

A Qualitative Study of Students' Perceived Benefits and Disadvantages of Requiring Foreign Language Courses in Undergraduate Degree Programs

Doyoun Kwon¹, Xiaozhou Zhang² & Kimberly A. Noels¹

1. Psychology Department, University of Alberta;
2. Educational Psychology Department, University of Alberta

Introduction

According to recent studies, obtaining a degree and certificate are not enough for newly-graduated students in the labour market. A specific study in Hungary stated that graduate job applicants had a better chance of tackling the rising unemployment rate if they fluently speak foreign language(s) (Szucs et al., 2014). This study also recommends universities and colleges to modify the language teaching strategy. However, another study revealed that many students in compulsory language learning courses got lower than average levels of achievement and persistence (Cox, 2012). On the one hand, language requirements seem to be needed for students to be prepared after their education is completed, but on the other hand, mandatory force of these teachings seem to counteract this purpose.

Research Question

As part of a larger study of students' perceptions of language requirements, the present study is going to investigate the current profile of language requirement, and to see the advantages and disadvantages of foreign language requirements in Canadian universities from students' perspectives.

Methods

Participants

The participants for this study included 326 students, where 68.1% are female.

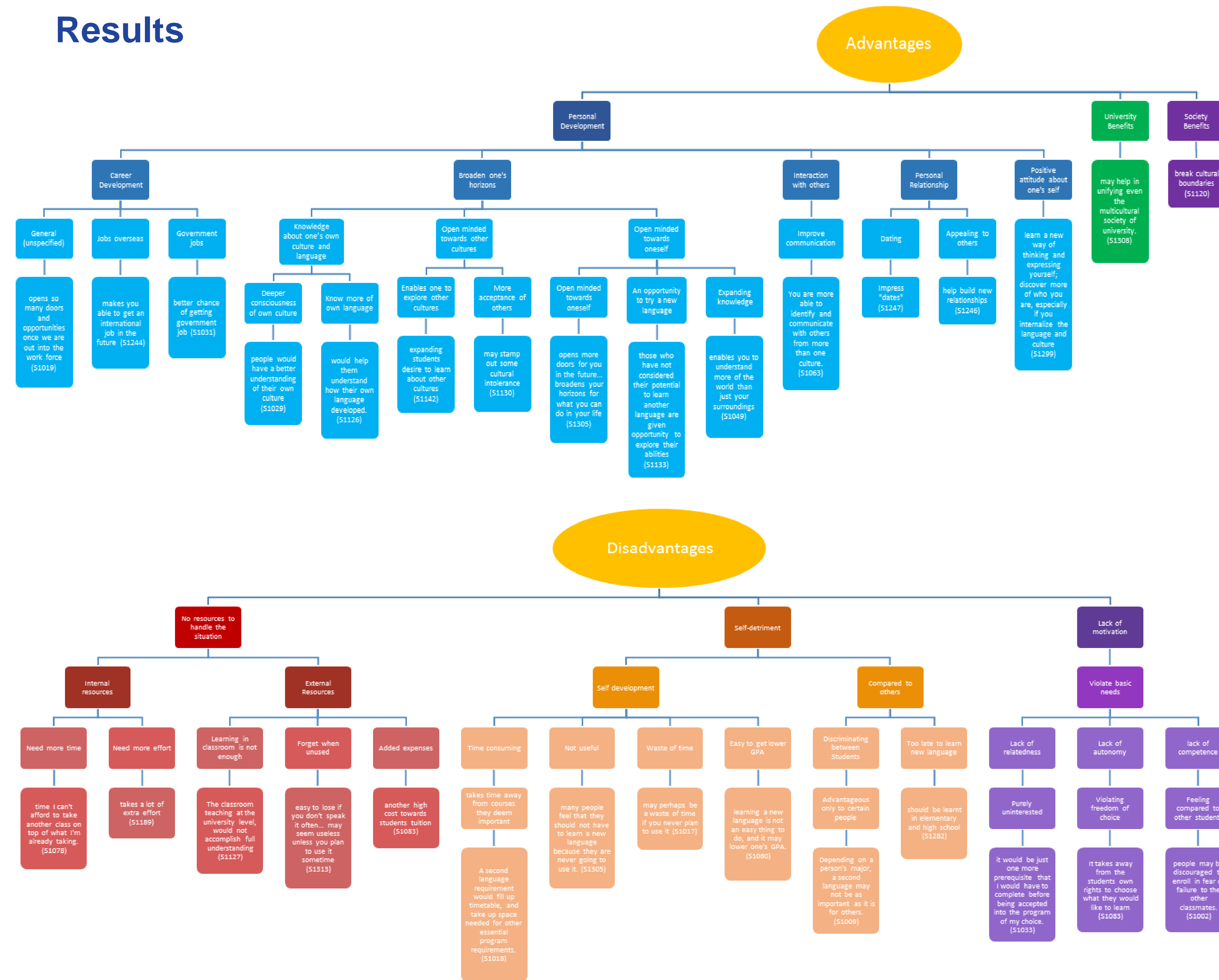
The student participants encompassed various departments such as humanities (14.6%), social sciences (19.5%), fine arts (5.6%), natural sciences and engineering (31.9%), and other (28.5%).

Procedures

The participants completed two open ended questions:

1. What are the advantages of mandatory foreign language course?
2. What are the disadvantages of mandatory foreign language course?

Results



- Results highlight the importance of the self, especially in the advantages section. This suggests that personal improvement is a major motivator one utilizes when learning a foreign language.
- The disadvantages responses reveal mixed reasons of self-detriment, lack of motivation, and a lack of resources, revealing that students may feel they are not ready for a mandatory language course, or have no use for learning a language.
- The difference between the two is that advantages rely heavily on internal self-concept, while disadvantages have external factors of one's self that plays an important role.

Conclusion

- Results show both external and internal reasons why one would assess mandatory language learning as advantageous or disadvantageous.
- Most of the students had both positive and negative perceptions about language requirement, implying that if a new school policy was implicated, there would no definitive prediction of where they would stand against this change.
- Future school policy should provide enough information and resources for students to handle the disadvantages before implementing mandatory language courses in the future.

References

- Szucs, R. S., Mate, Z., Laszlo, E., Foldi, K., & Mommertz, S. (2014). An examination of language requirements for newly-graduated students by quantitative research. *European Scientific Journal*, (34), 390-406.
- Cox, S. J. (2012). *Mandatory Second Language Learning in Post-Secondary Education: The Role of the Ideal Self and Imagery in Motivation and Achievement* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest, (ED552271)