

Adult language education in the United States – Accessibility, affordability, and opportunity

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Abstract

In the 2024 Olympic Games, people from around the world have come together to attend and to view the games, and - while French and English, along with the language of the host country (in this case, France), are the official languages of the Olympic Games, the presence and interaction of multiple languages has been visible to all (AFSCV, n.d.). In the US, foreign language skills are in demand in the workplace (ACTFL, 2019; NAE, 2017). The vast majority of the US population is over the age of 18, and at the same time, the number of college age students is predicted to decline by 15% between 2025 and 2029, and to decline still further, making the need for language learning opportunities for adults more important than ever (Grawe, 2018; Grawe, 2021; Barshay, 2018). In the presence of so many actual and potential adult learners, adult education and adult foreign language learning are poised to be a growth market. In addition, in a globalized and interconnected world, increasing access, availability, and affordability of adult language education is the right thing to do. This bibliographic essay will describe and examine the issues and challenges facing adult language learning in the US and identify an evidence-based approach to advocacy.

Keywords: adult education, language learning, multilingualism, bilingualism, language advocacy

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1. Introduction

In the 2024 Olympic Games, people from around the world have come together to attend and to view the games, and - while French and English, along with the language of the host country (in this case, France), are the official languages of the Olympic Games, the presence and interaction of multiple languages has been visible to all (AFSCV, n.d.). In the US, foreign language skills are in demand in the workplace (ACTFL, 2019; NAE, 2017). The vast majority of the US population is over the age of 18, and at the same time, the number of college age students is predicted to decline by 15% between 2025 and 2029, and to decline still further, making the need for language learning opportunities for adults more important than ever (Grawe, 2018; Grawe, 2021; Barshay, 2018). In the presence of so many actual and potential adult learners, adult education and adult foreign language learning are poised to be a growth market. In addition, in a globalized and interconnected world, increasing access, availability, and affordability of adult language education is the right thing to do. This bibliographic essay will describe and examine the issues and challenges facing adult language learning in the US and identify an evidence-based approach to advocacy.

More than half the world population is multilingual - using more than one language on a regular basis, and people of all ages learn languages for a variety of reasons – as a school subject, for travel, culture, and personal enrichment, for career and professional advancement, and in order to re-connect with family heritage (Grosjean, 2010, 2020). The question of adults, languages, and language learning in the US is multi-faceted. In addition to a discussion of the benefits of language learning and the use of other languages, it includes consideration and discussion of when, where, and how learners should study heritage and additional world languages. However, it is important to bear in mind that adults face a different pathway to learning than do traditional age students, in that adult learning opportunities are not always freely available everywhere, as they are generally to K-12 students. In addition, adult learning opportunities, when they do exist, may not meet the needs of the adult learner – and this includes not only the learning needs of the adult learner, but also the practical considerations of flexible scheduling, online courses, and of funding. Beyond the learning needs of adult vs. traditional age learners, often referred to as andragogy vs. pedagogy, these questions of affordability, accessibility, and opportunity broaden the scope of the issue (WGU, 2024; Knowles, 1970).

While the benefits of languages and language learning are well known, relatively few Americans – just under 20% of K-12 students - learn a language in school (AMACAD, 2017). On the other hand, over 70M speak a language other than English in the home (Dietrich & Hernandez, 2022). In addition, approximately 260M, the vast majority (78%) of the US population, are over the age of 18, and a survey has shown that 70% of those adults who have not taken a foreign language in school regret it and believe that they have missed opportunities because of it (Ogunwole, Rabe, Roberts, & Caplan, 2021; Mykhalevych, 2024). Research has also shown that there are over 35M adults in the US potentially interested in adult lifelong learning, and colleges and universities are developing additional options for adult learners (Cobb, 2024; Sodexo, 2020). There is an opportunity for language and adult educators to more effectively serve the needs of so many adult learners, ranging from an adult who plans to travel, or to work in another language, to a parent who would like to be actively involved in their child's language learning at school, or a senior who would like to stay mentally sharp and active.

The benefits of language skills are widely known and include personal and professional benefits for all, with the unmet demand for language skills in the workplace, the importance of language skills in international communication and global citizenship, and the role of the use of more than one language in delaying the onset of dementia among those benefits particularly relevant for the adult learner (ACTFL, n.d; ACTFL, n.d.a; ACTFL, 2019; NAE, 2017; AMACAD, 2020; Bialystok, Craik, & Freedman, 2007). However, fewer than 20% of K-12

students in the US study a language other than English, and only 6.5% of postsecondary students are enrolled in a course in a language other than English (AMACAD, 2017; American Councils, 2017; MLA, 2023). Issues include access, opportunity, affordability, and adaptation to learner needs and purposes, including language for professional and specific purposes (ACTFL, 2019; NAE, 2017). In addition, almost all Americans have a heritage language – either an indigenous or an immigrant language – in their background. Unfortunately, due to a long history of language loss in the US, many heritage language learners of all ages may wish to re-connect with a lost or partially forgotten family heritage language, or to improve their skills in a language that is part of their family history. All languages, including both heritage languages and additional world languages, bring benefits to the individual, to our society, and form part of our national language capacity. Moreover, beyond professional and societal benefits, it is necessary to always remember the personal benefits of heritage language learning (Montrul, 2010).

The status of the online language learning market both in the US and globally is growing, in contrast to enrollment in languages at institutions of higher education. While the North American online language learning market is growing, college and university enrollments are declining (Meticulous, 2024; MLA, 2023). This simple juxtaposition of facts is simply the metaphoric tip of the iceberg, with the underlying issue the reasons for this disparity among adults, who comprise 79.7% of the US population (Ogunwole, Rabe, Roberts, & Caplan, 2021). In addition, it is interesting to note that the online learning market is also increasing, while most language courses at colleges and universities remain on campus, which highlights the degree to which adult learners may need and or prefer online learning options, both synchronous and asynchronous (Valuates, 2024).

2. Perspectives on adult learning and adult education

It is important to consider adult language learning from an interdisciplinary perspective, within the context of adult learning and education, as well as within the framework of language learning. Adult learning is characterized by microlearning or nano-learning – learning in small chunks of time, skills-based education – learning to do, rather than to only know about, and customization/personalization of learning to meet the needs of the individual learner. The six principles of adult learning, or andragogy, introduced in the 1970s, are “(1) the learner’s need to know, (2) self-concept of the learner, (3) prior experience of the learner, (4) readiness to learn, (5) orientation to learning, and (6) motivation to learn” (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012, p. 3). Principles of effective adult learning include student support services, life and career planning, and financing learning (CAEL, 2024). The teacher’s role is also different in adult education, with the teacher as facilitator rather than expert and knowledge provider (WGU, 2024).

Advice to institutions of higher education includes not only employer involvement, but also non-credit to credit pathways, badges, and application of courses and credentials to advanced degrees (Continuum, 2024). Education and learning – along with the importance of creativity and invention - also need to be considered in the context of the presence of artificial intelligence, or AI, in the workplace and in society (Aoun, 2018). The principles of language learning have been described in terms of benefits, literacy, articulated sequences, backward design, target language use, authentic texts, communicative tasks, grammar in context, and effective feedback (ACTFL, n.d.). However, the needs and goals of adult learners are often different from those of children and traditional-age learners, as are their learning styles. Practical considerations of scheduling, budget, etc. In terms of adult language education, relevance to learner needs, goals, and prior experiences, a supportive learning environment, and learner responsibility are among the key elements (CAL, 2015).

The adult learner and the independent learner - Self-directed learning is a core concept in adult education, and the library can play a central role in lifelong learning for all (Loeng, 2020; Shores, 1975). While it is possible to consider the adult learner and the independent learner as one homogeneous group, it is important to remember that while independent learners may be of any age, and are often adults, adult learners may often be enrolled in schools and institutions of higher education in a wide variety of programs, ranging from job-related and professional programs to courses related to personal interests and to lifelong learning. While much of the

general advice and guidance given to adult learners is valid for most, individual and program-related issues and needs may vary. It is also important to remember that each individual learner varies in terms of readiness for the responsibilities of adult learning and independent learning. While adult learners enrolled in educational institutions may readily access technology, materials, study spaces, and – most importantly, advice and guidance, the public library continues to provide access to all of the above to everyone. Libraries may offer language classes and conversation groups either onsite or online. A librarian might well be able to provide the advice and guidance needed for effective independent learning, or to provide the information needed to connect with that advice and guidance locally in the community, or online. It is important that both institutions and adult learners themselves think creatively about curriculum and individual learning goals respectively, and engage with local and community partners, employers, mentors, and learning materials both in-person and virtually in order to achieve the best possible learning outcome.

Language learning for all – from myths to best practices - The French government has launched a “French for All” initiative, supporting and expanding access to French language learning, and reflecting the fact that access to language learning is a right (Cultural Services, 2022). While this is just one example of a program concerning one language, it can be generalized. Unfortunately, not all US students have the opportunity to learn heritage or additional world languages. While in the past, many attributed the lack of language skills in the US to a lack of interest, it is rather the lack of opportunity to learn heritage or additional world languages, continuously and from the earliest grade levels, that is the cause.

There are many myths about language learning, ranging from the best age to begin learning a language to the best method to use, and it is necessary to separate myth from fact. It is often thought that children are the best – and only – people able to learn another language, and this belief may prevent adult learners from beginning or continuing language study. However, it has been demonstrated that people of all ages can effectively learn one or more additional languages. This also holds true for people of all ages who may learn differently or have learning disabilities. As for an ideal age for language learning, while there may be a critical period in terms of acquiring language comparable to mother tongue speakers, this window may be larger than previously thought, with many adult learners successful in developing proficiency and even fluency, and as for learning environment, immersion has been found to be the environment most associated with best language learning outcome (Hartshorne, Tenenbaum, & Pinker, 2018). Students who have learning disabilities are often excused from foreign language requirements or are advised to select different options for fulfilling general education course requirements. However, many current beliefs and practices concerning foreign language learning for students with learning disabilities have been demonstrated as “myth” rather than evidence-based facts (Sparks, 2016).

As it has been demonstrated that neither age nor a learning disability preclude study of additional languages or are a reason to discourage or to deny the opportunity to an interested learner to learn another language, the questions are how best to teach and to learn. While many best practices are general, applying to most learners, there are some that may specifically apply more strongly to adult learners. In terms of adult learners, it is especially important to demonstrate the real-world applicability of the language being learned – at home and in the family, in the community, in the workplace, and in any special interests the learner may have. Experiential learning can play an important role as well. It is equally important to relate the language being learned to the personal experience of the learner. It is also important for the adult learner to be actively involved in their learning, and discussion of learning goals, schedules, and sustainable motivation are helpful. Beyond this, remaining in the target language as much as possible and creating a positive and engaging learning environment are needs shared by all language learners. It is also important to remember that not all adult learners are the same, and that some adult learners may have attempted language study earlier without sufficient success. Some may even have learning disabilities they are aware of or those that may never have been noticed or diagnosed. Still others may have had a limited or relatively unsuccessful experience in the classroom and may have lingering hesitations about learning.

Beyond these more general considerations, it is also important to consider how to address learning differences among adult learners, allowing all to have a successful experience even if they do not necessarily progress at the same rate or equally in all areas of language learning. For these reasons, it is good to spend some time discussing independent learning with adult learners and to assist them in developing their own independent learning, keeping in mind their individual goals and purposes as well as differences in previous knowledge. Self-paced instruction is a possible answer, with accelerated learning options for those with more prior language knowledge or those who have more time to devote to language learning. Technology can be an ally for the adult learner, expanding access to authentic language and culture, as well as providing access to additional conversation and practice through AI and asynchronous learning.

Challenges include the lack of programs generally, and of immersion programs, for adults; the cost of language learning; specific support and instruction in building the habit of language learning; the difficulties generally faced to a greater degree by adult learners such as lack of flexible scheduling, and online and asynchronous learning opportunities. In addition, some adult learners may be less tech savvy and familiar with online learning, and some learners may not hear or see as well, making user-friendly learning resources and online learning platforms essential. Some of the above challenges contribute to a lack of opportunity and fairness for adult learners.

In order to effectively address these challenges, it is essential that programs designed to specifically respond to the needs of adult learners be available, and not only that adult learners be allowed to attend classes designed for the typical high school student or undergraduate college student. The question of the cost of language learning is significant, and a barrier to language learning for many. Within educational institutions, classes need both to be adapted to respond to the needs of the adult learner and to be affordable so that these opportunities are available to all interested learners. In addition, immersion programs, generally considered to produce the best learning outcomes, are generally costly – it is important to create affordable and flexible immersion learning opportunities for all, including adults, seniors, and those with disabilities. Beyond affordability, it is also essential that adult learning opportunities be accessible to all in terms of access to - and familiarity with - technology, and all in terms of learning that is accessible to all. The issue throughout is the urgent need to make language learning opportunities available to adults that are affordable, accessible, and that respond to the needs of the adult learner. Special attention should be paid to the needs of the adult heritage language learner, who may be a new language learner re-connecting with a lost or forgotten family language, or a learner who may have spoken the language as a child, with family members, and may need to develop adult reading and writing skills and or professional language skills in the heritage language (Montrul, 2010).

Advice to the adult learner has included advice from educational institutions, cognitive scientists, language educators, and language enthusiasts, and includes a number of threads of interest and value to learners to varying degrees according to the individual learning style and learning environment of each learner. Much of this advice is commonsense and would apply to most learners in most situations, but some may be overlooked or undervalued, resulting in a less successful learning outcome. The primary threads of this advice include goal-setting, establishing a schedule and making language learning a habit, sustaining motivation, creating an immersive environment, developing opportunities to use the new language, getting feedback and assessment of progress, and finding a language learning advisor or guide (Roberts & Kreuz, 2016; Lewis, 2014; Wyner, 2014; Bibard, 2015; Alliance Française, 2024).

The role of habit in language learning - The idea of a language learning habit, while important to all learners, is especially important for the adult learner, who is often struggling to fit learning into an already crowded schedule and may not have all the advice and support that traditional students enjoy. If we think of the way that babies learn their mother tongue, listening, absorbing, and replicating language repeatedly over a significant period of time, it is easy to see why habit is especially important in language learning. However, for those learning a new or heritage language, it is not always easy, or even possible, to replicate the natural language learning process. For that reason, language learners – especially adult language learners with limited

time – need to specifically and intentionally build language learning into their daily routine. While this is a challenge, there is more authentic language available today for little or no cost to language learners than ever before. Adult learners can build their own language bubble, or individualized immersive environment, including a wide variety of resources and focusing on the interests and purposes of the learner – including movies, music, media, etc., as well as specific language learning activities. Paradoxically, while motivation is often considered the determining factor in language learning success, the habit of language learning can support learners when motivation may weaken due to the distractions of daily life or due to the inevitable plateaus in language learning progress.

The concept of habit is important in language learning. Habit has been discussed in terms of 7 elements, many of which can increase the effectiveness of teams, or in this case, language learners. They include being proactive, developing a plan for learning and measures of success, prioritizing goals and sticking to the plan, thinking win-win and developing learning collaborations and partnerships with advisors and guides, and also with conversation partners, etc., developing an understanding of the culture while learning communicative language, remaining innovative throughout the process, and making time for language learning while retaining work-life balance (Covey, 1990, 2020). Habit has also been described as a loop, with a cue, an action, and a reward. In order to create a new habit, it is necessary to keep the cue, insert the desired action – in this case, language learning, and to keep the reward. In addition, the importance of groups is also emphasized, which in language learning could imply a course, an informal language conversation group, or a language conversation partner, any of which could be in-person, online, or hybrid (Duhigg, 2012, 2023). Building on this work, the concept of tiny changes, or “atomic” habits, based on the sequence of cue, craving, response, and reward, echo the classics and provide a way to both break bad habits and create new ones (Clear, 2018).

It is also interesting to consider the nature of habit, in this case the habit of language learning. While the language learner is likely to consider the decision to learn a language an important event, the language learning habit, like any other, may actually be a tiny habit – easy, that can be started in the present moment, and most importantly, does not rely on motivation, which can be inconsistent. The concept of the tiny habit includes the anchor moment – an already existing habit, a new tiny behavior – in this case, language learning, and celebration of each time that the learner engages in language learning behavior. An unexpected aspect of acquiring the tiny habit of language learning is that motivation is not considered the centerpiece of a successful long-term outcome, and that the needed behavior design includes goal-setting and the development of specific behaviors, in this case, language learning behaviors (Fogg, 2020).

Becoming fluent - Advice on language learning strategies, or how to become fluent, is valuable for all language learners, but especially for non-traditional and adult learners, and those facing time and scheduling challenges or not enrolled in a structured language program. The following keys to language learning have been recommended: prioritize pronunciation; avoid translation; and use spaced interval repetition practice. It is also important to make a plan for learning, which includes strategies to maximize remembering and focusing on sounds, words, sentences, and benefits and pleasures of language learning (Wyner, 2014). The importance of passion, or the desire to learn the new language, of speaking the new language from the very beginning, and the importance of being able to locate free quality learning resources are especially important for the adult learner (Lewis, 2014). In addition to passion, the concept of quality vs. quantity is key, and realistically scheduling the daily language study time when the learner will have the quantity of time that has been chosen, and that it is at a time of day when quality learning is likely to occur (Bibard, 2015). The importance of planning, and its relationship to developing the habit of language learning and a successful learning outcome, has also been emphasized (Roberts & Kreuz, 2015).

Motivation and immersion are generally considered the best predictors of successful language learning outcome, and both can be challenging – especially for the adult learner. Everyone is challenged in sustaining motivation in the face of the inevitable plateaus in language learning, and the adult learner is faced with the challenge of creating an immersive environment in that, generally, free public school immersion programs are

only available for the elementary grades. Often the adult learner is faced with the dual challenge of developing an immersive environment independently and of finding the time in a busy adult schedule for proactive immersion in the target language. These challenges can be successfully overcome with the passion and motivation of the learner, combined with the effective development of the habit of language immersion.

3. Discussion

The history of adult education in what is now the United States can be traced back to the colonial era, including not only schools and universities, but also apprenticeships, libraries, and volunteer and community groups, offering both job-oriented education and training as well as education based on personal interests (Knowles, 1962). In the examination of adult learning, it is important to bear in mind both the overall number and percentage of adults in the US population – 258.3M and 77.9%, and the fact that this trend has continued to increase in recent years (Ogunwole, Gabe, Roberts, & Caplan, 2021) In a survey, 44% of adults reported participating in adult education activities, of which 21% reported participation in “personal-interest courses” which may include language learning (NCES, 2006).

The needs and goals of adult learners are often different from those of children, as are their learning styles and practical considerations of scheduling, budget, etc. The core principles of adult learning, or andragogy, in practice have been described as “the learner’s need to know - why, what, how?; the self-concept of the adult learner - autonomous, self-directing; prior experience of the learner – resource, mental models; readiness to learn – life related, developmental task; orientation to learning – problem centered, contextual; and motivation to learn – intrinsic value, personal payoff” (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012, p. 4).

Within the framework of advice for the adult learner, sustainable motivation and making language learning a habit are perhaps the most challenging aspects for the adult learner, whether enrolled in a course or as an independent self-directed learner. As for factors that may predict language learning outcome, personality, temperament, learning styles, aptitude, and attitude have been examined (Dornyei, 2005). In addition, the nature of the motivation – whether instrumental or intrinsic - of the individual learner has been examined in terms of its impact on language learning outcome, with intrinsic rather than more pragmatic motivations being the more powerful (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). However, other critical areas involve assessment and feedback, which implies a learning advisor or guide. This is where language educators can play an essential role in creating free online learning and assessment tools for all language learners and in providing direct advice and guidance to adult learners, but it is an area that may not yet have received sufficient attention, and risks being lost among the claims made by commercial and for-profit language instruction providers.

Areas where curriculum materials and instruction are especially needed are professional language skills and heritage languages. In the US, the demand for foreign language skills in the workplace is not being met (ACTFL, 2019; NAE, 2017). This might seem paradoxical in a nation with a history including both indigenous and immigrant languages where approximately 70M speak a language other than English in the home, but opportunities for learners to develop professional language skills in an additional or heritage language are lacking (Dietrich & Hernandez, 2022).

Another challenge is the use of technology in language learning – both in terms of developing curriculum and materials freely accessible online and in terms of the access to technology available to adult learners along with their comfort level in independently using available technologies. Although learners are generally more accustomed to and accepting of online learning since its wide use during the COVID pandemic, access remains uneven due to economic inequalities and new technologies like AI may not always be well understood or freely available to learners, especially if they are independent learners not enrolled in an educational institution. Better access and instruction in the use of technology, along with development of materials specifically suited to the needs of the adult learner are needed.

Action steps - For those who believe in the importance of languages and of opportunity for language

learning, actions steps include individual decisions to learn a new language or to re-connect with a heritage language, and to encourage friends and family to join in the journey. Beyond these personal decisions, it is also possible to advocate for language learning in the community and beyond, working to expand existing language programs and to develop new ones for learners of all ages in a variety of settings. Beyond the specific actions, it is always possible to support public initiatives for language learning and for adult education, signing petitions and voting for candidates for public office who support languages and language learning. For those who are language educators, it is possible to create freely available online language learning materials (OERs), serve as an advisor or guide to an adult language learners, and/or to adapt their language courses to better meet the needs of adult language learners, whether enrolled or independent learners.

With the benefits of language learning and use well known, the need for languages in the workplace, in our communities, and in an increasingly interconnected and globalized world, language learning opportunities for adults are needed, it is certainly time to expand the language learning options for adults. In addition, the number of potential adult learners is at an all-time high and predicted to grow. The question then becomes -how? The answers are both simple and complex. The rationale for adult language learning opportunities are well known, as are the principles of adult and language education, but there are various models available. The option of offering adult language learning at local institutions of higher education includes all of the advantages that such an institution can offer – expertise, experience, and the educational infrastructure. However, tuition costs can be formidable, and even if adults are offered a discount or even free tuition, the courses in place have typically been developed to meet the needs of the department and/or general education curriculum and the 18-25-year-old learner. In addition, the college and university campus can be daunting for an adult learner who has not attended college, or who may have had a somewhat negative experience in college or school.

The local college or university campus can, however, develop new course options, modalities, and scheduling to respond to the needs of adult learners. Community partnerships can also help to make adult learners feel more at home in addition to providing experiential learning and funding opportunities, as well as to developing local support for world and heritage language learning at all levels. K-16 partnerships with the local school district can also expand the scope of adult learning in the local community and beyond. This is where the community school option can play an important role. Located in the community, usually in building familiar to the adult learner and typically engaging in a dialogue approach to learning, the community school can offer a welcoming and user-friendly approach to language learning. Community schools are known for an adult-friendly approach to education for little or no cost to the learner, and course offerings are driven by local interest and demand. Community schools and their partner organizations are ideally positioned to respond to local adult learner needs in many areas, including languages. However, it is important that the community school adapt language learning from the curriculum available in the local school district so that the adult learning courses respond to the needs of the adult learner, relating to goals, whether workplace, personal interest, or heritage language oriented.

Establishing partnerships with local heritage organizations can be helpful in developing the curriculum and experiential learning, and in recruiting staff and students, not to mention the potential for local community support for the adult learning initiative. Beyond these general considerations, the question of accessibility for adult learners with disabilities needs to be considered, with accessible online and in-person services and differentiated instruction available.

4. Conclusions and future directions - *Affordability, accessibility, and availability*

The time for effectively addressing the lack of language skills in the US is now (Montlaur, 2019). Language skills are important – in our personal and professional lives, in our increasingly multilingual society, and in our ability to effectively engage as global citizens. Unfortunately, the opportunity to learn languages – either additional world languages or our own heritage languages, is limited, and many adults regret their lack of language skills. In order to provide access to this skill that benefits us all – the learner, our society, and our world,

it is necessary to provide pathways for proficiency and to fluency through our schools and institutions of higher education, but especially through our communities. Just as language itself is holistic, present in every aspect of our lives, language learning, with differentiated and individualized learning pathways, should be available to all. Over 70M in the US speak a language other than English in the home, and public libraries and community organizations offer a wide array of opportunities for informal and experiential learning, as well as opportunities to use newly-acquired language skills to engage with and to help others locally and globally.

Language learning needs to be affordable, available, and accessible for all interested adult learners. Affordability implies low- or no-cost school and community options; availability implies flexible schedules, online and hybrid/synchronous and asynchronous options and curriculum designed to meet the needs of adult learners; and accessibility includes courses for those with disabilities and special needs, as well as those with limited literacy. We need to also take into account the desirability of nano- and micro-learning, skills-based learning, customization and personalized learning, and technology-enhanced immersion and virtual learning. More attention and support are needed for adult language learners, who not only comprise the vast majority of the population, but whose needs may not be sufficiently met by educational institutions. The needs of heritage language learners and learners of additional world languages may be different, and both need to be considered, along with the needs of learners for creativity and invention in the age of artificial intelligence, or AI.

Curriculum and materials need to be developed to respond to the learning style and needs of adult learners, which are different from those typical of K-12 and traditional-age college and university students. Scheduling needs to be flexible, with online, hybrid, and asynchronous learning opportunities available to accommodate the needs of adult learners who may be juggling family, work, and other responsibilities. Advice, guidance, and support need to be available for both the classroom and the independent adult language learner in terms of setting language learning goals, developing a plan, creating an immersive language learning environment, and developing the habit of language learning. Training opportunities in adult education for language educators is also needed. Most importantly, funding and opportunity for both heritage and world language learning for adults need to be increased.

Importantly, effective adult learning benefits from partnerships and experiential learning, both in the local community and beyond. Adult language learners can benefit from language skills present in their local community or online, along with opportunities for experiential learning, through internships and employment where the learned language is used, and through opportunities to use their newly-acquired language skills to help others through paid and volunteer opportunities. Libraries and community organizations are among the resources available to all, and particularly relevant for the adult learner. In conclusion, adult education and adult foreign language learning are poised to be a growth market. In addition, in a globalized and interconnected world, increasing access, availability, and affordability of adult language education is the right thing to do, for all of us.

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