skills are the individual capabilities needed to successfully learn and use academic disciplines and science. Cognitive skills are the underlying tools that enable you to successfully think, prioritize, plan, understand, visualize, remember, create useful associations, own projects, and solve problems. The importance of cognitive skills is summed up in the following points:

- When cognitive skills are strong, academic learning is fast, easy and efficient;
- When cognitive skills are weak, academic learning will be problematic or even impossible;
- Cognitive skills are the essential tools for effective learning.

Learning a foreign language in high school or at any other time increases a person's understanding of his or her native tongue. The new language provides a constant basis for comparison that monolingual speakers simply don't possess. Most students will develop a better sense of things like native vocabulary, usage, grammar and style as they compare it to a different communication system.

Foreign language learning is much more a cognitive problem solving activity than a linguistic activity, overall. Studies have shown repeatedly that foreign language learning increases critical thinking skills, creativity, and flexibility of mind even in young children. They are steps or operations used in learning or problem solving that require direct analysis, transformation, or synthesis of learning materials. In the following, some of the cognitive strategies are exhibited:

- Clarification / Verification;
- Guessing / Inductive Inferencing;
- Deductive Reasoning;
- Practice;
- Memorization;
- Monitoring.

In addition to cognitive benefits, the study of foreign languages leads to the acquisition of some important life skills. Language studies almost always have a cultural context. Students don't just learn about the words spoken — they also get a view into the cultural behaviors of another language's speakers. This makes taking a foreign language in high school even more useful because it imparts a global perspective, widening understanding of the greater world. They also learn to effectively handle new situations and improve the ability to understand and communicate with people from different walks of life.