

***Lingua Mortium?* The Case for Classical Language Studies**

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Latin and ancient Greek are arguably the cornerstones upon which modern society is built. The languages and cultures of the ancient Romans and Greeks have created systems, structures, and concepts that endure today. With modern applications from legal systems worldwide to education to medicine, it is very difficult to say that these societies of ages past have not had a marked impact on modern society. For hundreds of years, learning the languages of Latin and Greek was an accomplishment not only revered by society, but expected for those in pursuit of knowledge or higher learning. However, modern attitudes have since changed and since the 1970s, educational pursuit of Latin and Greek has decreased worldwide, particularly in the United States. This recent trend begs a new question: is learning Latin or Greek still relevant? Is there still space for a classical education in our rapidly modernizing society? The answers to these questions and their solutions are complicated and multifaceted. There are issues of classism and elitism intertwined with the glorification of classical languages in academia and the learning of these languages. However, because of the prevalence of Latin and Greek in English and other Romance languages and the academic advantage associated with learning one or both of the languages, there is still an argument to be made for the modern purpose of classical languages.

Research has shown that studying classical languages offers a modern learner the benefits of a better understanding of English and Romance languages. Dr. Lisa R. Holliday (2012) has written extensively about the benefits of learning Latin in her research. In her research, Holliday compares the results of a myriad of studies that sought to assess whether learning classical languages in some capacity could be linked to heightened skills in both English and related Romance languages such as French and Spanish as well as higher cognitive performance overall. Holliday then builds off of the research conclusions of these studies to build her own case for classical languages. Holliday concludes that learning Latin does indeed possess benefits outside

of simply knowledge of the language itself. Her research does support the idea that learning Latin has marked links to a better understanding of other Romance languages as well as better comprehension of the vocabulary and structures of the English language. However, it is important to note that the idea that Latin is linked to improved cognitive abilities in subjects such as mathematics and the sciences is not supported in all of the research used by Holliday and therefore she herself cannot support this conclusion. In addition to this study, Dr. Amanda Wall (2016) conducted a similar search into the effects of learning Latin and Greek on children in her own research. Wall administered “mini-lessons” of Latin and Greek morphemes to groups of middle school students, who were given vocabulary tests both before and after the lessons. The students that were taught the morphemes performed significantly better on the vocabulary tests and were even able to explain why they had an increased level of understanding of the constructions of the words they were tested on. In her article, Wall states that “as students move through middle grades and into high school, vocabulary demands increase” and therefore, they have a greater need for not only a knowledge but a full understanding of English vocabulary. Wall’s research and conclusion supports her idea that a familiarity with classical languages will lead to a better knowledge of English, as a significant amount of English words are sourced from Latin and Greek. The studies performed by both Holliday and Wall reach similar conclusions, as both support the idea that a knowledge of Latin or Greek, be it a formal study of the languages by learners as in Holliday’s research or in the form of short, less formal “mini-lessons” as in Wall’s research can yield significant positive results in a learner’s understanding of the English language.

Additionally, a study done by Amy C. Crosston of Penn State University and Debra Moore of the University of Pittsburgh (2017) shows that learning Latin and Greek roots can also

be helpful for students seeking to learn English. Crosston and Moore designed a study to more thoroughly examine the effects of a vocabulary education that included morphological lessons into the subject material on students of three separate grade level bands. They compared these results to those attained in a separate lesson that did not include a morphological component, which they also conducted. Across the three grade bands, which were middle schoolers, grades 9-10, and grades 11-12, they found that the students that participated in the morphological lessons showed stronger English and vocabulary skills than those that had traditional lessons that did not include the morphological component. Additionally, they found that students in the band of grades 11-12 were the most significantly affected by the lessons and showed the most improvement against the English learners in the non-morphological group. Crosston and Moore's study shows that a better understanding of English, which is a benefit of Latin and Greek study as discussed in the previously aforementioned studies of Holliday and Wall, is not only effective in those that already know English but also those who are in the process of learning English. All studies showed that learning Latin and Greek had a positive effect on a learner's understanding of English, and some of the studies cited within Holliday's article correlated knowledge of Latin and Greek with higher academic performance overall. With the results of the studies of Holliday, Wall, and Crosston and Moore in mind, a strong case can be made for the enduring purpose of learning classical languages in the modern day.

Classical languages are also disproportionately utilized in academic research as well as both classic and modern literature. Holliday and Wall both note separately in their research that Latin and Greek words and modern English words that have Latin and Greek roots are used profusely in academia and that student success in academia is heightened when a student has a working knowledge of the languages. Additionally, Henryk Hoffmann (2023), a professor at

Jagiellonian University in Poland, describes in his book the instances where popular academic and philosophical author Aldous Huxley utilizes the Latin language in his work. Hoffmann's purpose is "to prove Latin's enduring "vitality" and importance by demonstrating how ubiquitous, conspicuous and "strong" it still is in modern Western culture." This chapter on Huxley is an excerpt from his book *Latin in Modern Fiction: Who Says It's a Dead Language?*, in which Hoffmann conducts a similar analysis of Latin used in literature using many other popular and influential authors including F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Steinbeck. In this specific chapter on Huxley, Hoffmann offers a comprehensive breakdown of Latin words and structures found in some of Huxley's works and explains them. After listing and explaining them, he concludes that "the Latin references encountered in his superior prose-numerous, diverse and insightful- constitute a significant contribution to the thesis that Vergil's language is far from being dead". This analysis by Hoffmann asserts the continued necessity of and use for classical languages, especially when studying and interacting with English literature. The emphasis on English literature connects to the work of Holliday and Wall, who both conclude that a knowledge of Latin leads to a better understanding of English.

Despite the benefits to learning Latin and Greek, there are also inherent complications with studying classical languages. One such issue is that of classism, which has permeated the study of classics for centuries and continues to endure. In their study, Drs. Jürgen Gerhards, Ulrich Kohler, and Tim Sawert studied the socioeconomic status and social activity of German families that made the decision to enroll their elementary and middle school-aged children in Latin language courses. They found that those parents that chose for their child to learn Latin nearly always reported both being college educated. The families also participated in social activities such as opera and ballet performances, markers of both higher social standing and

higher monetary earning. These parents were in stark comparison to families that had a lower household income, who did not often participate in social outings that correlated with higher social standing and were either not college educated or had a lower level of college education. These families more often reported wanting their child to learn a language with more of a modern practical application, with that language most often being Spanish, French, or English. Therefore, in this case, the study of Latin has become a new marker of social status, as those of a higher socioeconomic status will have the luxury of studying a language that arguably has less of a practical application than that of the modern languages most often taught in schools. Latin then becomes a new signifier of the division between socioeconomic classes which therefore makes it a class issue. In addition to the work of Gerhards et al., Ariana Traill of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign addresses this issue in her article, which is a review of the various ways Latin education is being approached both inside and outside of the traditional classroom. Traill addressed the reasons that classical language education has been opposed, stating that “the problems (with classics) are familiar: determined political opposition, charges of elitism-“that Classics has always been for 'toffs'," (Beard, xv)-or mere irrelevance. Classically educated politician, and now prime minister, Boris Johnson has given some of these myths new currency, famously disparaging Classical Civilization as not "crunchy" enough as a subject (Hunt, 16).” Traill then discusses in her article the new ways that classical education and languages are being taught on a global scale. Many of these new methods included those now available to low income students, as inexpensive or free classes for low income learners have been implemented in a variety of areas worldwide. However, they still require outside funding and sponsorship, which means the languages can still be inaccessible to many. The classes for low income learners are often privately sponsored through nearby universities, where the funds are generous but can

be limited. Cited in her article are the efforts of the University of Sao Paulo, which sponsors a Latin program at a nearby school. Although the program has been both successful and effective with students, it admittedly has a limited reach as the classes are confined to the students within that particular school. This shows that the accessibility of engaging with classical studies can be an issue of class. Many prospective learners of classical languages will be excluded either due to monetary reasons or the issues presented by the inherent academic elitism found in the formal study of these languages. The research of Gerhards et al. as well as Traill show that although learning classical languages has benefits, there are issues of accessibility that can affect learners and must be recognized.

Despite the accessibility issues involved with the study of classical languages, there is still a future for Latin and Greek in the modern world. It is important to first acknowledge the current state of classical language engagement, specifically in the United States. United States interest in the Latin language has been steadily decreasing since the 1970's. The National K-12 Foreign Language Enrollment Survey Report offers statistical insight into the specific numbers of Latin language learners in the United States. The report is conducted by The American Councils for International Education, a nonprofit organization that works closely with institutions of higher learning worldwide and works to promote interest in languages and cultural research. The statistical survey begins with reporting the number of language learners in the K-12 population by state. It then conducts a comprehensive breakdown of enrollment in foreign languages nationwide, ranging from the commonly taught languages to those with very little national enrollment. The survey reports a small nationwide population of Latin learners at 210,306 out of an overall group of 7,363,125 students in 2017. This equates to roughly 2.9% of K-12 language enrollment being composed of students that are actively learning Latin in school.

The survey also reports that Latin is expected to experience an overall decrease in enrollment at -0.66% as programs across the United States are being terminated. Nationwide, only one K-8 school reported having an ancient Greek program. These statistics reflect the worries shown in Holliday's research, where she states that interest and enrollment in Latin is dwindling. Despite the falling numbers of Latin learners, new programs offer renewed hope for classical languages. Although Traill recognizes the issues of classism and elitism in her article, she also provides examples of modern classical education that offer a hopeful future for the subject. Although the privately funded programs discussed in her article have a limited reach, they are also only the first steps towards making classical languages more attainable. Also mentioned in Traill's article are the University of Swansea, which provides short Latin classes in public parks at one British pound each, and Oxford University, which hosts Saturday Latin classes for children from low income households. Although these programs currently only affect the communities they are based in, they offer a model for similar programs as well as a direction towards a hopeful future for classical languages. Traill also notes that programs involving Latin and Greek need not be confined to a formal study of the languages. She describes instances in which individual teachers or schools have incorporated small Latin and Greek vocabulary lessons into the curriculum and the effects this can have on a renewed interest in the languages as well as student understanding of related subjects.

The continued use of Latin and ancient Greek in academia and literature as well as their important role as the roots of modern English and Romance languages constitutes not only a modern use but a need for the languages. Despite the socio-economic barriers that face potential learners, there is still a hopeful future for classical language learning today.



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