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Student motivation, school policy choices and modern language study in England

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Abstract
This paper investigates the relationship between the decisions made by school leaders in England concerning their school policy for teaching modern foreign languages (MFL) post-14, and student motivation for MFL. Seventy head teachers, 119 heads of modern languages and 666 students aged 14-15 from schools in England took part in the questionnaire-based study. Student motivation was measured using the Self-Regulation Questionnaire (Academic) (Ryan and Connell 1989), based on Self-Determination Theory. The relationship between student perceptions of the usefulness of specific languages and the decision to study these was considered. Results show that the way choice is presented is a key part of student motivation for MFL, and that students see different languages as useful for different reasons. Furthermore, the data suggest that the ways school leaders make decisions concerning language policy do not align with language provision that optimises student motivation. The study concludes by suggesting new pathways for rejuvenating language learner motivation in anglophone contexts.

Keywords
Language learning, Motivation; GCSE choices; school language policy

Introduction

This study investigates both student motivation to study a modern foreign language (MFL) in English secondary schools, and the decisions made by school-level policy makers regarding the teaching of the subject. Unlike previous studies, it considers student motivation in light of whether or not they have chosen to take the subject. At national level in England, MFL are not compulsory beyond the age of 14, leaving individual schools free to set their own policy. This study also considers how school leaders decide their school's policy on the subject's optionality, a topic that has received little attention to date. Studies on MFL motivation in the UK tend to show that students are generally poorly motivated (Coleman, Galaczi and Astruc 2007; Lanvers 2017a; Williams, Burden and Lanvers 2002), enjoy the lessons less than in other subjects (Graham, Macfadyen and Richards 2012), and are less motivated than their peers in other countries (Bartram 2006). The UK shares the motivation crisis with other anglophone countries, a phenomenon to be understood in the context of global English and the perception that 'English is enough' (East 2009; Group of Eight 2007; Lo Bianco 2014; Lanvers 2017a). Motivation for learning other languages has been described as being 'in the shadow of Global English (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie 2017: 457), meaning that language learners in anglophone countries start the process already at a disadvantage.

Unlike the majority of language motivation studies, this study adopts Self-Determination Theory as its motivation framework, and uses data on student choice to consider the impact of school-level curriculum organisation on student motivation. In addition, it considers the ways in which schools make decisions regarding language teaching in order to draw conclusions regarding the possibilities for improving take-up at GCSE.[1]

Successive annual Language Trends reports (see British Council 2017) have chronicled a declining trend in uptake of the subject in English schools and point to a continuing language learning crisis (Lanvers and Coleman 2013; Tinsley and Board 2017a 2017b). Other anglophone nations report similar crises (Berman 2011; Group of Eight 2007).

The four nations of the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) all take responsibility for their own curriculum. Language teaching in English secondary schools, which is the focus of this study, is guided by very light-touch government policy. At present, any language may be taught (Department for Education 2013) and the subject is compulsory only for students aged 7-14. Beyond those curriculum requirements, all decision-making is left to individual schools, including whether or not to teach a language to students older than 14. This results in schools having different policies: in some, languages are made compulsory for all students aged 14-16, in others they are made optional for all in this age group, and some schools stream students into 'pathways' depending on ability, with higher ability students encouraged to take a language (Education Datalab 2015; Lanvers 2017a)[2]. In recent years, performance measures contributing to school accountability and league tables have been contradictory as regards the value of MFL (see Long and Boulton 2016; Thomson 2016a; Board and Tinsley 2014; Staufenberg 2017). Overall, the impact on the subject has been negative (Staufenberg 2017; Wiggins 2016); given the relative difficulty of attaining good grades in MFL compared to many other subjects (Coe 2008; Ofqual 2015; Thomson 2016b; Vidal Romero 2017), independent (fee-paying) schools are now more likely than state-maintained schools to make a language compulsory (Tinsley & Board 2017) and within the state sector, schools with good academic records are more likely to do so than those with a poorer record (Lanvers 2017b).

The severe grading in MFL is a major factor contributing to problems in the delivery of the subject (Graham 2002; Taylor and Marsden 2014; Thomson 2016b;). Studies comparing the difficulty of a range of subjects at GCSE have found that getting a grade C (commonly accepted as the lowest pass grade) is harder in MFL than all subjects except the individual sciences and statistics (Coe 2008; Ofqual 2015). School leaders, under increasing pressure to improve their league table standing, are thus disincentivised to enter students for GCSE MFL (Education Datalab 2015; Harris and Burn 2011; Lanvers 2017b; Titcombe 2008).

For students, the decision to learn a language is the result of a particularly complex interplay of factors: student achievement and perceived ability, national and school MFL policy, parental and family attitudes and perceived 'usefulness', socio-political attitudes to MFL, and personal motivation. Where the subject is given optional status, students may perceive the subject to have low value (Chambers 1999; Coleman et al. 2007; Fisher 2011) further decreasing take-up.

Furthermore, the UK socio-political climate has been described as hostile towards languages, and at times xenophobic (Coleman 2009; Graham & Santos 2015; Lanvers and Coleman 2013). At present, the precise fallout of the decision to leave the European Union (known as Brexit) on the needs and policies for languages remains uncertain – as does much else in the Brexit process. However, there is little reason to interpret Brexit itself as a sign that the UK has opted to 'be content with monolingualism', (Pachler 2007, p. 9); indeed Brexit might stimulate an interest in learning languages currently less taught in the UK. Recent publications on language needs post-Brexit (Kelly 2017; Tinsley and Board 2017b) tend to suggest that language skills will become even more crucial. Given the lack of clear

national directives for MFL, individual schools are thus at the forefront of delivering MFL education fit for the nations' future needs. Therefore, this study, unlike others on the topic, uses the unit of individual schools and their MFL policy as the core independent variable. By considering both the ways in which school senior leaders and heads of department make decisions regarding the provision of choice at GCSE, and the impact of this choice on student motivation, this article offers new insight into the ways in which decentralised language education policy impacts on language learning in England.

Regarding motivation, research in MFL has found that motivation declines over Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14) (Coleman et al. 2007; Williams et al. 2002). Students have been found not to consider the subject intrinsically motivating (McPake, Johnstone, Low and Lyall 1999) and where the learning process conflicts with students' sense of identity, motivation has also been found to be problematic (Bartram 2006; Chambers 1999; Fisher 2001). Offering the choice between taking a particular subject, or dropping it, might increase motivation in that particular subject (Reeve, Nix and Hamm 2003). However, it has also been found that students link the optionality of MFL with low value (Chambers 1999; Coleman et al. 2007; Fisher 2011). Davies et al. (2004) and other studies have shown that students' perceptions of a subject are important in the GCSE choices they make, as well as perceptions of their ability (Blenkinsop et al. 2006). Where MFL is optional, then, its uptake depends not only on its availability to be chosen, but also on students' views of the subject as regards its value, usefulness, interest and difficulty (Gaotlhobogwe, Laugharne and Durance 2011). Nevertheless, Davies et al. (2004: 1) note that 'we know relatively little about the extent and consequences of student choice within secondary schools'.

Motivation in the current study has been measured using Organismic Integration Theory, one of the theories which makes up Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and which breaks down extrinsic motivation into increasingly internalised aspects. External regulation, whereby motivation is linked to external factors such as desire for a reward or avoidance of punishment, is the least autonomous, followed by introjected regulation, characterised by a feeling of pride in success or shame in failure. Identified regulation, which in this case could be the desire to learn a language in order to improve chances of getting a good job or accessing higher education is more autonomous, or self-determined, and considered to approximate to intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Connell 1989; Vansteenkiste, Niemiec and Soenens 2010). The more self-determined a student is, the more positive their educational outcomes (Reeve, Deci and Ryan 2004), with higher intrinsic motivation linked to higher attainment (Taylor et al. 2014).

This study adopts SDT because it permits a dynamic, holistic view on (language) learning motivation in several respects: SDT permits the conceptualisation of learner motivation in a dynamic interaction of more extrinsic and more intrinsic dimensions, rather than conceptualising these dimensions as mutually exclusive. Furthermore, SDT also conceptualises motivation as dynamic with respect to influences at the level of learner experiences. In this respect, some studies suggest that generic school experience factors such as liking the teacher, and enjoying the lessons, are crucial factors determining motivation in MFL (e.g. Chambers 1999, Krüsemann 2018). On the other hand, motivational dimensions specific to the subject (e.g. instrumental motivation to use the langauge for specific purposes) are well-established dimensions in MFL motivation, although studies

investigating motivation for MFL in UK schools tend to show that this dimension is often of relatively low importance for this context (Gayton 2010; McPake et al. 1999).

Furthermore, in order to establish how policy decisions are made in schools and how they affect student motivation, data from head teachers and heads of languages were collected. Decisions regarding which languages should be taught to which students come under the heading 'strategic leadership', which is largely the responsibility of the head teacher, although middle leaders such as heads of department may contribute to strategic thinking in their areas of expertise (Earley and Weindling 2004).

To sum up, there is currently little policy support at national level in England to increase MFL uptake. Evidence suggests that poor student motivation for MFL is a major contributor to the ongoing decline in MFL uptake, but given the increasing devolution of powers to individual schools in many policy decisions, there is an urgent need to understand how schools' framing of 'choice' for MFL may relate to motivation. Senior school management, even if willing to increase their MFL uptake, face systemic problems in MFL delivery, such as poor student motivation, staffing shortages (Allen 2016), lack of curriculum time (Tinsley and Board 2017) and severe marking. This context may lead school leadership teams to limit MFL study to some students only, with unknown effects on learner motivation. It is equally unclear if giving complete free choice to students to study a MFL or not carries a motivational advantage. This study directly investigates the views of senior and middle leaders to provide insight into this question.

The study

Research questions

The research questions addressed by this study are:

1. How do school leaders make strategic decisions regarding the provision of choice for MFL GCSE?
2. How does absence/presence of choice to study MFL or not relate to student motivation?
3. Is student decision-making affected by perceptions of the usefulness of the language?
4. Do perceptions of usefulness vary by language?

Method

In order to answer these research questions, data were collected anonymously by means of questionnaires for head teachers, heads of school language departments and Year 10 students (those aged 14-15 and who were in the first year of their GCSE courses). The project met the university's ethical guidelines and all individual school requirements were met.

Staff questionnaires were sent to a total of 437 schools in 22 local authorities via email, which represented a spread of geographical areas and a mix of urban, rural and coastal schools. The questionnaire was also circulated through teacher networks[3], social media and professional contacts. Student questionnaires were completed by a total of 666 students from 13 schools in six local authorities (administrative regions) completed questionnaires. The breakdown of students by school is presented in **Error! Reference source not found.**

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[Table 1 near here]

Instrument: student questionnaire

The questionnaire asked about both student choice and motivation.

Motivation items

A Self-Determination Theory instrument known as the Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ-A) (Ryan and Connell 1989), designed for high school (secondary) students was used, reflecting the continuum of motivation described previously. The measure has been used in a range of studies (see for example Alivernini et al. 2017) and consists of 32 items addressing reasons for doing homework, classwork, answering hard questions and trying to do well at school. The wording was modified in the present study to address work in language lessons specifically, asking 'Why do you do your work in languages?' Ten of the items were selected to identify students' position on the continuum in this domain, as shown in Table 2. For each of the ten items given in response to the question 'Why do you do your work in languages?', students were required to indicate whether the reason was 'very true' 'sort of true' 'not very true' or 'not at all true', in line with the standard procedure for administering the SRQ-A.

[Table 2 near here]

Choice items

After indicating whether or not they were taking a language, students were asked 'Did you have a choice whether to take a language or not?', with four possible response options as shown in Table 3 along with the group names they were allocated for analysis.

[Table 3 near here]

Students who indicated that taking a language had been up to them, and those students who were not taking a language and indicated 'yes but I didn't want to do a language at all' were asked 'As far as you can remember, how important were each of these things when you decided whether to take a language or not?'. They were presented with eight items (shown in Appendix 1) which were measured on a slider, with 0 marked as 'not at all important' and 100 as 'really important'. These options were designed to relate to the patterns of choice generally seen in schools, as outlined in the introduction.

Perceptions of the usefulness of specific languages were gathered from open comments, which were then copied directly including all spelling and grammar errors. These comments were coded thematically using inductive coding (Robson 2011) in the NVivo programme.

Instrument: staff questionnaire

Head teachers and heads of languages, the senior and middle leaders with influence over school MFL policy, were asked about the choices offered to students. Three response options were given: 'No students can choose, a language is compulsory', 'Some students can

choose' and 'All students can choose'. Respondents who selected 'some students can choose' (*n* = 26) were then asked how this was decided, with three options plus 'Other' given: 'Attainment in languages', 'Likelihood of obtaining an EBacc' and 'Attainment in other subjects'. They were also invited to make comments on this item.

Results

How do school leaders make strategic decisions regarding the provision of choice for MFL GCSE?

Staff responses showed that in 52.3% of the schools where languages were taught, all students were able to choose a MFL (Table 4).

[Table 4 near here]

Respondents who selected 'some students can choose' (*n* = 26) were then asked how this was decided. Several of the comments given under 'other' were found to refer to the concepts provided as response options, and so these responses were allocated to the appropriate category in the coding grid. The remaining five 'other' responses included two referring to students' interest in or enthusiasm for the subject and two referring to the Progress 8 performance measure.[4] One respondent indicated only that it was a decision made by the senior leadership team. Response breakdown is shown in Table 5.

[Table 5 near here]

Respondents were given the chance to comment on their response to this item, and coding revealed that these primarily related to attainment. Some fitted this theme quite broadly: 'Attainment in all subject and EBacc likelihood' (HoD_152); 'Combination of all of the above' (HoD_4), whereas others were very specific: 'FFTd data[5] - percentage change of C+ at GCSE' (HoD_82). Some elaborated on the process in their school and the extent to which choice is provided: 'Students CAN (but are discouraged from) opting out of languages but this can be vetoed by MFL dept and heads of year e.g. an able student will not be permitted to opt out, a less able one may be, but will not be stopped from doing a language if they wish to' (HoD_114).

Thus, although more than half of all participating schools reported that *all* their students could choose whether or not to take a language, the actual choice is only available to *some* students. For those students who were able to choose, predicted attainment in MFL drove their decision.

Does having a choice affect students' self-determined motivation?

In accordance with the procedure for scoring the SRQ-A (Ryan and Connell 1989), numeric values were allocated to responses to each of the ten items, with 'very true' scored 4 and 'not at all true' scored 1. A Friedman test with pairwise comparisons was subsequently carried out ($n = 416$, $\chi^2(9) = 492.446$, $p = .000$) which revealed significant differences in the distributions of scores of some of the items for MFL. These are shown in Figure 1 and Appendix 2.

[Figure 1 near here]

The following factors emerge as more motivating to the students when doing their work in languages: 'I want to understand the subject', 'I'll feel proud of myself if I do well', 'It's what I'm supposed to do', 'It's important to me' and 'I'll get in trouble if I don't'.

Mann-Whitney U tests on the individual items revealed no significant differences between students who had had free choice of whether or not to take a language and other students. Results are shown in Table 6.

[Table 6 near here]

The responses to the ten items on the scale can be combined to give scores for external, introjected, identified and intrinsic motivation, following the procedure set out in the SRQ-A (Ryan and Connell 1989), as shown in Table 7. Following this, further calculations can be carried out to generate a score on the Relative Autonomy Index (RAI), as shown:

2 x Intrinsic + Identified - Introjected - 2 x External

In this calculation, controlled motivation is weighted negatively and autonomous regulation positively, with the subscales furthest to the extremes weighted more heavily.

[Table 7 near here]

Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted to test for correlations between student scores on the motivation subscales and whether or not they had a choice. For the intrinsic and identified subscales, distributions were not similar and thus mean ranks were compared. The results of these tests are shown in Table 8 and reveal that students in the 'Free choice' or 'Everyone' groups had significantly higher intrinsic scores than those in the 'Pressure' or 'Grades' groups, although effect sizes were small. Those who had free choice also scored significantly higher than all other groups for identified regulation. Those in the 'Grades' group had significantly higher levels of external regulation than students in the 'Everyone' group.

[Table 8 near here]

Kruskal-Wallis tests with pairwise comparisons were carried out to establish whether significant differences existed between levels of controlled and autonomous regulation and scores on the RAI across the four choice groups. The tests showed that the 'Free choice' and 'Everyone' groups had significantly higher mean ranks than either of the other two groups for both autonomous regulation and the RAI, with small effect sizes (see Table 9). There were no significant differences between groups for controlled regulation.

[Table 9 near here]

The identified regulation scores for students in the 'Free choice' group were significantly higher than those of students in all other groups. It is therefore possible that the component items relating to understanding and importance of the subject are factors which, when valued by students, drive their choice, rather than being of value to all students. We have shown already that students considered how important they perceived a subject to be when making their choices, so it is a logical extension of this that students who actively chose languages were motivated by their evaluation of its importance.

Students who reported they had had to take a language because they got good grades had higher External regulation (being motivated by avoiding getting into trouble, doing what you're supposed to and the likelihood of reward) than any other group. These are likely to

be students who feel under pressure in school to achieve highly, and so being driven by 'doing the right thing' fits in with this approach.

How is student decision-making affected by their perceptions of the usefulness of the language?

As might be expected from the results from the staff data, not all students were able to make a choice. 40.8% of the 488 participants who were taking a language indicated that they had had free choice, 18.0% that they had been pressured into taking the subject, 25.4% that everyone in their school took a language and 15.1% that they had been made to take one because of their grades. 53.6% of the 140 who were not taking the subject indicated that they had had free choice.

A Friedman test with pairwise comparisons carried out on the data from the question 'As far as you can remember, how important were each of these things when you decided whether to take a language or not?' was significant for those not taking a language (n = 31, $\chi^2(7)$ = 43.581, p = .000) and those in the 'Free choice' group (n = 19, $\chi^2(7)$ = 32.498, p = .000). Pairwise comparisons carried out in SPSS and adjusted with a Bonferroni correction revealed that there were significant differences in the distributions of scores (see Figures 2 and 3 and Appendix 3 and 4).

[Figure 2 near here]

[Figure 3 near here]

For those students who had chosen to take MFL, there were significant differences between the scores for 'How useful I thought it would be' and 'Whether I liked the teacher', 'Getting an EBacc', 'Being seen as an "academic" student' and 'Whether my friends were doing it' as well as between 'Whether I thought I would get a good grade' and 'Whether my friends were doing it'. This reveals that those who chose MFL primarily did so because of their views of the subject's usefulness and were not influenced by whether their friends were taking it. These students were less concerned with the subject's importance than they were with their liking of the subject, and prospective good grade.

Those not taking MFL were also influenced by perceptions of usefulness. The data suggests that a number of factors are important in student choice, and getting the EBacc qualification (see Note 2) was the *least* of their concerns. Instead, usefulness seems to be the guiding influence on students, with other internal factors also playing much more of a role than externally-orientated ones such as the importance of getting an EBacc or being with friends. In line with previous studies (Blenkinsop et al. 2006; Stables and Wikeley 1997 1999), the perceived importance of the subject played a role, particularly for those not taking the subject.

Do perceptions of usefulness vary by language?

Qualitative comments give insight into student views of the usefulness of particular languages, and it is clear from these that students perceive different languages to be useful in different ways. Usefulness emerged from the coding as the key theme, which was then broken down into four subthemes, namely travel, personal connections, specific goals and geopolitical value.

French, Spanish and Italian were considered useful for travel:

> … when I go skiing I can speak their language. (STA_15, referring to French)
>
> Because we go to France. So if we learned French we'd be able to talk to people and they'd be impressed. (STF_29)
>
> … because I'm more likely to go to Spain on holiday. (STE_45)
>
> Because I go to Spain and the Spanish islands every year and it would be more beneficial to me. (STH_297)
>
> I have always wanted to travel to/live in Italy, and so learning the language would be immensely valuable to me. (STB_20)
>
> … because when we go to Italy we would be able to order food and tickets in Italian. (STE_45)

By contrast, German was considered useful because of personal connections:

> … half of my family can speak it. (STF_15)
>
> … I know many German people that live near me and it would be exciting to be able to interact in their mother-tongue. (STG_3).

Japanese was the language which seemed to be considered useful for the most specific reasons, often relating to the Japanese culture:

> Because I play a card game that can require to read Japanese or German. (STB_4)
>
> Because I'd like to find anime that I can understand so it doesn't take forever to find a dubbed/subtitled version. (STH_253)
>
> Because I want to be able to make J-Rock [Japanese rock music] when I'm older. (STD_8)

Chinese was considered useful due to its geopolitical position:

> Useful because of China's economic power. (STC_5)

These comments make clear that usefulness is perceived differently according to the language being considered. It is also notable that the majority refer to usefulness for something which is particular to the student, rather than a general perception, in line with the findings of Taylor and Marsden (2014).

Discussion and conclusion

Given the decentralised nature of MFL policy in England and the demands placed on the time of school-level policy makers, coupled with the continuing language learning crisis in the UK, it is increasingly important to understand how individual school MFL policies might affect student motivation. As the UK moves towards Brexit, the nation's demands for specific languages may change (see Kelly 2017; Tinsley and Board 2017b), but the need for overall better language skills does not. Given the pressures of league tables and performance measures on schools, it is hard to see how schools might facilitate any necessary future changes in MFL delivery.

Staff data suggests that school leaders are overwhelmingly driven by concerns about attainment in making decisions regarding whether or not to offer a choice. MFL remains a subject affected by harsh grading, and schools continue to operate in a climate of quantified accountability and exam-orientated success measures; these operational contexts make it difficult for schools to implement changes which may lead to increased motivation. Harsh

grading also impacts on student decision-making (Graham 2002; Taylor and Marsden 2014; Thomson 2016b;).

Schools' preoccupation with attainment is problematic when viewed alongside the student motivation data. Students who reported being made to take a language because of their high grades reported higher levels of external regulation. Whilst schools are likely to encourage such students to take MFL to improve their attainment profile, paradoxically, by foregrounding such instrumental reasons, they encourage a more external motivational regulation in students that previous studies have not associated with higher attainment. Thus, school practices of selecting students to continue MFL study because of past good grades inadvertently encourage students to adopt motivational orientations known to be detrimental to ultimate learner outcomes.

Conversely, students' self-determined motivation was found to be strongly affected by choice, in line with previous SDT studies conducted in other areas (Reeve et al. 2003). Applying the SDT model to MFL, this study has shown that choice is also linked to higher intrinsic motivation in language learning. Against expectations, this study found that students who were given free choice, or no choice at all - rather than students with higher attainment - demonstrated higher levels of intrinsic motivation towards language learning, and overall higher autonomous regulation. Free choice was also linked to higher identified regulation, meaning that students who had a choice were more likely to do their work because it was important to them and they wanted to understand the subject than their peers who did not have a choice. Those who either had free choice or attended schools where everyone takes a language were more likely to do their work because it was fun and they enjoyed it. Table 10 shows how the choice groups were linked to motivation.

[Table 10 near here]

From these findings, we conclude that having a choice was only beneficial to motivation when students had *completely* free choice. The positive motivational effects did not exist for students who felt that they were under pressure to make their choices, and those who felt that they had to take a language because of their grades, and that it was not their choice, were likely to be motivated in a way which suggests feeling a burden of expectation around achieving high grades. On the basis of the data, students will be better motivated, then, if languages are compulsory for all, rather than a choice for some, although best of all is to make the choice completely free. In addition to the impact of choice on intrinsic motivation, identified regulation was significantly higher for those students who had free choice. However, school leaders might find implementing a completely 'free choice' policy difficult, given the risk of further decreasing uptake, and subsequent impact on the metrics by which the school performances are judged.

These findings give insights into the way in which students view languages. The fact that students wanted to understand the subject, and were driven by the fact that they would feel proud when they did well, suggests that the subject was seen as a challenge to be conquered – something which was sufficiently difficult that they would earn the right to be proud of themselves when they succeeded. However, students also engaged in learning in order to avoid negative consequences. This suggests that they might not want to opt for MFL for intrinsic reasons, but nonetheless see the benefit of achieving something to be proud of eventually. Generally, striving to succeed at something deemed challenging is a

stance that, from a pedagogical perspective, schools should support; in the case of MFL, however, low self-efficacy, coupled with school policies that reinforce undesired motivational orientations, seem to dampen this stance in learners. Given the link between higher levels of intrinsic motivation and higher attainment (Taylor et al. 2014), it is likely that students with motivations engendered in this manner will achieve below their potential in MFL, and less than in subjects where intrinsic motivation is better supported– regardless of the additional effects of severe grading for MFL.

Student decision-making was found to be strongly affected by perceptions of usefulness; indeed, factors which can be termed internally oriented – those which are governed by students' own world-view or feelings of competence – were found to be significantly more important in the decision-making process when compared with those which are externally oriented– relating to other people, others' perceptions or external measures of success. This was shown in the comparative importance of items relating to usefulness, importance, enjoyment and grades above those relating to impressing others, liking teachers and being with friends.

Perceptions of usefulness were found to vary by language, with French, Italian and Spanish perceived as useful for travel and holidays, whereas German was useful for social reasons and Chinese for economic ones. Japanese was the language which was found to be most useful for students' own specific reasons, often relating to the culture of the country, and these findings suggest that the choice of languages offered needs to be given careful consideration.

These findings suggest that student interest in languages in general could be directly affected by the languages on offer. As students are influenced by their views of the usefulness of a language when deciding whether to take the subject or not, and as their views of usefulness vary by language, it seems clear that the languages on offer will influence the amount of take-up. What is not clear from the data is which languages would be best, as the reasons for perceiving a language to be useful seem to be particular to the student. However, students' evident interest in Asian languages may suggest a possible route away from the hegemony of French in a post-Brexit Britain (Ginsburgh et al, 2017; Lanvers, 2018).

We conclude that offering a free choice to students or making languages compulsory are two school policy models that are likely to yield better student motivation than, for example, selecting students based on achievement, ability or other factors. Our data suggest that developing school policies which treat all students the same (free choice for all or compulsory for all) is likely to increase enjoyment of the subject as well as intrinsic motivation, and, in the case of free choice, higher identified regulation. These effects might be due to the positive climate for language learning provided in such schools, in contrast to the negative attitudes which may pervade in schools where choice is not seen as free or the subject is seen as only for higher attaining students. Given the importance of motivation, especially intrinsic, for attainment (Taylor et al. 2014), schools might consider adopting policies that facilitate such motivational orientations, and at the same time promise to improve student outcomes and/or league table performance.

Together with other anglophone countries such as the US and Australia, the UK language learning landscape is characterised by a) low governmental requirements regarding

language learning, and b) difficulties in motivating students. This study has shown how schools which are able to determine their language policy –in the absence of clear governmental guidance on MFL- can make a real difference to student motivation if they adopt a policy that encourages motivation. However, school leaders, with a constant eye on performance measurement, need support in making such changes. Furthermore, our results suggest that the target languages offered may play a greater role in influencing motivation that discussed hitherto. It is timely to now explore how both avenues- school policy and diversifying target languages- may be utilised to offer much-needed rejuvenation to motivate learners in a variety of anglophone countries, and variety of educational settings.

Notes

1) General Certificate of Secondary Education, the exams taken at age 16 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland
2) In order to qualify for the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) performance measure, students must take GCSEs in English, maths, a science, a humanities subject and a foreign language
3) Network for Languages South East, Network for Languages West Midlands, Routes into Languages Yorkshire & The Humber, National Association for Head Teachers
4) The Progress 8 performance measure includes eight subjects, of which three must be EBacc subjects
5) Fischer Family Trust data, which is used to set students' target grades

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Appendices

Appendix 1
Response options for the item: ‘As far as you can remember, how important were each of these things when you decided whether to take a language or not?’

Getting an EBacc
Being seen as an academic student
Whether I liked the teacher
Whether my friends were doing it
Whether I thought I would get a good grade
How much I liked the subject
Choosing subjects I thought were important to know
How useful I thought it would be

Appendix 2

Effect Size (*r*) of differences in distributions of scores established through pairwise comparisons following Friedman tests on the item 'Why do you do your work in languages?'

	I might get a reward if I do well	It's fun	I enjoy it	I'll feel bad if I don't do it	I want my teacher to think I'm a good student	I'll get in trouble if I don't	It's important to me	It's what I'm supposed to do	I'll feel proud of myself if I do well	I want to understand the subject
I might get a reward if I do well		.03	.12*	.13*	.16*	.24*	.26*	.36*	.53*	.67*
It's fun			.12	.14	.19*	.30*	.32*	.46*	.49*	.63*
I enjoy it				.02	.06	.17*	.20*	.34*	.37*	.51*
I'll feel bad if I don't do it					.04	.15	.18*	.32*	.35*	.49*
I want my teacher to think I'm a good student						.11	.10	.28*	.31*	.44*
I'll get in trouble if I don't							.02	.17*	.20*	.33*
It's important to me								.14	.17*	.31*
It's what I'm supposed to do									.03	.17*
I'll feel proud of myself if I do well										.14
I want to understand the subject										

* Tests were statistically significant at the 0.05 level after Bonferroni correction.

Appendix 3

Effect size (*r*) of differences in dstributions of scores established through pairwise comparisons following Friedman tests for the item 'As far as you can remember, how important were each of these things when you decided whether to take a language or not?' For students who chose not to take a language.

	Getting an EBacc	Being seen as an academic student	Whether I liked the teacher	Whether my friends were doing it	Whether I thought I would get a good grade	How much I liked the subject	Choosing subjects I thought were important to know	How useful I thought it would be
Getting an EBacc		.26	.33	.35	.48*	.54*	.56*	.65*
Being seen as an academic student			.07	.09	.22	.23	.30	.39
Whether I liked the teacher				.01	.15	.21	.22	.31
Whether my friends were doing it					.14	.19	.21	.30
Whether I thought I would get a good grade						.06	.08	.16
How much I liked the subject							.02	.11
Choosing subjects I thought were important to know								.09
How useful I thought it would be								

* Tests were statistically significant at the 0.05 level after Bonferroni correction.

Appendix 4

Effect size (*r*) of differences in distributions of scores established through pairwise comparisons following Friedman tests for the item 'As far as you can remember, how important were each of these things when you decided whether to take a language or not? For students in the 'Free Choice' group.

	Whether my friends were doing it	Being seen as an academic student	Getting an EBacc	Whether I liked the teacher	Choosing subjects I thought were important to know	How much I liked the subject	Whether I thought I would get a good grade	How useful I thought it would be
Whether my friends were doing it		.18	.25	.27	.31	.41	.51*	.79*
Being seen as an academic student			.07	.09	.13	.23	.33	.61*
Getting an EBacc				.02	.06	.16	.26	.54*
Whether I liked the teacher					.04	.14	.24	.52*
Choosing subjects I thought were important to know						.10	.20	.48
How much I liked the subject							.10	.38
Whether I thought I would get a good grade								.28
How useful I thought it would be								

* Tests were statistically significant at the 0.05 level after Bonferroni correction.