Objectives

To (1) determine whether annual language proficiency testing is necessary by investigating patterns of language skill attrition, (2) identify language enhancement resources best suited to the Defense Intelligence Agency’s (DIA’s) needs, particularly those resources available through the Joint Language University (JLU) website, (3) describe how language use mitigates attrition, and (4) describe the effects of repeatedly (annually) taking the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT).

Findings

CASL researchers performed a preliminary analysis of the historical testing data of language professionals at DIA and found the following:

- DLPT reading and listening scores showed gradual improvement over time.
- Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) speaking scores showed a slight decline.
- Language training led to a slightly faster rate of improvement over time in reading and listening scores but had no effect on speaking scores.
- Patterns of proficiency loss suggest that administering the OPI annually and the DLPT every other year will not substantially increase attrition in test scores.

CASL researchers also conducted a critical inventory of the JLU resources and found a wide range of resources for language maintenance and enhancement. However, users would benefit from an online guide to JLU resources, more integration of these resources, and more resources that provide opportunities for interaction with target language users.

Relevance

The Department of Defense mandates that personnel certify their reading, listening, and speaking skills annually to receive Foreign Language Proficiency Pay, even when they have maintained their DLPT/OPI scores over many test administrations.

The preliminary data mining results provide initial information for test frequency policies and help focus future research efforts investigating factors that mitigate foreign language skill attrition.

Reports

- How does foreign language proficiency change over time? Results of preliminary data mining (July 2011)
- Online resources for language maintenance and enhancement: A critical inventory of the resources available through the Joint Language University website (June 2011)

For More Information

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