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# Xin Chao! Hallo! Bonjour! Hola!

Why not learn a modern foreign language?

**THERE ARE CURRENTLY 7,099** world languages, of which 2,294 are spoken in Asia, according to the prestigious Web-based publication *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, 2017*. Therefore, why not learn some of those languages? As far as I am concerned, studying foreign languages has many advantages, since not only does it improve your communication skills and creativity, but also your memory. Furthermore, the study of foreign languages makes you more flexible and tolerant because it provides you with a better understanding of other cultures. Moreover, let us not forget the importance of foreign languages to enjoy better career opportunities. For these reasons, I believe it is positive to learn foreign languages.

A language is divided into four skills, which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Those skills are classified as receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (writing and speaking). According to SIL International, 1999, a non-profit organization devoted to studying, developing and documenting languages, those skills are related, as in mode of communication (oral or written) and direction of communication (receiving or producing the message). Consequently, working on your speaking and listening skills will definitely improve your communication skills. Research shows that foreign language learners retain 90 percent of what they learn by using it immediately or teaching it to someone else. This is because learners make mistakes and hence they are forced to correct those mistakes. As a teacher of a modern foreign language, I would point out the relevance of attending meet-ups

with native speakers and singing songs, as well as watching and listening to all kind of videos of interest, as some of the most efficient ways to boost your communication skills. Similarly, writing short stories, poems or scripts will help you to develop your writing skills, as creativity plays a major role. Teachers of modern foreign languages usually discourage learners from translating literally from their mother tongue to the language they are learning, the target language, because it might not be grammatically correct or natural. Last but not least, you can enhance your reading skills and memory by reading out loud. As I see it, reading daily for about 10 to 20 minutes is good practice.

Barbara Jordan, a lawyer, educator and American politician, once said, “One thing is clear to me: we, as human beings, must be willing to accept people who are different from ourselves.” I could not agree more with that statement. As a matter of fact, studying a language is not only about learning sounds, grammar and vocabulary, it also concerns learning about other cultures. Modern foreign language learners are, then, expected to develop their cultural competence, which is the ability to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with people across cultures. As a consequence, learners will acquire intercultural communication skills, broaden their minds, have a better understanding of the world and develop tolerance and respect towards other cultures. An example of empowering cultural competence is that of Saigon Star International School, where all the staff try their best to instil in learners values such as international-mindedness, respect, cooperation, communication and

adaptability, amongst others, by telling learners about International Primary Curriculum-concepts such as home country, host country and adoptive country.

The 21st century is characterized by a global economy in a globalized world, where the ability to speak additional modern foreign languages certainly makes a difference when it comes to getting a job. Knowledge of one or more additional languages will make your CV look more interesting to employers, who highly appreciate employees who can speak several languages. Some of the fields where polyglots—people who know several languages—have more chances include transportation and tourism, translation and interpreting, teaching, sales and marketing, public relations and government. Another advantage of mastering a modern foreign language is that you can work abroad, which will contribute to both your professional and human development. As for wages, according to Euro London, a recruitment agency, employees who know additional modern foreign languages can increase their salaries by around 10–15 percent.

As a teacher of a modern foreign language, I strongly recommend learning another language, because you will benefit from it. It will make you more confident when expressing your thoughts. It will also make you more creative when writing or speaking. Apart from that, you will keep your brain active. Also, you will develop a more positive attitude towards cultural difference. Plus, your understanding of the world will be different. Last but not least, you will have the opportunity to apply for more rewarding jobs. Therefore, all your efforts will pay off! ■