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Language Lethargy: Investigating the hesitancy to study foreign languages from the perspectives of students at the University of The West Indies.

Word Count: _____

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to God for guiding me through this journey and providing me with the strength and wisdom to complete this thesis. Without God's blessings and support, I would not have been able to achieve this accomplishment.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Mr. Romulo Guedez Fernandez, for his unwavering guidance, support, and encouragement throughout the process of writing this thesis. His expertise, patience and dedication have been instrumental in helping me achieve my goals, realize my objectives, and complete this project.

ABSTRACT

The importance of foreign language acquisition in today's world cannot be overstated. Despite the fact that research has shown that language education is a key component of intercultural communication and global understanding, many students at the University of The West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine, demonstrated a lack of enthusiasm for learning foreign languages. This study sought to investigate the phenomenon of language lethargy, which describes the increased reluctance to study foreign languages, reasons for this hesitancy, and its impact on the students' personal, academic, and professional lives, using a mixed-methods research design that included questionnaires and interviews.

The study revealed that the lack of substantial motivating factors have resulted in a widespread indifference in foreign language learning¹, with students deviating from FLL to pursue more ostensibly lucrative degrees. The biggest impediments to foreign language acquisition, according to these studies, are a lack of effective and efficient education systems, as well as a lack of incentives and immersion programs to motivate people to pursue foreign language degrees and even learn a new language. With this in mind, it is recommended that foreign languages at all academic levels require modern teaching strategies and better marketing, as well as adequate support and funding from relevant agencies, in order to better entice students to pursue foreign languages and help them better understand the need for plurilingualism in contemporary society and the positive impact it will have on their lives, development, and understanding of the wider world.

¹ The term "Foreign Language Learning" will be abbreviated to FLL.

Keywords: foreign language learning, language education, language lethargy, language hesitancy, Plurilingualism, immersion, study abroad, UWI, education policy

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INTRODUCTION

Language is the cornerstone of communication and plays a vital role in shaping individuals' personal, social, and professional lives. In today's globalized world, the ability to speak multiple languages is becoming increasingly important. The ability to communicate effectively in different languages opens up opportunities for travel, work, and cultural exchange, and promotes understanding and tolerance across linguistic and cultural boundaries. However, despite the increasing importance of foreign language learning, many students exhibit a lack of interest or motivation to study foreign languages. This phenomenon, referred to in this study as “language lethargy,” has been observed among students in different contexts and has become a growing concern for educators and policymakers.

The University of The West Indies (UWI) is a regional institution of higher education with campuses in several Caribbean countries and like many universities around the world, UWI offers foreign language courses as part of its curriculum. According to a study by the Modern Language Association (MLA), there has been a decline in the study of foreign languages in the United States, with enrollments dropping by 10% between 2013 and 2016 (MLA, 2017). Similarly, UWI has also experienced a decline in language enrollment rates over the past few years. This trend is concerning because it not only limits students' opportunities for personal and professional growth, but also has broader implications for the region's economic development and international relations.

To address this trend, it is important to investigate the underlying reasons for language lethargy among UWI students. One possible factor is the perception that English is the dominant language in the Caribbean and that there is no need to learn other languages. However, this perception ignores the fact that many Caribbean countries have a rich linguistic diversity, with languages such as Spanish, French, Dutch, and Creole spoken alongside English.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to shed light on the factors that contribute to language lethargy among UWI students and propose strategies to overcome it. The findings of this study could inform policies and interventions aimed at promoting language learning in higher education institutions, not only in the Caribbean region but also globally. Ultimately, this study seeks to emphasize the importance of language learning as a means of promoting cultural understanding, enhancing global competencies, and fostering personal and professional growth.

Rationale

This research project explores language lethargy and attempts to identify the factors contributing to students' reluctance to study foreign languages. This study's findings are essential for education policymakers and practitioners who play a significant role in enrolling students in foreign language programs. This study will provide insight into students' perceptions and the underlying causes for their lack of interest and excitement in university-level foreign language studies.

This project will also contribute to the existing literature on foreign language learning motivation and attitudes in the Caribbean region, serving as a resource for future educators investigating the complex factors influencing language learning attitudes and behaviors in diverse cultural contexts, as well as potential strategies for promoting language learning and multilingualism among Trinidad and Tobago university students. This research topic investigates the importance of learning a foreign language in today's globalized environment. It investigates the need for improved relationships between foreign language students and graduates and the working world, particularly in the context of the Caribbean area, by providing insights into the

viewpoints of students from diverse faculties. As a result, the findings of this study can assist in developing evidence-based language education policies and practices in Trinidad and Tobago and globally, in addition to providing practical recommendations for improving language learning among UWI students, which, if left unbridled, could have ramifications on the education and employment sectors.

Thesis Statement

Despite the global push for plurilingualism and the benefits it offers, students at the University of the West Indies (UWI) are reluctant to pursue foreign language degrees.

Parameters

This research will be conducted at the University of the West Indies Campus in Trinidad and Tobago from October 2022 to April 2023. With the increasing globalization of the world economy, language skills are becoming more important in the job market, and fortunately, Trinidad and Tobago provide a rich context for studying foreign language reticence, as it has a diverse linguistic landscape, educational policies that are responsible for promoting multilingualism, and some students' skepticism that foreign language degree skills are relevant to their career goals and an asset in the job market. For these reasons, the timing and location are excellent for better understanding this emerging phenomenon and the impact it may have locally, regionally, and globally.

This research will take a look at the viewpoints of UWI students and educators on the growing reluctance to study foreign languages, with a particular emphasis on the personal, cultural, and socioeconomic aspects that contribute to this language disinterest/lethargy.

Objectives

1. To identify the most common barriers and challenges to foreign language learning among university students at The University of The West Indies.
2. To investigate the role of language policy and education in promoting or hindering students' interest in foreign languages.
3. To assess students' perceptions on foreign language learning at a university level.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to contribute to the existing literature on language learning motivation and language policy by providing insights into the factors contributing to language hesitancy and lethargy among UWI students in Trinidad and Tobago. For this research, information was collected through the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The findings from the two methods will be triangulated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to language lethargy among UWI students.

Quantitative data will be collected through questionnaires distributed to a representative sample of UWI students, which will include 25 items of varying question types. The surveys will be designed to collect information on students' motivation for language learning, attitudes towards

foreign language acquisition and challenges with foreign language learning and plurilingualism. Subsequently, the qualitative data will be informed by the findings obtained from the questionnaires. This data will be gathered through interviews comprising 7 questions with participants who have had firsthand experiences with foreign language learning. To best understand this topic, both the quantitative and qualitative data will be analyzed.

Chapter Outline

This study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter includes an overview of the relevant literature, emphasizing the relevance of language learning in today's world, the variables that impede foreign language acquisition, and the general attitude toward foreign language learning and degrees. Using questionnaires and interviews, Chapter Two presents the findings relating to the overall perception of foreign language study, providing insight on the reasons for the reticence in pursuing foreign languages in Trinidad. Whereas Chapter Three discusses the study's findings with an emphasis on respondents' perceptions toward the issue.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

Language learning is a critical component of global education since it enables people to communicate across countries and promotes cross-cultural understanding. However, many students struggle with language learning and acquisition and one of the biggest challenges they encounter is lethargy. Lethargy, according to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, is a state of being exceedingly fatigued and lacking energy or enthusiasm. In the context of language learning, it refers to a state in which students are unmotivated and lack the desire to study languages. The aim of this literature review is to investigate the factors that give rise to language lethargy among students at the University of The West Indies, St. Augustine and to explore potential solutions to overcome this challenge.

The importance of language learning cannot be overstated. According to E.F. Engel's study "*The Value of Knowing Modern Languages*", there are various advantages to learning a language that extend beyond the acquisition of a new skill. One of the main advantages is the development of cultural awareness and intercultural competency, as aforementioned, which allows individuals to better understand and communicate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Engel, 1996). He goes on to say that those who study foreign language learning (FLL) will have a broader outlook and sympathies, as well as a more enriched intellectual and emotional storehouse, making them more productive members of society. In addition, language acquisition has been found to improve cognitive performance and boost brain plasticity, which can lead to improved academic and professional achievement (Kuhl et al., 2003; Mechelli et al., 2004). Furthermore, since language skills are highly appreciated in international commerce and diplomacy (Byram, 1997; Honig & Brod, 1997), proficiency in languages can increase career opportunities and improve

worldwide marketability. Overall, the advantages of language acquisition are countless and can have a substantial impact on personal, intellectual, and professional development.

Despite the numerous advantages of FLL, there are several barriers to language acquisition. Engel (1996) mentions "negative attitudes towards language learning" as one of the key obstacles to acquiring language proficiency. Some individuals, for example, might presume that learning a language is too difficult, time-consuming, or simply not worth the effort. In the field of foreign language learning, attitude is a critical aspect that influences a learner's ambition and achievement, as well as their overall learning experience. In his article *"The Importance of Attitude in Foreign Language Learning,"* Alfred N. Smith (1971) adds to the discussion by noting that unfavorable attitudes and perceptions regarding foreign language learning may create barriers that inhibit learners' progress and success. Those who perceive language learning as a pleasurable and enriching experience, on the other hand, may be more motivated to engage with the content and continue in their efforts to acquire proficiency (Dörnyei, 1994). Similarly, their perceptions of their own linguistic ability can influence motivation and success. Those who have a development mindset and believe that their language skills can improve with practice and hard work are more likely to remain consistent with their language learning efforts and eventually succeed (Dweck, 2012). Overall, an individual's attitude can have a significant impact on their pursuit of FLL learning those who are looking to pursue FLL with negative attitudes may be more hesitant to actually go forward with their pursuits, whereas those who develop these attitudes while participating in the program may abandon their studies entirely.

David Crystal (1998) contends in his book *"English as a Global Language"* that extensive use and acceptance of English as the global lingua franca can have a negative impact on language learning. The English language's global dominance has resulted in an increasing number of people

adopting English as their primary language, raising concerns about the impact of English on language lethargy, the lack of motivation or interest in learning other languages, and the decline in language diversity and cultural understanding (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). While Crystal acknowledges that the increasing popularity of English has opened up new avenues for communication and cultural exchange, he also asserts that English dominance has resulted in a decrease in interest in learning other languages. He further claims that this change is due to a growing conviction that English is the only language required for international communication, with others believing that English is sufficient for their personal and professional needs. This viewpoint may also explain the global decline in enrollment in foreign language courses, with the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine being no exception. This does not account for those who learn languages on their own or with the assistance of a private teacher, which may suggest a disinterest in the structure of language teaching in the education system rather than languages.

Recent research on foreign language acquisition shows that outdated teaching approaches have a negative impact on language learners' ambition, motivation, and engagement. For example, William Wagaba (2013) examines the issues experienced by foreign language learners in Uganda as a result of ineffective teaching methods in his article titled *"Foreign language teaching and learning: Challenges and Opportunities at Makerere University."* Wagaba observes that previous approaches to foreign language teaching in Uganda have emphasized grammar skills and rote memorization, which can contribute to language lethargy. This sentiment was echoed in the study *"Understanding EFL learners' motivation and attitudes towards learning English"* by Lee and Oxford (2008), in which students expressed frustration, discontent, and feelings of disengagement and de-motivation as a result of poorly structured and outdated teaching methods that provided few opportunities for authentic communication or cultural exploration. As a result, many students

struggle to understand the significance and practical application of what they are learning, leading to indifference and apprehension about continuing to study foreign languages. These findings imply that outdated teaching approaches can lead to language lethargy as learners fail to understand the connection between language acquisition and their personal interests and needs. Wagaba, on the other hand, provides a more communicative and task-based approach to language instruction that stresses practical language use in real-world circumstances and promotes student autonomy and involvement. By adopting this practice, foreign language educators can assist in preventing language lethargy and foster a more positive and engaging language learning experience for all students. However, given the persistence of this issue, prospective students may be hesitant to pursue FLL, let alone an education system fraught with unresolved concerns.

Moreover, existing education systems in Trinidad and Tobago that prioritize grades over competence have been cited as a potential contribution factor in students' language lethargy. According to Trinidad and Tobago's Education Policy Paper current assessment and evaluation practices in the education system are primarily focused on grades and test scores, leading to a narrow view of education that prioritizes academic achievement over the development of practical skills. According to research, this may lead to a lack of enthusiasm and interest in foreign language learning since students may believe that grades are the most essential component in their education and may see it as an additional burden on an already rigorous academic schedule. Furthermore, grade-focused rules might contribute to an emphasis on rote memorization and test-taking tactics rather than practical language usage, resulting in a lack of communicative competence and a sense of alienation from the language-learning process. This can contribute to a sense of disengagement and motivation among foreign language learners. Additionally, Trinidad and Tobago's Language and Language Education Policy (2010) recognizes the need to shift away from a focus on grades

and test scores and toward a more comprehensive and integrated approach to foreign language learning that emphasizes practical language use, cultural awareness, and intercultural communication. Policymakers may assist in counteracting foreign language lethargy and fostering a more positive and engaging language learning experience for students by shifting the focus away from grades and toward broader language learning outcomes.

Technology has had a tremendous impact on foreign language acquisition over the years, with mounting proof that it promotes plurilingualism and may prevent language lethargy among students. In his article *"In a World of SMART Technology, Why Learn Another Language?"* Robert Godwin-Jones (2019) argues that technology has the potential to improve the quality of language learning by providing learners with opportunities to interact with authentic material and native speakers of the target language. While he admits that technology cannot replace the advantages of face-to-face conversation and language immersion, he believes it can augment traditional language learning approaches. He also emphasizes the advantages of employing technology for language learning, such as online language exchanges, mobile applications, and multimedia materials. Furthermore, Raquel Oxford (2011) notes in her paper entitled *"Effects of Technology-Enhanced Language Learning in Second Language Composition"* that technology enables personalized and differentiated instruction, allowing students to work at their own pace in areas where they require more practice. As a result, the students have demonstrated better levels of enthusiasm and engagement, which can overcome language lethargy and improve learning outcomes. Overall, these findings suggest that technology can enhance language learning by providing learners with a new and novel approach to interacting with the target language and culture, thereby overcoming traditional barriers to language acquisition.

Similarly, the advantages of studying abroad and other language immersion programs in combating linguistic lethargy have received much attention in the literature. The potential for learners to immerse themselves in a new culture and environment, which could provide an immersive and real learning experience, is one of the most significant benefits. According to Gregory Armstrong's (1984) study *"Life After Study Abroad: A Survey of Undergraduate Academic and Career Choices"*, study abroad experiences can increase language skills, cultural competency, and career chances. Armstrong discovered that students who studied abroad had higher levels of foreign language proficiency and confidence in their language skills. He goes on to say that being exposed to a variety of learning environments can help students establish a more holistic understanding of the language while also encouraging them to take a more active role in their language learning. According to Armstrong, the majority of participants attested that the study abroad program revived their interest in languages, and the majority of them went on to pursue international employment prospects. Michael Flack's (1976) study *"Results and Effects of Study Abroad"* contributed to the discussion by reporting that students who took part in study abroad programs had higher academic performance, such as higher GPAs, and higher marks on language exams than those who did not participate. These findings imply that study abroad and language immersion programs can be effective in combating language lethargy by enabling learners to immerse themselves in the language and culture, practice their language skills in real-life settings, and develop a greater appreciation for the language and its culture (Ungar, 2016).

In conclusion, the literature review has highlighted the limited research available on foreign language hesitancy in the Caribbean, particularly in Trinidad and Tobago. This scarcity of research has highlighted the need for further studies on this topic in order to gain a better understanding of the causes and effects of foreign language lethargy and hesitancy in the Caribbean context.

Additionally, it has been noted that many of the proposed solutions to combat foreign language lethargy and hesitancy have been successful in developing countries, which raises questions about the applicability and effectiveness of these solutions in a developing country such as Trinidad and Tobago, which still has limited resources. Therefore, further research is necessary to explore the development of Caribbean-based solutions that consider the unique social, cultural, and economic contexts of the region in order to effectively combat foreign language lethargy and hesitancy in the Caribbean.

CHAPTER TWO

Findings

This chapter presents the results of the questionnaires and interviews conducted to investigate the factors that contribute to language lethargy and hesitancy. These findings offer valuable insights into the complex and multifaceted nature of foreign language use and maintenance, as well as practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and language learners alike.

Questionnaire

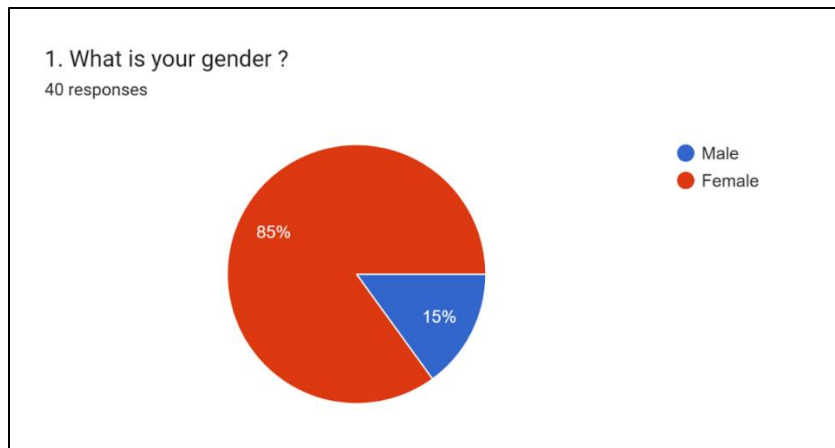


Fig. 1. Pie Chart showing participants' gender.

According to these results, the majority of respondents were female, accounting for 85% of all respondents, while only 15% were male.

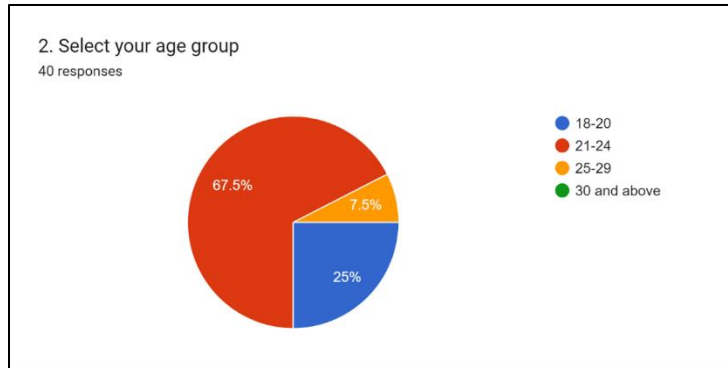


Fig. 2. Pie Chart showing Participants' age.

These results indicate that the majority of participants, totaling 67.5%, were between the ages of 21 and 24.

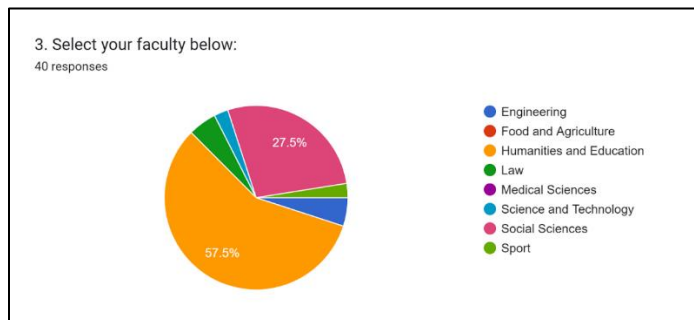


Fig. 3. Pie Chart indicating the participants' respective faculties.

According to the results obtained more than half of the participants (57.5% of responses) belong to the Faculty of Humanities and Education.

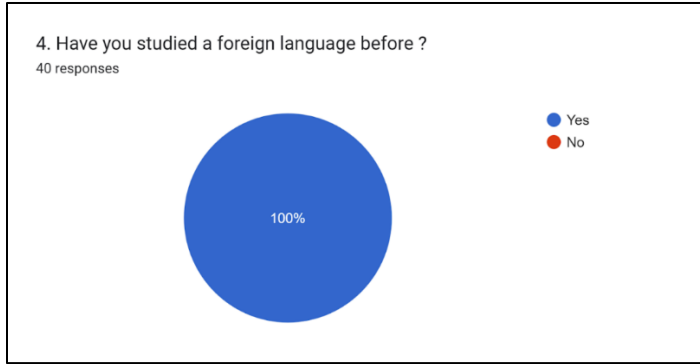


Fig. 4. Pie Chart reflecting the percentage of participants that studied foreign languages.

The responses to this question reveal that all respondents (100% of participants) had studied a foreign language.

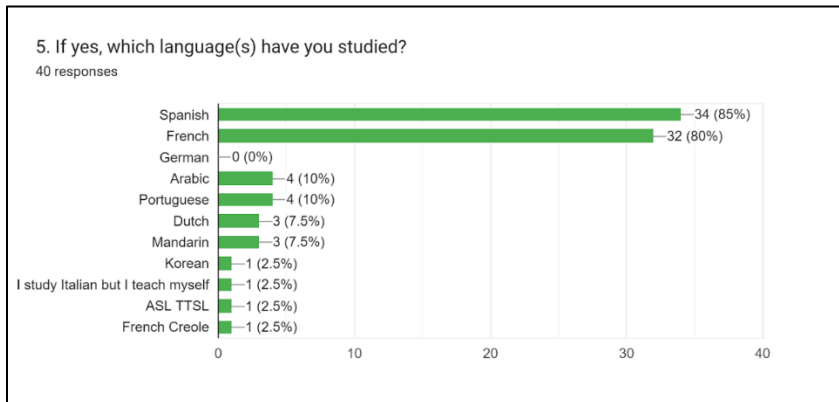


Fig. 5. Bar graph indicating the languages studied by the participants.

According to the findings, Spanish and French were the most commonly studied languages, accounting for 85% and 80% of respondents, respectively.

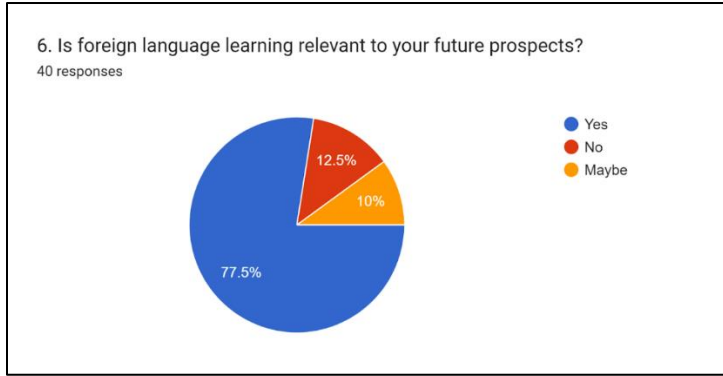


Fig. 6. Pie chart depicting participants' perceived value of foreign language to their future careers.

The results obtained indicate that most respondents (75% of participants), believe that foreign language learning is essential for their future endeavors.

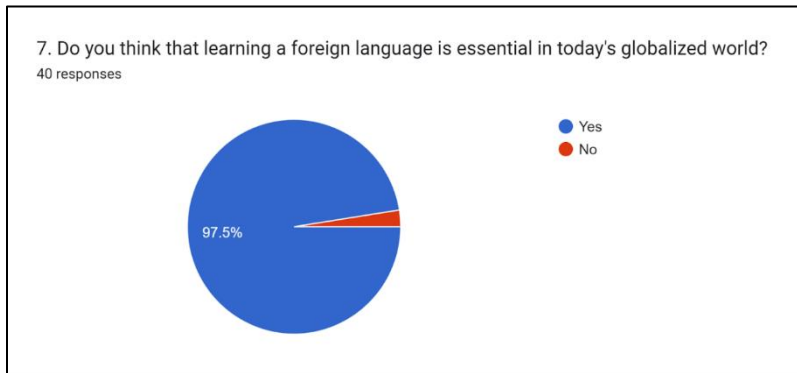


Fig. 7. Pie chart showing the participants' perceptions of the relevance of foreign language in today's world.

The results show that 93% of respondents acknowledge that foreign languages have a place in contemporary society.

Question 8 prompted students to elaborate on their response to Question 7, which dealt with their opinion of the importance of foreign languages in contemporary society. The majority of respondents (96.3%) stated that it was essential for communication, travel, and business.

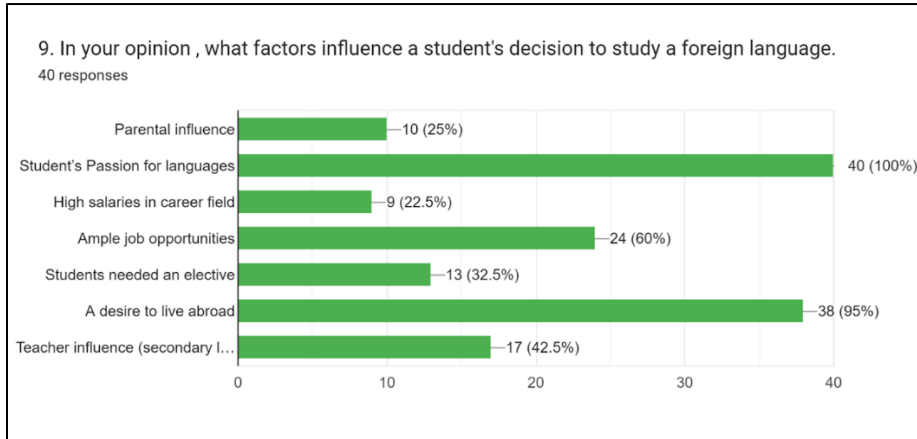


Fig. 8. Bar graph indicating the motivating factors that inspired the participants to pursue foreign language learning.

The findings indicate that the majority of respondents (100%) were motivated by their passion for learning foreign languages. This is followed closely by a desire to live abroad (95% of respondents).

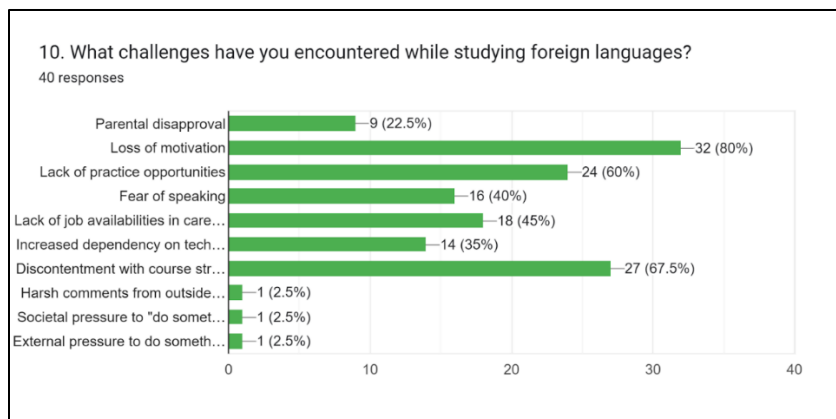


Fig. 9. Bar graph depicting the challenges encountered while studying foreign languages.

According to the responses obtained, the majority of respondents, comprising 80% of participants, identified "loss of motivation" as the most difficult aspect of learning a foreign language. "Discontent with the course structure and teaching methods" follows closely behind, with 67.5% of respondents admitting that it is a struggle.

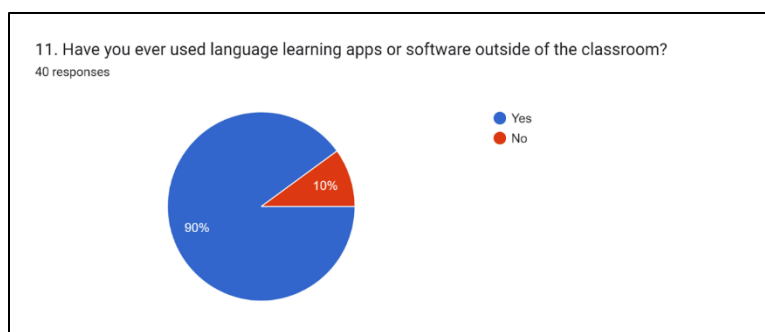


Fig. 10. Pie chart showing the participants who use or have used learning apps and software beyond the classroom.

The results reveal that 90% of students, representing the majority of participants, have used learning apps or other software outside of the classroom.

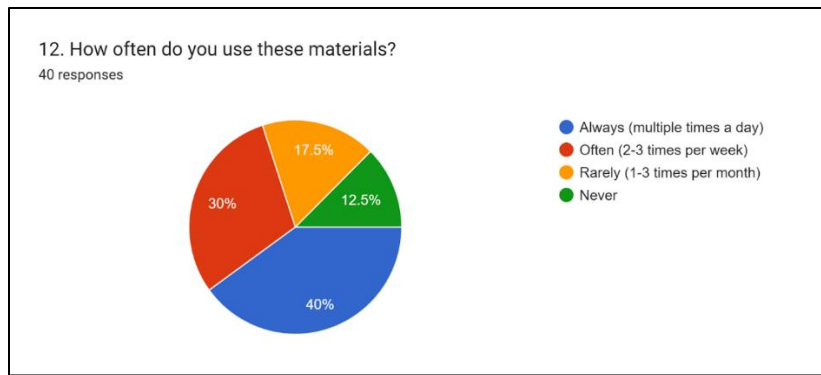


Fig. 11. Pie chart depicting how frequently learning apps and software are used by the participants.

According to the chart, 40% of respondents use language apps or software multiple times per day (always). Also, 30% of respondents reported they use them only 2-3 times per week (often).

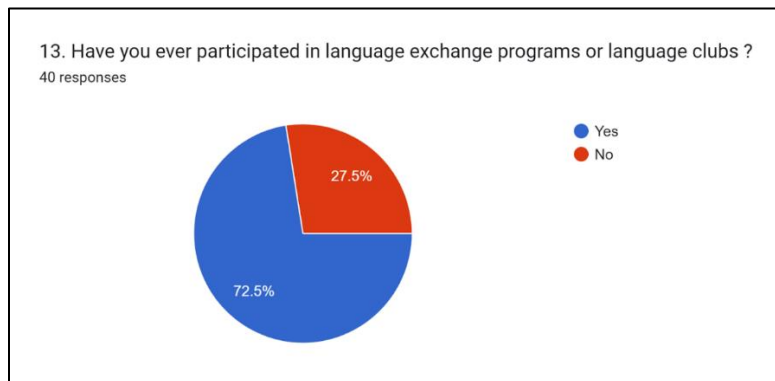


Fig. 12. Pie chart indicates participants' participation in immersive activities.

The findings show that the majority of participants, 72.5%, have participated in immersive activities including study abroad programs and language clubs.

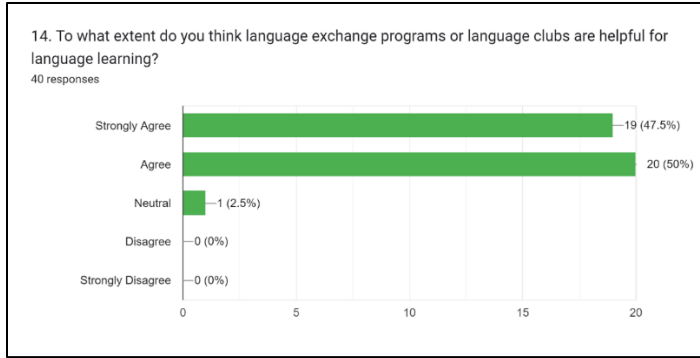


Fig. 13. Bar graph reflecting participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of immersion programs.

According to the findings, the majority of respondents (50%) agree that these programs and activities are essential for foreign language learning.

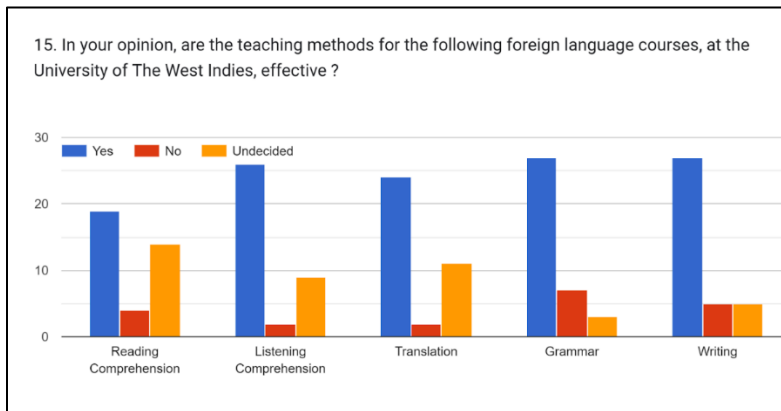


Fig. 14. Bar graph indicating the effectiveness of teaching methods of specific foreign language components at UWI.

The responses show that the majority of students found the teaching methods effective in reading comprehension, listening comprehension, translation, grammar, writing components.

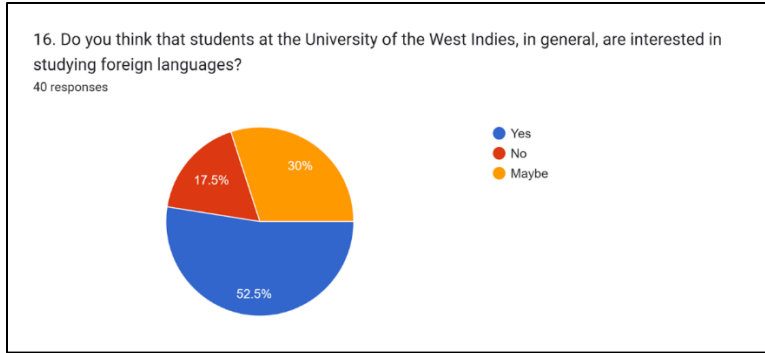


Fig. 15. Pie chart reflecting the participants' beliefs on the overall interest in foreign language learning at UWI.

According to the responses, 52.5% of students believe that university students are interested in learning a foreign language.

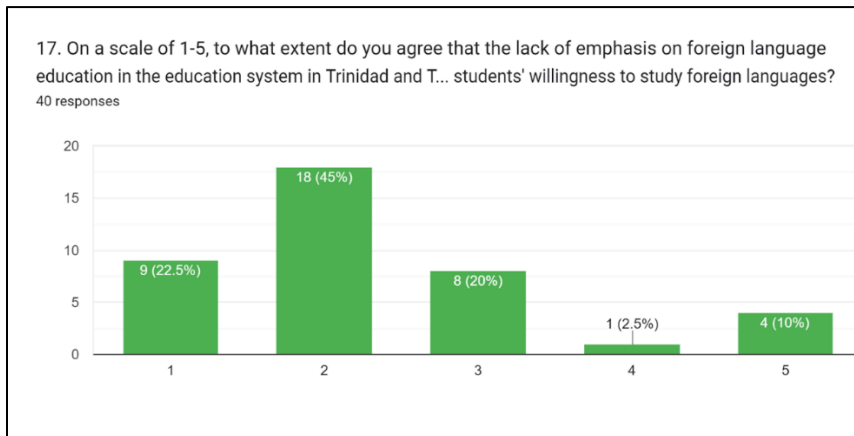


Fig. 16. Bar graph reflecting participants' views on the impact of education policies on student's willingness to pursue FLL.

According to the findings, the majority of students selected "2" on a scale of 1-5, indicating that the lack of emphasis on foreign language education in Trinidad and Tobago's education system has a negative effect on students' willingness to study foreign languages.

Question 18 asked participants to state whether they believe students who study foreign languages had an edge in the job market. The vast majority of respondents (82.3%) felt that learners have a competitive advantage as they are able to communicate and function within multiple countries, languages, and cultures, making them more valuable to employers.

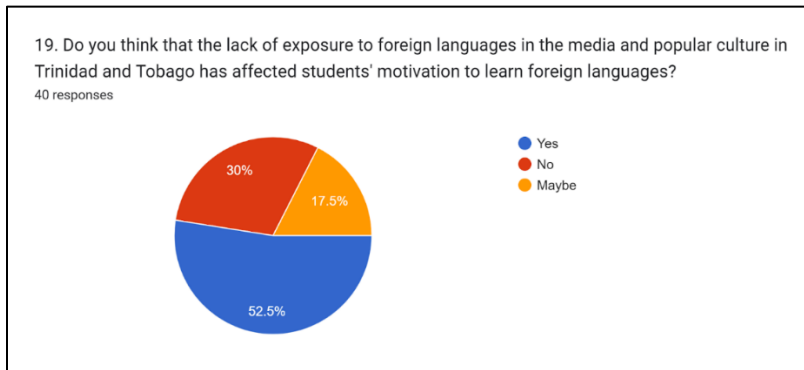


Fig. 17. Pie chart showing participants' view on students' motivation to study foreign languages.

For this question, the majority of students (52.5% of participants) agreed that a lack of exposure to foreign languages in Trinbagonian media and popular culture has a detrimental impact on students' enthusiasm to pursue foreign language learning.

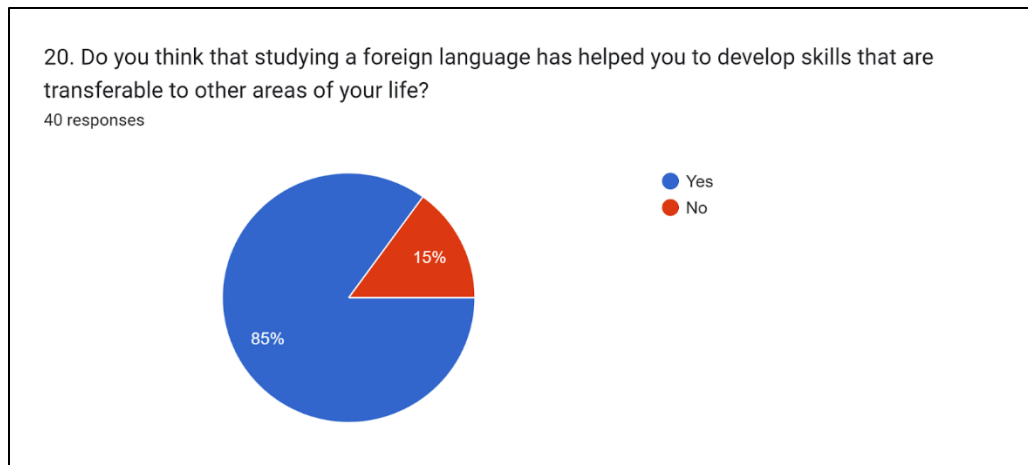


Fig. 18. Pie chart reflecting the participants’ perspective on the practicality of foreign language skills.

According to the findings, 85% of respondents have gained life skills through foreign language instruction.

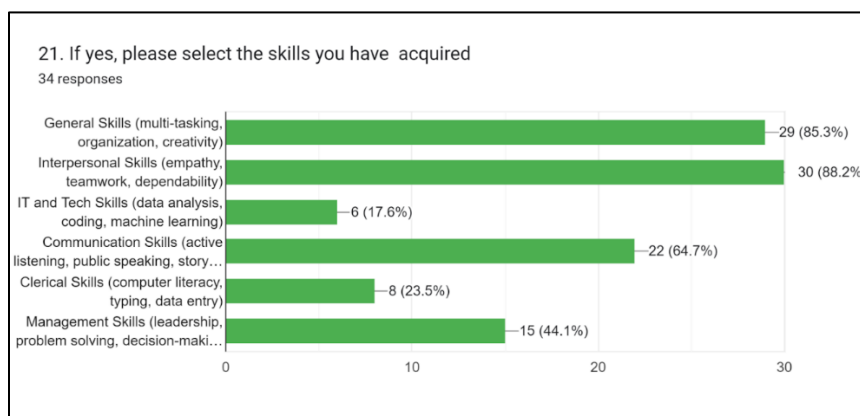


Fig. 19. Bar graph showing the skills that can evolve through the process of foreign language learning.

According to the participants, 88.2% of respondents have developed interpersonal skills such as empathy, teamwork, and dependability. This follows closely with 85.3% responders acquiring general skills such as multitasking, organization and creativity.

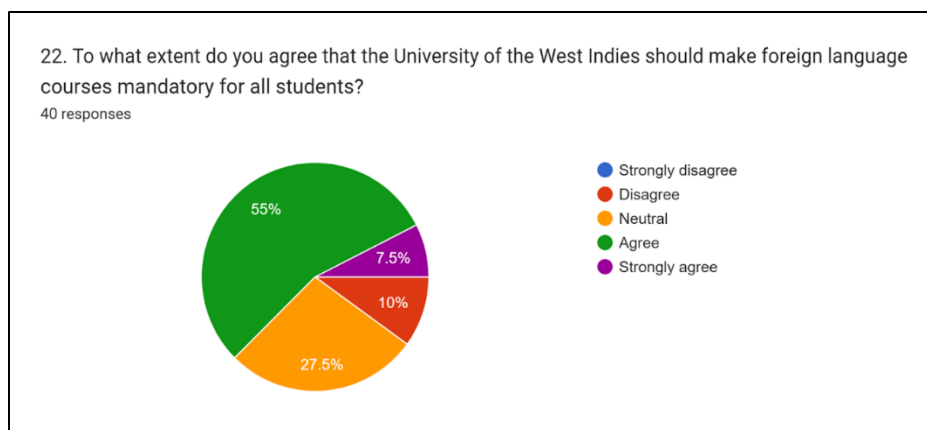


Fig. 20. Pie chart reflecting students' views on compulsory foreign language learning.

According to the data, 55% of participants believe that UWI should make foreign language classes mandatory.

Question 23 asked participants to state whether they thought technology made language learning more or less difficult. The majority of students (75%) asserted that technology makes learning foreign languages easier while 35% of students admitted it has become more difficult.

Question 24, an open-ended question, questioned whether learning a foreign language helped them understand their own culture and language but the vast majority stated that it had not.

In question 25, participants were asked to provide suggestions to educators or policymakers on how to improve the quality of language learning at the university level. There was an assortment of replies, investing in immersion programs and modifying the curriculum were the two most popular responses.

Interview

The interviewees comprised one foreign language student from year 1 and year 3 (Y1, Y3), a past student (PS) and a secondary school teacher (T2) offered their time and expertise for this study. However, their identities would remain anonymous and as such they would be referred to only by their respective initials, to protect their privacy and confidentiality. The participants' responses were organized into subsections that were topics of focus, such as personal attitudes towards FLL, challenges faced, and motivation, for ease of interpretation.

Category: Personal attitudes towards foreign language learning

Participants were asked about their opinion on foreign language learning and its importance. They were also asked to recall an experience that had impacted their attitudes towards foreign language learning. Their responses were recorded as follows:

Y1 expressed that, *“Languages broaden your mindset and options and give you a competitive edge in the workplace”* but *“at times it feels like the degree doesn’t make sense because I travel and see people functioning well with just google translate. In those moments, I feel like I could do something better with my time like do a major in psychology and learn languages after school.”*

For Y3, *“Languages gives you a lot of professional opportunities and helps with making new connections but when I did the work abroad program in France, I struggled to adapt because I felt like I could not apply what I had learnt in school.”*

According to PS, *“They [languages] are definitely an important asset in the world of work. I see it every time I go for an interview or get called out for an advertising promotion.”* He added that *“During my study abroad in Colombia, I was complimented my accent and effort and it made me want to be more fluent.”*

T2 stated that *“There are a lot of personal and professional benefits of learning foreign languages. Personally, it makes learners more well-rounded, open-minded, and empathetic person. Professionally, you [learners] get the opportunity to travel, network and build clientele.* Conversely, she notes that *“After I left university, the only jobs available were teaching which I wasn’t initially interested in. Then, I realized that most of the job opportunities were abroad, I had to settle for teaching.”*

Category: Challenges faced

The interviewees were also asked about the challenges of learning a foreign language and the reasons why individuals would be discouraged from FLL. This aimed to explore the various factors that may deter individuals from learning a foreign language, as well as the unique challenges that different languages may pose for language learners.

“Different languages present different challenges. For example, Arabic’s grammar is more complex than English’s because the verb comes before the subject in sentences” (Y1). In response to the following question, she added that *“Based on my experience, a lot of people think languages are hard, so they don’t do it. People are always compliment me and say they would never do it but it’s easy, just passion and practice.”*

Likewise, Y3 shared that *“Mandarin was difficult because they have 4 tones in their language that change the meaning of every word and phrase if used incorrectly.”* According to her, *“there are no jobs for foreign language students besides teaching and call-center operators. I feel like there’s no opportunities here [Trinidad and Tobago] for us [foreign language students] ... it might make more sense to pursue something lucrative like Business or Med and study languages privately.”*

GS asserted that *“French was definitely harder because there were a lot of grammar rules.”* He then stated that *“parents want their children to become lawyers, doctors, and engineers because that was the goal in their time. They more so see languages as “hobbies” here [in Trinidad]”*

T2 asserted that *“in my time, French was a heavy course, and I did not enjoy it at all but at times Spanish was difficult to grasp because of how quickly they spoke.”* Then, she adds, *“Back then, parents had a lot of influence on what you studied. They wanted their children to become either a doctor or a lawyer. Some teachers brought that mentality to the workplace and*

discouraged children against studying foreign language because it was seen as an unstable field”.

Category: Motivation

Participants were asked about their motivation to start learning a foreign language, any challenges encountered in the process and how they maintained their motivation and momentum.

Y1 testified that *“I only continued with foreign languages because my secondary school teacher influenced me. She travelled a lot and was always telling us stories about it, and I realized I wanted that lifestyle. Sometimes, though, the [Spanish] degree feels stagnant. I love the lecturers but sometimes the classes can be boring, and I do not even feel like coming to class but if you are passionate about languages, you’ll keep at it.”*

Y3 revealed that *“Foreign languages seemed to be the only direction I had because of the subjects I chose at the CSEC and CAPE level. It felt like the most obvious and secure choice at the time.”* She also mentioned that *“French classes are heavy. There’s homework every day and it doesn’t give you time to do much else. You do not even feel like you grasped the work afterward”.* Nevertheless, in order to stay motivated *“I don’t focus much on the class work I just set realistic goals for myself and work towards that for example read 1 article in the target language per day. That way I feel like I’m accomplishing something that will make an impact on my language skills as opposed to just passing exams.”*

According to PS, *“I loved to talk and travel so obviously languages was the best choice for me”*. He stated that *“as a guy doing foreign languages, people always think you’re gay”* He adds that *“when I was in school, I read a lot and tried to look at things that interested me in the target languages so that I can find some enjoyment in actually learning the language.”*

T3 stated that *“I didn’t know what I wanted to do and at the time and Spanish was the only thing I was genuinely good at”*. She revealed that *“In secondary school we didn’t have access to as many resources, so I practiced with my friends all the time”*.

CHAPTER THREE

Discussion

The aim of this chapter is to interpret the findings highlighted in Chapter Two (2). In an effort to better understand and provide reasoning for the growing phenomena of language lethargy, this study focused on student's perceptions and attitudes toward foreign language learning, motivating factors in pursuing FLL and challenges that arose in the process. Based on the results obtained, it was evident that students have differing perspectives on the importance and relevance of FLL, with some considering it worthwhile, and others feeling indifferent. The information gathered also indicated the primary variables that motivate individuals to pursue foreign languages such as personal interest, career aspirations and cultural curiosity. On the other hand, the study identified several challenges faced by FLL learners such as lack of motivation, external pressure and discouragement and ineffective teaching methods.

The data collected from the questionnaire reveals a potential gender imbalance in language learning. According to these results, 85% of respondents were female with only 15% being male. Merideth Wightman in her study, *"Gender Differences in Second Language Learning: Why They Exist And What We Can Do About It"*, the majority of respondents being female is consistent with research that has found that women tend to be more likely to learn foreign languages than men. This could be attributed to several factors such as the feminization of foreign languages as it appears more appealing to female students due to societal perceptions of gender roles. Becky Francis echoed this sentiment in her study, *"The gendered subject: students' subject preferences and discussion of gender and subject ability"*, and notes that different subjects have stereotypical gender roles. For example, mathematics and science are perceived as more masculine while

languages are deemed to be more feminine. PS, a male interviewee, admitted that *“as a guy doing languages was seen as “girly” and people called me gay”*. Therefore, it could be inferred that societal disapproval contributes to language hesitancy among the male population and the gendered perception of language should be investigated as another potential barrier to language learning.

In addition, the findings indicate that learners’ attitudes and perceptions toward FLL play a significant role in their motivation, engagement, and success. In fact, the way they view languages and culture can have a significant impact on their level of interest (Flack,1976). This is made evident when comparing the responses of Y1 and PS’s experiences with foreign languages. On one hand, Y1 became disinterested in language pursuits when she perceived it to be useless *“I feel like I could do something better with my time like do a major in psychology and learn languages after school”*. While on the other hand, PS testified that he felt more inclined to continue with language learning after being complimented by natives during a study abroad program. Taylor and Bransen justify this in their study, *“Perceptions, Attitudes, and Choosing to Study Foreign Languages in England: An Experimental Intervention”*, stating that positive attitudes toward language learning are often linked to increased motivation, more extensive use of the language, and improved learning outcomes. Conversely, negative attitudes can lead to disinterest and avoidance. The study also reveals that the use of technology in FLL was identified as having a positive impact on learners’ attitudes and perceptions by providing new mediums of communication, larger access to resources, and better alternatives to traditional language learning (Chun et.al, 2016). Overall providing a solution to language hesitancy.

Moreover, this research revealed the bleak realities of employment for foreign language learners. First, the idea that there are numerous employment possibilities for language learners

does not necessarily correspond to reality (Honig & Brod, 1974). The disillusionment that comes with acknowledging or facing this truth has been shown to be damaging to learners' enthusiasm, attitude, and drive to pursue foreign languages further. All interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the employment opportunities for language learners in Trinidad and Tobago, lamenting that "the only jobs available are as teachers or call-center operators" (Y3) and noting that most of the jobs advertised to students during their studies were often only available abroad (T2), which is not always accessible or economically feasible for most students. Second, while 82.3% of participants believe that foreign language learners have a competitive advantage in the workplace, it is sometimes not enough to secure jobs. According to Honig and Brod (1974), persons whose primary competence is a foreign language may have difficulty finding work. Thus, in order to get the most out of their languages skills, they should pair foreign languages with others degrees, such as International relations, business or economics. As a result, this findings suggests that one of the demotivating factors for language learners is the misconception that there are a plethora of employment opportunities, which, when debunked, results in the development of lethargic feelings toward language learning and an overall reluctance to pursue it.

The findings also identified outdated teaching methods as the main demotivating factor in pursuing foreign languages. Despite the well-documented benefits of learning a foreign language, poor teaching skills can overshadow these advantages and lead to a lack of motivation, excitement, and engagement among students. Based on the findings, it became clear that students faced two major challenges. The first is a focus on grades rather than competency. The majority of participants claimed that the instructions were sufficient to help them pass exams (see fig. 15), but not for long-term memory retention and application in real-world settings (Y3). As a result, learners develop speaking aversions, low self-esteem, and a negative view of the language,

creating the ideal environment for language lethargy to materialize. Students then complained about the rigidity of the course structure. According to interviewees, the lecturers' personalities were not adequate to compensate for the mediocre course program, which failed to pique the participants' attention. (Y1). Based on the findings, it is possible that these subpar approaches are contributing to the fall in enrolment in foreign languages at UWI, as their poor teaching skills cause students to lose interest in language learning and pursue alternative degrees. In her article, *“The Use of Songs in Teaching Foreign Languages”*, Yukiko Dolly (1975) Jolly posits the benefits of incorporating modern and non-traditional methods of teaching in students' motivation, noting that through the use of song, she realized that students engaged more with the content, increasing their exposure to authentic language, and helping improve pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition. By cultivating pupils' interest and willingness to study, teachers can prevent language lethargy. The study then emphasizes the significance of generation-specific teaching strategies in order to adequately respond to students' varying needs and attention spans.

Limitations

This study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. Firstly, the substantial number of female respondents in the sample could potentially alter the findings, as research has suggested that gender may impact language learning (Wightman, 2018). As such the results obtained may be skewed towards women's experiences with foreign language learning. Secondly, the questionnaire did not reach students from every faculty, which may have limited the scope of the findings. The experiences and perspectives of students from other faculties may differ from those in the sample, which could impact the generalizability of the study. Lastly, the small sample size of 45 respondents may not be representative of the larger population. While the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the experiences of foreign language students

in the Caribbean, they cannot be generalized to other contexts or populations. Future research should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample to ensure the generalizability of the findings.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study sought to investigate the reasons behind the hesitancy of students to study foreign languages at university, with a particular focus on the attitudes and perceptions of students towards foreign language learning, motivating factors, and challenges encountered. The study found that while learners acknowledge the social, cultural, and intellectual benefits of language learning, their biggest deterrent to studying foreign languages is outdated teaching methods that fail to grasp their attention or seem worthwhile. Nevertheless, the study also indicates that language lethargy may be a periodic occurrence, and there is hope for foreign languages to thrive as a course of study and a career field. The findings suggest that proper management, marketing, and financial allocation can help to combat language lethargy among students and encourage them to study foreign languages. Furthermore, the study leaves space for further investigation into the experience of males in the foreign language field. While this study focused on the attitudes and perceptions of all students towards foreign language learning, it is worth considering whether there is any gender-specific factors that may influence males' hesitancy to study foreign languages. Future research in this area could help to identify any specific challenges that males face when it comes to language learning and inform efforts to encourage greater male participation in the field. All in all, this study underscores the importance of making language learning relevant and interesting to students and highlights the need for universities to rethink their approach to foreign language teaching. By doing so, they can help to bridge cultural and linguistic divides in our increasingly globalized world and prepare students for success in a variety of fields.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that educators and policy makers focus on creating new curriculums and developing new teaching methods that are better suited to the needs and interests of the newer generation of learners. This can include incorporating technology into language learning, using interactive and engaging teaching methods, and providing a range of resources and materials that cater to different learning styles. In addition, there should be more emphasis on post-graduate opportunities for language learners, such as study abroad programs, job opportunities, and internships. This will not only encourage students to pursue language learning, but also provide them with valuable opportunities to apply their language skills in real-world settings and gain practical experience in their chosen field. Therefore, by promoting language learning as a valuable and relevant skill and providing opportunities for learners to develop and apply their language skills, it is hoped that attitudes and perceptions towards foreign language learning will improve, and there will be less feelings of language lethargy among learners. Furthermore, it is believed that these efforts will not only benefit individual learners, but also contribute to the development of a more skilled and competitive workforce, thereby boosting the job market in the long run.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Letter of Introduction

Dear Participant,

My name is Ariel Boynes Mohan, and I am now in my final year of studies at The University of The West Indies, St. Augustine. I am currently pursuing a double major in French and Spanish and have opted to explore the reluctance to pursue foreign languages at the tertiary level for my final project. Despite its advertised "employability" and "desirability," there has been a significant decline in students obtaining foreign language degrees throughout the years. This questionnaire will be used to get viewpoints from university students on this growing issue/phenomenon.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and strictly confidential. No identifying information (mail, email address, etc.) will be collected, and all information collected will remain anonymous.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

1. What is your gender?

Male Female Other

2. What is your age?

18-20

21-24

25-29

30 and above

3. Select your faculty below:

- Engineering
- Food and Agriculture
- Humanities and Education
- Law
- Medical Sciences
- Science and Technology
- Social Sciences
- Sport

4. Have you studied a foreign language before?

- Yes
- No

5. If yes, which language(s) have you studied?

- Spanish
- French
- German
- Arabic
- Portuguese
- Dutch
- Mandarin
- Korean

Other _____

6. Is foreign language learning relevant to your future prospects?

- Yes
- No

7. Do you believe that learning a foreign language is essential in today's globalized world?

- Yes
- No

8. Why or why not?

9. In your opinion, what factors influence a student's decision to study a foreign language?

- Parental Influence
- Student's passion for languages
- High Salaries in career field
- Students required an elective course
- Desire to live abroad
- Teacher influence (at a secondary level)

10. What challenges have you encountered while studying foreign languages?

- Loss of motivation
- Lack of practice opportunities
- Fear of speaking
- Doubting of abilities
- Lack of job availabilities within field
- Parental discouragement
- Increased dependency on technology/technological applications
- Discontentment with course structure and teaching methods

11. Have you ever used language learning apps or software outside of the classroom?

- Yes
- No

12. How often do you use these materials?

- Always (multiple times a day)
- Often (2-3 times per week)

- Rarely (1-3 times per month)
- Never

13. Have you ever participated in language exchange programs or language clubs outside of the classroom?

- Yes
- No

14. To what extent do you think language exchange programs or language clubs are helpful for language learning?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree

15. In your opinion, are the curriculum and teaching methods for foreign language components at the University of the West Indies effective?

Components	Yes	No	Undecided
Reading Comprehension			
Listening Comprehension			
Translation			
Grammar			
Writing			

16. Do you think that students at the University of the West Indies, in general, are interested in studying foreign languages?

Yes No Undecided

17. On a scale of 1-5, to what extent do you agree that the lack of emphasis on foreign language education in the education system in Trinidad and Tobago has affected students' willingness to study foreign languages?

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly agree neutral strongly disagree.

18. Do you think that students who study foreign languages have an advantage in the job market? If so, why?

19. Do you think that the lack of exposure to foreign languages in the media and popular culture in the Caribbean has affected students' motivation to learn foreign languages?

Yes No

20. Do you think that studying a foreign language has helped you to develop skills that are transferable to other areas of your life?

Yes No

21. If yes, please select the skills you have acquired:

- General Skills (multi-tasking, organization, creativity)
- Interpersonal Skills (empathy, teamwork, dependability)
- IT and Tech Skills (data analysis, coding, machine learning)
- Communication Skills (active listening, public speaking, storytelling)
- Clerical Skills (computer literacy, typing, data entry)

Management Skills (leadership, problem solving, decision-making)

22. To what extent do you agree that the University of the West Indies make foreign language courses mandatory for all students?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

23. Do you think that the availability of online resources has made it easier or harder to learn a foreign language? Why?

24. Has studying a foreign language helped you to develop a deeper understanding of your own language and culture? If so, explain:

25. What advice would you give to language educators or policymakers to enhance the effectiveness of language learning at the university level?

APPENDIX B
Interview Questions

1. What motivated you to start learning a foreign language?
2. Have you encountered any specific difficulties while learning a foreign language? For example, have you struggled with a particular aspect of the language, such as listening comprehension or writing?
3. What are some of the personal attitudes you hold towards foreign language learning? For example, do you think it is important to learn a foreign language?
4. Have you ever had positive/negative experiences that have impacted your attitudes towards foreign language learning? If so, can you describe what happened and how it affected you?
5. Why do you think individuals are discouraged from studying foreign languages?
6. How do you maintain your motivation to learn a foreign language? Do you set specific goals, or do you have a support system to keep you accountable?
7. Do you find that different foreign languages present unique challenges for language learners? If so, can you give an example of a language that you found particularly difficult to learn and why?