Regional expertise and culture throughout the Department of Defense

The Department of Defense research landscape

PURPOSE
To discover the current U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) regional expertise and culture (REC) research landscape and report on its major research efforts and topics of study, key contributors and publications, and collaborative practices, as well as opportunities for creating an online research collaboration tool.

CONCLUSIONS
Subject matter experts (SMEs) interviewed and surveyed believe that better communication, coordination, sharing, and funding are required to align DoD REC research activities with its REC research goals. There are compelling reasons to consider creating an online research collaboration tool.

RELEVANCE
This report and an online research collaboration tool would allow (a) program managers, researchers, and end users of REC research to plan, discuss, and coordinate their efforts more efficiently; (b) policy makers to easily track research efforts commissioned or engaged in, as well as find expert researchers who could help address mission-relevant questions; and (c) current and future research initiatives to be aligned with DoD strategic goals.

Executive summary

PURPOSE
The University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL) reports on the current U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) regional expertise and culture (REC) research landscape to inform the Defense Language Office (DLO) of its major research efforts and topics of study, key contributors and publications, collaborative practices, opportunities for research, as well as opportunities for creating an online research collaboration tool (R-Space).

CONCLUSIONS
In interviews and survey responses, subject matter experts (SMEs) in REC research within the DoD both commended and raised challenges for current REC research efforts. SMEs praised the mission-focused and cross service applicability of REC research, the knowledge and enthusiasm of key contributors, and efforts to develop collaboration both within the DoD’s REC research community and between it and academia. At the same time, SMEs noted the need for better REC research coordination, more social science expertise and personnel, and greater collaborative practices. Main findings include:

1. Key contributors to REC research across the DoD are located at AFCLC, ARI, ARL, AFRL, CAOCL, NAWCTSD, TRADOC, and the HSCB Modeling program;

2. Relevant research themes and topics include training and education, software development, cross-cultural competence (3C), socio-cultural knowledge, personnel and validation studies, organizational improvement, and forecasting and computational modeling;

3. The first influential documents guiding REC research activities in the DoD were published yearly, starting in 2005; and

4. Collaborative practices are mostly informal and conducted via e-mail, although formal collaborations are beginning to sprout. Despite these resources, programs, and practices, SMEs suggested that better communication, coordination (of qualified personnel), and sharing (within and between agencies and academia) are required to better align researcher activities with DoD REC research goals.
To achieve the goals set forth in DoD’s Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities: 2011–2016 (Department of Defense, 2011), CASL presents the following recommendations to facilitate such alignment efforts:

1. Choose a tool or coordinate an effort to integrate tools
2. Encourage use of, maintain, and market R-Space
3. Increased collaboration between government and academia:
   - Support basic and long-term research
4. Hire qualified personnel
5. Encourage sharing among all REC research contributors
6. Improve communication and coordination internal and external to the DoD
7. Develop a conceptual framework to guide REC research activities
8. Build consensus on a future direction for the REC community

CASL also presents the following opportunities for future research:

1. Validation studies for 3C requirements
2. Validation studies of REC training and education programs
3. Basic REC research in: technology use, defining regional expertise, cognitive dissonance, changes in stress associated with REC training, and team cohesion

**RELEVANCE**

This report and an online research collaboration tool would allow (a) program managers, researchers, and end users of REC research to plan, discuss, and coordinate their efforts more efficiently; (b) policy makers to easily track research efforts commissioned or engaged in, as well as find expert researchers who could help address mission-relevant questions; and (c) current and future research initiatives to be aligned with strategic goals.
Executive report

PURPOSE

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) realized that the U.S. military was not optimally prepared to interact with people from Middle Eastern and South Asian cultures (U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services, 2008). Thus, in 2004, by mandate of law, the U.S. Secretary of Defense opened the Defense Language Office (DLO). The DLO primarily addressed language policy, as driven by the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap (Defense Foreign Language Steering Committee, 2005), which focused on language professionals, including foreign area officers (FAOs), to enhance language capabilities within DoD.

The DLO tasked the University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL) with (a) documenting the current landscape of DoD-funded research in the areas of regional expertise and culture (REC), (b) creating a proof-of-concept for a web-based research collaboration tool, and (c) presenting findings to DoD personnel in a DLO-sponsored out-brief. The following critical questions were posed to CASL: Who are the leaders in REC research, what are they doing, and what is their focus?

CASL is charting the research landscape by identifying (a) groups and individuals engaged in REC research across DoD and noting key contributors; (b) past, current, anticipated, and desired research programs, themes, and/or topics; and (c) influential REC documents (i.e., reports, articles, and web sources). This report also provides information on current collaboration efforts, as well as the perceived strengths of and challenges for REC research activities and personnel throughout DoD. Finally, CASL presents state-of-the-art non-DOD research that might have relevance to DoD REC strategic goals.

Results from our discovery inform our second deliverable, a proof-of-concept for an online research collaboration tool (R-Space) that would serve as a repository of the information cited above. The proof-of-concept is being developed with the explicit understanding that it should provide a forum for decision makers and researchers to (a) work collaboratively on their current research efforts, (b) reflect on the services’ alignment with the DoD strategic plan and REC contributors’ alignment with DoD’s REC research goals; (c) help program managers determine areas of synergy, overlap, redundancy, and gaps; and (d) chart a research agenda outlining a coordinated path to future goals.

CONCLUSIONS

In interviews and survey responses, subject matter experts (SMEs) in REC research within the DoD both commended and raised challenges for current REC research efforts. SMEs praised the mission focus and cross-service applicability of REC research, the knowledge and enthusiasm of key contributors, and efforts to develop collaboration both within the DoD’s REC research community and between it and academia. At the same time, SMEs noted the need for better REC research coordination, more social science expertise and personnel, and greater collaborative practices.

Key contributors to REC research are located at AFCLC, ARI, ARL, AFRL, CAOCL, NAWCTSD, TRADOC, and the HSCB Modeling program. Themes addressed in studies relevant to DoD include training and education, software development, cross-cultural competence, socio-cultural knowledge, personnel and validation studies, organizational improvement, and forecasting and computational modeling. SMEs recognized key DoD REC researchers as capable scientists who are open to working with each other and enthusiastic. Furthermore, alliances among DoD agencies and between DoD and academia are developing. However, SMEs suggested that better communication, coordination, and sharing are required to better align researcher activities with DoD REC research goals.

To achieve the goals set forth in DoD’s Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities: 2011–2016 (Department of Defense, 2011), CASL presents the following recommendations to facilitate such alignment efforts:

1. Choose a tool or coordinate an effort to integrate tools.

In adopting an online collaboration tool, DoD could either choose one tool to serve as the sole-source tool that would include the functionalities of all existing tools, or host a retreat at which contributors to each tool would work together to create a single R-Space. Having a sole-source portal will reduce duplicative efforts and provide REC community members with one-stop shopping for information they desire.

2. Encourage use of, maintain, and market R-Space.

For continued utility, the content and architecture of R-Space must be updated regularly and maintained in order to provide users with tool capabilities that meet their needs and interests; facilitate active tool use, and recruit, maintain, and develop the membership base required to sustain a viable tool. Considerable effort will be necessary to market R-Space so that it may continue to thrive.

3. Increased collaboration between government and academia: Support basic and long-term research.

DoD research must keep up with academic research standards to expand its research perspective and opportunities, and to better direct and facilitate research that meets its needs. The DoD REC community would benefit from
consulting with academic scholars (both domestic and international) on state-of-the-art research to impact the Department’s mission relevance.

4 Hire qualified personnel.

Given that a major concern for SMEs is the lack of credentialed social scientists participating in DoD REC research efforts, the DoD should exercise more rigorous hiring standards and seek highly qualified REC researchers trained with the appropriate knowledge and skills.

5 Encourage sharing among all REC research contributors.

Promoting participation by all contributors in the DoD REC research domain would allow for greater input from a variety of perspectives, relieve the burden and lessen the sole reliance on current key contributors, and advance overall collaborative efforts.

6 Improve communication and coordination internal and external to the DoD.

Increased communication and coordination would allow for transparency of results, and thus a reduction of redundancies in time, funding, and research efforts.

7 Develop a conceptual framework to guide REC research activities.

Currently, training and education activities are carried out without a guiding framework. As a result, it is difficult to pave a sequential path that closes the gap where REC research is and where it should be. With a conceptual framework guiding research questions, program managers will be better equipped to influence policy and provide guidance to the DoD.

8 Build consensus on a future direction for the REC community.

Policy makers have begun the necessary steps to create a unified REC research community throughout the DoD, but the momentum must be maintained. Future plans among policy makers in high-level positions should be aligned before providing direction to the rest of the community. If insufficient consensus exists among researchers, scientists, end users, and decision makers, REC research efforts will remain disjointed and ultimately will be ineffective in meeting DoD’s REC-related goals and objectives.

CASL also presents the following opportunities for future research:

1 Validation studies for Cross-Cultural Competence (3C) requirements.

A great deal of research exists on REC training, but little in the way of a needs analysis and an understanding of the link between culture training and actual performance criteria. The requirements for 3C are still being defined and thus training is not consistent throughout the services. Areas ripe for research include identifying who should receive training, how much training to provide, and whether 3C increases language or culture-specific learning.

2 Develop and implement validation studies for training and education programs.

Another opportunity for future research involves the relationship between culture training and mission effectiveness. While a great deal of scientific work goes into developing products such as training curricula and simulations, very little basic or applied research is available on the role of socio-cultural factors, including the impact of regional knowledge and expertise on individuals’, leaders’, and teams’ behaviors and performance outcomes.

It is not enough to possess culture and/or regional expertise gained through training and education programs; research on roles and implications for work processes and operational outcomes also are essential. The challenge associated with studying cultural aspects is that they are dynamic and abstract. Empirical research must investigate a suitable way to measure cultural performance before validation studies of cultural training can be accomplished.

“People cannot foresee the future well enough to predict what’s going to develop from basic research. If we only did applied research, we would still be making better spears” (Smoot, 2006).

3 Return to basic REC research in:

- Technology Use for Training: Basic research on the optimal mode for training would yield maximum benefits for service members of various backgrounds.
- Defining regional expertise: Expertise implies proficiency. Procedural and declarative knowledge, as well as behaviors, need to be identified as proxies for regional proficiency.
- Cognitive dissonance: An affective state of discomfort caused by conflicting perspectives or conflicting cognition in relation to a situation (Bem, 1967). In such situations, an individual typically will change the cognition to match the behavior. Cognitive dissonance can occur in soldiers who are trained for combat but then are required to engage in peacemaking efforts. Researchers need to think about how culture training can be implemented so as to minimize psychological distress to the soldier who must toggle between thoughts of enemy and thoughts of ally.
- Stress: Managing stress was found to be an enabler to coping with unfamiliar situations. 3C training, viewed as a coping resource, should be studied as a buffer against the negative implications of cross cultural challenges. As stress also has strong links to performance, studying the effects of 3C on stress reduction is vital to individuals, teams, and to fulfilling military missions.
- Team cohesion: SMEs emphasized the importance of team research as it relates to 3C training. Relevant topics of interest
include how to transfer 3C-related individual competencies into unit effectiveness.

**RELEVANCE**

Researchers and policy makers indicated the desire to easily track DoD REC research efforts (i.e., those commissioned or conducted by various DoD components) so that they can (a) better coordinate research activities and collaborate on research, (b) more effectively use limited resources, and (c) take steps to ensure that research addresses DoD mission-relevant questions.

Through this report and use of an R-Space tool, the DLO will be able to (a) assess and monitor the ongoing REC research landscape and research funding, while calling attention to any duplicative efforts (b) provide quick report turnaround on the status of DoD REC research to government bodies, e.g., the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation (HASC O&I) of the U.S. Congress, (c) write policies that would help the services align with DoD strategic goals for REC capabilities throughout the U.S. Armed Forces, and (d) provide guidance to REC research program managers.

For DoD REC researchers, program managers, policy makers, and other stakeholders (e.g., soldiers, officers, and academic scholars), this report and R-Space would provide information for (a) tracking REC research efforts (DoD commissioned or conducted), (b) identifying expert researchers who could help address mission-relevant REC research questions, (c) identifying areas that require research attention. R-Space could also help new entrants to the field become familiar with current unclassified DoD REC research programs, help external academic scholars and contractors become more involved and informed on DoD REC research efforts, and provide references for program managers and supervisors, as well as officers’ decisions and support for their personnel.

**REFERENCES**


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