

Foreign Language Study in America

If you want to see how foreign language study should be taught, you really should look at how Europe teaches its children. In Europe, more than **90%** of students start learning English in Elementary school and **53%** of all Europeans say that they can speak a 2nd language. Imagine the positive economic impact, as well as societal impact, that having 53% of Japanese people saying they can speak a second language? It would have a very big impact on Japan's ability to conduct business with the rest of the world. In Japan now, the number is closer to **10%**.

However, today I will be talking about foreign language study in America and how it is different and how it is the same from Japan.



Like in Japan, foreign language study in America is lacking behind that of Europe by a large margin. In America, **25%** of elementary schools, **58%** of junior high schools, and **91%** of high schools offer foreign language study. That number is very, very low. As the school districts are facing budget problems, one of the first programs they are cutting are foreign language classes. In 1997, the number of junior high schools offering foreign language classes was **75%**! Because most schools, even if they offer foreign languages, do not make it a requirement for graduation, only **18.5%** of American students are enrolled in foreign language classes.



For example, the San Antonio Independent School District requires only 2 years of foreign language study in high school to graduate. High school in America is 4 years. Amherst high school offers 5 languages (Latin, French, German,

Spanish, and Chinese) but it is not a requirement of graduation that you must take a foreign language. In America, each school district will have their own graduation requirements and as long as complete those, you can fill in the extra class time classes that you want to study. It's more like a university in Japan but that what high school is like in America.

One other big difference is that we don't have entrance exams so teachers teach foreign languages for communication and proficiency rather than for grammar. In Japan, the goal of all classes is to pass the high school and university entrance exams but since that is not a concern in America, the teaching style is completely different. Recently, many foreign language classes are using technology in a very advantageous way that could not have been done in the past. Many language classes are using video conferencing technology to have discussions with students in schools from other countries. They are using internet games and applications to aid in study.

In America, if your school district offers more than 1 foreign language, you have the choice of what foreign language you want to study from junior high school. Amherst offers 5 foreign languages. You can choose to take 4 years of the same language, 2 years of 2 languages, 1 year of 4 languages, or really anything you want.

The most common foreign language classes being taken in American schools were:

1. Spanish	72%
2. French	14%
3. German	4.4%
4. Latin	2.3%
5. Japanese	0.8%
6. Chinese	0.7%
7. Russian	0.14%
8. Other	5.49%

Looking at this list, you might wonder why Latin is so high on this list even though nobody speaks Latin anymore. That is because people believe that if you study Latin, you will do better in your English classes and get a higher score on the SAT exam because so many words in English come from Latin that if you know the original Latin, you will be more able to guess the meaning of a word you don't know in English.

To conclude, language learning in America is taught with a different goal in mind and with a different teaching style which is more effective in teaching students to be better able to communicate in a foreign language, but because it is not require



and so many students do not continue it for their entire junior high school and high school careers, students in America do not develop the ability to communicate in a foreign language as well as students in Europe. The idea is good but the students just don't get the chances the learn the language which makes everything "mottainai!"