'If they are going to university, they are gonna need a language GCSE': Co-constructing the social divide in language learning in England

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1 Introduction

In the context of global English, the learning of modern languages (ML) in Anglophone countries faces increasing challenges (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2017). In the UK, this problem has been exacerbated by an erosion of ML policies at national level, and has led to an increased social divide between those who learn languages at any post-compulsory age, and those who do not (AUTHOR, 2017b(a&b)(a&b)). To date, little is known about the genesis of this social divide, including the role of the autonomy given to schools to determine their own language policy.

This article focuses on England,[1] examining beliefs regarding the purposes of teaching and learning ML (and Latin, in one school) in four secondary schools in the north of England, using interviews and focus group data from three stakeholder groups: students aged 13/14 (Year 9), their language teachers, and senior management (head teacher or assistant head). Discussion points included reasons for teaching/learning languages, the future of language learning, and school language policy. Over the last two decades, research on second language learning has undergone a significant shift towards socially and historically embedded frameworks (Block, 2003). Working in this framework, this article analyses stakeholders' perceptions of ML in relation to the social and educational contexts of their school. Hitherto, the SES divide in ML has been described at the level of the individual learner (Coffey, 2016; Taylor & Marsden, 2014); a study which focuses on individual schools as units of analysis offers a novel perspective on the problem, aiming to investigate to what extent schools may co-construct this divide.

The article is organised in the following way: the initial section provides a necessarily broad context, since the article encompasses language education, general UK education policy, and the link between these and socio-economic status (SES). The following topics are discussed: a) devolution of powers to individual schools, school performance measures and ML policy, b) the image of ML as a school subject within the context of global English, c) the social divide in language learning, and d) social segregation in schools generally. The data section reports on stakeholder perspectives on language learning and teaching. Results reveal that the current lack of direction regarding ML policy, coupled with increasing power of schools to determine their own policies, facilitates the social divide in ML learning. Senior management tend to rationalize their ML policy with reference to their intake's socioeconomic mix, with the result that social and educational variables, already the strongest predictor of individual students' overall performance (Hartas, 2011), also determine the opportunities for language study open to them in the first place.

2 Literature review

2.1 Academization, performance pressure and ML policy

Over the last few decades, education policies across the UK, but also in other Anglophone countries, have enacted increasing devolution of decision-making power to schools (Dimmock, 2013), whether in terms of admissions, budget or curriculum, providing increasing opportunities for senior management to determine school policy (Hallinger, Murphy, & Hausman, 2013). In England, this has led to burgeoning numbers of self-governing schools, in particular Academies – state schools which receive direct funding from central government and enjoy more autonomy than other state schools (http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies/b00205692/whatisanacademy). Currently c. 57% of state secondary schools in England are Academies (Board & Tinsley, 2015). Self-governance intensifies competition between schools (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012), for instance in relation to attracting the most academically able students. Schools are highly incentivised to do this as they are under considerable pressure to perform: the 'League Table' of results for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE: nationally standardised and accredited tests in a variety of subjects at age 16+) is a key performance indicator. New performance indicators, Progress 8 (measuring year-on-year pupil performance across eight key subjects, see www.gov.uk/government/publications/progress-8-school-performance-measure), and the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc, measuring performance in five key subjects at age 16, see www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/285990/P8_factsheet.pdf)–(get rid of space)(get rid of large space before WERE)were introduced in 2016; as yet, the precise effect on ML remains uncertain.

Languages beyond the age of 14 were made optional in England in 2004, leading to a steep drop in GCSE ML uptake to only 40% of students in 2011 (Tinsley & Han, 2012), with subsequent further year-on-year reductions (AUTHOR, 2017bLanvers, 2017b(Lanvers, 2017b)). With increasing school devolution, school differences regarding their own ML policy (whether languages should remain compulsory past age 14, and, if so, for how many students) strongly relate to school type: schools able to select their student intake tend to offer more ML teaching, to a greater number of students, over more years (AUTHOR, 2017bLanvers, 2017b).

Furthermore, within the examination system, ML are known to suffer from disproportionately severe grading at GCSE level, and in respect of subsequent qualifications (Advanced level = A-level, school leaving qualification

permitting university entry, typically taken age 18+). At GCSE, students score on average one full grade below results in other subjects, based on both individual grades in other subjects and past grades, and fewer students continue with a ML in the transition from GCSE to A-level than in other subjects (all data: Myers, 2006). Thus, schools with high levels of language take-up at GCSE may suffer worse their 'League Table' results (Board & Tinsley, 2015, 4). This motivates some school management teams to let only a few high-achieving students continue with ML beyond the compulsory phase (Filmer-Sankey, Marshall, & Sharp, 2010), leaving 'a growing overall impression that schools are starting to regard languages as expendable for some pupils' (Board & Tinsley, 2015, 9).

2.2 Subject image of ML and global English

ML tend to be an unpopular subject, often seen as irrelevant, or difficult (with some justification, see above) (Blenkinsop, McCrone, Wade, & Morris, 2006). When the obligation to study a ML up to age 16 was dropped in 2004, this further increased the disaffection with the subject at a younger age (Evans & Fisher, 2009, 2): knowing they would give up on ML soon, students aged 11–14 saw little point in dedicating effort to the subject. Meanwhile, many schools operate a selection for ML study on the basis of academic merit, reinforcing the subject's image of being for the 'nerdy'. English as a global lingua franca may also contribute to students' demotivation. A somewhat monolingual English outlook, coupled with an inflated perception of the global significance of English, are often cited as reasons for the disinterest in languages in Britain more generally (Coleman, 2009; Dewaele & Thirtle, 2009). European comparative studies on motivation show that British students show the lowest levels of motivation for language learning, while students across Europe show the highest motivation for studying English (Eurostat, 2012).

2.3 The social divide in language learning

Relations between SES and academic performance across a range of subjects are well documented, in the UK (Machin, McNally, & Wyness, 2012) and elsewhere (e.g. Westrick, Le, Robbins, Radunzel, & Schmidt, 2015). Performance in ML is no exception to this (e.g. Aro & Mikkilä-Erdmann, 2015; Butler, 2014):

Student SES has been correlated to both learning *outcomes* in ML (e.g. Sanjurjo, Blanco, & Fernández-Costales, 2017) and *motivation* (e.g. Kormos & Kiddle, 2013) in a variety of contexts. The interesting phenomenon in England is that SES also correlates with *uptake* of language study; this correlation is further complicated by the fact that individual schools may determine their ML policy for ages 14+, and that school are socially segregated in a variety of ways, for instance by SES characteristics of catchment area (see below).

This social divide in language learning is explained by some scholars with reference to Bourdieu (Coffey, 2016; Taylor & Marsden, 2014). For instance, Coffey found that students' rationales about whether to continue with language learning relate to their access to the social, cultural and symbolic capital of ML, while Taylor & Marsden's study demonstrates how access to these forms of capital correlates with students' socio-economic background. These studies have persuasively demonstrated that a Bourdieuian frame of perceptions of ML skills as constituting capital (or not) offers an apt conceptualization for the social divide we observe on the level of the individual learner. They do not, however, explain the genesis and intensification of the ML social divide we observe at the level of the whole school; this study aims to address this gap.

Differences in school language policy tend to fall along academic and social school characteristics (~~AUTHOR, 2017b~~Lanvers, 2017b): 86% of private schools, compared to 44% of state schools, have a policy of compulsory language learning for some or all students aged 14–16 (Board & Tinsley, 2015), and 76% of private, compared to 18% of state schools, make ML compulsory for all those aged 14–16 (Board & Tinsley, 2015, 119). In 28% of state schools, some students have no opportunity to study a language beyond age 14. In this context, it is important to recall that in the UK education system, not just private, but many state schools may select their intake. For instance, schools enjoying a high level of academic success typically have a high percentage of students taking GCSE languages; this is, in turn, strongly related to indicators of the school's intake (high socio-economic status background). In state schools, the percentage of language take-up at GCSE is negatively related to the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.[2] There are also large differences in language take-up depending on the type of state school: in schools that are allowed to control their admissions, students are more likely to study a language up to GCSE than in schools that cannot; academies are the type of state school most likely to offer languages to all students (all data: Board & Tinsley, 2015). Within the state sector, academies are the schools that share most characteristics with fee-paying schools (high uptake of ML, above average overall academic achievement, intake selection).

In sum, the social segregation in ML uptake in England does not, in the main, follow the independent/state divide, but rather that between such schools that may select their intake, and schools that may not, and between academically higher- and lower-performing schools (~~AUTHOR, 2017b~~Lanvers, 2017b; Board & Tinsley, 2015).

Using PISA data (Programme of International Student Assessment, see www.oecd.org/pisa (add) after pisa), Jenkins, Micklewright, and Schnepf (2008) assess the social segregation in English schools as average compared to other European countries. However, the 'market-like' school environment (Glatter, Woods, & Bagley, 2005, 1) in England allows schools to 'cream off' the best pupils (Goldring, 2005). Academization also offers ways for senior management to shape their school according to socio-economic factors, such as the social characteristics of their intake (Braun et al., 2011). In this way, academization facilitates social segregation; an increase in the social divide in language learning could therefore also be expected. The UK housing market also contributes to social segregation in schools, as catchment areas of academically successful schools tend to demand a premium in property prices (Allen, 2007; Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles, & Wilson, 2014; Cheshire & Sheppard, 2004), permitting middle-class parents to 'buy into' such catchment areas.

The above trends are not designed to obfuscate the fact that (nearly) all schools will have some SES diversity: they underscore how performance pressures may lead school management to design school policies they deem appropriate for the SES background that is dominant in *their* intake.

To summarize, there is a strong social divide between those who learn languages at any post-compulsory level, and those who do not (AUTHOR, 2017b). Students' beliefs regarding languages as a school subject are more polarised than in respect of other subjects, with some students perceiving ML as demanding, boring, or pointless. For senior management, the pressure of 'League Table' success militates against making languages compulsory beyond what is strictly necessary. Regarding national policy, frequent changes suggest a lack of direction and clear rationale for the subject (Graham & Santos, 2015; Pachler, 2007). Reports on the decline of language learning (Board & Tinsley, 2015; Dearing, 2007; (delete Dearing 2007) Nuffield Foundation, 2000) tend to focus on utilitarian rationales for languages, such as their economic utility and the benefits they offer for individual employability. Other rationales, such as personal enrichment, fostering societal cohesion, developing intercultural understanding and tolerance, and world citizenship, are neglected, suggesting a 'potentially serious communication gap between [...] policymakers in language education and language teaching staff' (McNeill, Spöring, & Hartley, 2004, 13). The social divide suggests that only learners bestowed with the social and cultural capital necessary to imagine the future benefits of language skills tend to engage in language learning beyond the compulsory phase. School management, for their part, who need to operate within the harsh agenda of performance-focus, have ever greater power to shape their language policy according to their own schools' league performance advantage.

This study triangulates views from key stakeholders regarding ML learning and teaching, all operating under this set of challenging conditions. Beliefs about language learning and teaching held by senior management, teachers and students are compared across four different schools. Three of the participating schools are state schools, one is independent. The independent and one state school control their intake, the other two do not. Three (independent and two state) schools have compulsory languages for all aged 14–16; in one, only very students study a language at age 14+. The schools have different percentages of students entitled to free school meals. Participating schools are situated in an area in north England with very low ethnic diversity (average 95% white), where few students have English as an additional language. The schools are also in counties with the lowest uptake of GCSE languages in England (Department for Education, 2016).[3] Thus, as a cohort, the participating students are unlikely to have experienced or witnessed multilingual practices often in their lives (friends, family, community); one might expect them to be acculturated into a 'monolingual (English) mindset' (Coleman, 2009).

3 This study

3.1 Research questions

The following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the beliefs of senior management, language teachers and students about the following issues:

   - rationales for teaching/learning languages
   - current and possible future experiences of language learning (get rid of empty line below)

2. How do these beliefs differ between stakeholder groups?
3. How do these beliefs differ between schools?
4. How do these beliefs relate to type of school and socio-demographic and academic school characteristics?

3.2 Participants and data

Senior management in all state secondary schools and two private schools in the target local authority/county were asked to participate in the project. Of these, five schools volunteered; four were selected to maximize diversity of school characteristics. School data on the socio-economic status and background of the intake and academic performance were elicited from www.education.gov.uk (unless indicated otherwise). Information regarding school language policy was sought from teachers and school brochures. Ethical permission was sought from the researcher's institution and from each participant. With participants' permission, all focus groups and interviews were recorded. In line with national child protection policy, the researcher was DBS[4] checked. In each school, one member of senior management and at least one language teacher were interviewed, and a minimum of three mixed gender focus groups were organized with Year 9 students (aged 13–14) (randomly chosen, except for gender balance). Qualitative data was collected in school, statistics were accessed from freely available sites, see Table 1). Interviews with senior

management were undertaken in their offices, teacher interviews either in offices or a free classroom, and student focus groups in free classrooms, without the presence of teachers. Year 9 cohorts were chosen as they, or their schools, must decide at that point whether they should continue with language study or not. Focus groups were conducted to promote free discussion among students, and decrease inhibition in front of the researcher, especially important given the students' age. This method is known to be effective in reducing the felt gap between the researcher and the researched (Field, 2000), in particular with younger participants. Staff interviews lasted about 20–25 min and student focus groups about 15 min. All data collection was undertaken by the principal researcher (see ~~Table 2~~1 (correct to Table 1)).

Table 1 Participants and data.

alt-text: Table 1

	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4
Key Information				
School type and setting	State school: Non-denominational Community Comprehensive in town	State school: Catholic Converter Academy in village	State school: Non-denominational, Comprehensive in small town	Independent school: Non-denominational in small town
Student numbers*	1495	1481	650	610
Applications/places offered ****	535 applications for 238 places	326 applications for 210 places	146 applications for 170 places	n/a
Main competitors	similarly/worse performing Independent & Community State schools	None in/near village. Closest: Independent schools in nearby towns	better performing Academy in very close proximity	Independent school & Academies (all worse performing)
includes study for 16–18 year olds?	yes	yes	no	no
School Language Policy				
Key stage 3 = age 11–14) **	Near 100% study 2 ML, 3 possible. Limited choice between 2 languages	Near 100% study 2 ML. No choice between 2 languages	Near 100% study 1 ML	Near 100% study 2 ML. Some choice between 2 languages
Key Stage 4 = age 14–16 **	1 ML compulsory, 2 or 3 possible (under 20% study 2 languages) some language choice	1 ML compulsory, 2 possible (under 20% study 2 languages) some language choice	1 ML only for high ability students no language choice	1 ML compulsory, 2 possible (under 10% study 2 languages) some language choice
School Performance and SES Indicators				
% students sitting at least one language GCSE*	95%+	95%+	c. 25%	95%+
% of students eligible for Free School Meals any time in last 6 years	20%	21.9	57.2%	n/a
% of students achieving 5 + a*-c GCSEs 2015*	66%	56%	54%	79%
% achieving the English Baccalaureate	54%	58%	37%	50%
% of students registered with special education needs	6.7%	3.3%	20%	n/a
Latest Ofsted outcome	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good	Excellent (Independent School Inspectorate)
Community Descriptors				
Town/village size	48,000	4000	20,000	174,200
Community characteristics	small city, largest employer = university	agricultural large village	former mining community	coastal city, former mining town
8.1% or work-age population receiving jobs seekers allowance****	8.1%	8.1%	26.3% = main catchment area 17.6% = other areas	8.3%
Data collected				

Student focus groups (mixed gender)	5 groups = 28 students	5 groups = 26 students	5 groups = 28 students	3 groups = 17 students
ML Teachers interviewed	4	1	1	1
School Management interviewed	1 Assistant Head	1 Assistant Head	1 Head Teacher	1 Assistant Head

*2013 data from http://www.education.gov.uk/, retrieved 15 January 2015.

    **data from school websites and Heads of ML.

    ***combined 1st,2nd and 3rd choice. Admission numbers from the county's website.

    ****from: national Census, 2011 and http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/.

Table 2 Coding framework for staff and students (insert Table 2 lower).

alt-text: Table 2

Coding framework for staff	Coding framework for students
rationales for teaching/learning ML:	*rationales for learning ML*:
- using ML to develop learning skills (for any subject)	- cultural understanding
- teaching linguistic awareness and literacy	- employability
- teaching cultural understanding	- cognitive development
- employability	- travel
- cognitive development	- getting qualifications
- getting qualifications	
issues relating to own school:	*issues relating to experiences of ML at school*
- criticism of ML teachers/teaching	- ML is a 'hard' subject
- criticism of own school policy	- hating the subject
- justification of own school policy	- enjoying the subject

issues relating to wider educational context:	issues relating to ideas about language learning
- national policy	- global English as demotivator
- global English as demotivator	- alternative pedagogical visions for teaching & learning ML
- narrow curriculum and exam-focused teaching	- interest in (world) languages other than taught
- teaching to pass exams	- UK compares badly in language learning to other nations
- pressure of league tables	- English abroad is only serves for basic communication
- alternative pedagogical visions for teaching & learning ML	
- issues relating to transition from primary school	
- difficulty of explaining any rationales for ML to students	
- issues relating to trips abroad	

Table 1 summarizes key school information, school performance and SES indicators, ML policy, community descriptors and data collected at the four schools. Except for a slightly higher percentage of students with special education needs in school 1, academic and social descriptors of state schools 1 and 2 are very similar: both are popular with parents (oversubscribed) and required (at the time of data collection) virtually all children (except for 5–7% of the lowest ability) study a language up to age 16. Unlike school 1, school 2 controls its admissions, using religious affiliation, proximity to school, and academic records as entry criteria. Students from this school come from geographically dispersed areas, whereas nearly all school 1 students live in/on the outskirts of the city where the school is situated. Schools 1 and 2 achieve above the national average on key performance indicators and have below average percentages of students entitled to free school meals. The reverse is the case for school 3, set in a former mining town with high unemployment, with a high percentage of students entitled to free school meals and a high percentage of students with special educational needs, and below national average academic performance. Unlike schools 1 and 2, this school is undersubscribed and in competition with a better performing nearby Academy. School 4 is a high-performing private school in a small coastal town, without strong competition from other schools. No official socio-economic descriptors are available for this school, but high fees exclude all but middle-class background students. Schools 1, 2 and 4 make the study of one language compulsory for most students up to age 16; schools 1 and 2 make most 11–14 year olds learn two languages and offer several languages; in school 3, students aged 11–14 are offered one language only, which most drop aged 14+.

3.3 Instruments and method of analysis

A qualitative approach was used to elicit statements about beliefs and rationales for learning languages at school, and to investigate interrelations between these and sociodemographic and school policy variables. The software

NVivo was used for coding and analysis. Interviews and focus groups were structured around pre-formulated questions (Appendix 1 and 2). The data was audio recorded and orthographically transcribed. For the coding process, an 'emergent integrative framework which encapsulates the fullest possible diversity of categories and properties' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 41) was adopted, involving constant comparison of coding and analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 102). This inductive process of coding involved initial immersion in the data in order to generate broad topics. In this phase, three overarching themes were identified: a) issues relating to wider educational contexts (such as national ML policy, or League Tables), b) issues relating to participants' specific schools, and c) different rationales and justifications for teaching/learning ML. In line with inductive practices, sub-topics for each overarching theme were identified, resulting in the following coding frameworks (Table 2): INSERT TABLE 2 HERE (insert table 2 here)

In the final coding process, frequencies of each stakeholder group mentioning any of these topics were established.

Furthermore, word cluster similarities were analysed (NVivo corpus linguistics, Pearson correlation coefficient). Word cluster similarities allow us to see the overlap in lexical bundles occurring across the different text corpora. The comparative analysis of lexical bundle overlaps between different stakeholder groups, and from different schools, offers an opportunity to triangulate the results of the thematic analysis. Thus, the Corpus Linguistic method described above offers a quantitative way to verify and corroborate the qualitative analysis.

4 Results[5]

4.1 Senior management

Fig. 1 illustrates that senior managers focus on rationales relating to improving overall academic performance, as well as fostering cultural understanding. For instance, the senior management in school 1 see languages not only helping to satisfy Governmental criteria for teaching quality assessment, but also as central to the delivery of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education:

One of the new OFSTED (=Office of Standards of Education) criteria is to prepare the students for a new global world through guidance. [...] Students, no matter how weak they are, need to have that level of awareness and spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is one of those things that justifies why you should be teaching a foreign language because it hits all these buttons. (senior management, school 1)
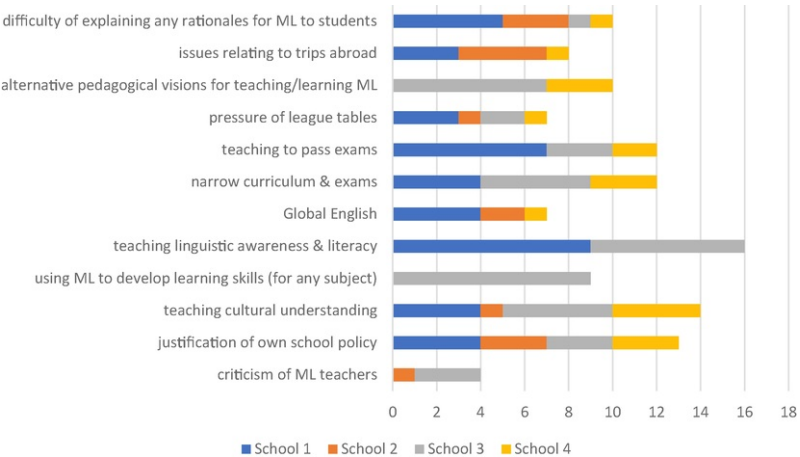

Fig. 1 Senoir Management:topic frequency by school.

alt-text: Fig. 1

Generally, senior managers focus on personal and social educational rationales, such as fostering tolerance and respect for other cultures:

I think children don't just learn the vocabulary and the grammar they also learn about the culture of the language as well. (senior management, school 2)

Rationales relating to linguistic awareness and literacy skills also feature prominently, sometimes related to global English, in that English speakers might lose out on developing metalinguistic awareness associated with second language learning:

I think our students need to learn a language to know what it's like to talk to someone who thinks in a different language [...] Yes everyone says that all speak English although that is not always the case but half of the world's population think in two languages.

All senior managers aim to justify their own language policy, e.g.:

The emphasis in our schools is on sciences, that is the most popular choice I think a lot of it through parental pressure [….] when we put together our option bloc … we need to weigh up the options to see if we offer two languages or just one. (senior management, school 4)

School 3 admits only higher ability students to the study of languages beyond the age of 14, selected by primary school performance in maths and English. The head teacher seems critical of this process, but given the performance pressures he feels under, sees no other option but to hand-pick students based on a hypothetical ML ability - an ability, which, in turn, is calculated on English performance at primary school:

It might seem mad to judge what you get in languages based on what you get in primary in maths and English, the argument I get back is well statistically those who are good at maths, good at English […] no room for variation and individuality. (senior management, school 3)

All senior managers are aware of systemic problems relating to language policy, such as severe grading:

The League Tables militate against that [=giving higher priority to languages] because statistically it's a grade harder - in languages - than the other subjects. (senior management, school 1)

The head teacher of school 3 also holds ML teachers responsible:

The skill level of the staff needs to be addressed again and they need to engage the student […] unfortunately, and hands up, we teach to an examination and that narrows the mindset with regards to why you are doing it. (senior management, school 3)

Senior management are the group who refer most frequently to wider educational issues relating to ML, and to difficulties in the implementation of good language teaching. However, all senior managers, but in particular the head teacher in school 3 - with the smallest ML department and lowest ML take-up - have visions of teaching languages for a wide range of reasons, going far beyond academic advancement and instrumental benefits (e.g. employability). Thus, senior managers recognise the great potential of ML, for instance, for 'learning how to learn' (Harris, 2008), or for teaching intercultural awareness (Peiser & Jones, 2012). However, actual priority is given to driving performance targets. School 3's senior manager advocates using ML as means to teach learning strategies, crystallised in the slogan 'instil the love of learning', used no fewer than eight times in the interview. Nonetheless, he admits that this seems an untenable goal, and describes his school as obliged to 'teach to the exam'.

4.2 Teachers

Fig. 2 shows that teachers mention rationales relating to cultural understanding, tolerance and respect most often, but expand more widely on non-utilitarian rationales, such as fostering cognitive development and linguistic awareness,

I think learning a language is not just about the language, it is very mind broadening. (T, school 4)
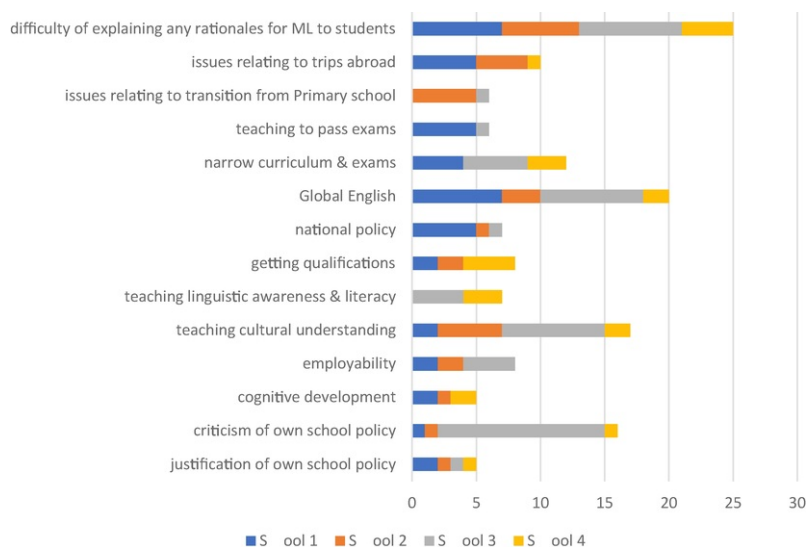
Fig. 2 Teachers:topic frequency by school.

alt-text: Fig. 2

and generic rationales relating to academic skills and employability:

[...] and we would mention the independence and the study skills that you get, and the fact that if you do go on and go away say study abroad you are gaining a level of maturity when you then come out of university which should be significant. (T, school 2)

Teachers frequently mention the difficulty of motivating students to study languages, especially in an area of England where language-related job opportunities are scarce: the employability rationale is cited as a negative rather than a positive factor, and is related to students' acute awareness of the ubiquity of English. Like senior management, teachers view global English as a demotivator:

I think English is still the world language and it breeds ignorance to think they can just get away with thinking they can speak English wherever they go unfortunately. (T, school 3)

A further demotivating factor mentioned is the fact that same-age students studying English tend to have higher proficiency:

Our students are acutely aware that their peers (i.e. similar-aged European teenagers, author's note) have a much better level of language than them so that does not build their confidence. (T, school 2)

All teachers criticize the current policy of having languages as options (as opposed to a compulsory subject) at age 14 and the severe grading to which they are subject, and seek to contrast 'proper teaching' with 'teaching to the exam':

It is unfair … so unfair … we don't play the game we teach our students to speak and use the language and understand and we don't teach to just pass the exam and we get penalised for that. (TGS, school 1)

The teacher in school 3 complains about senior management:

We get compared to all the other departments and our results are worse and get pulled across the coals for it.

Practical issues (timetabling problems, too little time allocated for those studying two languages) are also seen as eroding the quality of teaching. However, teachers overall do not see the future of language teaching to be threatened by global English:

I think we would still argue as a department [...] that however much people might speak English it is a huge huge advantage practically to actually speak another language for all sorts of reasons. (TH, school 2)

In sum, teachers refer to a broader range of rationales for language learning than senior management, express sharp criticism of national policy, and, with the exception of the teacher in school 3, are broadly supportive of their

own school's policy. Like senior managers, they express acute awareness of the gap between what languages could offer and the current practice of 'teaching to the exam', but most teachers describe their own teaching as somewhat non-compliant with this.

4.3 Students

Fig. 3 shows that students mention practical, skills-based and employability rationales most frequently:

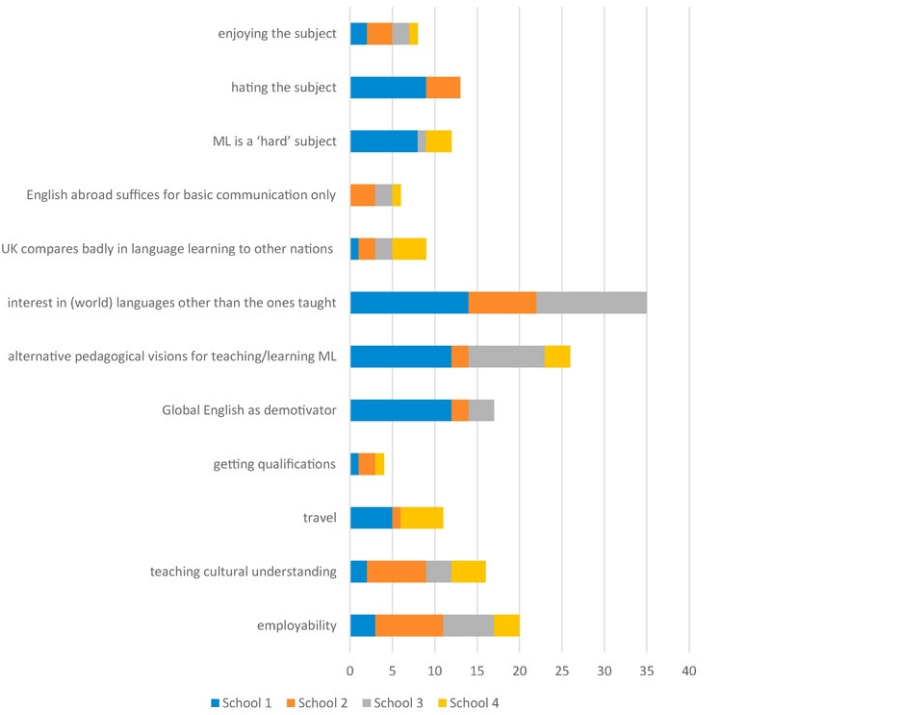*F: You get more job opportunities if you have more languages. Not just English. (school 1)*

Fig. 3 Students:topic frequency by school.

alt-text: Fig. 3

Students also frequently mention rationales relating to cultural learning, and the necessity of showing respect to other cultures:

M: It would be quite rude to just always answer in English. You should show at least some common courtesy and use some phrases in French. (school 1)

For a minority of students, the dominance of English is perceived as so great as to justify the 'English is enough' attitude:

F: I feel there is no point in learning languages, everyone speaks English. (school 1)

Many had encountered problems trying to practise their language, only to be met by (fluent) English answers:

M: When I was in Italy I really wanted to practise like speaking a different language but all of them … they started to speak English … quite annoying. (several others agree) (school 1)

Using ML qualifications for educational advancement is a reason often (but not exclusively) cited by the private school students:

M: Good for college applications, looks good. I don't think I would go abroad though. (school 4)

Regarding learner experiences, many students echo the staff's impression of 'teaching to the exam':

M: I mean some of the stuff they teach you are techniques and then there is so much pressure in the speaking exam ... just 2 minutes. (many in group agree) (school 1)

School 3 students express unhappiness about their inability to access language study regardless of their academic ability:

M: They put you in pathway 1 if they think you are capable of passing.

M: But some who are in pathway 2 they want to do a language.

F: You can complain.

M: You can try to get out of pathway 2 but I think you should have an option.

M: Like one language for pathway 1 and another one for pathway 2. (school 3)

Encouraged to speculate about future language learning, students proved very imaginative. In school 1, students in two focus groups felt that languages might not be taught any more at school in Britain in 50 years' time, and would be offered as a leisure activity only; the world, meanwhile, would have learned English. Internet traffic in English for the present time was estimated at anything between 99% and 10%, with a number of students predicting that many languages would die or somehow merge with English.

They will probably like merge languages in the future and stuff. (f, school 1.)

Technology would, in this scenario, come to the aid of lazy learners:

F: I think in 100 years or so you can just speak and a computer will automatically translate.

M: I think people will have a brain implant.

M: Or Google glasses with translation. (school 1)

F: I think we will have a chip put in the head that teaches you French (school 1)

Thus, students offer an impressive range of rationales for languages, focusing on skills and employability, but also on cultural enrichment and respect towards other cultures. Although disliking some classroom activities, students enthusiastically conveyed ideas concerning language pedagogy - both in formal settings and beyond – that revealed a general interest in languages.

To summarize, staff mention generic academic skills development more often than students do. Teachers mention a wider spectrum of rationales for learning languages, and cite the most challenges in their daily teaching (e.g. severe marking, exam-focused curricula, lack of senior management support). They also reflect more on the problem of finding rationales for ML in the context of global English, and refer to an inward-looking, monolingual and monocultural outlook in their region of northern England, which exacerbates the problem of 'selling' ML to students. Senior managers, by contrast, focus on non-language-specific rationales for language learning; some blame teachers for teaching ML in an uninspiring way. In none of the schools do students seem demotivated to learn languages per se, which supports the finding that, despite a significant social divide in actual take-up, interest in ML does not differ along these lines (Grenfell & Harris, 2013). In fact, many expressed the desire to reach a high standard:

M: I'd love to speak a language fluently, and live abroad.

F: If you live in the country then the more you hear it the more you pick it up.

M: You could ask people you were friendly with in the country to help you learn.

F: Do an exchange, like you teach them English and they teach you their language. (school 3)

Unlike staff, students focus on the use of skills, leading to much speculation as to which language would yield most benefit. Students are also keenly aware of the 'respect for other cultures' rationale. The fact that students overall seem to over-estimate the spread of English does not seem to aggravate whatever demotivation might be present; on the contrary, many seem curious about (world) languages currently not offered in their school.

4.4 School differences

Figs. 1–3 illustrate differences in responses between the schools. Senior management in school 3 offer a non-language-specific rationale for teaching languages, emphasising generic educational benefits. By contrast, school 4 senior management refer to the usefulness of language qualifications. The teacher in school 3 evokes many negative topics, including the school's language policy. Students in the private school have the fewest negative comments to make about language learning, and students in school 3 complain much more than students in the other schools about poor ML provision. In reverse, school 3 students make no reference to using languages for travelling, or gaining qualifications. In school 1, which makes languages compulsory for all up to age 16, more students profess to dislike languages, and to find them hard. Overall, however, student differences between schools are much less pronounced than staff differences.

The next section presents the lexical bundle analysis. Word cluster similarities of all coded texts (see Method), permitting an independent verification of the patterns described above, are displayed in Tables 3–5.

Table 3 Senior management interviews: word cluster similarity by school.

alt-text: Table 3

school	school	Pearson correlation coefficient
2	3	0.386396
4	3	0.375018
1	3	0.372297
2	1	0.358305
4	1	0.355591
4	2	0.272633

Table 4 Teachers interviews: word cluster similarity by school.

alt-text: Table 4

school	school	Pearson correlation coefficient
1	3	0.538812
4	1	0.529045
2	1	0.432608
2	3	0.42747
4	3	0.371282
4	2	0.33764

Table 5 Student focus groups: word cluster similarity by school.

alt-text: Table 5

school	school	Pearson correlation coefficient
4	1	0.836962
2	1	0.826369

1	3	0.823581
4	2	0.811844
2	3	0.811052
4	3	0.750155

The tables shows (change to: table**s** show) that lexical bundle among the student cohorts form the four schools are relatively homogeneous, unlike the lexical bundles used among the staff from different schools. Hence, the corpus linguistics analysis shows the same patterns as the topical analysis: staff from different schools debate the topic in hand with marked differences; students, on the other hand, evoke similar topics regardless of school. There is one exception to this general finding: the lexical bundles in students from school 3 show little overlap with the other student data. There are no clear patterns regarding staff differences between schools.

4.5 Relation to socio-demographic and academic school characteristics

This section examines the results of the topical analysis in relation to the academic and social characteristics of the four schools. This topical analysis has demonstrated how senior managers tend to justify their policies with reference to general academic contexts, and the specific socio-economic context of their schools. The head teacher of school 3 emphasized the cultural enrichment aspect of ML, claiming it serves to counter-balance the low ethnic diversity in the area, but justified his (low priority) policy with reference to his students' socio-economic deprivation and low professional aspiration:

I think where we live in the [XXX] it is very white and monocultural and we need to offer more enrichment in that way […] we need to introduce trips abroad, just an awareness of the multilingual world … We are in a very deprived area, the vast majority of students will not leave this local area […] very limited multicultural opportunity, very white, only 1.7% are non-white. (senior management, school 3)

Employability skills, or gaining educational qualifications, do not feature in his justification. By his own admission, his vision for ML, which is comprehensive and humanistic, is somewhat removed from current practice:

What I'd love to do is offer 7–8 languages at Key stage 3, whether it is vocational course or not, and then you understand how languages are formed […]. I think theoretically what you want to do is to develop the love of learning. […] Education is broader than exam results and I think an appreciation of the world as a whole is absolutely imperative, understanding different cultures, different environments, it is fascinating. (senior management, school 3)

School 4's senior management, by contrast, focuses on the benefits of language qualifications for university applications, encouraging students to exploit the 'hard academic credentials' for their academic advancement:

Why not just do an AS level language, it will give them an advantage, for instance at university, or they could do a language ab initio. We try to motivate them like that […] I think if you can speak a foreign language it is highly respected and one of these things where people are in awe … it is a challenge to do. (senior management, school 4)

Similarly, senior managers in schools 1 and 2 cited language qualifications as a means to impress employers or universities:

Especially if they are going to university, they are gonna need a language GCSE on their certificates … because they [universities] know it is a hard subject […] (senior management, school 1)

As for teachers, those from schools with compulsory languages up to the age of 16 tend to embrace this school policy, referencing academic qualifications as well as an enhanced reputation for their school:

The reputation is, if you go to school A [with compulsory languages], it's a tough school to be in. (TT, school 1)

The teacher at school 3 stands out as criticising a lack of management support, as well as voicing greater concerns about global English 'taking away' learner motivation. This teacher also refers negatively to the employability rationale, as their students would not see language skills as an asset for future careers. Preoccupied with 'in-house' problems, this teacher gives less space to criticising policy on a national level:

I have only been in teaching two years and came in really enthusiastic, wanting to teach all these wonderful things and now I just feel I am stuck teaching coursework all the time, boring monotonous exam. (T, school 3)

Teachers in schools 1, 2 and 4 but not 3 mention trips abroad as rewarding experiences: school 3 does not offer any such trips.

In sum, senior managers relate their rationales for teaching languages to the socioeconomic and academic characteristics of their school, and base their ML policy on this assessment. Senior managers (and, albeit to a lesser extent, teachers) from the three high-performing schools (1, 2 and 4) reference the 'qualification' argument. This rationale is explicitly rejected by both senior management and the teacher at the lower-performing school with a more socially disadvantaged intake. Students in this school (school 3) do not mention the benefits of languages for travel, most likely because they lack opportunities to travel abroad. Beyond this, however, the differences found among staff across the various schools are not replicated among students. For instance, students at school 3 do not, in fact, dislike languages more, and students across all schools reference the 'cultural enrichment' and 'showing respect'

rationales surprisingly often. Relatedly, students from all schools share imaginative ideas about improving language pedagogy, unlike their staff, who have less to say on the subject, and – if they mentioned it at all - voiced ideas which did not echo those of students.

5 Discussion and conclusion

The social divide in language learning is by now well documented; recent studies have contributed to our understanding of this phenomenon as it manifests itself on the level of the individual (Coffey, 2016). This divide, however, is also a *systemic* one (Lan(La**n**vers)vers, 2017a&b), manifest in stark differences between schools in terms of ML policy and uptake. We have little understanding of how stakeholders' views on ML, the formulation of ML policy and experiences of ML learning contribute to the divide at the level of the whole school. This is the lacuna that the present study has set out to address.

The data presented here focuses attention on SES intake, rather than the independent/state school binary, as a determining factor in ML uptake. State school 3, with its low SES intake, differs most in its ML provision, while the independent school 4 shares many characteristics with state schools 1 and 2: all three have compulsory ML, and are high performing. How, then, do head teachers explicate their ML policy?

All senior managers, regardless of their school, may *express* progressive and comprehensive visions for the teaching of ML – in fact, the head of the school with a high percentage of students from disadvantaged backgrounds was most vocal on this. In *practice*, however, both managers and teachers admit that ML lessons consist in the main of 'teaching to the exam'. Therefore, so managers argue, ML policy must align to the demands of performance pressures. In no school was the gap between aspiration and practice greater than in the under-performing school, which had many students from lower SES. In this school, the poor ML provision was explicitly linked to the purported professional and academic needs of students, which were deemed not to include ML.

On the other hand, students, from all four schools expressed interest -in principle-in studying languages, and volunteered a surprising range of rationales for ML, beyond the oft-cited utilitarian and instrumental motivations (i.e. personal development, desire to show respect to other cultures). They also expressed interest in participating in a global multilingual world - in other words, they demonstrated 'international posture', defined as 'a tendency to relate oneself to an international community rather than specific L2 groups' (Yashima, 2009: 145). Thus, despite growing up in the most monolingual and monocultural areas of England, these students, regardless of their SES, demonstrate a surprisingly open and curious attitude towards international communities. Perhaps more surprisingly still, they do not overwhelmingly subscribe to the 'English is enough' principle to participate in international communication. Instead, students seem more interested in learning other world languages (e.g. Chinese, Japanese) rather than the European languages offered to them now (French, German). These findings suggest two important implications for learners with L1 English: first of all, as Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie (2017) posit, the attractiveness of *all* L2s stands 'in the shadow of English', and L1 English speakers will therefore always struggle that bit more to become motivated to learn a L2. However, here, we see students attracted by languages that -in their eyes - stand a little less in this shadow, by virtue of their size and international status. The second observation is that the languages they profess interest in are not European. Several reasons offer themselves to explain these observations, the most obvious one being that students already had negative experiences of learning a European language, resulting in overall low motivation and learner confidence (see above). A second explanation might be that students view the spread of English proficiency in Europe as sufficient to think they can indeed 'get by with English'. Finally, regardless of Brexit, and of the fact that European languages are deemed to be in great demand post-Brexit (Kelly, 2017), these students might see their international (future) self as more cosmopolitan than European. Of course, all these factors are likely to interplay, but the absence of empirical studies on such learner attitudes is striking. In view of the L2 motivation crisis in the UK, further studies, shedding light on what *kind of motivation* students might show for what *kind of language,* are much needed.

Returning to the issue of SES divide, it was striking to observe that there were no decipherable patterns in *student* attitudes towards ML and the SES characteristics of their school. In other words, this study found no evidence that students themselves to construe their needs for ML study as socially conditioned – unlike their head teachers. In this manner, students who happen to attend schools where ML is deemed a low priority find their international posture curbed against their will.

This study has contributed to our understanding of how the tripartite educational context of lack of direction in national ML policy, pressure on school performance, and devolution of policy making to schools, drives school managers to formulate socially conditioned ML policies, ostensibly responding to the specific needs of their cohort's SES intake. The combined effects of the above educational practices are setting the path towards an increasing social divide in language learning *opportunities*, let alone achievement. Urgent research is needed to investigate what language policies, both nationwide and school-internal, might best be adopted to counter this divide. Given that a language learning crisis is evident many Anglophone countries (AUTHOR, 2017bLanvers, 2017a&b, Wiley 2007), future studies should also address the question if these countries share similarities in respect of social divide and ML policies uncovered here.

5.1 Limitations

This study was conducted in three small towns and one village in a dominantly 'white' area of northern England. Students were randomly selected for participation, albeit representing the full spectrum of ability. Outcomes may differ in different settings (e.g. more ethnic diversity, different student mix), or with larger, quantitative data from more schools, or in a UK nation with different language education policies.

Appendix 1

Focus group questions for students:

- How do you like language learning? If you learn (ed) two, which do you prefer?
- What do you (not) like about language learning?
- How useful do you think is it to learn languages today? Why?
- Do you think everyone speaks English today? Is it worth while learning other
- languages?
- Do you think people will learn languages in the future? How?
- If you could learn languages any way you wanted, how would you like to learn
- them? Which ones?
- Which language(s) do you think is/are useful to learn?

Appendix 2

Interview questions for Staff (Senior management and language teachers):

- What is the role and value of languages in the curriculum today?
- Is it worth while learning languages today?
- Given the spread of English globally, is it still worth while learning languages?
- Which other global languages might be important to know in the future?
- How can students benefits from language learning?
- What will the future hold for language learning in the UK?
- What are your views on the curriculum and assessment?
- For teachers: What would you change in language teaching if you could?
- For senior management: Say a little about why you implement language teaching
- the way you do at your school.

Uncited references

AUTHOR., 2017a; Department for Education, 2015; Wiley, 2007. (all added now)

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Footnotes

[1] Education policy in the UK is devolved to its four nations (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland), resulting in some variation in ML policy (see Machin et al., 2012). All nations currently have a phase of one compulsory ML at lower levels of Secondary school (age 11–14). Scotland is committed the European goal of equipping students with skills in two ML.

[2] The percentage of a schools' cohort entitled to free school meals is deemed a relatively reliable indicator of a relative social deprivation of a school's intake, see Board & Tinsley, 2015.

[3] County not named to protect anonymity of schools.

[4] Disclosure and Barring Services, holding criminal records.

[5] The following conventions are used to cite participants: T = teacher (followed by further personal identification letters in school 1 where four teachers were interviewed), school x = school in which the staff worked. Students: F = femal

student, M = male student, school x = school in which dialogue or student comment took place, always placed at the end of a citation from same focus group.

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Lanvers, U. (2017b). Elitism in language learning in the UK. In (eds D. Rivers & K. Kotzmann) Isms in language education. Berlin: De Gruyter (pp. 50–73). Delete the following: BROWN et al 2011, DEARING 2007.

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