

Universities blame 'societal shift' for axing foreign language degrees

Level 3: Advanced

Article summary: This article discusses how foreign language studies are changing in the UK. Many universities are ending foreign language degree programmes or closing entire language departments. At the same time, more and more young people are using online apps to study one or more foreign languages in their own time.

Time: 60 minutes

Skills: Reading, Speaking, Writing

Language focus: Adjectives in academic contexts

Materials needed: One copy of the worksheet per student

Key:

1. *pipeline*
2. *substitute*
3. *crisis*
4. *shift*
5. *barrier*
6. *elite*
7. *domain*
8. *vital*
9. *driven*
10. *prolific*
11. *Iberian*
12. *nuances*
13. *plummet*
14. *axe*
15. *shortsighted*

1. Warmer

- a. The purpose of this activity is to encourage students to think about the reasons people choose to study (or not study) foreign languages. Have students work in small groups to discuss the questions. Then invite volunteers to share their answers with the class. Take a poll to see how many people had similar answers. Do your students have the same reasons for studying English? Are they interested in any other languages?

2. Key words

- a. Ask students to work individually or in pairs to complete the definitions and then find the words in the article. Tell students that some words may appear in a different form in the article. Allow a few minutes for students to check answers in pairs or groups before checking answers with the whole class.

- b. Ask students to work individually or in pairs to complete the sentences using the words from the previous activity. Encourage students to read complete sentences to you when they give answers so that you can check their pronunciation of the key words.

Key:

1. *barrier*
2. *plummet*
3. *nuances*
4. *Iberian*
5. *shift*
6. *elite*
7. *pipeline*
8. *shortsighted*
9. *axe*
10. *domains*

- c. Ask students to work individually or in pairs to write their own sentences with the remaining vocabulary items. Encourage students to read complete sentences to you when they give answers so that you can check their pronunciation of the key words.

Key:

Students' own answers using crisis, driven, prolific, substitute, vital.

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3. Comprehension check

- a. Students can work individually or in pairs to do this activity. Encourage students to underline the section in the article where they found the answers. Remind them that if they can't find the information in the article, then they should circle *Not mentioned*. Check answers as a class. Compare the ways students corrected the false sentences. Is there more than one way to correct any of the sentences? To extend, have students quiz each other on other true and false statements about the article.

Key:

1. *False – UK universities are cutting language programmes and departments.*
2. *Not mentioned*
3. *False – Young people spend more time on language learning apps.*
4. *False – Apps are not a substitute for language degrees, people need to connect in ways that translation tools can't manage.*
5. *False – Duolingo is very concerned about the popularity of language degrees, they sponsored a report about the "language crisis" in universities.*
6. *False – the UK does not have a national strategy for language learning.*
7. *Not mentioned*
8. *True*
9. *True*
10. *True*

4. Key language

- a. Tell students that the adjectives in the list are often used in academic contexts. They can describe fields of study, people like students and professors, literature, research or other aspects of academic life. Ask students to work individually or in pairs to find the words in the article and then complete the definitions. Allow a few minutes for students to check answers in pairs or groups before checking answers with the whole class.

Key:

1. *d*
2. *a*
3. *f*
4. *c*
5. *e*
6. *h*
7. *g*
8. *b*

- b. Ask students to work individually or in pairs to write their own sentences with the adjectives from the previous activity. Remind students to use an academic context – they can talk about things they've studied, people they went to school with or ideas they are interested in. Encourage volunteers to share their example sentences with the class.

5. Discussion

- a. Students discuss the questions in pairs or groups. Ask them to justify their opinions, referring to their own experiences or beliefs whenever possible. Invite volunteers to share their answers with the class. To extend, ask students to share what they learned from discussing the questions with their classmates.

6. In your own words

- a. The purpose of this activity is to encourage students to reflect on what they learned in the article and how it could relate to their own lives. Tell students to imagine that their university has decided to eliminate all foreign language learning programmes, including English. If they are current students, they can talk about the university they are attending now. Alternatively, students can talk about a university they attended in the past or would like to attend in the future. Have students write a persuasive letter to the head of the university. They need to explain why the university should not eliminate the foreign language programmes. Remind students that persuasive letters include evidence.

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This means students need to include specific examples to explain why it's important to keep the language learning programmes. Tell students that it's important to be polite and respectful in their letters.

- b. Have students share their letters with a partner. Tell partners to give feedback about the ways the students can improve their letters, like adding more examples or using more descriptive language. Give students a chance to edit their own letters based on their partner's feedback. Then ask volunteers to read their letters aloud to the class. After students read their letters aloud, offer praise on at least one thing they did well in the letter.