



U.S. Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning¹

Culture and Language Survey: Importance of Culture vs. Language

Purpose and Method

Over the past few years, the Department of Defense, along with numerous other organizations, has sought to evaluate the success and value of the different military services' culture and language learning programs. In order to provide some concrete measures assessing Marine Corps culture and language learning programs, the U.S. Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL) sent out a survey to 15% of all Marines with email addresses on the Marine Corps Global Address List during February 2010, excluding general officers. CAOCL received 2406 valid responses from Marines, representing all 42 military occupational specialties, all ranks, and all educational levels.² Of the respondents, 83% had been deployed at least once in the past four years, and 20% were currently deployed. Comparisons of the survey demographics to data on the Marine Corps indicate that respondents are representative of the Marine Corps with the exception of the lowest ranks.³

Findings: Culture versus Language

The majority of Marines in the survey responded that cultural and language capabilities were important to operational effectiveness. However, cultural capabilities were rated as more important than language skills (high statistical significance, $p < .000$).⁴

For those Marines who had received predeployment cultural and language training in the past four years, 81% said that their cultural training had made them more operationally effective; 71% responded that their language training had made them more operationally effective.⁵ Again, more Marines said cultural training contributed to operational effectiveness than language training (high statistical significance, $p < .000$).⁶ Similarly, Marines who had deployed to a Named Operation in the past four years stated that they used cultural knowledge more frequently than language skills in their area of operations (high statistical significance $p < .000$).⁷

Policy Implications

Marines in the survey viewed both cultural and language capabilities as important. However, they consistently ranked cultural capabilities as more important to mission effectiveness than language skills. The *Marine Corps Language, Regional and Culture Strategy: 2011-2015*, dated 13 January 2011, aligns with the data in the survey.

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² General officers were intentionally excluded from the population.

³ Because Privates (E-1s), Privates First Class (E-2s) and Second Lieutenants (O-1s) do not always have addresses on the Global Address List, these ranks are underrepresented in the data. As young Marines new to the Corps, these ranks are unlikely to have deployed in the past four years.

⁴ Paired-sample t-test, $N=2384$, on a scale from 1 (not at all important) to 4 (very important), mean ranking of culture was 3.25 and of language was 3.09.

⁵ Of those Marines who had deployed in the past four years, 83% had received cultural training, and 55% had received language training.

⁶ Paired-sample t-test, $N=858$, binary (0, 1); mean ranking of culture was .87 and of language was .71.

⁷ Paired-sample t-test, $N=1556$, on a scale from 1 (never) to 4 (always), mean ranking of culture was 2.4 and of language was 2.0.