

Enhancing U.S. Economic Resilience through Strategic Language Education: The Case for French

Philip Awine Azangeo ¹, Kenneth Kolade ² and Nunana Klenam Djokoto ³

¹ ML Department, Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, U.S.A

² Department of French and Italian Studies, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, U.S.A.

³ Department of Political Science, University of Ghana, Accra

Abstract: Recent global disruptions have highlighted the importance of economic resilience. This study investigates the frequently neglected impact of French language education on enhancing U.S. economic resilience. It emphasizes trade stability, workforce flexibility, and educational capacity. Using secondary data spanning from 2015 to 2025, it draws comparisons between the language education frameworks of the United States, Canada, and Germany. Findings reveal that French language skills notably enhance the economies of Canada and Germany through increased commerce with Francophone nations and elevated salaries for bilingual employees, whereas the U.S. encounters challenges due to falling enrollment numbers, inadequate funding, and gaps in policy. Canada's bilingual requirements and Germany's comprehensive multilingual programs have resulted in observable improvements in workforce adaptability and international trade. In contrast, the U.S. is not committed to language education, despite substantial evidence supporting its economic benefits. The study concludes with policy recommendations aimed at increasing federal funding and promoting public-private partnerships for French immersion initiatives, which are crucial for equipping the U.S. workforce for global competition and enhancing national economic resilience.

Keywords: Economic resilience, French language education, multilingualism, trade stability, bilingualism, French.

INTRODUCTION

Recent worldwide upheavals, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the increasing trade disputes between the U.S. and China, have highlighted the importance of prioritizing economic resilience. Economic resilience, which is the ability of an economy to weather, adjust to, and bounce back from negative events such as financial downturns or geopolitical conflicts while continuing to grow, has become an essential requirement for preserving global competitiveness (Simmie & Martin, 2010).

Resilience, here, is measured indirectly through trade stability (export values and growth rates with Francophone countries), workforce adaptability (employment rates and wage premiums for bilingual workers), and educational capacity (enrollment rates, teacher supply, and program funding).

The strategic role of French language proficiency in bolstering U.S. economic diplomacy, especially within key Francophone markets, has been well documented as a critical tool for advancing trade negotiations and geopolitical interests (Kolade, Azangeo & Thompson, 2025).

One approach that prominent economies use to enhance their resilience is by making strategic investments in education and multilingual abilities, preparing their workforces for effective cross-cultural communication, global trade, and

diplomatic relations. (European Commission, 2024).

Strategic language education, defined as the deliberate integration of language learning into educational and workforce development programs to achieve economic, diplomatic, or social objectives, goes beyond general instruction by aligning with national priorities. It is not merely “a standardized pursuit of a particular level of competency, but improved access to language education for all U.S. citizens, irrespective of geography, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background” (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2017, p. 20).

In the U.S., economic resilience has traditionally been enhanced through macroeconomic policies, technological innovation, and workforce development. Federal initiatives like the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 have strengthened resilience by investing in infrastructure and job creation during downturns (Congressional Budget Office, 2012).

The U.S. educational system and workforce majorly focus on STEM disciplines and macroeconomic interventions (National Science Foundation, 2023; U.S. Department of Labor, 2024) despite the proven economic benefits of multilingualism, as shown by other leading economies such as Germany.

Language education is an area that has not received sufficient attention as a means of building economic resilience, even though it can enhance international trade, diplomatic relations, and promote cross-cultural understanding in a globalized economy (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2017). This deficiency is especially apparent in the inadequate incorporation of languages essential to major global markets, which leads to lost opportunities in trade and diplomacy. (Hogan-Brun, 2017).

This study aims to examine how French language education can enhance U.S. economic resilience. Specifically, it seeks to identify the barriers in U.S. French language education that limit economic benefits by assessing French language education initiatives in the U.S., Canada, and Germany to guide recommendations for improving resilience.

This study contributes to the existing discourse by highlighting the underexplored role of French language education in strengthening U.S. competitiveness in a globalized economy. While existing literature has examined the link between language proficiency and business development (Hogan-Brun, 2017), this research extends the conversation by demonstrating how French language education can positively affect economic outcomes.

The results present practical recommendations for legislators and educators to guide the creation of educational policies that enhance workforce skills and strengthen national resilience. This research establishes a blueprint for applying language education to address global economic difficulties, offering insights for both developing and developed countries aiming to enhance their economies through multilingualism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides a theoretical, conceptual, and contextual background for examining how French language education can enhance U.S. economic resilience.

Theoretical Frameworks on Language Proficiency and Economic Resilience

Economic resilience, which refers to the capacity to recover swiftly from economic shocks (dynamic resilience) and to reduce immediate production slowdowns (instantaneous resilience) (Hallegatte 2014), offers a framework to understand how language proficiency can mitigate economic disruptions. The Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF, 2022) claims that

multilingualism enhances trade networks by promoting cross-cultural communication and lowering transaction costs during "shocks." Byram and Wagner (2018) highlight the importance of intercultural skills, asserting that language abilities equip firms to efficiently navigate global markets, thereby improving instantaneous resilience.

According to human capital theory, proficiency in languages increases workforce productivity and adaptability, contributing to dynamic resilience. For instance, bilingual employees can transition to new markets, allowing economic activity to persist after disruptions.

Empirical Evidence on Economic Benefits of French Language Education

Empirical research highlights the economic advantages of French language proficiency, especially in trade and labor outcomes. Byram and Wagner (2018) discovered that language abilities help to overcome communication barriers in Francophone markets, reducing costs associated with trade negotiations and increasing the likelihood of contract success. Research indicates that bilingual French speakers enjoy employment benefits in sectors such as international business and diplomacy, with consistent wage premiums noted in developed economies (New America, 2019). French language skills are particularly sought after in industries like aerospace and luxury goods, where Francophone nations play a significant role.

Disparities in Language Education Systems Across Countries

Existing literature has shown differences in language education systems, with the U.S. lagging behind countries like Canada and Germany. Canada's bilingual initiatives, particularly in Quebec, emphasize French language education, which supports economic integration with Francophone markets (Canadian Parents for French, 2020). Germany's language programs, which are integrated into national curricula, focus on multilingualism as an avenue to enhance global competitiveness (Eurostat, 2025). Conversely, the U.S. does not have a national language policy, resulting in foreign language studies often being culturally and structurally deprioritized (France-Amérique, 2020). Research indicates that countries with mandated language education see higher proficiency rates, which improves workforce adaptability (OECD, 2023).

Gaps in Existing Literature

There is a notable absence of U.S.-specific research on the economic implications of French language education, especially regarding its contribution to increasing economic resilience through trade and workforce enhancements. While studies such as those by Byram and Wagner (2018) and OIF (2022) establish the economic importance of language proficiency, they tend to focus on multilingualism generally or on contexts within Europe and Canada, giving little attention to French in the United States. Comparative studies of language education systems (e.g., OECD, 2023) reveal disparities but seldom investigate the particular impact of French language education on economic resilience in the U.S. This research aims to fill this gap by presenting a focused, data-informed comparison to support recommendations relevant to the U.S.

METHODOLOGY

This study presents post-2015 secondary data to support a comparative study of French language education's role in enhancing economic resilience in the U.S., Canada, and Germany and is sourced from academic literature, government reports, trade statistics, workforce surveys, and international policy documents from 2015 to 2025. The comparative approach ensured methodological transparency and allowed for a comprehensive synthesis of existing research around the subject.

A detailed search was conducted across major academic databases—Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar—using relevant terms such as “language education,” “language proficiency,” “economic resilience,” and “French.”

These articles were selected for their relevance to French language education and economic resilience, focusing on verifiable metrics from the U.S., Canada, and Germany. Analysis involved descriptive statistics for quantitative metrics (e.g., trade volumes, enrollment rates) and qualitative comparisons for educational initiatives, ensuring consistent metrics across countries to facilitate objective comparative analysis.

Reliance on secondary data may limit primary insights, and differing currencies (USD, CAD, EUR) complicate direct comparisons of trade and funding, though native currencies ensure source accuracy. Data availability may not fully reflect 2025 trends.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This chapter synthesizes key findings from the literature into thematic areas that explain the economic benefits of French language education, challenges in U.S. French language education and French language education initiatives particularly through data obtained from the articles.

Economic Benefits of French Language Education

Proficiency in French boosts economic resilience by improving trade stability with Francophone markets, but the U.S. is falling behind Canada and Germany in capitalizing on these advantages. Francophone nations, which account for 25% of the global GDP, present considerable trading prospects (OIF, 2022). From 2015 to 2023, U.S. exports to these regions increased by 5% annually, primarily driven by the aerospace and luxury sectors (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2023). In contrast, Canada saw a 12% rise in exports to Francophone Africa between 2015 and 2020, thanks to its bilingual workforce (Statistics Canada, 2021). Despite currency differences (USD, CAD, Canada's 12% growth rate surpasses the U.S.'s 5%, demonstrating French proficiency's role in sustaining trade flows and enabling rapid market recovery, benefits underutilized in the U.S.

Prior findings further demonstrate that French language skills enhance workforce adaptability and contribute significantly to trade stability with Francophone countries, which are essential for sustaining economic resilience in globalized (Kolade *et al*, 2025; Dafong, Kolade & Thompson, 2025).

French proficiency significantly enhances workforce adaptability, contributing to economic resilience by enabling workers to navigate global labor markets and mitigate economic disruptions. In the U.S., 90% of employers rely on multilingual employees, with 25% of job postings in international business, diplomacy, and tourism requiring French, and bilingual workers earning a 5–20% wage premium, averaging up to \$8,000 annually (New America, 2019). In Canada, where French is recognized as an official language, 40% of job listings require French-speaking skills, and bilingual workers in trade industries enjoy a 10% higher employment rate along with a CAD 5,000 salary advantage (Statistics Canada, 2021). In Germany, French is regarded as a specialized skill, with only 1–2% of job openings asking for it, yet it provides a 13% wage increase (OECD, 2023; Glassdoor, 2025).

Comparative analysis does reveal that French proficiency expands job opportunities and income potential across diverse markets, with Canada's high demand (40%) and Germany's specialized roles contrasting the U.S.'s moderate 25% (Verbal Planet, 2023). These labor market advantages, such as higher employment rates, wage premiums, and access to global roles, demonstrate French proficiency in fostering resilience by enabling workforce flexibility and sustaining productivity during and after economic shocks, which necessitate French education.

Challenges in U.S. French Language Education

Barriers in U.S. French language education limit its potential to enhance economic resilience through trade stability and workforce adaptability. Only 20% of U.S. K-12 students (1.2 million) study a foreign language, with French enrollment declining 15% (2015–2020) and college programs dropping 10%, with 129 programs eliminated between 2016 and 2020 (American Councils, 2017; Modern Language Association, 2020). In contrast, 40% of Quebec students (400,000) engage in bilingual programs, and 15% of German students (1.2 million) study French (Statistics Canada, 2021; Jakub Marian, 2025). The U.S. has 10,000 French teachers, down 30% since 2000, compared to 25,000 in Canada and 12,000 in Germany, despite a larger population (National Foreign Language Center, 2016; Statistics Canada, 2021; OECD, 2023). U.S. funding for language education is \$150 million annually, versus CAD 500 million (\$400 million USD) in Canada and €400 million (\$472 million USD) in Germany (American Councils, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2021; OECD, 2023). Only 11 U.S. states mandate foreign language study, unlike Quebec's universal requirement or Germany's 80% student mandate (France-Amérique, 2020; Statistics Canada, 2021; OECD, 2023).

Despite differing currencies (USD, CAD, EUR), U.S. funding remains lower even after conversion, restricting French proficiency that Canada and Germany leverage for recovery (OIF, 2022; New America, 2019). The U.S.'s barriers—low enrollment (20% vs. 40% in Quebec, 15% in Germany), declining French programs (15% K-12, 10% college), teacher shortages (10,000 vs. 25,000 Canada, 12,000 Germany), and underfunding (\$150 million vs. \$400 million USD Canada, \$472 million USD Germany)—severely limit French proficiency compared to Canada and Germany. Canada's universal Quebec mandate and Germany's 80% requirement contrast with only 11

U.S. states mandating language study, reducing access. These gaps restrict trade stability (e.g., 25% global GDP markets) and workforce adaptability (e.g., up to \$8,000 premiums), which Canada and Germany leverage for instantaneous and dynamic resilience, highlighting the U.S.'s missed economic opportunities (OIF, 2022). Systemic barriers, including declining enrollment in French language programs and inadequate federal support, have been identified as key factors limiting the United States' ability to leverage French language skills for economic diplomacy (Kolade *et al.*, 2025; Dafong, Kolade & Thompson, 2025). These educational barriers are compounded by structural challenges in U.S.-Francophone trade relations, where diplomatic initiatives and economic programs face political and infrastructural hindrances, thereby limiting the U.S.'s capacity to leverage French language skills for economic diplomacy and commercial advantage (Dafong *et al.*, 2025).

Comparative Perspectives on French Language Education Initiatives

Canada and Germany's French language initiatives outpace the U.S., leveraging proficiency to enhance economic resilience through skilled workforces. Canada's 2 million bilingual students, including 450,000 in French immersion with 85% proficiency, supported by CAD 200 million, bolster trade and workforce adaptability (Statistics Canada, 2021; Canadian Parents for French, 2020). Germany's 80 bilingual Gymnasiums educate 100,000 students, with 15% (1.2 million) learning French, backed by €400 million, enabling robust trade contract success (Eurydice, 2024; OECD, 2023). In contrast, U.S. initiatives, like Alliance Française (25,000 students) and Louisiana's programs (10,000), are limited, with the National Security Language Initiative excluding French (OIF, 2022; American Councils, 2017). Canada and Germany's higher enrollment and funding foster French proficiency, enhancing instantaneous resilience by sustaining trade and workforce productivity and dynamic resilience by enabling rapid recovery, benefits the U.S. underutilizes.

Synthesis

French language proficiency significantly enhances economic resilience through trade stability and workforce adaptability, yet U.S. barriers limit its potential compared to Canada and Germany. Francophone markets, contributing 25% to global GDP, drive trade benefits, with Canada's 12% export growth (2015–2020) and Germany's 10% contract reliance (2022) outpacing the U.S.'s

5% growth (OIF, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2021; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2023). Workforce adaptability is bolstered by French proficiency, with Canada's 40% job posting demand and 10% higher employment rate contrasting the U.S.'s 25% and up to \$8,000 wage premium (Statistics Canada, 2021). U.S. barriers, low enrollment (1.2 million students, 15% decline), 10,000 teachers, and \$150 million funding versus Canada's \$400 million USD and Germany's \$472 million USD, restrict these benefits (American Councils, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2021). Canada's 2 million bilingual students and Germany's 1.2 million learners, supported by robust initiatives, enhance instantaneous resilience by sustaining trade and productivity and dynamic resilience by enabling recovery, opportunities the U.S. underutilizes due to systemic constraints.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance U.S. economic resilience through French language education, two recommendations can be made, drawing on Canada and Germany's models.

Increasing Federal Funding for K-12 French Programs

The United States must increase federal funding for K-12 French programs to \$500 million annually, modeled on Canada's CAD 500 million investment, which supports 2 million bilingual students (Statistics Canada, 2021). The U.S.'s current \$150 million allocation limits enrollment to 1.2 million students, compared to Canada's 400,000 in Quebec alone (American Councils for International Education, 2017). This funding, administered through Department of Education grants over five years, could train 5,000 new French teachers and increase enrollment by 10%, to boost trade stability significantly within Francophone markets.

Informed by the successes and limitations documented in U.S. economic diplomacy efforts within Francophone Africa, an integrated approach coupling language education enhancements with targeted diplomatic engagement offers a pathway to reinforce economic resilience and bilateral trade expansion (Dafong *et al.*, 2025).

Establishing Public-Private Partnerships for French Immersion Programs

The United States must establish public-private partnerships with firms like Airbus to fund French immersion programs in 100 U.S. high schools, inspired by Germany's 80 bilingual Gymnasiums

educating 100,000 students (Eurydice, 2024). Targeting regions with aerospace and automotive trade, this initiative could produce 50,000 French-proficient graduates annually within three years, using corporate tax incentives to offset costs, addressing the 65% of U.S. firms facing communication barriers (Byram & Wagner, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that French language education could enhance U.S. economic resilience, as it has in Canada and Germany. French proficiency unlocks access to Francophone markets, enhancing trade stability and enabling rapid recovery from economic shocks. It empowers workers to navigate global labor markets, securing employment and income advantages in diverse sectors. Through comparative analysis with Canada and Germany, the study identified significant gaps in U.S. language education policy and proposed practical recommendations. These findings are significant, as they shift the perspective on language education from merely a cultural benefit to an essential strategic resource for economic benefits and global competitiveness. More commitment from the U.S. to enhancing French language skills would enable the country to respond more effectively to global crises, increase trade opportunities with Francophone regions, and prepare its workforce for a more integrated economy.

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Source of support: Nil; **Conflict of interest:** Nil.

Cite this article as:

Azangeo, P. A., Kolade, K. and Djokoto, N. K. “Enhancing U.S. Economic Resilience through Strategic Language Education: The Case for French”. *Sarcouncil Journal of Education and Sociology* 4.10 (2025): pp 8-14.