
Reasons to continue learning Latin

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For these reasons you should continue to learn Latin

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<https://p.dw.com/p/4UWK4>

"Carpe diem" is a popular maxim in Latin that literally means in Spanish "Cultivate the day", refers to that we must "Take advantage of each day" Imagen: Gunter Kirsch/Zoonar/picture alliance

In a globalized world, foreign language proficiency is increasingly important and taken for granted. However, secondary school pupils still often choose Latin, a "dead" language, because no one speaks it anymore, i.e. there are no "native speakers".

But interest in Latin is waning across the country. While in 2008 more than 830,000 young people across Germany were still learning Latin in school, in 2021/22 they were only 539,000 out of 8.44 million, or 6.4% of Germany's pupils. By comparison, around 1.5 million pupils learn French across the country.

Professor Stefan Freund is president of the German Association of Classical Philologists (DAV), the professional association of Latin and Greek in schools and universities, and teaches Latin at the Bergische Universität Wuppertal.

DW: Is Latin a "dead" language?

Stefan Freund: Latin is a living look at the past and the workings of the language.

What is the argument for continuing to learn Latin today?

The teaching of Latin imparts skills that can be applied throughout life to try and learn other foreign languages, which remain valid. While modern foreign language teaching focuses on communication, Latin classes focus on linguistic reflection: How is Latin different from German? How do you change words and formulate certain statements in certain situations?

Latin is the common "influencer" not "mother" of the Romance language family (French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian) and the origin of many English words (language, computer, artificial intelligence...) some of them indirectly.

In Germany some students choose Latin instead of French or Spanish, for example. Is this due to the insistence of their parents or because they already have their sights set on a specific field of study?

We can only speculate on the motives of the students. Four points are probably relevant: a general interest in history and mythology and an approach to language, more through reflection and analysis than direct communication.

In addition, a study or career perspective for which Latin seems useful; And teachers, who are on average quite young, know the critical opinion that the public, parents and students have of their subject and therefore attach great importance to attractive teaching that has nothing to do with compulsory learning.

For what careers and professions is Latin useful in Germany or even an essential requirement?

In any case, it is useful for many subjects: history, philosophy, theology, Romance studies, law (Roman law), medicine (history of medicine, terminology), pharmacy (terminology), linguistics, all the (sub)disciplines that (also) deal with the period before 1750 or so and the European level: history of music, art, science, ecclesiastical history, Local history...

When did Latin begin to lose importance?

Until the eighteenth century, Latin was the most common language in which newly published books were printed. Vast reserves of knowledge are only accessible with knowledge of Latin, since only a tiny part of these neo-Latin texts has been translated.