

KAREN: Hello, and welcome back to the Student Hub Live. OK, this is our penultimate session of Freshers, and we are now going to talk about the rewards and challenges of studying languages.

But before we do that, how is everybody? And how is Simon's finger, which I've been keeping a close eye on?

SOPHIE: I think he's OK. He doesn't have to ask for his TMA extension anymore, so that's good news. I mean, HJ did try and print the picture the first time, but he cut his finger off. So I don't know if that's trying to say anything.

But we do have the full picture now. There he is, Simon. Get better soon.

KAREN: Oh, it looks, it's still bleeding. OK, yeah. Do take care of that, Simon. We don't want any injuries during the Student Hub Live. How's everyone else doing in the chat?

HJ: I think we're all happy and excited for the languages session. We had a few more things come in as well.

Briefly, Kate sent in a picture of her study buddy Scout looking very helpful there, over her notes.

KAREN: Aw.

HJ: And Lucy sent in a picture of her owl as well, which apparently is also a musical instrument that makes owl sounds when, there's a hole in its head somewhere. But that generally doesn't happen after study for me, though.

KAREN: I've got one of those owls, that make a noise.

HJ: And Lucy already sent in a picture of her extremely organised desk. I like all those magazine files. Very organised, I like that.

KAREN: That is super organised. Maybe she's doing maths. You should take note of that, HJ.

Right, so in this session I'm delighted to welcome Maria and Qian, who are going to tell us a little bit about modern languages and the rewards and challenges of studying them. Because

not many people know, well, they will now, about some of the language programmes at the Open University, and how easy and accessible they are.

So we are looking at our 161 books and images, and we've got some widgets there. So we've got a Chinese character, and we're asking what does it mean in English? So we're going to feed that into the discussion, but that should be popping up if you're in the Watch and Engage section of the website from now.

So languages. How does it all work at the Open University, in terms of studying it? What do students expect?

KAN QIAN:

To study a language at the Open University, you study both, have online tutorials, you have face-to-face tutorials, and you have the books, everything. But most importantly, they have a designated website, all the supporting materials are on the module website.

And then we have the tutor group, the students forum. So there are lots of support. And every student belongs to a tutor group, about 15 or 20 students belong to a tutor group. And then they hand the assignments to the tutor, the tutor provides personalised feedback.

And it's through all those different channels of interaction that they, of course. The students help each other out as well. We'll talk about some of the support like Student Buddy perhaps later.

KAREN:

Yeah, and there are lots of languages. And you're involved with Chinese, and you're mainly involved with Spanish as well as other things. Aren't you, Maria?

MARIA:

Well, lots of languages. At beginner level we do French, Spanish, and German, Italian, Chinese. And you can continue with French, Spanish, and German. We do English as well, so you can also do a language studies degree with English as your main focus. So it's very wide.

And there is one module that all language students take, which is L161, that is one of the books. And it gives an introduction to what it is to learn languages, an introduction to different cultures. It's called Exploring Languages and Cultures.

And in this module, I think the main asset is, well, of course, the materials. I would say that because we produce them. But also a very important asset is students themselves, I mean, yourselves, because there is such variety and diversity of backgrounds with the students who are studying English, students who are studying German, students who are living in a foreign

country. And all those come together, and there are really exciting discussions on the forum.

KAN QIAN: They're bringing their richness, their experiences to the course. And also we are developing an MA in Translation course, starting in February next year, so students who have got the degree in Modern Languages, if they want to continue with the MA study, they could.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. One thing I like in particular is, well, the title of this book, *Languages and Culture*. And it's so important. I mean, we've done sessions before where you've come in with some fabulous Chinese spring rolls. I think was Chinese New Year, at the time, wasn't it? And we spoke a little bit about language and dialect and also the way in which languages were presented and the variety of scope that there was on offer.

But this idea, then, of language and culture, why is that so important? Why is culture important in actually being able to speak and understand a language?

MARIA Well, they're related. They're mutually important. Language has emerged from culture.

FERNANDEZ- There's no culture without language. There's no human culture without language.

TORO:

And, of course, in the language you have a whole culture. Just the words, well, I'll just give you an example. I've got here, this is from the very beginning of the module "Exploring Languages and Cultures." And, you know, you've got children from one country, for whom a spider will be a "he." Children from another country, the spider will be a "she." Now, that sounds really not very relevant. But actually it's shaping the way you see the world.

And really, if that happens with such a seemingly insignificant thing as a little bug, imagine for concepts like love, friendship, collaboration, hospitality. It will mean completely different things in different languages. And it's not just a matter of learning the dictionary equivalent, because there's never such a thing as a strict equivalent. And that's what's fascinating about it.

KAREN FOLEY: You do do things in different and fascinating ways. And I wondered if we could talk a little about singing and music and songs and tone. Because, you know, there's a variety of things. So it's understanding, I guess, fonts and words, but also it's more to it than that, isn't there?

MARIA I mean singing, I mean, that's my something I really love doing. And I run workshops in
FERNANDEZ- multilingual singing, singing in as many languages as possible and preferably languages you
TORO: haven't studied. And I like singing in languages I don't know.

And that's the beauty of singing, because you don't need to worry about the grammar. It's taken care of. You don't need to worry about the vocabulary. It's taken care of.

So you can just sing the tune. Make sure you pronounce it right. That's the only thing you need to care about. And, of course, you try to know what you're singing about.

And it's wonderful, because suddenly you're using the language, and people from that culture can understand what you're saying.

KAN QIAN: Yeah. I mean, when it comes to Chinese, Mandarin Chinese has four different tones, which is a big challenge for beginners. But when they sing, they do not have to worry about the tones. The musicality takes care of it.

So a lot of students say, oh, it's great. When I sing, I memorise the words, and I don't have to worry about the tones. So that's the benefit of, when you learn language, try to sing at the same time.

MARIA FERNANDEZ-TORO: So you can do it on YouTube as you study. Unfortunately, we haven't yet developed a way of doing it online. But, you know, there's such a rich world there. But it is an area on which I'm doing research. So that's why I'm so passionate about it.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, OK, excellent. No, that sounds really interesting. So there's lots going on, in terms of learning languages. You're both looking, I guess, at the tone and the way of speaking.

You've also sometimes got different characters. Our quiz question which we've got is "What does this mean in English?" When I last heard, what do you think our students would say, by the way? What do you think, which answer? "Thunder," "electric shock," "film," or "TV"?

KAN QIAN: A student probably may say it's electric shock?

KAREN FOLEY: You think it's electric shock.

KAN QIAN: Yeah?

KAREN FOLEY: OK, let's have a look. Right. "Thunder" at 38%, "film" of 38%, "electric shock" none.

KAN QIAN: All right!

[LAUGHTER]

KAREN FOLEY: And "TV" 25%. So what was the correct answer?

KAN QIAN: The correct answer is "film."

KAREN FOLEY: "Film." OK! Good.

KAN QIAN: Because -

KAREN FOLEY: So half of them got that right.

KAN QIAN: Yes, that's good!

KAREN FOLEY: Or so.

KAN QIAN: Yeah. The Chinese, a lot of nouns are formed like that. The word formation is sort of, you build up a word, based on the meaning of individual character. So a lot of Chinese nouns are very descriptive.

For example, "computer," literal translation is "electric brain." And so the film is electric, initially. You know, when you film it it's like shadows on the screen. So that's how it's formed.

KAREN FOLEY: So it's not always a case of having a direct word that's matched for something, like you might have in singing, with the tones. There's more of a nuance to it. And this is why culture is important.

KAN QIAN: That's correct, yeah. And just now, when Maria mentioned that example by the culture, and I was thinking about the Chinese term, there are 16 words for the English term "cousin." And why is that? Because in China, in Chinese culture, the positions inside the family is very important. So, depending on your age, your gender, which side of the family you belong to, so that term "cousin," as soon as you say it you know which side of the family this person comes from. So that really reflects the culture.

MARIA FERNANDEZ-TORO: And the thing is, as soon as you start learning a language, even at beginner level, you're going to start to hit these issues. So you start immersing yourself in the new culture and the view of the world, right from the beginning. And that's what's so exciting.

KAREN FOLEY: OK, so, moving on to level 2, then. So we talked about the range and breadth of scope at level 1 and how students might go about doing them. What are some of the rewards, then, at learning at level 2?

**MARIA
FERNANDEZ-
TORO:**

Well, at level 2, the languages that have got level 2 normally have a residential school. So you have a chance to actually use the language face-to-face with other people in the country, so you get closer to the culture. You carry on building. You build your confidence. And then, moving on to level 3, you can flourish.

And the idea is that you start to be able to talk about current affairs. You can begin to read literature. You can engage with people at a much deeper level, go beyond asking directions or describing your best friend and so on. You really can engage more.

And, of course, you can engage at the workplace. You've got much more to offer, not just because of the language skills, but also because of all the skills you acquire as part of the process of learning a language.

KAREN FOLEY: OK, but is it still fun, then, at level 3? That all sounds quite sensible.

KAN QIAN: I think so, because you can appreciate the subtlety of the language, the humour. And, a lot of times, in language, without understanding the subtleties between the two languages you can't really appreciate the humour. For example, in Chinese, I'll just show you one example.

The expression, we have a lot of four-character expressions. The expression [SPEAKING CHINESE], and then the second line, [SPEAKING CHINESE]. There's only one change of character, one change of sound.

So the first one means "You cannot delay it for one moment." And then an advertiser turned that into an advertisement for a cough medicine, because that first character, [CHINESE], means "cough." So then it turns it to mean, you know, "Coughing must not linger." So that sort of play of words, you could only appreciate how clever, witty, that is, when you study at a high level.

**MARIA
FERNANDEZ-
TORO:**

And the satisfaction, when you get one of those.

KAREN FOLEY: You get that.

**MARIA
FERNANDEZ-
TORO:**

Yes! I know, I know why it's funny! You know, it's very satisfying.

KAREN FOLEY: It looks very complicated, though. I mean, I dread to think, Chinese and Mandarin are being taught both in terms of, I guess, the written, the English alphabet, as well as the characters. What might students want either of those different options for?

KAN QIAN: It is like learning two different systems, at the beginning, because there's very little sort of correlation. But at the very start we teach students how to type, how to word-process, so they could key in the alphabets, the Pinyin we call it, and then the characters actually all pop up on the screen. Then they could just choose.

So, at the Beginners level, they do not have to handwrite them if they don't want to. And the joy of recognising those characters is that, because they are not alphabetically based, it's a completely different script. Students get the satisfaction for that pure challenge. Then they think, oh, I recognise that!

When they watch a documentary about China, a lot of students write on the forum, say, oh, you can't believe! I recognised two characters we just learned last week! So it's that sort of satisfaction, something completely different from what they know before.

MARIA FERNANDEZ-TORO: And we've got a wonderful app that you helped develop, haven't we, to learn to write Chinese characters. And I think, I had to play with it. And it's great. I mean, it's just such a different skill, you know. It's very enriching.

KAREN FOLEY: OK, tell us about some of the support for students who are studying language modules. I mean, we've spoken a lot about community and about sharing. And it strikes me that being able to talk to other people is a really important thing to be able to do.

So how might students be able to access support, either from their tutor or from other people, or even elsewhere?

KAN QIAN: One of the supports we provide to level-1 language modules is an initiative called "Student buddy." And we invite an ex-student who has recently completed that module to come back to the student forum which is the discussion forum for that module to provide practical and moral support at key learning points, basically, at the start of the module, and then two weeks leading up to each assignment. So students feel they could ask any question. They don't feel it's a silly question or questions they don't want to bother their tutor. They will ask their Student buddy.

And it's been going on for the last two years. And the evaluation shows that students really appreciate the buddy being there.

**MARIA
FERNANDEZ-
TORO:**

And students are able, also, to meet on the line and organise their own groups for conversation. There are tutorials, of course, but also students organise their own to practise. And, of course, the support from the tutors is huge, every year. We get massive praise of the support given by tutors.

KAREN FOLEY:

We've been talking, before, with the Careers Advice Service, about employability and this whole idea that starting with the Open University gives you a lot of skills that people may not be aware of. And that strikes me that learning a language is also tapping into a lot of skills. So can you tell us a little bit about how people might use those, in terms of their employability?

**MARIA
FERNANDEZ-
TORO:**

Yes. The skills you gain at the OU, the general skills, you also, of course, when you learn a language, you know, technology skills, using forums, learning to manage your identity online, that is part and parcel of being an OU student. And, of course, you'll gain that if you learn languages, as well.

But there are things that are specific, or more specific, to languages. For example, what we were saying earlier about engaging with a different culture. Well, you are able, you learn to look at things from a different perspective and from the other person's perspective. And that gives you huge potential, when it comes to negotiating.

So I think one of the challenges for language graduates, when they apply for jobs, is to learn how to sell all those other skills. Because often you think that all you've got to offer is the language you've learned. But actually there's so much more that you can offer, and that throughout your studies you learn to do that. And we have quite a few activities to help you develop that skill, as well.

KAREN FOLEY:

Yeah, that's absolutely wonderful. Maria and Qian, thank you so much for coming in. That's all we've got time for. But we are going to show people a video on languages and employability. after this session.

HJ, you need to sort that desk out, because the vice chancellor's coming in.

HJ:

I know. I'm quite embarrassed. I'm going to have to have a quick, I think we'll just sweep everything off the desk.

KAREN FOLEY: You've got five minutes in the video break to do that. What's been going on in the chat? We don't have time for questions and such, but I'm aware that there has been a lot going on. Anything you'd like to just feed in?

HJ: Well, if you do have questions that we haven't been able to get to, email us, studenthub@open.ac.uk, and we'll get back to you on those. We really want to answer them. But we're just generally talking about some of the language we speak.

So Bridget knows English and German and taking beginner Spanish and did a bit of Latin in school, as well. Let's have a look. Ruth speaks French and German, as well, which is quite cool. So, a lot of linguists, here.

SOPHIE: There's quite a lot, yeah. And Julia, she picks up on different words. But her family, they have a habit of dropping random words in different languages into conversation. So, for example, her mum asks for the butter, but the butter is German. So, just a nice little family thing they have.

And apparently her dog can also speak French. If you ask -

[LAUGHTER]

If you ask the dog in French if it likes to go for a walk, he gets just as excited as if you ask him in English. So that's really sweet. I like that.

MARIA FERNANDEZ-TORO: OU pets get multilingual.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes -

[LAUGHTER]

- exactly. Exactly. Well, thank you both for that session. We must sort ourselves out before the vice chancellor comes in. And Simon, I hear your wife has asked you to bake some bread before she gets home and that you're going to oblige. Be careful not to cut your hand off, please, for that.

We're just going to get sorted while you enjoy this video on languages and employability. And then we're going to come back for our final session, which is going to be with Debbie Britton

and Peter Horrocks, where we're going to talk about the Open University's latest ad campaign, "Dream, Believe, Succeed." We'll be back in five.