

Universities blame 'societal shift' for axing foreign language degrees

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

a. People study languages for many reasons. Why do you study English?

☐ I want to do well in school.

☐ I want to get a good job.

☐ I want to travel to different countries.

☐ I want to learn about different cultures.

☐ I want to make new friends.

☐ I want to _____.

2 Key words

a. Choose the correct word to match each definition. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

Iberian

attractive

foreign

awareness

intellectual

1. from a different country or culture _____

2. interesting, enjoyable or pleasing _____

3. knowing or understanding something _____

4. related to intellect, or intelligence _____

5. related to Spain and Portugal _____

societal

multiple

shift

passion

strategy

6. a formal plan of action for a long period of time _____

7. a small move or change in something _____

8. related to society or people in a community _____

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9. strong excitement, interest or emotion _____
10. when there are two or more of the same thing _____

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity.

1. Most chefs have a(n) _____ for food and drinks.
2. Professor Rose is an interesting and _____ person
3. It's important to have _____ of issues like climate change.
4. Business students learn about marketing and _____.
5. I went on holiday to the _____ Peninsula.
6. She has _____ copies of her favourite book.
7. A career in professional sport is _____ to some teens.
8. If the community members work together, they can solve many _____ problems.
9. Andy loves to watch _____ films in the cinema.
10. People's interests and values _____ when they get older.

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Richard Adams
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- 1 Universities say a "societal shift" caused them to remove foreign language degrees and departments. They say there aren't enough students who want to study languages. Can years of study be replaced by AI or online translation tools?
- 2 No, says Michael Lynas, the UK director for the Duolingo language app.
- 3 "There's good cultural reasons to learn languages – the UK is part of a global world. There's a need to connect with other people in ways that translation tools can't do.
- 4 Information from Duolingo shows that UK users are more likely to learn multiple languages than people in other countries. People aged under 22 are the biggest group of app users.
- 5 We know there is a problem with formal language education, but it's not because young people aren't interested," Lynas said.
- 6 Megan Bowler is a student and lecturer at Oxford. She said that there is no national strategy in place to protect these important subjects.
- 7 "University language students are creative thinkers".
- 8 "These skills and intellectual values are now even more important in the age of AI."
- 9 Over the past five years, nearly 50 centres of French, German, Italian and Iberian studies closed or got smaller. Places like Nottingham University and Leicester University may close language departments.
- 10 Hannah Sutcliffe graduated from Leicester with a degree in Spanish and French. She said the languages, cultural awareness and critical thinking she developed are very important to her career.
- 11 In the past 30 years the students taking A-level French decreased from 30,000 to below 10,000. German decreased from 10,000 to about 2,000 each year.
- 12 Only Spanish made improvement. There are also small increases in other languages like Chinese. Fewer students now study languages at A-level and university.
- 13 Dr Emma Staniland is a lecturer in Spanish studies at Leicester.
- 14 "Students who come to university to study languages have a passion for it. In the future, it may be impossible for most students to choose language degrees. Modern language degrees will be for only rich people."
- 15 Dr Maite Usoz de la Fuente also lectures in Spanish at Leicester University. She said Brexit also made studying languages less attractive because it removed career options in Brussels, Paris and the rest of the EU.
- 16 "The people who come to study foreign languages with us want a degree that's going to allow them to work internationally."

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Glossary

A-Levels: Secondary school studies in the UK – Students start aged 16, before they go to university

Brexit: The UK's official exit from the European Union in 2020

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3 Comprehension check

a. Decide if the statements are True or False.

1. UK universities added many more foreign language programmes. _____
2. Translation apps are the best way to connect to other people. _____
3. People over 40 are the biggest users of Duolingo apps in the UK. _____
4. The UK has a national strategy for language learning. _____
5. In the last five years, almost 50 language centres closed. _____
6. The number of students taking French in the UK has decreased. _____
7. University language students have a passion for learning. _____
8. Brexit made UK students less interested in learning foreign languages. _____

4 Key language

a. Read the sentences below from the article. Then choose the correct options.

Fewer students now study languages at A-level and university.

She said Brexit also made studying languages less attractive ...

1. We use **fewer** / **less** to make comparisons with nouns we can count:

Lin has ... books than Marta.

2. We use **fewer** / **less** to make comparisons with adjectives:

History is ... interesting than science.

b. Write **less** or **fewer** to complete the comparisons.

1. I have _____ classes than my sister.
2. There are _____ teachers than students in this school.
3. Language learning apps are _____ exciting than video games.
4. We visited _____ countries than our neighbours.

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5. The dictionary is _____ expensive than the phone.
6. Koalas are _____ intelligent than monkeys.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

1. Are you surprised universities are ending language studies in the UK? Why?
2. How do you prefer to learn English – in a classroom, with an app or in a different way?
3. Can a language app help you understand a foreign culture? Why? Why not?
4. Why do you think Spanish and Chinese are popular with students?

6 In your own words

- a. Imagine that you made a new friend online. Your friend is starting university in the UK next year. They need to decide if they should study a foreign language at university. Write a letter to your friend. Explain why it's a good idea to study a language. You can tell them why you study English. You can also suggest which language you think they should study.
- b. Share your letter with a partner. Practise reading it aloud. Then read the letter to your class.