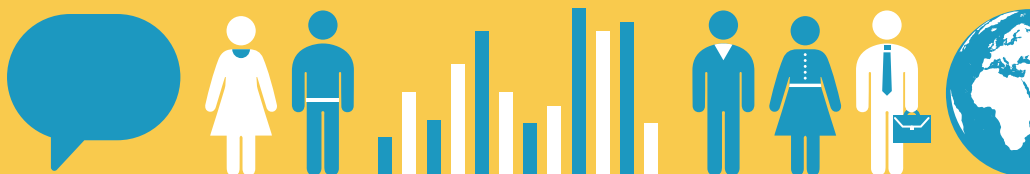


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BRITISH COHORT STUDY ANALYSIS



Born Global is a British Academy project on language skills for employability, trade and business.

The British Academy set out to develop a deeper understanding of the language needs for employment, employer attitudes to languages and how language is used in the workplace for different purposes, by employees of different levels of skill and accountability.

We have produced an overview booklet on the Born Global project and the context in which it was undertaken. We have also produced a separate overview and summary of each data set.

This booklet deals with the analysis of the British Cohort Study (BCS) longitudinal data set, commissioned by the British Academy in 2014.

Introduction

Recurrent surveys and reports on employer attitudes and needs indicated high levels of unmet demand for language skills in employment and notable gaps in language proficiency amongst the UK workforce.¹ It therefore seemed reasonable to explore whether UK-educated individuals with language skills might be at some kind of advantage in the labour market, vis-a-vis their monolingual peers. The British Academy commissioned the Education and Employers Taskforce to review existing literature on this topic and explore the relationship

between UK-earned language qualifications and subsequent labour market success through analysis of the British Cohort Study, a longitudinal survey which tracks 17,000 people who were born in England, Scotland and Wales in the same week in 1970. Though the data is from 2000 and relates to a cohort born in 1970, this is the only “birth” cohort study that carries information about individuals from birth and follows the members until adulthood, which allows a comprehensive study of their backgrounds and labour market entry.

The Education and Employers Taskforce tested this hypothesis through exploring the relationship between the possession of UK language qualifications at different levels and three indicators of subsequent labour market success: earnings, employment outcomes; and job satisfaction. We have outlined the key findings, information about the data set and methodology below. The literature review is available in the full report on the British Academy *Born Global* webpage.

Summary of key findings

- Little evidence was found of any direct association between the possession of language qualifications and labour market outcomes at the age of 29, whether measured through earnings, employment outcomes or job satisfaction
- While there was some incidence of UK-educated linguists securing superior labour market outcomes, these effects disappeared when statistical controls for social background and academic ability were introduced; this suggests that this association was linked to other factors such as social background rather than language study

The analysis also revealed the following characteristics of those who were more likely to have studied languages at A-level and degree level:

- Social class: those belonging to higher social classes
- Gender: female respondents
- School type: those who had been to independent or grammar schools
- Academic ability: higher attaining respondents

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About the data set

The British Cohort Study dataset provides information on qualifications obtained (by subject and at different levels), employment and earnings outcomes, and social and other characteristics that might influence the relationship between language qualifications and labour market outcomes, such as socio economic background, ethnicity, ability, academic performance and parental involvement in education.

Methodology

This research focused on A-Level and degree level language qualifications, as these are relatively scarce amongst the population and represent a proxy for language proficiency for an important segment of the population. However, a limitation of the study is that this measure would not capture

a number of groups with bi- or multilingual proficiency within the UK labour force:

- a) bi- or multilingual immigrants who obtained qualifications abroad but now work in the UK;
- b) heritage language speakers who obtained British qualifications, but who developed their language skills outside the formal schooling/ qualifications system;
- c) non-language-specialists who have learned languages through means such as Institution Wide Language Programmes.

This analysis controlled for the influence of social class (using father's social class as a proxy), gender and academic ability (proxied through standardised maths score at age 16) on labour market outcomes at age 29.

Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis. Analysis was undertaken using SPSS v. 19.

Endnotes

1. UK Commission for Employability and Skills (2014) 'Employer Skills Survey 2013: UK Results', Evidence Report 81; CBI (2013) 'Changing the Pace, CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey 2013'; British Chambers of Commerce (2013) 'Business is Good for Britain' international trade survey.

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In 2011, the British Academy launched a new programme, with funding from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, targeting deficits in languages and quantitative skills. The programme of work reflects the Academy's longstanding concerns about deficits in these areas of the humanities and social sciences, as well as in UK education and research. Through the programme, the Academy funds research and relevant initiatives, and seeks to influence policy in these areas.

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