

19 - Exploring factors impacting university beginners' motivation to continue language learning: Survey insights

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Abstract

Following a restructure of the landscape of higher education at a university in Singapore, many departments experienced a significant transformation. In a department offering foreign language courses, thirteen foreign languages have been mainly offered as electives to students at the university for over 20 years. As part of efforts to further develop these language programmes as well as improve retention rates, a survey was conducted over a period of 2 semesters in AY2023/2024 to better understand the motivations of beginner language learners. The results revealed what students considered to be motivating factors for them to take up foreign language courses. They also revealed some common challenges faced by students, including some learning difficulties and restrictions at the institutional level. A few of these challenges were found to negatively influence the retention rates of students. Implications on language course design, pedagogy and policy making at the university level will be discussed in this paper.

Keywords: motivation, language retention, beginner learners, university language courses, foreign language programs

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a decline in the number of foreign language learners among university students in countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, leading to the gradual closure of some university foreign language programs and departments.

According to a report by the Modern Language Association of America (Lusin, et al., 2023), since 2009, enrolment in language courses has decreased year by year for most languages, except for a few like Korean. This decline includes previously stable language programs such as French, German, Spanish, and Chinese. In UK universities, the number of students studying foreign languages has dropped by 54% over the past decade, with 10 universities closing their modern language

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departments and another 9 significantly downsizing them (Kenny & Barnes, 2019). In several universities in Australia and New Zealand, at least 9 language programs have ceased the courses since 2020 (Miller & Neigert, 2024).

This phenomenon raises concerns about whether the young generation has lost interest in learning foreign languages. However, market data suggests the opposite.

According to a report by Global Market Insights (2024), the foreign language learning market was valued at \$52.7 billion in 2023 and is expected to exceed \$300 billion by 2032, with the largest growth in the market for the 18-20 age group.

A report by HolonIQ (2021, 2023) indicates that the global direct-to-customer language learning market was \$60 billion in 2021 and is projected to double by 2025. Certain languages, such as Chinese, have a market value of \$7.4 billion, which is expected to double by 2029.

Official figures from individual countries also show an upward trend in foreign language learners. According to the report by the Instituto Cervantes (2020), the number of Spanish foreign language learners increased by 60% in the past 10 years. France's foreign ministry reported a growth of the number of French learners worldwide from 120 million in 2014 to 132 million in 2024, although the number in the UK and US is declining (Jones, 2024). According to the Ministry of Education of China (2021) and a report on China Daily (Wang & Zhou, 2023) the number of people learning Chinese outside China increased from 20 million in 2020 to 30 million in 2023.

Clearly, the decline in foreign language learners among university students stands in stark contrast to the optimistic global outlook and growth in language learning. What are the underlying reasons for this disparity? Current discussions primarily focus on two aspects: economic factors and administrative/policy factors. (e.g. Coda, et al. 2022)

These reasons are certainly important, but many frontline language teachers are eager to know what they can do to help mitigate the decline in university foreign language learners.

The Centre for Language Studies at the National University of Singapore offers 13 languages as elective courses, ranging from beginner to advanced levels. Over the past decade, both the number of language courses and student enrolment have increased. However, we have also observed a decline in the number of students continuing to more advanced courses after completing introductory ones. Given the global trend of decreasing language programs and enrolment numbers, we are concerned about the declining student retention rates in university foreign language courses and hope to take actions to improve these rates.

From an educator's perspective, we are most interested in understanding the factors that encourage or hinder university beginner foreign language learners from progressing to the next level of courses. By identifying these factors, we can make timely adjustments to beginner language instruction to retain students who might otherwise discontinue.

A few teachers who continue to teach the second level occasionally hear from students about their reasons for not progressing. Commonly mentioned reasons include scheduling conflicts, heavy coursework in their major, participation in study abroad programs, and some students expressing concern about poor grades. However, we cannot draw any conclusions from such anecdotal information. Even if we are able track down all students who have chosen not to continue their foreign language studies and ask them directly about their reasons, we are uncertain whether they would feel comfortable answering such questions.

Therefore, we came up with the idea of conducting an anonymous survey among students currently enrolled in beginner courses, asking them if they wish to continue to the next level and what their reasons are. To support this initiative, we have reviewed relevant literature on foreign language learning motivation.

2. Literature Review

In the past few decades, foreign language learning motivation has been thoroughly and widely discussed. The most well-known theories of foreign language learning motivation include the Socio-Educational Model (Gardner, 1988) and the L2 Motivational Self System (Dornyei, 2009). Empirical research inspired by these models primarily explores which motivational factors contribute to successful foreign language learning (e.g., Hernández, 2006).



The specific context of this study is the decline in university foreign language course enrolment and retention rates since the 21st century. We are particularly interested in understanding which motivational factors drive university students to continue studying foreign language courses of the next level when they have the option to choose otherwise. We believe it is essential to focus on reviewing the most relevant research literature from recent years, specifically regarding the reasons university students choose to learn foreign languages in the 21st century.

Gallagher-Brett (2004) conducted a study through surveys and focus group discussions with British university foreign language learners at different levels to identify the reasons they choose to study foreign languages, which included personal satisfaction, travel, career, future study, communication, culture, and social purposes.

Demers (2009) interviewed 33 Canadian university students learning different foreign languages at various levels, finding that their motivations included interest in the language, living and working abroad, academic requirements, a desire to maintain a language learned in high school, communicating with family, and preserving their heritage language.

Hertzler and Halling (2011) surveyed 100 U.S. college students in French courses at all levels, asking why they chose to learn the French courses. Their reasons included a love for the French language and culture, academic and employment benefits, family heritage, and suitable course schedule.

These studies provide insights into the overall motivations of university students for choosing to learn foreign languages. However, the data and discussions cover learners at various levels and do not distinguish between the initial motivations for choosing to study foreign languages at university and the motivations for continuing to the next level courses after completing beginner levels. In fact, there is relatively little research on the latter, but those that do exist are more in-depth and offer greater value for our study.

Chua and Azlan (2019) interviewed 11 students taking level 2 Mandarin courses in a Malaysian university, the findings showing learners were motivated to continue learning due to the advantage in employability, increased interest and grades in their level 1 learning.

Smith (2009) collected data from seven students from American university learning intermediate and advanced Spanish and Russian through surveys and interviews. The study found that students' motivation to continue studying a foreign language into advanced levels evolves over time. However, having a long-term goal motivates learners to persist, as these goals can diminish the negative impact of short-term difficulties in workload and performance. The development and refinement of long-term goals are supported by increased knowledge and interest in the language and culture during the learning process, improvements in academic performance, and the motivation derived from completing manageable tasks. Additionally, developing linguistic awareness can lead to positive language transfer. Furthermore, helping students recognize the practical value of what they are learning—such as opportunities to interact with native speakers, participate in immersion programs, and engage in simulated scenarios created by teachers—enhances their commitment to advancing their language studies.

Awad (2018) interviewed four students enrolled in advanced foreign language courses at American universities and identified factors that encourage them to continue studying foreign languages, including: the enjoyment of classroom learning, support from teachers and family members, flexibility and enrichment in the curriculum provided by teachers, a desire to apply their skills in the target language community, and an understanding of the target culture and current events.

Matsumoto and Obana (2001) surveyed 245 Japanese learners at three universities in Australia and found that learners choosing to study intermediate courses had a diminished interest in Japanese business compared to beginner students. Instead, they became more interested in specific language system elements, such as grammar and vocabulary. When they recognized the differences between Japanese and their native language and had successful experiences interacting with native speakers, it motivated them to continue learning. In contrast, beginner students, due to their limited knowledge, often struggled to find joy in learning the language system and faced challenges in smooth communication with native speakers. As a result, they tended to view learning Japanese as merely an academic subject, making them more susceptible to the difficulties of specific learning tasks (such as kanji) and their academic performance, which could lead to dropping out. This study also found that

effective teacher support and an enjoyable classroom atmosphere could influence students who initially did not plan to continue their studies to reconsider and choose to enrol in intermediate courses, even if their grades were not very high. The researchers concluded that, compared to other university courses, the impact of teachers and class dynamics in foreign language courses is much stronger. Teachers can help students broaden their diverse learning interests and goals, moving beyond limited language knowledge and academic performance, thereby increasing enjoyment and retention rates.

Although the studies on university students' motivations to continue foreign language courses are few, they provide direct insights for our research. However, they involve a limited range of languages, small sample sizes, and lack data from Asian universities, as well as quantitative analysis results to corroborate their findings.

Moreover, previous research primarily focused on intermediate and advanced foreign language learners, while our urgent challenge lies in the fact that beginner learners have the lowest retention rates. Studies have also shown that beginners are more likely to give up language learning than intermediate learners (Matsumoto & Obana, 2001). Therefore, we designed a quantitative study targeting beginner foreign language learners at the National University of Singapore.

Our exploratory research question is:

- 1) Among the many reported potential factors, are there any that significantly influence the decision of beginner learners across language programs at the National University of Singapore to continue learning the next level of the language course?
- 2) If yes, what are the factors, and how do their influences differ?

3. Methodology

3.1 Instrument

We designed an online questionnaire divided into two parts.

The first part relates to the participants' background information, including gender, age, faculty in the university, year level, program level (undergraduate, postgraduate, alumni, exchange), personal interests, intended work industry, first language, second language, course load, and the Level 1 language course they are currently studying. To ensure anonymity, we do not collect participants' names or contact information, and the online questionnaire does not require login or identity verification.

The second part focuses on participants' foreign language learning experiences, including the reasons they chose to take the level 1 language course in the first place, the challenging areas/components in their current language learning, their intention to continue taking the level 2 language course, and the reasons leading to or stop them to choose to continue. The statement options are derived both from factors discussed in the literature and anecdotal evidence reported by the Teaching Development Committee members at the Centre for Language Studies.

The questionnaire and the following procedure of data collection and analysis have been approved by Department Ethics Review Committee (DERC) at Centre for Language Studies, National University of Singapore.

3.2 Procedure

We conducted the questionnaire survey during two semesters of the 2023-2024 academic year. In the fifteenth week of each semester, which is the second week after the final exams for the language courses, administrative staff from the centre emailed all students enrolled in Level 1 foreign language courses at the Centre for Language Studies, National University of Singapore, across 13 languages. We will provide details on the number of participants for each language program in Section 4.1.

Over 3,000 students received the questionnaire invitation, and during the four-week data collection period, they were sent two reminders. Interested students could voluntarily participate in the survey without receiving any form of compensation, and all participants' consent has been obtained for using their anonymous data in publications.



4. Data Analysis

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

We received 548 valid responses (294 from semester 1, 254 from semester 2), they are from students of different demographic profiles and backgrounds, as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 - Participants' background: Age, Gender, Exchange status

	Age (mean)	Male	Female	Exchange students
Semester 1	21.6	40.5%	59.5%	9%
Semester 2	22.1	43.8%	56.2%	6%
Overall	21.8	41.6%	58.4%	7.5%

The survey responses distribute across language programmes, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

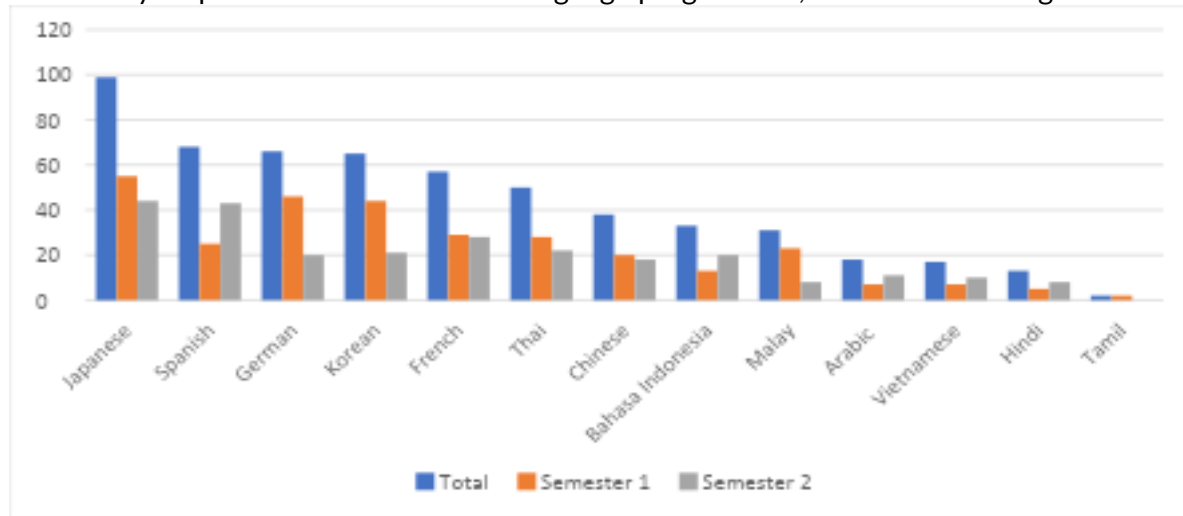


Figure 1. Distribution of Survey Responses across 13 Language Programmes

The survey responses are from students of different faculties in the university, as illustrated in Figure 2.

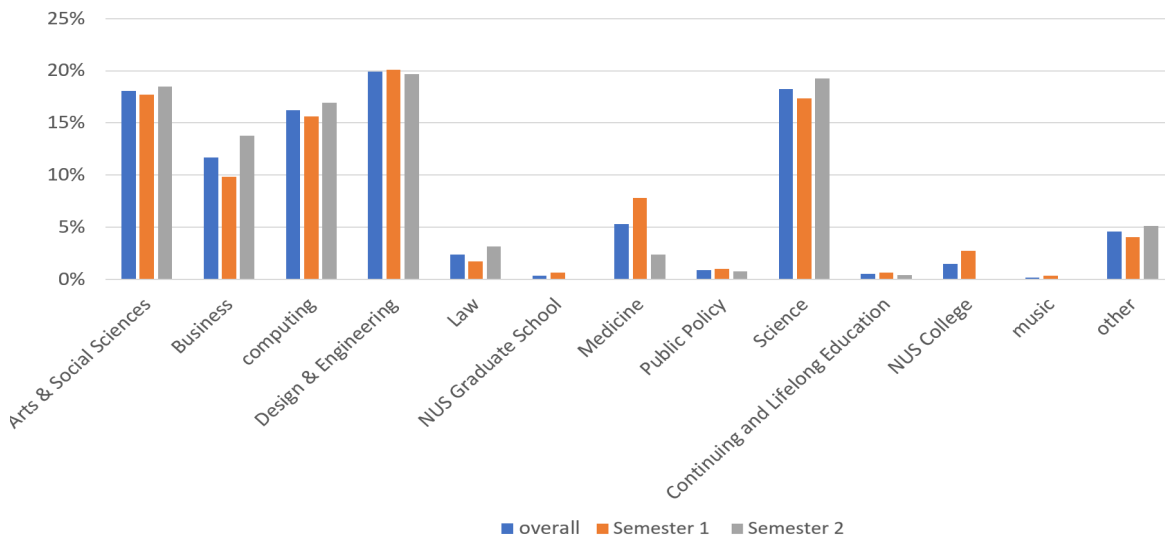


Figure 2. Participants' Faculty in the University

The participants are from different year levels and study programmes, as illustrated in Figure 3.

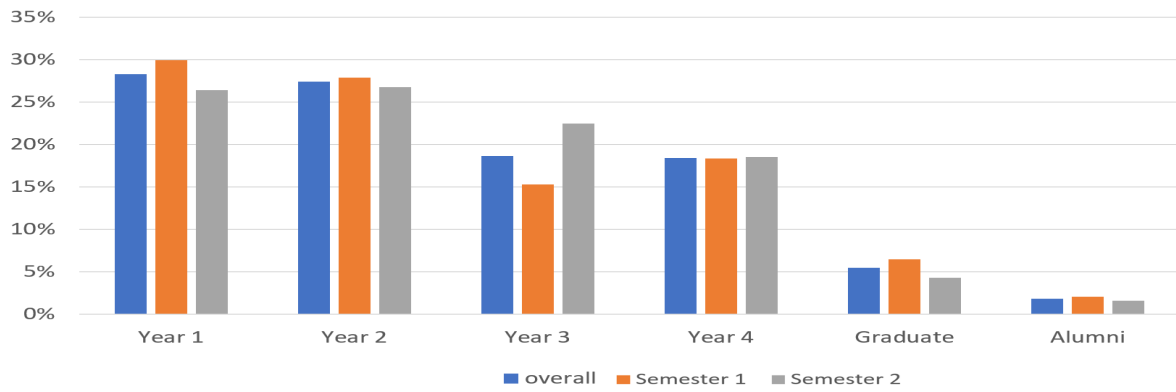


Figure 3. Participants’ Year Level and Study Programmes

The participants’ intended work industry and personal interests are illustrated in Figure 4 and Figure 5.

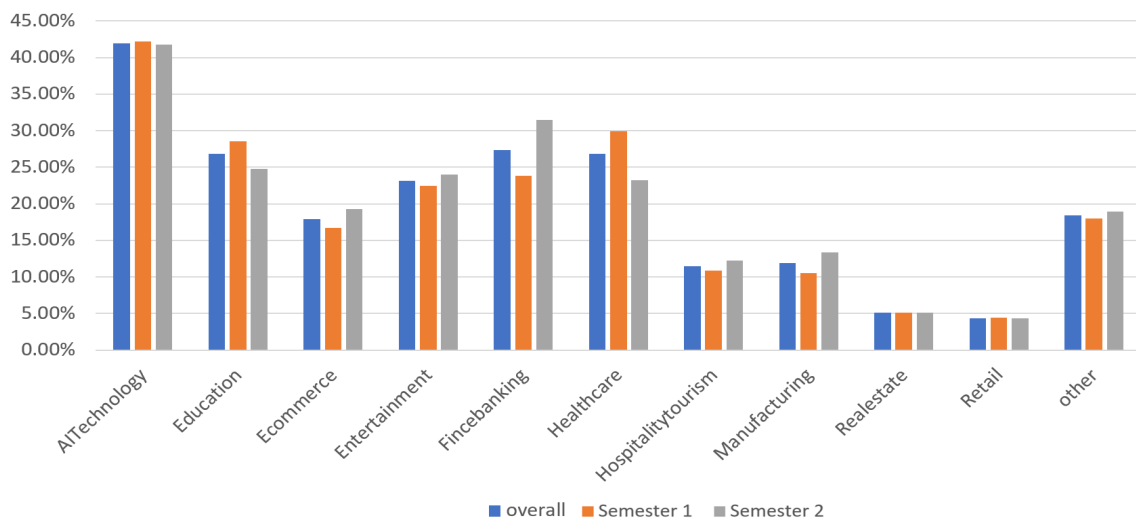


Figure 4. Participants’ interested work industry

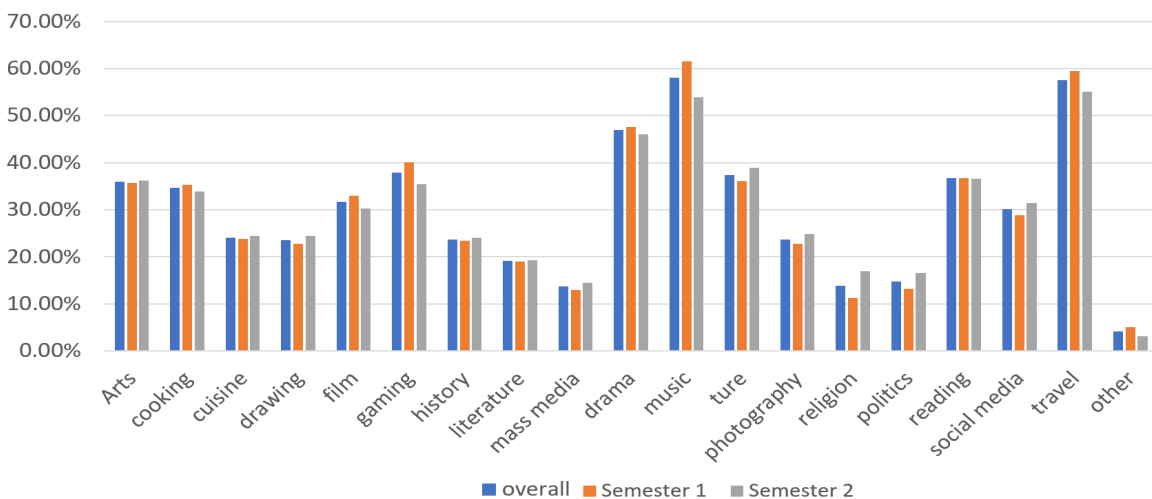


Figure 5. Participants’ Personal Interests

The reasons that participants chose to take the level 1 language course are illustrated in Figure 6.

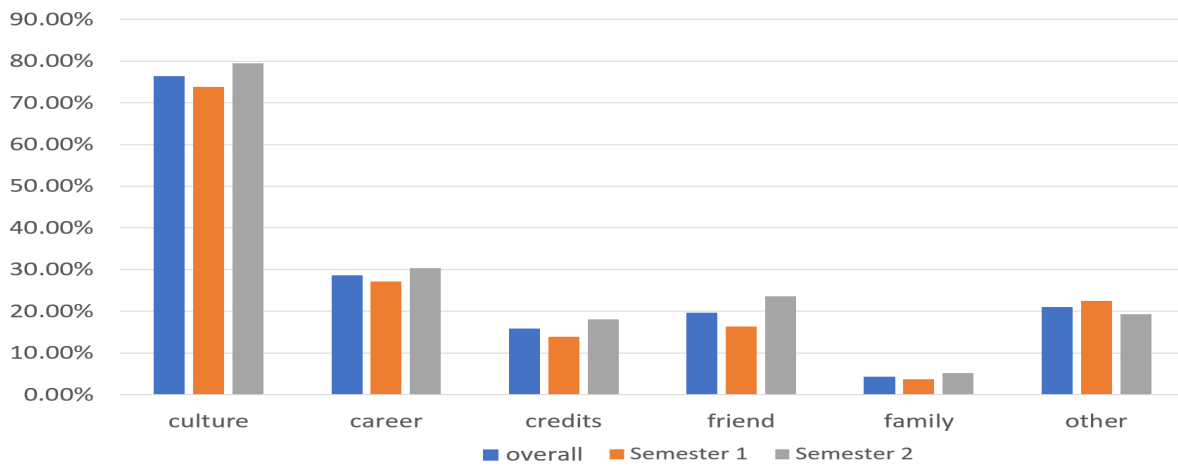


Figure 6. The Reasons for Choosing to take the Level 1 Language Course

The course contents participants feel challenging are illustrated in Figure 7.

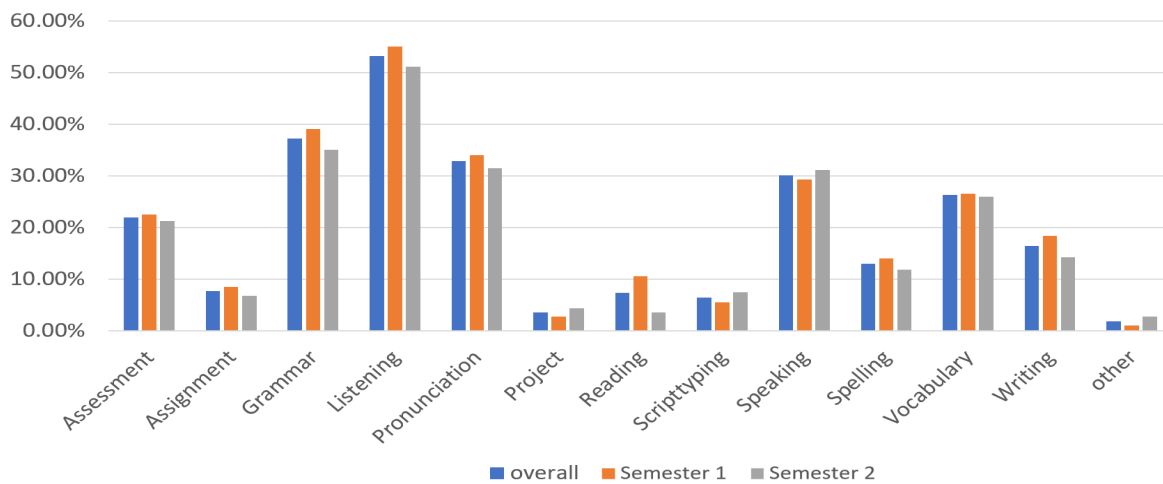


Figure 7. The course contents participants feel challenging

For the reasons might lead students to continue with level 2 language course, participants rate each statement as appropriate on a 6-point Likert Scale, 1 indicates strongly disagree, and 6 indicates strongly agree. Table 2 summarises the mean score of all statements.

Table 2 - Reasons that might lead students to continue with level 2 language course

Overall Ranking	I intend to continue taking the next level of the target language because...	Overall	Semester 1	Semester 2
1	The teacher is nice/helpful/engaging/inspiring.	5.60	5.62	5.58
2	I enjoy the accomplishment and achievement in learning the language.	5.46	5.45	5.48
3	The class is fun, interesting and engaging.	5.46	5.48	5.44
4	I like the target language.	5.37	5.41	5.32
5	I plan to travel to places where the target language is spoken	5.28	5.29	5.27
6	I like the target language culture.	5.26	5.31	5.20
7	The course is well planned, organized and taught.	5.25	5.20	5.32
8	It helps me communicate with the target language speakers	5.18	5.19	5.17
9	It helps me know better the people, society and culture of the target language	5.11	5.12	5.11

10	It can foster a better understanding of cultural similarities and differences.	4.99	5.01	4.97
11	I want to be friends with the target language speakers.	4.67	4.66	4.69
12	Learning the language helps to develop independent learning skills.	4.65	4.58	4.73
13	I want to make friends in the language course.	4.51	4.49	4.52
14	Knowing the target language can enhance my job prospects.	4.49	4.54	4.42
15	I think I may get a good grade for the Level 1 language course.	4.42	4.43	4.42
16	I plan to get the CLS Certificate for the target language.	4.41	4.48	4.34
17	it helps me understand my own culture better.	4.09	4.00	4.20
18	I want to take the course together with my friends	3.97	4.01	3.92
19	My friends/seniors recommended me to continue learning it.	3.60	3.54	3.67
20	Knowing the language will help my future study	3.55	3.55	3.55
21	I plan to get an external language certificate for the target language.	3.38	3.42	3.34
22	My family members recommended me to continue learning it.	3.24	3.26	3.22
23	I plan to get the NUS Language Minor for the target language.	3.13	3.22	3.04
24	I need a course to fulfil my graduation credits.	3.00	3.04	2.96
25	The language is related to my study	2.61	2.58	2.65

For the reasons might stop students to continue with level 2 language course, participants were asked to select the statement which they felt true to them. Table 3 summarises the selection rate of each statement and their ranking.

Table 3 - Reasons that might stop students to continue with level 2 language course

Overall Ranking	The reasons might stop students to continue with level 2 language course	Overall	Semester 1	Semester 2
1	My major courses demand significant time and attention.	57.85%	60.88%	54.33%
2	A low grade will affect my GPA.	47.45%	48.64%	46.06%
3	The target language course is demanding.	38.14%	37.41%	38.98%
4	The target language is difficult.	35.40%	35.03%	35.83%
5	I do not have more S/U grading options for language courses.	16.42%	16.33%	16.54%
6	The language course timings are too early (e.g. 8am).	15.51%	17.01%	13.78%
7	I will graduate after this semester.	13.32%	9.18%	18.11%
8	The language course timings are too late (e.g. 6pm).	11.31%	13.61%	8.66%
9	I am going to on SEP/Intern/NOC/LOA next semester	8.76%	7.14%	10.63%
10	Other	8.58%	10.20%	6.69%
11	I don't receive sufficient support from the course.	7.66%	8.84%	6.30%
12	The learning content is not stimulating or engaging.	6.93%	7.48%	6.30%
13	I can learn the target language with mobile tools	6.39%	5.78%	7.09%
14	I am not allowed to take more language courses	5.84%	5.44%	6.30%
15	I don't feel a sense of achievement	5.47%	5.10%	5.91%
16	I have to travel too far from my department.	4.74%	5.44%	3.94%
17	The learning content is not useful or relevant.	4.01%	4.08%	3.94%
18	I will finish my exchange at NUS.	3.65%	4.08%	3.15%



19	technology/AI can help me communicate in any language in the future.	1.46%	1.36%	1.57%
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4.2 Statistical Analysis

Since we collected data from students across two semesters, we first examined whether there were significant differences between the two datasets, considering two university-specific factors. First, there are generally more exchange students in the first semester than in the second semester. Second, more students typically graduate in the second semester, making them less likely to continue to Level 2 courses. Additionally, although the time interval between semesters is short, students' attitudes and willingness to learn may change over time. From descriptive data in Figures 1–7 and Tables 1 and 2, we observed slight differences between semesters.

To test for significant differences, we compared each survey item individually. Categorical variables were analysed using Chi-Square tests, while continuous variables were analysed with Independent T-tests. Results showed no significant differences between semesters, allowing us to merge the two datasets for further analysis.

Our primary research question is: Which factors significantly influence beginner learners' decisions to continue to Level 2 language courses across programs at the National University of Singapore? To answer this exploratory question, we used Logistic Regression to identify predictors of a “Yes” response to the survey question: “Do you intend to take the Level 2 language course?”

Although not all survey items have been previously reported as influencing continuation in higher-level courses, we included all data for screening and performed Logistic Regression by sections. To account for the limitations of statistical testing due to the data structure (discussed further in the Conclusion), we analysed both the merged data and semester-specific datasets to assess consistency in predicting factors across contexts.

Table 4 summarizes the factors that significantly predict a “Yes” response to the question: “Do you intend to take the Level 2 language course?”

Table 4 Predicting factors for continuing with level 2 course

Section	Factors	Semester 1	Semester 2	Overall
Background	I am an exchange student			(-) *
	Overall course load		**	
Personal Interests	#Cuisine	(-)*		(-)**
	Drawing		(-)*	
	History		*	
	Politics	*		
Intended Work	Travel			*
	#Education	*		*
Industry	Entertainment		*	
Reason to take level 1 course	Career		*	
	Culture	*		
Challenging Course content	Grammar	(-)*		
	Speaking		(-)*	
Reasons for continuing with level 2 course	#Vocabulary	*		*
	#Writing	(-)*		(-)*
	#I like the target language.	*	*	*
	#The class is fun, interesting and engaging.	**		***
	#Knowing the language will help my future study	(-)*		(-)*
	I plan to get the CLS Certificate	(-)*	**	
	I plan to get the NUS Language Minor	**		
	The language is related to my study	*		
	I think I may get a good grade	(-)**		
	My family members recommended me to continue learning it.	(-)*		
z	The language course timings are too early (e.g. 8am).	**		
	#The language course timings are too late (e.g. 6pm).	(-)**		(-)*

Note. (-) negative effect, # significance observed consistently, *(p<.05), **(p<.01), ***(p<.001)

As shown in above table, identified predicting factors that are consistent across different datasets were marked with #. In the following section, the results will be discussed by section, with a focus on the consistent factors.

5 Discussion

5.1 Variables related to Background

Among the variables related to participants' background information, only "exchange student" and "overall course load" had significant predicting effects, although neither was found to be consistent across the datasets.

In the merged data, students who identified as exchange students were less likely to continue with the Level 2 course, which is an understandable finding. Participants might have limited their consideration of the question "Do you intend to take the Level 2 language course?" to the context of the National University of Singapore, which is not an option for those who are completing their exchange. We have also heard some exchange students mention that their home universities do not offer the language courses they are currently taking, making it difficult for them to pursue Level 2 even after returning to their home university.

Overall course load was found as a predicting factor only for the data of semester 2, and it is not understandable why students with heavier course load tend to continue with level 2 language course. Since its predicting effect is not consistently significant across data sets, we do not focus on it for discussion.

5.2 Variables related to Personal Interests

Only "Cuisine" was identified as a consistent predicting factor with a negative predicting effect, but it is difficult to understand why students who enjoy cuisine are unlikely to continue with the Level 2 language course. Therefore, we treat this result with caution, pending verification with future data and analysis.

"Drawing," "History," and "Politics" were found as predicting factors in the data from only one semester, so we consider these to be inconsistent findings.

"Travel" was identified as a predicting factor in the overall data. Although this finding is not consistently reflected in the respective two sub-datasets, the merged data with a larger sample size gives us more confidence in this result. Additionally, its positive predicting effect aligns with previous literature, which reports that traveling to or living in a target language country is a motivation for foreign language learners to continue their studies (Gallagher-Brett, 2004). If learners wish to use the language while traveling, this desire supports their motivation to continue learning, especially since beginner courses may not meet these functional needs.

5.3 Variables related to Interested work industry

Education as an intended work industry was found as a predicting factor for both semester 1 data and overall data. It's positive predicting effect indicates students who intend to work in the education industry are likely to continue with level 2 language course. This finding is fresh to us, and we didn't find anything about it in the literature. But an anecdotal evidence we encounter recently inspired us in interpreting the finding.

A former student who had previously learned Arabic recently wrote to her former Arabic teacher that she is pursuing her Master's degree in Education, and she always recall and reflect on the teacher's instructional style and methods and learn from him, even though her master's specialization is unrelated to the Arabic language. Although this finding does not directly relate to the primary aim of this research—improving retention rates—we believe it is quite insightful and worthy of continued attention in future studies.

Entertainment as an intended work industry was found as predicting factors only in semester 2 data, so we consider it as an inconsistent finding.



5.4 *Variables related to reasons for choosing level 1 language course*

Although "Culture" and "Career" reasons were identified as predicting factors in the data from only one semester, their positive predicting effects align with findings reported in most previous literature and are very understandable results. While these findings do not directly relate to our initial goal of improving retention rates, they serve as indicators that suggest our data can reflect students' motivation for learning foreign languages.

5.5 *Variables related to challenging course content*

In this section, three challenging course content areas with negative predicting effects were identified as influencing factors, but only one of them, "Writing," showed consistency across the datasets. This finding generally aligns with previous literature, which indicates that beginners are easily affected by difficulties in language learning, leading them to discontinue foreign languages. Unfortunately, when we sought to further discuss "Writing" as a predicting factor, we realized that the questionnaire's definition of this item was not sufficiently clear. We were unsure whether students were thinking of handwriting scripts or essay compositions when they respond to this option. Therefore, we have listed this as one of the limitations of our study and will revise the wording of this item in future data collections.

Grammar and Speaking as challenging learning content were found as predicting factors only in the data of 1 semester, however their predicting effect is not consistent across datasets.

An unexpected result was that "Vocabulary," as a challenging learning component, had a positive and consistent predicting effect across different datasets. In other words, students who find vocabulary challenging to learn are more likely to continue with the Level 2 language course. We can find some indirect evidence to explain this finding. According to Matsumoto and Obana (2001), intermediate Japanese learners show more interest in language system elements, such as grammar and vocabulary, compared to beginner students. Our finding suggests that, despite vocabulary being seen as a challenging component, these learners are not deterred by this difficulty; rather, they are more willing to continue their studies. We tend to believe these students are more serious learners who actually care about expanding vocabulary with strong practical motivations but face frustration at beginner level. Awad (2018) found that when learners hope to use the target language in real-life contexts, it drives them to continue deeper language studies. Unfortunately, with limited language knowledge like few vocabularies, beginner students are unlikely to experience the sense of accomplishment from applying what they've learned, nor will they feel the motivation that comes from it.

Although the difficulty of learning vocabulary is a reality—due to the heavy memorization load involved, we believe teachers can go extra mile to help beginners sooner feel the practicality of vocabulary learning, for example, by creating more contextualized learning situations for vocabulary practice, or adjusting the textbook content with a more practical focus. The advanced language learners interviewed by Awad are motivated to continue progressing to higher levels because they appreciate how their teachers flexibly adjust the curriculum content to enhance practicality.

Another interesting notice is that Listening as the highest-ranking challenging learning content, was not found as a predicting factor effectively influencing students' decision for taking the next level language course. We can understand this contrast as that, it is common for foreign language learners to perceive listening as a difficult component, but this difficulty is well taken by the learners, so it is not reason stopping them to continue learning. It is worth digging why the difficulty of listening is well understandable by students, while some other components are not.

Following this logic, if there is a way to alleviate the demotivation caused by the difficulties of learning, teachers can take targeted actions in the classroom to prevent students from being discouraged by the challenging components.

5.6 *Variables related to Reasons for continuing with level 2 course*

In this section, three reasons were found as predicting factors consistent across data sets, but with different predicting effects and significant levels.

“The class is fun, interesting and engaging” (rank 3 in Table 2) shows the strongest positive predicting effect and consistent in Semester 1 data ($p < .01$) and overall data ($p < .001$). The enjoyment in having the lesson motivates learners to continue learning. This point has been repeatedly reported in the research, so as in our study. Enjoyable classroom atmosphere can be so influential to motivate students with not so good grades to continue learning, and even can change students’ decision in the middle of their level 1 learning from Discontinue to Continue (Matsumoto & Obana, 2001).

“I like the target language” (rank 4 in Table 2) shows the most consistent positive predicting effect in all three data sets. It is not stated whether the learners like the language in the first place or the learning in level 1 made them like the target language, but since the survey is taken after the course and exams, it is reasonable to believe their level 1 learning experience contributed to their positive perception to the language and thereby motivates them to continue learning.

Although the top-ranking reason, “the teacher is nice/helpful/engaging/inspiring” was not found to be an effective predictor by itself, the above two findings are indeed closely related to the teacher. This aligns with previous literature; Matsumoto and Obana (2001) argue that the impact of teachers and classes in foreign language courses is much stronger compared to other university courses. Teachers can help students expand their diverse learning interests and goals, making them enjoy the learning journey, rather than only looking at the learning difficulties and academic performance.

Therefore, we believe that the impact of teachers to foreign language learners may be greater than we initially thought. To help students enjoy the classroom and appreciate the target language, some specific methods can be employed, such as inviting native speakers as guests to interact with them, providing affordable immersion opportunity (Smith, 2009), might make some inevitable learning difficulties seem trivial as compared with the satisfaction gained, and thus alleviating the demotivation associated with those challenges.

In this section, we also encountered a perplexing result: the statement “Knowing the language will help my future study” had a negative predicting effect. This means that students who selected this statement tended not to continue with the Level 2 course, and this effect is consistent across datasets. In fact, this result contradicts some qualitative findings in the literature (Gallagher-Brett, 2004). Therefore, we tend to treat this finding with caution, pending verification in future rounds of data collection and analysis.

5.7 Variables Related to Reasons for not continuing with level 2 course

Only one statement was identified as the predicting factor with a negative predicting effect and consistent across data sets ‘The language course timings are too late (e.g. 6pm)’, indicating students feel evening lessons are too late tend not to continue with level 2 course. We cannot identify whether the responses are from students who took evening lessons in level 1 course. But according to some teachers, some evening lessons timing are popular for some language programmes. But some other students also shared they chose evening lesson timing only because it fit their course schedule. It is reasonable to believe in the evening, most students are not at their most energetic moment, leading a decrease in concentration, enjoyment and effectiveness. However, this should be verified with more direct evidence, such as qualitative data from interview.

6. Conclusion

In general, our research findings from the survey are consistent with previous studies, indicating that learning enjoyment and affection for the target language have the greatest impact on motivating students to continue to the Level 2 course. This is largely contributed by the teachers’ efforts. We believe that teachers can further enhance their influence on students by creating more practical scenarios that emphasize the practicality of the learning content, alleviating the demotivation associated with short-term challenges and frustrations.



Regarding the learning difficulties commonly mentioned by some students, such as listening, we might not need to be very concerned, as these inevitable challenges are associated with the beginner level. And our survey finding shows it is unlikely to lead to a decision to quit language learning.

Additionally, some of our intriguing findings, such as those related to vocabulary as a challenging component and evening lesson timing, are worth verifying with future data and analysis.

Finally, our study has some limitations. First, the majority of questionnaire items required participants to select options, resulting in many categorical variables that are not fine-grained and limit the choice of statistical analysis. Therefore, in future rounds of data collection, we plan to revise the survey questions to a Likert-scale format whenever possible. Second, some survey items were not clearly stated, such as "writing" as a challenging learning component, which limited our interpretation of the statistical results. Third, in the last two sections of the questionnaire, we directly asked what reasons led participants to continue or not continue with the Level 2 course. This approach required participants to make judgments about each statement and establish causal relationships. The way of asking questions might be too direct and could not capture many uncertainties and subconscious thoughts in participants' minds. Therefore, we will also review the phrasing of the questionnaire items to better align with the psychological foundations of survey research.

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