



## 21 - Insights from student feedback into language learning: Implications for course design and pedagogy

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### Abstract

This study is part of a large research project aimed at understanding the factors that influence learners to continue studying a foreign language at a University in Singapore. The present study aimed to explore learners' perceptions of 13 language courses, focusing on what they liked and disliked about the courses. Data were collected from 1,034 language learners through online student feedback conducted by the university and analysed using the Modified Grounded Theory Approach. The analysis process included initial coding and focused coding, resulting in the identification of several key categories and the theories. Preliminary results indicated that positive factors such as course design, relevance, exposure, and learning environment were commonly identified across languages. In contrast, the negative factors, including assessment, course design, and organisation, were diverse depending on the language programme. Through this systematic approach of Modified Grounded Theory, the study supplemented the details of the motivation survey stated above, underscoring the multifaceted nature of language learning and highlighting critical factors that can motivate learners to persist in their language studies. The findings have relevant implications for foreign language education. They can offer a validated framework for evaluating and enhancing learning components and provide evidence-based recommendations for course design.

**Keywords:** Student feedback, Language learning, Course design, Motivation, Pedagogy

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### 1. Introduction

The growing demand for multilingual competencies in today's interconnected and globalized world has placed increased emphasis on foreign language education in universities. Understanding student perspectives on language learning becomes crucial for developing practical pedagogical approaches and course designs within this context. While extensive research exists on student feedback in general education, there remains limited comprehensive analysis of student perceptions across multiple foreign language programs, particularly in Asian contexts. This study examines student feedback across 13 language courses at a Singaporean university, offering unique insights into the factors that influence language learning motivation and persistence. Understanding these factors is crucial for designing language courses that enhance learning outcomes and improve student

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engagement and retention. Ultimately, this study can contribute to developing evidence-based approaches to foreign language education, ensuring that programs align with diverse learners' evolving needs and expectations.

Student feedback has been recognized as significant in improving teaching quality and course design. It offers insights into course strengths and areas for development, enabling educators to make evidence-based adjustment to curricula. While studies have examined the role of feedback in evaluating teacher performance, its application in guiding course improvement, especially in multilingual and culturally diverse contexts, still needs to be explored. This section examines the literature on student feedback mechanisms, challenges, and implications for improving language course design.

Using student feedback to inform teaching and course improvement can be challenging. Kember, Leung, and Kwan (2002) conducted a longitudinal study on student feedback questionnaires (SFQs) across 25 departments of a Hong Kong university, revealing minimal evidence of improved teaching quality over time. Their findings attribute this stagnation to the inflexible design of standardized feedback instruments, prioritizing appraisal over development, and discouraging educators from leveraging feedback for meaningful change. They argue that feedback systems often fail when focusing solely on performance evaluation, neglecting developmental goals. These insights underscore the need for feedback systems tailored to the specific needs of courses and learners, particularly in dynamic and diverse language programs.

Mandouit (2018) also critiques traditional end-of-course feedback mechanisms, describing them as "inherently flawed" for assuming that outgoing students' feedback is equally applicable to future cohorts. The scholar advocates for iterative and structured feedback cycles, emphasizing the importance of professional development to support educators in acting on feedback. While Mandouit's study focuses on teacher improvement in secondary education, its emphasis on developmental feedback offers valuable insights for adapting student feedback in higher education.

Central to the effective use of feedback is its framing as a developmental tool rather than an evaluative one, Mandouit's action research methodology highlights the transformative potential of feedback when integrated into a continuous process of reflection, collaboration, and professional growth. This resonates with the present study which seeks to use student feedback to identify areas of improvement and guide course redesign in ways that enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

In a similar vein, a study by Kember et al. (2000) highlights that fostering reflective thinking in students requires intentional curriculum design and supportive educational practices. While their work does not explicitly focus on feedback systems, it underscores the importance of aligning teaching and assessment practices with broader institutional goals of improving learning outcomes.

Feedback is pivotal in bridging the gap between teaching strategies and student learning outcomes. As Black and Wiliam (1998) argue, formative assessment is most effective when it prioritizes development rather than appraisal, providing actionable insights that guide learners and educators. The role of teacher-student interaction and self-assessment is central to this transformation. The scholars (1998) underscore that meaningful learning occurs when students actively engage with feedback, identifying gaps in their understanding and taking steps to address them. Similarly, this study's findings reveal that opportunities for interactive learning and reflective practices significantly influence student motivation and engagement. By promoting environments that encourage student autonomy and participation, language programs can enhance both the quality of learning experiences and the effectiveness of feedback systems.

Research on feedback in education highlights several nuanced aspects that are particularly relevant to multilingual and diverse educational contexts. For instance, Hattie and Timperley (2007) argue that feedback is most impactful when it addresses specific aspects of a learner's performance, providing clear guidance on tasks, strategies, or self-regulation. Their model identifies three key questions: "Where am I going?" (goal setting), "How am I going?" (monitoring progress), and "Where to next?" (future improvement) as fundamental to effective feedback.

Similarly, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) highlight that feedback is most effective when it empowers students to engage with and regulate their learning processes actively. The researchers (2006) propose that feedback systems should clarify good performance, facilitate self-assessment,

deliver high-quality information, encourage teacher-student dialogue, motivate positive beliefs, provide opportunities to close gaps, and inform teaching practices. Building on this, they argue that effective feedback must go beyond a one-way transmission of information. This dialogue approach allows learners to discuss feedback, reflect on their performance, and collaboratively explore ways to improve.

Li (2019) highlights the significance of feedback timing, suggesting that immediate feedback during communicative tasks can enhance learner uptake and performance. In contrast, delayed feedback encourages reflective thinking but is less effective for immediate application. These findings are particularly relevant for multilingual classrooms, where feedback timing must be tailored to diverse learner needs and task demands.

Similarly, Shute (2008) underscores the importance of formative feedback for improving learning outcomes, emphasizing its effectiveness when it is supportive, timely, and specific. Her work identifies key variables influencing feedback success, such as timing, specificity, and alignment with learner needs. These insights are particularly relevant to the present study, which examines feedback practices in multilingual language programs to enhance learner engagement and motivation.

Zheng and Yu (2018) demonstrate that engagement with written corrective feedback varies significantly among lower-proficiency students, often limited by linguistic competence. Their study highlights that while LP students exhibit positive attitudes (affective engagement), they face challenges in understanding and applying indirect feedback (cognitive engagement).

These findings are particularly relevant to the present study, which examines feedback mechanisms in diverse language programs to enhance student learning outcomes.

Furthermore, Wisniewski et al. (2020) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis, highlighting the significant variability in feedback effectiveness. They found that high-information feedback, which integrates task, process, and self-regulation levels, is most effective, while simple reinforcement offers limited benefits.

The present study aligns with these insights by examining feedback from 1,034 learners across 13 language programs at a Singaporean university. Identifying factors that influence student motivation and persistence seeks to bridge the gap between feedback collection and actionable outcomes, contributing to evidence-based improvements in course design and pedagogy. Building on the Modified Grounded Theory Approach, the research contributes a framework for understanding how feedback can be leveraged to improve multilingual course design and pedagogy. This integration of theoretical insights and practical applications sets the stage for the subsequent Methodology section, where the study's design and analysis are detailed. The focus on over 1,000 learners' feedback across diverse language courses offers a unique opportunity to examine the interplay between feedback practices and learner engagement in multilingual educational contexts.

## **2. Methodology**

The primary aim of this study is to examine the positive and negative perceptions of students enrolled in Level 1 language modules across 13 foreign languages offered by the Centre for Language Studies at the National University of Singapore. This analysis is based on data collected from the end-of-semester module feedback. Specifically, the study focuses on the feedback sections titled "What I like about the module" and "What I did not like about the module," which contain a compilation of students' open-ended comments. These comments have been analysed qualitatively to provide insights into student experiences and attitudes toward the modules.

As such, the study poses the following Research Questions (RQs):

**RQ1:** What aspects of the language course do learners perceive positively?

**RQ2:** What aspects of the language course do learners perceive negatively?

**RQ3:** Are there positive and negative shared features across the 13 language courses?

These research questions provide a framework for gathering perspectives into both positive and negative aspects of the course and how common or specific features impact the language learning experience. providing actionable insights to enhance foreign language course design. Furthermore, these results are expected to provide actionable insights to enhance foreign language course design.

## 2.1 Methods

### 2.1.1 Participants

Participants in this study were students enrolled in Level 1 modules for any of the 13 languages offered at the Centre for Language Studies during the first semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. These participants included students from various bachelor’s and master’s programmes across multiple faculties within the university, who elected to study a language either as an elective course or as part of their degree requirements. The participant group also encompassed exchange students studying at the university, along with life-long learning students. Table 1 details the number of students enrolled per module and the number of respondents to the online student feedback form.

**Table 1** - Number of Enrolled Students per Language Course

Languages	Enrolment Numbers: AY 2023-2024, SEM1	Number of Respondents
Arabic	43	24
Bahasa Indonesia	81	46
Chinese	158	83
French	241	147
German	223	119
Hindi	12	10
Japanese	273	168
Korean	305	173
Malay	137	72
Spanish	214	116
Tamil	9	7
Thai	87	63
Vietnamese	18	6
Total 13 languages	1801	1034

### 2.1.2 Data

The data used in this study was the official end-of-semester module feedback form, a structured questionnaire that students complete to evaluate their experiences in a specific module. This feedback form typically includes questions about various aspects of the courses such as course content, teaching quality, learning resources, course organization and assessment. Additionally, students are asked to share what they liked most and least about the module, including open-ended comments. The data from these forms are used by faculty and administrators to assess and improve the course quality and teaching methods, making it a valuable tool for ongoing course development and enhancement of the learning experience.

### 2.1.3 Data Analysis

All data were collected from module feedback forms and anonymized by program module convenors to ensure confidentiality before analysis. The study adhered to ethical standards, receiving clearance from the university’s Institutional Review Board.

The data were analyzed using the Modified Grounded Theory Approach (M-GTA) by Kinoshita (2003), an adaptation of Glaser and Strauss’s Grounded Theory (1967). M-GTA was chosen for its flexibility and structure, making it particularly effective for analyzing complex datasets like student feedback. This methodology integrates existing frameworks with emergent data, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and unique themes. It is especially suited for multi-language analysis, uncovering both shared themes—such as teaching methods and curriculum design—and culturally or linguistically specific insights. This dual focus ensures findings are actionable and tailored to the diverse needs of language programs, leading to more effective educational strategies.

The analysis involved systematic coding of feedback by language group and categorizing comments as positive or negative. The authors divided responsibilities across the 13 languages as

follows: (1) Japanese and Korean, (2) Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, and Tamil, (3) Bahasa Indonesia, Malay, Thai, and Vietnamese, and (4) French, German, and Spanish. The process included open coding to identify key concepts, axial coding to organize categories, and selective coding to develop central theories explaining the data.

Individual analyses were compared in collaborative meetings to ensure rigor and minimize bias. These sessions fostered collective interpretation, achieving consensus and enhancing the reliability of the findings. By combining diverse perspectives, the methodology yielded balanced insights into students' perceptions of each language module and highlighted commonalities across the programs.

The results of this detailed analysis are presented in the following section.

### 3. Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis in this research was conducted in the following procedure.

#### 3.1 Step 1: Open Coding – Generation of Basic Concepts

The initial phase was generalising fundamental notions in alignment with the "constant comparison" strategy. To analyse the substantial volume of data, the authors categorised 13 languages into 4 groups and appointed a researcher to oversee each group. Each researcher meticulously examined every comment, enquiring, "What is the meaning of this?" "What is being alluded to here?" and made classifications indiscriminately. During this preliminary phase, it became apparent that numerous learners provided the following comments:

- (1) Enjoyed the course.
- (2) Fun and interesting.
- (3) Classes were very engaging and interactive.

(1) and (2) express the pleasure and interest derived from the process of learning. Conversely, (3) delineates the manner in which the classes are done. Consequently, (1) (2) were provisionally classified within the category designated as "fun and interesting." Conversely, (3) was established under the provisional designation of "engaging and interactive." Each researcher established the categories in the aforementioned method. Subsequently, we exchanged the categories developed independently and examined the similarities and differences among the various linguistic groups. As a result, the following categories were created.

#### 【 Why I like the language course 】

interest and fun	engaging, lively, interactive	a new language and scripts	Culture	peer
teachers	assignments/assessments	workload, volume of contents	safe /stress free environment	pace, speed of the course
easy	feedback	materials, textbook, resources	course content and organization	rewarding, sense of achievement
class size	relevance, applicability, real-world application	Speaking, conversation, good practice	Counter Examples	Others

Figure 1a. Basic concepts generated by open coding

**【 Why I don't like the language course】**

Workload	Prior knowledge, unfairness, smurfers	Assessment problems Examination/Test /Quizzes	Bellcurve
Others Counter Examples	Pace, Speed of course	Class timing	lack of practice, class hours
Teaching problems	Difficulty	Lack of application, releavnce	textbook, resources problems

**Figure 1b. Basic concepts generated by open coding**

**3.2 Step 2: Initial organization of common categories across languages**

By comparing languages, we determined that a uniform categorisation could be applied across all languages, while allowing for the inclusion of extra categories that accommodate language-specific nuances. Consequently, we developed a unified worksheet and reclassified the data accordingly and then we labeled key concepts for each category.

**3.3 Step 3: Re-organization of categories by selective coding**

Analysis of the data utilising the common framework revealed that a particular category should be divided into two distinct categories. For instance, (4) and (5) belonged to the same category.

- (5) Able to learn a new language.
- (6) Learning more about the Korean language and culture.

However, (5) indicates that students exhibit a favourable attitude towards acquiring a new language, which may not be the language they have a specific reason to take. This include the comments such as "I wanted to get a new knowledge" but not necessarily a language nor the particular language. Conversely, students who wrote (6) demonstrated an interest in the specific language and articulated the achievement that fulfilled their aspiration. Consequently, (5) and (6) were delineated as "Learning a new language" and "Interest in the language and culture."

On the other hand, some categories were merged. For example, (7) were positive descriptions about 'teachers' and (8) was those about 'students'.

- (7) The teachers are really helpful and kind.
- (8) Everyone is friendly and my classmates from tutorial class are willing to help me when I faced some problems in class.
- (9) All the tutors and lecturers are extremely kind, understanding and helpful.

Nonetheless, numerous comments address both subjects concurrently like (9), making it challenging to distinguish between them. Consequently, they were merged into a singular category tentatively titled "teacher and peers make the lesson enjoyable."

After examining all of the languages, we reorganised the categorisation of positive comments by merging several categories marked in the same colour and creating a new category highlighted in red. On the other hand, we discovered that it is unnecessary to re-categorize negative comments. Instead, it provided for new categories to handle language-specific comments, which exist depending on the language course. It is because positive factors were commonly identified across languages. In contrast, the negative factors were diverse depending on the language programme.

**Figure 2. Re-organized concepts generated across languages**

**【 Why I like the language course 】**

interest and fun	engaging, lively, interactive	a new language and scripts	Culture	peer
teachers	assignments/assessments	workload, volume of contents	safe /stress free environment	pace, speed of the course
easy	feedback	materials, textbook, resources	course content and organization	rewarding, sense of achievement
class size	relevance, applicability, real-world application	Speaking, conversation, good practice	Counter Examples	Others
Interest in the language and culture				

3.4 Step 4: Completion of the categories

As a result, the categories and the key concepts were finalized as follows:

**Table 2 - Finalized Categories and Definitions**

**【 Why I like the language course 】**

	Category	Definitions
A	Interesting and Enjoyment	Course/lesson is interesting and fun
B	Interactive and Engaging	Lesson is interactive and engaging
C	Cultural Exposure	I can lean culture
D	New Language Acquisition	I can learn a new language
E	Speaking Practice Opportunities	The course enhances communication skills pronunciation
F	Positive Teacher and Peer Influence	Teacher and peers make the lesson enjoyable
G	Interest in the Language and Culture	I like the language and culture
H	Practicality and Usefulness	Contents are applicable and relevant to real word
I	Appropriate Course Pacing	Pace of the course is good
J	Useful Assignment/Assessment	Assignment / Assessment is helpful for learning
K	Well-organized course and materials	Course content is resourceful and well-organized
L	Accomplishment and Satisfaction	Sense of achievement, satisfaction, reward, confidence
M	Counter examples and others	Counter examples and others

**【 Why I don't like the language course 】**

	Category	Definitions
A	Heavy Workload	The workload is too heavy
B	Experienced Students	Students have background knowledge
C	Assessment /Assignment Issues	The assessments are too difficult/have problems
D	Competitiveness	The bell curve is steep
E	Pacing Issues	The pace of the course is too fast
F	Logical Challenges	Class times are too early/too late
G	Insufficient Practice	There is not enough practice
H	Language Difficulty	The language is difficult to learn
I	Lack of Practical Application	The course is not applicable or relevant
J	Materials / Course Organization	Course content is not sufficient and not well organized
K	Teacher issues (= one of the language-specific categories)	Teacher or teaching has areas for improvement

Based on the finalized categories, we checked through the data throughout languages and built the theories which will be presented in the next section:

#### 4. Major Findings

##### 4.1 Summary of Segmented Comments

Given the focus on qualitative analysis, this study exclusively examines the positive and negative open-ended comments provided by students. These comments correspond to the sections titled “What I like about the module” and “What I did not like about the module,” where students are encouraged to freely express their thoughts and opinions on any aspect of the module they wish to elaborate on. Overall majority of the languages received more positive comments than negative. Table 4 outlines all the segmented comments analysed (total n = 1472).

**Table 3 - Number of Segmented Comments**

Languages	Positive Comments	Negative Comments	Total Comments	Positive Rate %
	n	n		
Arabic	15	9	24	63%
Bahasa Indonesia	32	18	50	64%
Chinese	56	37	93	60%
French	152	64	216	70%
German	94	74	168	56%
Hindi	28	6	34	82%
Japanese	163	110	273	60%
Korean	174	112	286	61%
Malay	51	62	113	45%
Spanish	90	41	131	69%
Tamil	5	3	8	62%
Thai	48	21	69	70%
Vietnamese	6	1	7	86%
Total for 13 languages	914	558	1472	62% (Average)

The comments in the students’ online feedback titled “Why I Like the Language Course” were systematically arranged into columns, each denoting a distinct category, labelled from “A” to “L”. Each row comprises segments of feedback comments from students regarding different facets of their language training experience. The following are the principal themes identified through theory building based on students’ opinions regarding their appreciation for language education, accompanied by illustrative comments. Sample comments are extracted from the language that contains a significant number of corresponding remarks.

The abbreviations of the following languages are indicated in brackets after the sample comments: Arabic (AR), Bahasa Indonesia (BI), Chinese (CH), French (FR), German (GR), Hindi (HD), Japanese (JP), Korean (KR), Malay (ML), Spanish (SP), Tamil (TM), Thai (TH), Vietnamese (VT)

##### 4.2 Why I Like the Language Course

**A: Interesting and Enjoyment.** Across all languages, the most frequently recurring comments were “interesting” and “fun.” This suggests that students’ motivation to learn can be significantly enhanced by “fun” and “interesting” contents or courses.

- very easy to find it super fun (KR)
- Spanish is interesting to learn (SP)
- It was very enjoyable and fun learning a foreign language (ML)

**B: Interactive and Engaging.** The interactive and engaging classroom activities were well-received by the students. This implies that interactive activities, including games, roleplays, and discussions, etc. can foster a positive association with language learning, thereby motivating students to engage in their learning process.

- Interactive and made me more passionate about learning Korean (KR)



- the lessons are very effective because they are very engaging (SP)
- the fact that we can speak with other students a lot more than in regular modules (JP)

**C: Cultural Exposure.** Students placed a high value on cultural elements in language courses. This suggests that students view language as more than just a means of communication; it is also a means of comprehending cultural contexts, which can enhance their motivation and commitment to the course.

- A great initial introduction to the Thailand culture (TH)
- I liked how the course also focused on the cultural aspects of the course (BI)
- It allowed me to better appreciate Vietnamese culture (VT)

**D: New Language Acquisition.** This is another of the most frequently encountered comments in various languages. Comments such as "I got to learn a new language system (CH)" suggest that students appreciate the opportunity to learn a new language, while "it is a new subject that is a breath of fresh air (KR)" suggests that students appreciated the language course as a source of comfort or refreshment in contrast to their rigorous core subjects.

- I love having the opportunity to learn a new language (GM)
- have fun learning a new language despite its difficulty (VT)
- new topic outside of my technical course (SP)

**E: Speaking Practice Opportunities.** Students highly regarded the availability of practice opportunities, particularly speaking exercises. This serves as confirmation of the importance of interactive components in the course design, indicating that the inclusion of a diverse and frequent array of practice activities enhances student engagement and the perceived utility of the course. However, only a small number of language courses received such feedback.

- Since the class size is small, we get a lot of practice time as well (VT)
- enjoy speaking and practicing Chinese with my classmates and my professor (CN)
- The fact that we can speak with other students a lot more than in regular modules (JP)

**F: Positive Teacher and Peer Influence.** A number of comments emphasised the significance of a supportive environment, with a particular emphasis on instructors and classmates. This implies that student satisfaction in language courses is influenced by the role of teachers and peers, which can also improve the overall course satisfaction and learning outcomes.

- teacher made the class enjoyable (CN)
- good friendships with classmates (HD)
- I love the people in the class as well, many of us are generally very fun! (FR)

**G: Interest in the Language and Culture.** Personal interest in the language was a significant factor in the student's enjoyment of the course. The course was perceived more favourably by students who were personally invested in acquiring a particular language. This implies that by motivating students to investigate and articulate their rationales for selecting a specific language, their dedication and admiration may be improved.

- Learning more about the Korean language and culture (KR)
- I love French, so being able to learn it was a dream come true! (FR)
- I like languages and Indonesia (BI)

**H: Practicality and Usefulness.** Students valued courses that provided practical applications, considering language skills to be practical, applicable, and valuable beyond the classroom. This implies that the integration of real-world applications, which are founded on cultural scenarios and daily conversation in a variety of contexts, may fortify students' motivation.

- The course allowed me to learn a new language which is very useful especially when I travel to Indonesia (BI)
- the fact that this course was able to help me converse with my Thai friends! (TH)
- I was able to appreciate and learn a new language that may be useful for my future career (ML)

**I: Appropriate Course Pacing.** The course's pace affects students' perception of its manageability and effectiveness. Feedback about good pace suggests that a well-balanced pace facilitates learning without overwhelming students. A structured yet flexible pace allows students to absorb new information steadily, enhances retention and comprehension. Nevertheless, the number of courses that received such feedback was restricted.

- The pace is just nice (TH)
- very chill and easy to follow (ML)

**J: Useful Assignment/Assessment.** Students appreciated assessments that were both balanced and diverse, as they offered clear indicators of their development in various language areas. This suggests that assessments should be strategically intended to evaluate students' progress throughout the course by addressing various language skills, including listening, speaking, writing, and reading.

- Has a wide range of segments to test our understanding of French language – written tests, oral, hand-written assignments (FR)
- There are various different kinds of assessments including vocabulary tests, role play, assignments (GM)

**K: Well-organized Course and Materials.** The course organisation and structure, as well as a diverse array of materials, were articulated by a significant number of students. This suggests that supplementary assistance and autonomous learning are fostered by a well-organised curriculum and appropriate learning materials, which in turn increase student motivation.

- The course is very well structured (AR)
- Taught in a very well structured manner! (GM)
- very nice balance of theory and practice, theory being homework, practice in tutorials (JP)

**L: Accomplishment and Satisfaction.** Several students expressed their satisfaction and sense of accomplishment in the process of acquiring a new language. Statements such as "able to master a new language" are indicative of the rewarding experience of skill acquisition. Students can be motivated by this sense of proficiency, which validates their progress and promotes ongoing engagement with the language.

- the amount of knowledge gained at the end is very impressive (HD).
- has been taught can be further developed on our own or by following up with the other levels (AR)
- My confidence in speaking Chinese has increased and I am motivated to continue my studies (CH).

In conclusion, the aforementioned findings suggest that students value language courses for a variety of reasons, including practical utility, structured support, and cultural learning, as well as interactive engagement. Concurrently, certain trends may be identified, which will be elaborated upon at a later date. These insights offer invaluable advice on how language courses can be designed to engage students and how to cultivate long-term student motivation in language acquisition.

#### 4.3 Why I Don't Like the Language Course

The comments in the students' online feedback titled "Why I don't like the Language Course" were systematically organised into columns, each signifying a unique theme or concept, and labelled from "A" to "K". This arrangement was similar to the aforementioned. Segments of feedback comments from students regarding various aspects of their language learning experience are found in each row. The following are the primary themes that were identified through theory building from students' perspectives on their appreciation for language education, accompanied by illustrative comments. In comparison to positive remarks, negative comments were scarce and were exclusively found in specific language courses. Sample comments are extracted from the language that contains a greater number of corresponding remarks, even if the number is only a few.

**A: Heavy Workload.** The heavy workload and time demands were among the most frequently voiced complaints. Numerous students in a variety of language courses reported that the burden was excessive, particularly when they were attempting to balance other academic obligations. They cited frequent quizzes, assignments, and vocabulary lists as being particularly taxing.

- The workload is definitely very high (JP)
- the workload could be quite high for some people since there is homework every other week and there is quite a number of quizzes throughout the semester (TH)
- Too much to learn in 10–11 weeks (AR)



**B: Experienced Students.** In multiple language courses, students observed that peers who had prior knowledge of the language created an uneven playing field, which impacted grading curves and made it more difficult for true novices to perform well. This is likely attributable to the fact that learners acquire language through popular culture, as these comments were written mainly by students in Korean, Japanese, and Hindi language courses.

- Having smurfers in the course (KR)
- Sometimes, I felt as if certain students knew the language and could speak it already so from the get-go, I was already being disadvantaged (HD)
- There are still groups of students who seems to have good grasp and some knowledge of the language which is unfair to complete beginners taking this course (JP)

**C: Assessments/Assignments Issues.** Assignments and assessments were frequently identified as challenging, particularly in the context of auditory comprehension. Students frequently encountered difficulties with the pace and clarity of listening exams, and they perceived that assessments occasionally did not correspond with their level of preparedness.

- Listening comprehension was too fast and was not replayed which made it very difficult (JP)
- The writing quizzes are TOO easy, and the listening quizzes are TOO difficult. There needs to be a balance between them (TH)
- The questions for the exams are very ambiguous and hard to understand (ML)

**D: Competitiveness.** A few courses received a significant number of complaints regarding the bell-curve, and students reported feeling anxious and demotivated when their grades are influenced by performance comparisons with their peers. In particular, bell curves and competitive grading structures add pressure and diminish the enjoyment of learning.

- the bell curve/average scores of the course being very high, making me uninterested in continuing to learn the language (KR)
- the very competitive bell-curve (FR)

**E: Pacing Issues.** Students felt that the fast pace of the courses did not allow them enough time to fully absorb the material before moving on to new content, making it challenging to keep up, especially for beginners.

- Sometimes the course was so fast paced that I felt a bit left behind by all the new information that got thrown at us during one lecture (CH)
- it was quite slow for the first half of the semester, then after the midterms we get drilled with sooo much vocab (AR)
- It is too fast, I do not have enough time to practice and be comfortable with the new sentence structure before going to the next topic (GM)

**F: Logistical Challenges.** A few language courses had logistical issues, such as shortage of lesson hours, inconvenient class timings or classroom locations, which added additional strain on students' schedules and hindered their overall learning experience.

- The classes should be longer (GM)
- the location of the classroom one is in utown and the other is in as4, it is quite inconvenient (SP)

**G: Insufficient Practice.** Several courses were criticized for not offering enough in-class practice, particularly for speaking and listening skills, leaving students feeling underprepared and lacking confidence in real-life application.

- More should be spent on forcing us to speak freely (ML)
- It did not give sufficient practice for sentence structure and assembly (GM)
- I feel that we could have more emphasis on training our listening ability of the language (SP)

**H: Language Difficulty.** Many students found specific aspects of language structure—such as grammar, vocabulary, or scripts—especially challenging, with insufficient foundational support provided for beginners to build confidence.

- The French words has too many irregularities (FR)
- Difficult language to learn and master (VT)
- characters are really difficult if you have never experienced the writing style before (CH)

**I: Lack of Practical Application.** Some courses included components (like skits, vlogs, or blog posts) that students found irrelevant or unhelpful for language acquisition. They felt these activities added to the workload without enhancing practical language skills.

- Some characters not really relevant for everyday use (CH)
- The in real life applications of the things we learnt is quite little (KR)
- Some vocab we won't use in everyday life – eg modes of transport (BI)

**J: Materials/Course Organization.** Disorganization in course materials, resources, and online platforms (like Canvas) was a frequent complaint. Students found it difficult to access or understand assignments and resources due to inconsistent or unclear organization.

- Even simple things like who we should submit our assignments to is not clear, when this could be easily avoided by making use of the Canvas "Assignments" function (ML)
- I wish more resources could be provided (HD)
- i would have preferred more structure in the announcement for canvas, which can be quite messy at times and hard to find important information the announcement for canvas (FR)

**K: Teacher Issues.** Some students were uncomfortable with the lecturer’s comments and teaching style, which they found to be inappropriate and distracting. Comments that were perceived as insensitive or irrelevant detracted from the learning environment.

- The lecturer was absolutely the worst part of the course (ML)
- The idea of a class having two different teachers is very poor – both teachers are not necessarily in sync on what they are teaching. Most pertinently, it forces students to figure out the links between lectures ourselves (ML)

In summary, these findings highlight areas requiring attention to improve student satisfaction and learning outcomes, such as workload management, equitable assessment practices, enhanced practical applications, and better course organization.

#### 4.4 Major students’ negative comments

It is encouraging to note that students provided more positive than negative feedback, as illustrated in the findings above. This provides valuable insight into the aspects of the language courses that are performing well. By capitalizing on these strengths and addressing areas of improvement, the overall quality of the courses can be enhanced. Certain limitations—such as class hours and class size—are factors beyond teachers’ control. While these aspects may present challenges, improvements can still be made in areas under our efforts, such as curriculum, teaching pedagogy, learning materials and assessment.

Therefore, this section will focus on addressing areas that can be improved within the scope of our control. Specifically, it will discuss key themes focusing on Assessment and Assignment Issues, Insufficient Practice, and Materials and Course Organization. Figure 3 provides a summary of the most frequent complaints and requests given by the students across larger language courses, including Japanese, Korean, Chinese, French, German, Spanish, Malay, and Bahasa Indonesia.

**Figure 3. Frequency of students’ negative comments on three categories**



**Legend**

- Korean
- Japanese
- Chinese
- French
- German
- Spanish
- Thai
- BI
- Malay



The following is a summary of the major criticisms provided by students across the major language courses.

**C: Assessments/Assignment Issues.** Among three categories, assessments and assignments issues are the most unfavourable component shared among students across languages.

**Korean:** The feedback highlights concerns about the difficulty of exams, particularly for beginners, and the heavy emphasis on grammar-based tests. Students also mentioned challenges with exam timing, frequent assessments, unclear essay rubrics, and the need for more vocabulary quizzes. They suggested extending exam durations and quiz deadlines to alleviate these issues.

**Japanese:** Students expressed concerns about the frequency and intensity of assessments, with some suggesting the test schedule be adjusted to reduce workload and anxiety. Several comments highlighted difficulties with listening quizzes, especially due to the speed and format of the audio, and the lack of time to process answers. There were also requests for oral exams to be individual assessments rather than team-based, so that teachers could better evaluate individual speaking skills.

**French:** Students expressed that some take-home assignments were tedious and lengthy, especially in an introductory language module. Some students felt that assessments should better incorporate conversation practice and suggested that certain assignments, like the "voyage francophone," were time-consuming and not necessary. Overall, the frequency and difficulty of assignments and tests were seen as overwhelming.

**German:** Students expressed concerns about the frequency and workload of assessments, particularly the many vocabulary quizzes, which they found overwhelming, especially for a beginner-level course. There were complaints about the timing of the semester tests, which overlapped with other assignments, leaving little time for revision. Some students found the listening tests difficult due to fast accents, and the vocabulary quizzes were often seen as excessive, with unclear or repetitive content.

**Spanish:** Students expressed concerns about the oral test, noting that they had minimal practice prior to it. There were concerns about tests and exams carrying a high weightage, as well as the expectation for students to write an essay for the first continuous assessment (CA), which some felt was too challenging. Additionally, the listening components of the tests were seen as too fast, making it hard for beginners to understand.

**Thai:** Students noted that there was a lack of balance between writing and listening quizzes, with writing quizzes being too easy and listening quizzes being too difficult. The listening quizzes were particularly challenging due to the speed, making students guess answers instead of understanding them fully. Additionally, students felt that the mid-term format did not match the expectations set in the homework assignments, especially with unannounced changes regarding pronouns.

**Malay:** Students found the assessments overwhelming, with too many tests and assignments for a beginner-level course. They mentioned difficulties with the listening comprehension due to fast speed and poor audio quality, which impacted their performance. Additionally, there were complaints about ambiguous exam questions, poorly structured assignments, and content-heavy exams.

**J: Materials / Course Organization.** Materials and course organization was another major components students perceived negatively.

**French:** Students suggested improvements in the course structure, especially in organizing Canvas announcements, which they found messy and hard to navigate. There were requests to introduce vocabulary together with gender (un, une) to reduce the extra work of searching for it later. Additionally, students requested that listening exercises be slowed down for better comprehension, and that more learning materials would be helpful. There were concerns that the course's focus on grammar, conjugation, and subject-verb agreement could be better structured and made more beginner-friendly.

**German:** Students found issues with course management and structure, mentioning that content was difficult to find and there were concerns about the vocabulary quizzes, with students noting that the glossary was poorly arranged and contained repetitions or inaccuracies. The frequency of vocabulary quizzes, combined with the volume of words to memorize, was seen as overwhelming. Additionally, some students felt that the course focused too much on grammar, leaving little time to enjoy and understand the language.

**Malay:** Students expressed frustration with the course's disorganization, particularly the scheduling issues. There were complaints about a lack of a fixed vocabulary list, unclear exam content, and mismatched information across Canvas, slides, and assignments. The course's coordination was criticized, with students mentioning that changes in deadlines, test dates, and course expectations were not communicated well.

**G: Insufficient Practice.** Students of some programmes also felt that there is not enough conversation practice provided by the teachers.

**German:** Students mentioned that there was not enough time for practice and suggested longer lecture times (preferably 2 hours instead of 1.5 hours). There was also a request for more practice material and course notes to help grasp the concepts better. Some students felt that the course did not provide sufficient practice with sentence structure.

**Malay:** Students expressed a desire for more practice in conversational Malay, as well as an emphasis on forming sentences. They suggested that the course should focus more on conversational vocabulary rather than adjectives, which would be helpful for practical application in writing and speaking.

## 5. Summary and Discussion

### 5.1. Language Similarities

Table 4 and Table 5 summarise the frequency of segmented comments to address RQ3: Are there positive and negative shared features across the 13 language courses? The intensity of each feature within each language group is indicated by the colour; the darker the colour, the more frequently the corresponding remark segments appeared. This leads to the emergence of some trends, which will be elaborated upon in the subsequent section. Note that Hindi, Tamil, and Vietnamese are weaker colours due to few numbers of comments overall.

**Table 4.** Frequency Table of Positive Features of Each Language

		AR	JP	KR	SP	BI	TH	VT	FR	GM	HI	TM	ML	CH
A	Interesting and Enjoyment	Dark Purple	Dark Purple	Dark Purple	Dark Purple	Dark Purple	Light Purple			Dark Purple			Dark Purple	
B	Interactive and Engaging							Dark Purple						
C	Cultural Exposure				Light Purple	Dark Purple	Dark Purple	Dark Purple	Dark Purple		Light Purple			
D	New Language Acquisition		Light Purple	Light Purple	Light Purple			Light Purple	Light Purple	Light Purple			Light Purple	Dark Purple
E	Speaking Practice Opportunities		Dark Purple											Dark Purple
F	Positive Teacher and Peer Influence	Light Purple					Dark Purple	Dark Purple	Dark Purple	Dark Purple	Dark Purple		Dark Purple	Dark Purple
G	Interest in the Language and Culture			Light Purple										Dark Purple
H	Practicality and Usefulness					Dark Purple	Light Purple							
I	Appropriate Course Pacing							Light Purple				Light Purple	Light Purple	
J	Useful Assignment/Assessment													
K	Well-organized course and materials	Dark Purple	Light Purple	Light Purple	Dark Purple	Light Purple			Dark Purple	Dark Purple	Dark Purple	Dark Purple		
L	Accomplishment and Satisfaction	Dark Purple									Light Purple			

Table 4 is a summary of the positive features of each language. From this, the following trends can be observed.

Firstly, **A: Interesting and Enjoyment** were predominantly perceived by students from AR, JP, KR, SP, and ML. These students also appreciated **K: Well-organized course and materials**. This suggest that classroom activities and teaching/learning materials play a key role for making the course / lessons interesting and enjoyable. If we look at the languages themselves, certain languages have complex written scripts, and the introduction of tones compared to some languages which use the





Latin alphabet. It is notable that despite needing to learn an entirely new script, students of AR, JP, KR TH still indicate that they found the course to be interesting and enjoyable. This occurs despite the Arabic and Japanese students reporting a substantial workload. These findings indicate that students may derive pleasure from language acquisition, even when faced with a new script or challenging language, provided the course is well-structured and utilises thoughtfully designed materials.

Secondly, students in BI and TH appreciated **C: Cultural Exposure**. This may be because Indonesia and Thailand are popular destinations for Singaporeans to travel to and are in close proximity to Singapore. This also reflects the students' cultural project of the respective programmes. These students also appreciate **H: Practicality and Usefulness**. They mentioned that the target language is useful for travelling when they visit the target countries.

Thirdly, students in CH predominantly expressed their appreciation for the course due to **D: New Language Acquisition**. This may be due to their status as exchange students primarily from Western nations, where they lacked sufficient exposure to the target language in their home countries.

Table 5 is a summary of the negative features of each language.

**Table 5. Frequency Table of Negative Features of each Language**

		TH	CH	JP	AR	GM	SP	FR	BI	KR	HI	ML	TM	VT
A	Heavy Workload	■	■	■	■	■			■					
B	Experienced Students									■	■			
C	Assessment/Assignment Issues	■	■	■		■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
D	Competitiveness									■				
E	Pacing Issues	■	■	■	■	■	■							
F	Logistical Challenges													
G	Insufficient Practice											■		
H	Language Difficulty				■		■	■					■	■
I	Lack of Practical Application								■					
J	Materials/Course Organization		■					■			■	■		
K	Teacher Issues													

According to the table, the following trends can be observed.

Firstly, **A: Heavy Workload, C: Assessment /Assignment Issues, and H Language Difficulty** were most unfavourable comments perceived by the students of TH, CH, JP, AR, and BI. This may be due to the complex writing system of the target language and the frequency of assignments and assessments. This should be why they also feel the pace is too fast.

Secondly, **B: Experienced Students** was most strongly indicated by students in KR. It may be a testament to South Korean soft power, through their cultural exports such as Korean pop music or Korean dramas, which has resulted in students learning Korean, and subsequently desiring to formalize such learning at the university level. Similarly, learners of HI are typically exposed to cultural elements such as Bollywood cinema, music and social media.

Thirdly, **H: Language Difficulty** were perceived by students in SP, FR, TM and VT. Those difficulties arose from different reasons, for instance, SP was perceived as challenging in listening, FR was due to the grammar (including gender) and pronunciation, TM for its script and VT for its tones. GM received comments about difficulty of grammar as well, however there were more comments against assessment / assignment, heavy workload and pacing issues.

## 5.2 Implications

This study highlights numerous positive aspects of the courses that could be the major motivational factors for learners to continue learning the specific language. On the other hand, negative features discovered in this study could be the major reasons to discontinue the learning of the respective language. These insights would enable educators to make timely adjustments that align with students' evolving needs and challenges, supporting a responsive curriculum that adapts effectively at each stage of language proficiency. This approach would facilitate evidence-based curriculum adjustments, refining language education to better support students' learning needs and motivations throughout their language learning journey.

Consequently, the findings are profoundly relevant and enlightening for enhancing students' motivation.

Nevertheless, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Feedback was exclusively gathered from students enrolled in Level 1 courses. This may offer preliminary insights for students unfamiliar with the language; nevertheless, if the respondents are from advanced courses, their perspectives may differ. Moreover, the data was obtained from a single institution, and the results may not be generalisable to other institutions. The results may be affected by the attributes of the educational environment in which this study was performed. Subsequent research could mitigate these constraints by broadening feedback acquisition throughout numerous semesters at diverse schools. The findings open pathways for future research to expand on insights across proficiency levels and over time. Ultimately, this study lays the groundwork for a more responsive and evidence-based framework in language education, enriching the language learning experience.

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