**Can we design language education policy and curricula for a motivated learner? Self Determination Theory and the UK language crisis**

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## **Abstract**

As in other anglophone countries, foreign language (FL) learning in the UK is in crisis. With the UK entering its fourth decade of this crisis with no end in sight, it is timely to ask how current policy directions for language learning beyond the compulsory phase (currently age 14 in all four UK nations) align with learners’ psychological needs in relation to language learning. After a review of these psychological needs within motivational theory, this article first discusses current FL policies in all four UK nations (England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland), alongside the current debates around the recently published 2021 Ofsted Curriculum Research Review for languages (OCRR), which is likely to underpin Ofsted’s inspections of provision in England. We then critically evaluate a range of research-based measures to incentivise language learning and boost learner motivation, some of which show promising results. Taking as our theoretical basis the psychological needs of *autonomy, relatedness* and *competence* that comprise Self Determination Theory (SDT), we then analyse FL policy and practices directions in the UK, including those articulated in the OCRR, and conclude that these tend to ignore or misinterpret motivational theory. This is followed by recommendations for FL policy which align both with SDT principles and research evidence. The conclusion critically evaluates opportunities and risks of current UK policy directions.

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## **Keywords**

anglophone language learners; Self Determination Theory; language policy, England; Scotland; Wales; Northern Ireland, Ofsted review

## **Introduction**

If all second language learning does indeed stand ‘in the shadow of English’ (Dörnyei and Al‐Hoorie 2017), the learner who already speaks English as (one of their) first language(s) can be conceptualised as an especially challenging case. Like other anglophone countries (Lanvers et al. 2021a), the UK has been experiencing a decline in language learning for decades. In England, second language (L2) study beyond the age of 14 was made optional in 2004, leading to a steep decline in students continuing with L2 study at age 14+: whereas in 2002, 76% of students studied an L2 up to age 16, in 2011, only 40% of State educated 14-year-olds studied an L2 (Tinsley and Han 2012). Over the last decade, the percentage of students choosing to study a language up to age 16 has hovered around 46-50% (Collen, 2021 a, b, c). The number of entrants for modern foreign language degree courses has also been in sharp decline - by 16% between 2007/08 and 2013/14 (Bowler 2019).). Within this picture of decline, we observe a sharp social divide: students from less advantaged backgrounds are less likely to continue language study than those from more advantaged backgrounds, and nearly a third of those studying languages at university come from fee-paying schools (Lanvers 2017b). Looking beyond formal education, it is noticeable that second language proficiency among the UK adult population is the worst or, on some measures, second worst (after Ireland) in comparison to EU countries (British Council 2013). Compared to European averages, a higher percentage of the UK population believe that learning any language is just not useful (Eurobarometer 2012).

Unsurprisingly, researchers have turned their attention to why UK students are poorly motivated (Lanvers 2017a). The 2021 Ofsted Curriculum Research Review for languages (henceforth, OCRR) offers little more than glimpses of that research, however. For example, citing Graham (2014), the authors comment that ‘Much has been written about motivation as a construct and different theories developed to explain it’ (OCRR: 4), but then offer no further insights into such theories, settling instead on self-efficacy as the sole route to improve motivation, and presenting it in a selective manner (see Graham, this issue). In so doing, the OCCR offers a view of L2 motivation that is fragmented and incomplete (see also Evans and Fisher, this issue).

Globally, research into L2 motivation is heavily skewed in favour of learners of English (Boo et al. 2015; Mahmoodi and Yousefi 2021), even though a decline in language learning can be observed in all anglophone contexts (Lanvers et al. 2021a). Given this research skewness, care should be taken to conceptualise L2 motivation in a manner that accommodates anglophone learners, and learners of languages other than English (LOTE) (see *The Modern Language Journal* 2017, 101, no.3). Self Determination Theory (SDT), as a theory rooted in psychology rather than (educational or applied) linguistics, provides a model that can accommodate any specific learner group, including the learner with English as their first language, and is therefore of particular relevance for this article. SDT (Deci and Ryan 2000) focuses on individual *agency*. In SDT, motivation for any activity is conceived of as driven by the meeting of three universal psychological needs, which are closely related and interdependent on one another (Ryan and Deci 2017):

• *competence* (the ability to attain internal and external outcomes, the ability to address these in an efficacious manner),

• *relatedness* (the need to developsecure and satisfying social connections with others)

• *autonomy* (the need to self-initiate and self-regulate) (Deci and Ryan 2000).

In SDT, the core psychological dimensions are conceptualised as a continuum, specifically one extending from more self-determined (intrinsic) to more controlled (extrinsic) regulation. Five distinct categories along this continuum have been identified: *external regulation* (motivation coming entirely from external sources such as rewards or threats); *introjected regulation* (externally imposed rules that students accept as norms they should follow in order not to feel guilty); *identified regulation* (engaging in an activity because the individual values it highly and sees its usefulness); *integrated regulation* (involving choiceful behaviour that is fully assimilated with the individual’s other values, needs and identity); and pure *intrinsic regulation* (highly autonomous, engaging in behaviour purely out of interest).

Given its appropriateness for language learning in anglophone contexts, SDT will be the lens through which this article will review motivation for L2 learning in the UK. It will begin by presenting the UK foreign language (FL) learning context, in two sub-sections: 1) current FL policies in all four UK nations (England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland), and 2) school projects and interventions designed to motivate students. Our main section looks at each of the core psychological needs of SDT in turn, each time evaluating how current research evidence on FL policies and practices, on the one hand, and the statements of the OCCR on the other, align with the principles of SDT. Each section concludes with *policy recommendations*, generated by SDT principles, and supported with empirical evidence. The conclusion critically evaluates the opportunities and risks implied by these recommendations.

## **Context**

***Language policies in the four UK nations***

As education policies in the UK are devolved to the four nations (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), current policy developments are discussed separately for each nation.

*Scotland* is committed to the EU’s ‘1+2 model’ (mother tongue plus two additional languages) (Scottish Government 2012), starting with a first L2 in the first year of primary school, to be continued up to age 15. A second L2 is to be introduced no later than age 9. Scotland’s ‘mother tongue plus two’ policy is currently supported by £18 million of investment (Gorrara 2018). This generally lauded ambitious policy nonetheless faces considerable obstacles: funding is not guaranteed beyond 2021, schools struggle to offer pupils the language curriculum they are statutorily entitled to, and policy threatens to widen the already considerable gap between community language skills and those offered for formal learning (Hancock and Hancock 2019).

In *Wales*, Welsh is compulsory in the first three years of secondary school, and the Welsh Government’s vision is to increasingly teach and treat Welsh like a further first language, not an L2. There is no requirement to teach an L2 at primary school, and at secondary level, L2 uptake is low compared to other UK nations. The ambitious aim of the Welsh government to achieve ‘bilingualism plus 1’ is far from being achieved, with GCSE entries for French, German and Spanish declining from around 7,648 in 2015 to 5,028 in 2021 (Collen et al. 2021a). This seems to be partly because other languages are squeezed out of the curriculum timetable by Welsh (Gorrara 2018).

*Northern Ireland*’s language education policy, as well as its learning outcomes, might be described as the weakest among the four nations. A short-lived initiative for primary languages was scrapped in 2015, so that currently only three years of language learning are compulsory for all. Although Northern Ireland reports a lower gradient of decline than England and Wales, at A-level in particular (Collen 2021b), the social divide between those who learn languages beyond the compulsory phase, and those who do not, is starker than in the other UK nations (Henderson and Carruthers 2021). Similar to Wales, the time available for the teaching of other languages is affected by time allocated to teaching of the heritage language, Irish. The overall progress (or otherwise) in the learning of *any* language will depend on the nation’s success in implementing and supporting stronger language policies such as Primary Languages (Bowler 2019).

85% of all UK school students reside in *England*. Here, schools must teach an L2 to pupils aged 7-11 in primary school (Key Stage 2), and aged 11-14 in secondary school (Key Stage 3). The last decade has seen the percentage of students aged 16 with a language qualification stagnating around 45% (Collen 2021 a, b, c)., with little sign of change. Similar to Northern Ireland, there is a stark social divide between those who learn languages beyond the compulsory phase and those who do not (Lanvers 2017b). In 2011, the English government introduced the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), a qualification which students aged 16 receive automatically if they score good grades in five subjects, which must include an L2. It was hoped that the promise of obtaining the EBacc would increase language uptake. However, the target of 75% of Year 10 pupils achieving the EBacc by 2022, already revised downwards, and that of 90% by 2025, is unlikely to be met, on the UK government’s own admission (TES 13th December 2021). This suggests that the educational benefit of receiving this qualification remains unclear, both to individual students and schools. Language learning beyond the age of 16 continues to fall year on year, as does uptake of language degrees in higher education institutions.

To sum up, all four nations currently make language learning compulsory for the ages 11-14. UK participation in language education is poor compared to other European countries, with only 4.2% of students studying two or more languages, compared to the EU average of 51% (Eurostat 2016). The future of the above-described ambitious policies of Scotland and Wales remains uncertain, as they depend on sustained funding. Despite their diversity, all the national policies share some characteristics: ambitious aims regarding uptake have not been supported – thus far - by secure and longitudinal funding and joined-up policy across all educational sectors (primary, secondary, tertiary), and they do not address the fundamental question of why, in the age of Global English, anglophone school students need to learn a second language at all.

***L2-motivating projects***

Having ascertained that the problem descriptors for the crisis are both well established and plentiful, this section now asks in what way interventions and initiatives designed to improve student motivation and attitudes have endeavoured to address the crisis. Aiming for representativeness rather than completeness, we will present these initiatives in two parts, divided into what one might call ‘outreach’ projects, and those that form part of a research study.

Within the first group, a common characteristic for schemes such as Routes into Languages (Routes) and the OWRI Student Language Ambassador Programme, is for universities to offer a variety of outreach activities in schools designed to motivate school students. These activitiesare often led by university language students, so that they may act as role models and ambassadors for languages. The range of activities offered is very diverse and may aim, for instance, to increase awareness of the importance of language skills, inject fun into learning and offer cognitive stimulation via language learning, as well as some cultural input. It is difficult to discern an explicit rationale for such programmes that could link with motivational theory. In SDT terms, they seem to have focused mainly on extrinsic rewards such as educational and career prospects, and to a lesser extent on subject relevance, relatedness, subject enjoyment and competence. The focus on the instrumental value of language learning is reflected in the fact that the greatest reported post-event change for Routes in the most recent evaluation (Gallagher-Brett 2016) was in students’ perceptions of the usefulness of languages for careers. Finally, although project evaluations for both Routes (Gallagher-Brett 2016) and the OWRI Student Language Ambassador Programme (Tinsley 2021) indicate some small improvement in student attitudes and intention to continue languages to GCSE, the absence of any inferential statistical analyses within them, plus the suggestion that the events created an ‘immediate motivational lift’ rather than long-term change (Gallagher-Brett 2016: 36), makes the longer-term success or otherwise of this kind of initiative rather hard to interpret.

One other large-scale initiative worth mentioning is the mentoring project Language Horizons, led by Cardiff University in partnership with five universities in England. Similar to Routes, this uses university students as ambassadors, but targets learners’ sense of competence, identity and ‘connectedness’, interest and creativity, as well as subject relevance, in L2 school learning via small group mentoring, mostly online (see Rushton and Thomas 2020). Language Horizons thus seems more closely aligned with the principles of SDT, an observation reflected in the project outcomes, where increased sense of competence and desire to continue with language study was reported for learners experiencing the intervention and compared with a control group of schools (Rushton and Thomas 2020). Once again, however, the quantitative data analysis for this evaluation does not seem to have included any significance testing, presenting instead descriptive statistics only.

A number of research projects have implemented classroom interventions targeting aspects of L2 motivation among learners aged 11-14, with more or less reference to motivational theory. Taylor and Marsden’s (2014) intervention addressed the perceived instrumental value of language learning, and to a lesser extent, its relevance to learners, by offering Year 9 students external speakers’ insights into the relevance of language skills. However, this did not have any clear impact on learners’ motivation to continue language learning to GCSE. A further group of studies implemented interventions united in a focus on multilingualism and identity, through which they addressed issues of relatedness and sense of competence. Lanvers et al.’s (2019) intervention did so by raising awareness of global multilingualism and of its value, reporting a greater appreciation of multilingualism among learners aged 12-13 after the intervention. The study was developed to include further reflection on multilingualism either through direct information about the nature of language learning and global multilingualism (teacher sessions) or small-group support (mentor sessions) (Lanvers 2020). Similarly, Forbes et al. (2021) drew on identity theory (e.g. Norton and Toohey 2011) to design and implement an intervention to increase learners’ knowledge and awareness of languages, alongside self-efficacy. Learners were also encouraged to reflect on how information presented in class about multilingualism related to themselves as users and learners of different languages. A final group of studies targeted self-efficacy and mindset within a framework of self-regulation and metacognition about L2 learning, through the implementation of learner strategy instruction incorporating attribution retraining (Graham and Macaro 2008; Macaro and Erler 2008; Graham et al. 2020; Molway and Mutton 2020). All studies in this last group report a positive effect of the intervention on self-efficacy to a varying degree, and for different groups of learners (e.g. Graham et al. 2020). They also indicate that such changes need time and longer-term interventions to have a broad impact on motivation for language learning.

It is also possible that the success or otherwise of motivational interventions, be they of the outreach kind or within a research study, depends on how far the activities they include meet *all* the basic psychological needs SDT stipulates as necessary to foster enduring and resilient motivation. Outreach activities and interventions that emphasise instrumental, professional and educational benefits of L2 competencies tend to focus on externally regulated behaviour and motivation, to use SDT terminology. Sitting at the opposite end of the scale to intrinsic motivation, this type of motivation is predicted to be most vulnerable to infelicitous external influences, as well as most unstable. Instrumental motivation and external pressure *might* nonetheless be beneficial if learners start to introject, and identify with, the value system behind the external pressures. For this to happen, however, it seems likely that such a value system needs to be made much more explicit to learners, through activities that, for example, involve cultural contact and encouragement of empathy and openness. In the absence of evidence that interventions do facilitate such transitional change, however, we must conclude that instrumental arguments offer, in SDT terms, more potential for infelicitous than felicitous effects, especially if such arguments are countered with the ‘everyone speaks English anyway’ riposte.

Those interventions that were successful in improving perceptions of subject relevance (Forbes et al. 2021; Lanvers et al. 2019; Lanvers 2020), using a mixture of teaching about a) multilingualism in the world and in the UK, b) language learning as the norm for most young students, globally and c) the cognitive benefits of language learning, addressed both relatedness and competence in SDT terms. Relatedness was fostered in the sense that students, realising the ‘oddity’ of monolingualism, showed increased desire to become like others, and competence in the sense that they realised that, by engaging in language learning more deeply, L2 competencies and their associated cognitive benefits are attainable for most students, not just the most academically gifted. Overall, however, the interventions had more modest success in improving self-efficacy, and those using peer or slightly older student mentoring approaches fared best in this respect. In SDT terms, this evidence suggests that the promise of experiencing competence in L2 learning is made plausible by peer mentors, i.e. other students that participants can relate to in terms of age and prior experience. Greater impact on self-efficacy was achieved in those studies that specifically targeted this construct within a framework of self-regulation (see, for example, effect sizes reported in Graham and Macaro 2008), but there was little evidence of improvement on overall motivation for language learning (Woore et al. 2020).

It is noticeable that one central motivating dimension in SDT, autonomy, has received little attention in most interventions, and for good reason. After all, if students were to develop an enhanced sense of autonomy in L2 learning, how could they action this, in the context of L2 delivery that permits little autonomy to students or teachers? Furthermore, in the context of an intervention within a quasi-experimental study, it is difficult for researchers to permit too much autonomy, given that they are bound by the ‘fidelity to the conditions’ of the intervention. We shall return to this issue in the conclusion.

## **Applying the SDT lens to the UK L2 motivation crisis: evidence and policies**

This section discusses the motivational challenges for UK learners through the lens of SDT. Subdivided into the three sections, *competence, autonomy* and *relatedness*, we evaluate in what way current and proposed policies may foster or thwart these motivational dimensions. Each section is followed by consideration of the policy recommendations emerging from the OCRR. Before doing so, it is important to recall, however, that SDT sees the three core psychological needs as interrelated: the different levels of regulation need to be understood as co-dependent and mutually reinforcing. Improving self-efficacy alone, for instance, would not be enough to foster motivation, for learners need to feel competent in what they value.

***Competence***

Seeking out new challenges is central to SDT as part of a need for growth as a human, and central to intrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan (2000) postulate that intrinsic motivation begins with a proactive organism: all humans are said to possess a natural tendency to engage in activities that they find interesting and that, in turn, promote growth. Such activities are characterised by novelty and by optimal challenge (Deci and Ryan 2000). Within SDT, optimal challenge constitutes a competence need as a basis for intrinsic motivation, ‘for it is success at optimally challenging tasks that allows people to feel a true sense of competence’ (Deci and Ryan 1980: 260).

Empirical studies (e.g. Erler and Macaro 2011) point to the inter-relationship between learner competence, perceived self-efficacy, positivity towards language learning and students’ motivation to continue with language study beyond the compulsory phase. However, UK students report extremely low learner self-efficacy (Williams et al. 2002), even among learners expected to achieve top GCSE and A level grades (Graham 2004). In SDT terms, this seemingly puzzling observation - why would students with high grades feel low self-efficacy? - is entirely understandable: to feel self-efficacious and competent, learners must feel competent in skills that *matter to them*, and ‘people must feel ownership of the activities at which they succeed’ ([Ryan and Deci 2017](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1362168820912355): 95). For instance, if communication skills are valued, but students feel they cannot communicate freely and express what they actually want to say, rather than what an examination ‘requires’ them to say, self-efficacy will be low, regardless of teacher feedback and grades they might receive (Graham 2004). Even very young learners suffer from low L2 self-efficacy (Courtney et al. 2017), especially in aspects of language learning that matter most to them, namely communication with others (Graham et al. 2016).

Generally, we observe motivation for language learning declining with student age (Lanvers 2017a), albeit with some nuanced differences: while enjoyment of the subject may be higher at primary than at secondary level, students’ sense of progress can increase self-efficacy at the early stages of secondary schooling for some learners (Chambers 2019; Graham et al. 2016). This is perhaps because of greater curriculum time being devoted to language teaching in that phase, or perhaps that teaching is delivered by language specialists, and students experience more challenging activities (Graham et al. 2016). However, the overall poor coordination between different education sectors (Myles et al. 2019), the recent abrupt shift in pedagogy from a focus on communication towards a more assessment-based curriculum (Courtney 2017), all present challenges for students’ self-efficacy. This is especially the case if secondary school students feel that lessons do not equip them with the skills they need to attain not just ‘competence’ but the competence they *value* (Graham et al. 2016; Graham, this issue). In alignment with SDT principles, we can predict that the efficacy deficit will remain as long as assessments and syllabi focus on passing exams rather than equipping learners with the skills to communicate meaningfully.

UK students are acutely aware that their L2 proficiency outcomes lag behind those of fellow L2 learners in other countries (Lanvers 2017a), so that that any bi-national student encounters generally tend to default to use of the *lingua franca* English, given foreign students’ good levels of English proficiency. Even in students identified as ‘very talented’ for L2 study, self-efficacy lags behind that of those students identified as talented for other subjects (Graham et al. 2012). Students perceive languages as a ‘hard’ school subject (Myers 2006), and for good reason: good FL grades are, on average, harder to obtain than for other subjects. Low self-efficacy is thus conveyed doubly, via low grades, and via the sense that students cannot express important things in the target language. This sense of low self-efficacy is also likely reinforced via school policy: many schools select only students of high academic calibre to continue a FL beyond age 14 (Lanvers 2017a). In this way, many students in state schools have their low sense of self-efficacy for FL confirmed via official school policy at age 13, when selection for L2 continuation takes place. Unsurprisingly, in terms of SDT, learner motivation is observed to be poorer in schools using selection by ability than in schools where all are made to continue with L2 study up to age 16, regardless of ability (Parrish 2017). Thus, the majority of learners of modern languages in the UK are offered no positive efficacy reinforcers via schooling, nor real-world L2 application and communication.

Lanvers (2020) found that openly discussing the systemic hurdles faced by language learners in England, including fewer contact hours compared to the average FL student in the EU (Gruber and Tonkyn 2017), can have some positive influence on learner self-efficacy (Lanvers 2020). Yet the deleterious impact of Global English – through ‘English is enough’ attitudes - is not being addressed in school contexts. Instead, we observe that public, pedagogical (and occasionally academic) discourses tend to individualise the issue, often blaming students for their poor motivation (Lanvers et al. 2021b), an argument echoed in public and social media (Lanvers et al. 2020; Lanvers and Coleman 2017). To conclude, the low self-efficacy found among UK learners is co-constructed by the education system, in a number of ways: from curriculum design, school practices of selection, to marking practices.

Only a minority of students who *opt* to continue language study beyond age 14 report enjoying the academic rigour, challenge and ‘rarity’ value associated with FL study (Lanvers 2012; Stolte 2015): students with initial confidence purposefully seek opportunities for further confidence-boosting experiences. Thus, the few who thrive faced with the challenges posed by FL learning, and encounter initial success and hence high self-efficacy, purposely seek opportunities for further confidence-boosting experiences.

***L2 policies fostering competence***

*Policy recommendations to foster competence: curriculum*

1. *Overhaul the curriculum* to enable students to better express themselves in their L2. This should include a topic overhaul to match learner needs (Evans and Fisher, this issue), and an increase in vocabulary range (Milton, this issue). FL curricula should be centred around opportunities to actively communicate in the FL, supported by rich and plentiful input.
2. *Explicitly discuss and take into consideration the challenges and disadvantages* that UK learners of LOTE face (Lanvers 2020; Coffey, this issue).

*Policy recommendations to foster competence: school planning*

1. *Abolish the school policy of ‘selection by academic ability’*. Instead, schools may decide to offer languages optionally to all, or mandatory to all (Parrish 2017).
2. Align the new curriculum with *assessment strategies and practices*, using assessment formats modelling authentic, communicative and age-appropriate events.

***Autonomy***

According to SDT, a sense of ownership over one’s learning, freedom in some learning activities and self-management of learning are the vital elements for positive learner motivation. Motivation is fostered by engaging in activities that are personally meaningful and related to one’s values, and permit ‘identified’ and/or intrinsic regulation. Learning contexts and activities that support learners’ need for autonomy, and align with their internal values and needs (Noels et al. 2019), foster internalised regulation and thus stabilise and strengthen motivation (Noels, et al. 2003). This observation has been borne out in many empirical studies (Chaffee et al. 2014).

In practice, the level of autonomy a L2 learner might experience is highly mediated by top-down directives: national policies and targets such as the Ebacc and national league tables, the examination system and (prescriptiveness of) the curriculum. For instance, schools aiming to increase the participation rate of L2 learning beyond age of 14 find themselves in a catch-22 situation: if they permit more students deemed ‘less able’ to undertake L2 study, they might move towards achieving EBacc targets for L2 engagement, but they may also damage their schools’ average GCSE scores. In this way, relatively low levels of autonomy in L2 delivery can trickle down from national policy to school policy, to teacher practice through to the individual learner. The SDT principles of increasing choice and opportunities for self- direction (Deci and Ryan 1985), to allow people a greater feeling of autonomy, also apply to groups and institutions. Therefore, this section discusses autonomy not just on the level of the learner, but also of L2 teachers, curricula and delivery.

More than other countries (Lanvers and Chambers 2019), the UK’s L2 examination systems, in all four nations, are characterised by high-stakes final summative exams taken at age 16. Up to this age, grades are mostly given via teacher assessment, but these are not vital for academic progression. The general disadvantages of high-stakes, single examination systems are well known (Machin et al. 2020); for L2 testing, they constitute a particular challenge in that single measures are not best suited to assessing the complexities of L2 competency, and the high-stakes format increases foreign language anxiety and reduces foreign language enjoyment in learners (Dewaele at al. 2018). Teachers, for their part, in an effort to achieve the best possible results for their students in a subject known for its ‘harsh’ marking, try their best to push students through the GCSE test, resulting in lessons characterised by washback, repetition and rote learning (Gayton 2010; Wingate 2018), instructional rather than interactive styles (D’Arcy 2006), with less opportunity for meaningful communication than learners report wanting(Graham et al. 2016). Unsurprisingly, students complain of boring lessons, lack of sense of progress and levels of challenge not matching their intellectual development (Wingate 2018). Inauthentic materials and topics which are neither relevant nor inspiring for the learners’ age (Pachler 2007; Macaro 2008) add to this problem: inauthentic materials and topics are unlikely to encourage learners to manipulate language and develop communicative skills which are meaningful to their own lives.

Turning to features which foster a sense of autonomy, we can refer to a - by now substantial (e.g. Benson 2011; Murray and Lamb 2018a) - body of research on autonomy in language learning. Learner autonomy, defined as ‘the capacity to take control of one’s own learning’ (Benson 2011: 58) can be fostered by teaching learning strategies *explicitly*: equipped with meta-cognitive strategies to regulate their own learning, learners are empowered to adjust their FL learning to their individual needs. The OCRR makes no use of this potentially powerful motivator (Graham; Woore et al., both this issue), although research evidence offers some clearly identified pathways for an autonomy-enhancing pedagogy. In addition to teaching learning strategies, interactive teaching styles are also known to enhance a sense of authenticity: if learners are asked to manipulate language in an authentic and meaningful manner, they report higher motivation (Gruber and Tonkyn 2013) than in directive teaching styles - an observation in line with SDT predictions. Generally, offering choices, for instance in reading materials, pace of learning, and in the variety and genres of authentic materials, are important cornerstones for a pedagogy fostering autonomous FL learning, as is the validation of learners’ existing language skills and their multilingual identity (Murray and Lamb 2018b).

To support teachers’ delivery of such autonomy-enhancing FL pedagogy, training, based on latest research evidence (Raya and Vieira 2018), would constitute a necessary first step but will not suffice so long as teachers themselves experience little autonomy. The importance of teacher autonomy (Benson 2013), both for fostering autonomy in learners, and teachers’ own mental wellbeing, has received increasing attention over the last decade (Benson 2013; Mercer and Kostoulas 2018). Furthermore, a large body of research exploring ways in which teachers can best use research evidence to improve their practice emphasises the danger of handing teachers ‘recipes’ for instruction drawn from research findings (Ellis 2010). Teacher beliefs and practices are more likely to change if any guidelines drawn from research findings are offered as ‘pedagogic proposals’ or ‘provisional specifications’ (Ellis 1997:83) which teachers then ‘transform’ through experimentation and adaptation to their own context. Teacher autonomy in the UK is reported to be relatively low and related to high teacher drop-out (Worth and van den Brande, 2020). Furthermore, L2 teacher autonomy is endangered further via a combination of several factors. The move towards schools forming consortia of Academies (Academisation) has led to a loss of autonomy in the self-management of individual schools (Thompson et al. 2020). Within the complex, top-down management structures of large Academies, some subject teachers are increasingly being given prescriptive lesson plans and teaching materials, to be delivered to all students in the same year according to rigid plans and in a similar manner (personal communication). Poor teacher autonomy is considered a key reason for the current UK teacher shortage and high attrition rate (Allen at al. 2018). Arguably, in England, the OCRR, alongside centralised initiatives such as the National Centre of Excellence for Language Pedagogy (NCELP), pose challenges for L2 teachers’ sense of autonomy. The latter aims to improve L2 delivery by training teachers in methods designed to teach phonics, grammar and vocabulary, streamlining and unifying teaching approaches. There is thus a focus on reducing the diversity of methods, materials and approaches, with all the potential for limiting teacher autonomy that that implies, as well as standing in contradiction to research on effective teacher development practices (Macaro et al. 2015). Furthermore, the OCRR appears to advocate approaches likely to lead to a vocabulary size too small and insufficiently varied to allow meaningful self-expression in the target language, and match age-appropriate learner needs (Milton, this issue; Milton and Alexiou 2009), which, in turn, is likely to result in students’ frustration at their inability to express themselves authentically (Andon and Wingate 2013).

To conclude, several important aspects in current (high stakes examinations, school targets) and planned (streamlined teacher training, abridged curricula) L2 delivery risk hindering both learners and teachers from developing a sense of autonomy in FL learning and teaching.

***L2 policies fostering autonomy***

The first observation here is that our policy recommendations 1. *Overhauling the curriculum* and 4. *Changing assessment strategies* are relevant for fostering autonomy as well as sense of competence, because of the opportunities for self-determined engagement they offer. National policy and teacher training also need to be addressed, however, as follows:

*Policy recommendations to foster autonomy: national policy*

1. *Offer schools greater freedom in FL planning and delivery*. *Remove target setting*. The policy of school freedom would include (financially) facilitating the teaching of lesser taught languages, including those desired by students in individual schools. UK students profess surprisingly high curiosity towards other languages and cultures, and often wish they could learn a language other than the one they are offered at school (Lanvers 2020; Parrish 2020) – an untapped motivational potential. Moving away from target setting would liberate schools to deliver their FLs in a manner best suited to their students. For these reasons, Ebacc targets should be removed.
2. *Offer teacher training on autonomy-enhancing pedagogy*, using approaches that encourage teacher autonomy and consider research into teacher development (Macaro et al. 2015, Chapters 6 and 7) and teacher agency(PDC in MFL, no date). Currently, the combined effect of Academisation, streamlined top-down training, and the OCRR remove rather than foster what little teacher autonomy might be left, and even teachers skilled in autonomy-enhancing pedagogies risk being de-skilled under these circumstances.

***Relatedness***

In L2 motivation, relatedness can manifest itself as the desire to communicate with the L2 community, given that in SDT it indicates a sense of ‘belongingness and connectedness with others’ (Ryan and Deci 2000: 73). The English competencies found in learners’ peers abroad weaken this incentive, and students might find it difficult to see how language learning relates to their them and why they should strive to speak an L2. In a subject where ‘personal relevance’ is known to be a key motivational factor for UK learners (Taylor and Marsden 2014, who do not define the term further), the absence of a convincing rationale for languages in the curriculum (Pachler 2007) thus constitutes a particular motivational hurdle. Understandably, many students are confused about why they are studying a language at all (Lanvers 2017a). Inauthentic teaching materials and content not aligned with the culture of the target language community is likely to further add to the sense of irrelevance and lack of connectedness. In addition, students may find this sense of disconnection between L2 learning and their own lives echoed in their surroundings. British parents are overall less supportive toward FL study than in other countries (Bartram 2006), and within the UK, attitudes to FLs are strongly social class related (Lanvers 2017b). Students, for their part, tend to reverberate parental attitudes towards FLs (Lanvers et al. 2019; Martin 2020), with the effect that (positive or negative) attitudes towards FL study tend to be passed within families, and thus remain within similar socio-economic demographics (Lanvers and Martin 2021). In a situation where students are least likely to receive educational input correcting the ‘English is enough’ fallacy and offering possibilities for relatedness, education should offer such motivational input to all students. Virtual communications, e-twinning and a vast array of online tools for authentic contacts with age appropriate L2 communities are not only free to most educational institutions today, have proven effective in raising learner motivation (Parmaxi 2020).

***L2 policies fostering relatedness***

*Policy recommendations to foster relatedness: curriculum*

Recommendation 1 above would address relatedness as well as competence and autonomy, because this policy change would give students the opportunity to relate meaningfully to the content of communicating in the L2. Furthermore, we propose:

1. Develop *holistic rationales for L2 learning and communicate these to learners***,** in a manner integrated into the curriculum. Clear policy rationales help students to see how L2 learning relates to their own lives. A range of *meta*linguistic rationales, going beyond instrumental reasons for L2 learning, should be discussed explicitly as part of FL study. These should include (at a minimum): teaching about the *worldwide ubiquity of language learning, the limits and future trends of Global English, and overall help learners to identify with a global community of language learners* **(**Forbes et al. 2021; Lanvers 2020; Lanvers et al. 2019). The content should be adapted to nation-specific policies. For instance, the alignment of Scottish policy directions with current EU FL policies, laudable in the eyes of many linguists, is unlikely to reap any motivational benefits if not communicated clearly to students.

*Policy recommendations to foster relatedness: pedagogy*

1. *Increase L2 contact***.** Virtual and online encounters have made it possible to bring the L2 speaker community into the classroom in a more efficient and instructional manner than ever before. The school environment offers the opportunity to break the negative cycle of ‘English is enough’ via offering ample opportunities for authentic, synchronous L2 communication with their peers abroad in order to foster a greater sense of connectedness with the world beyond the classroom.

## **Conclusion**

At the heart of the UK L2 motivation crisis lies a confused ‘official’ rationale for language learning in the age of Global English, that seems disconnected from what motivational theory and empirical research suggests are the factors that drive motivated behaviour. This is likely to leave learners feeling confused about their L2 learning. Global English is not discussed, yet students are very aware of its omnipresence and are often culturally imbued with an ‘English is enough’ habitus (Lanvers 2017a). As such, initiatives that focus on the instrumental benefits of language learning, including its career benefits, are unlikely to have any long-term impact. It is heartening to see that motivational interventions aiming to foster autonomy, competence and relevance have shown some success in changing students’ mindsets and attitudes, and disheartening to see that little of the approaches they have employed have translated into policy in England.

Not all language policy planning in the UK is infelicitous to motivation, however. In Wales, for example, the efforts to ‘promote’ the learning of Welsh from an L2 to an ‘additional L1’ are planned to allow a great deal of school and teacher freedom, with schools designing their own curricula and policies. Both the Welsh and Scottish policy directions have the merits of clarity, alignment with national interests and - in the case of Scotland - alignment with the EU rationale for language study: fostering international identity, mobility, social cohesion and tolerance. Here, unlike in England and Northern Ireland, we see evidence of a clear vision and rationale for L2 learning in the context of Global English. The caveats, however, remain that policy directions in both Scotland and Wales are still unaccompanied by substantial investment, lack implementation pathways, and are poorly communicated to those who matter most: the learners.

Many credible recommendations to address the UK language crisis have already been formulated elsewhere, including in White Papers, by the British Academy and the British Council[[1]](#endnote-1). We thus should address the plausible question of why we have added to these, and in what way our recommendations differ. The immediately obvious answer lies in our motivational approach, putting the psychological needs of the learner at the centre. Central to this approach is our belief that meeting learner needs is the pathway for successful, sustainable and enjoyable FL learning. Any teacher will corroborate how much easier, more efficient and more enjoyable it is to teach students who want to learn.

We conclude by discussing our recommendations by way of a SWOT (strength, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis: a SWOT analysis permits a critical assessment of both feasibility, likelihood, robustness and disadvantages of our recommendations.

Starting with strengths, our recommendations address much more than what the OCRR recommendations describe as the ‘three pillars of progression: phonics, vocabulary, grammar’ (p.8). Our recommendations address a holistic range of language skills, including developing fluency, spontaneity, self-expression, language awareness, facilitating cross-linguistic transfer, and learning how to learn languages. The proposed policies are designed to offer learners positive engagement and a robust motivational orientation, offering a steady bulwark against the inevitable setbacks and frustrations that come with language learning, and thus relieving teachers from the burden to offer multiple small, fun, potentially motivational but rarely educational events (Wingate 2018). They aim to prepare learners for authentic L2 use, not for passing assignments or a narrow range of skills. Most importantly, all recommendations are built on a considerable body of empirical literature on motivation, as well as theoretically warranted. As for risks, any research-informed policy development, such as the one proposed here, harbours the potential of overseeing or misrepresenting some research evidence. The best mitigation against such dangers would be to ensure a diverse team of experts works collaboratively on these changes.

Regarding weaknesses, we concede that the proposed changes are substantial and concern all aspects of FL delivery: curriculum design, assessment, school policy, teacher training, material use, L2 contact. An overhaul targeting all aspects, however, offers the advantage that alignment between these elements can be strategically planned and integrated. Regarding opportunities, we note that the current context of the UK FL crisis has engendered a strong appetite for change, and some novel approaches in Scotland and Wales. In this context, our learner-focused approach offers the chance for sustainable FL delivery, giving hope that motivated learners will continue with FL study long beyond the compulsory phase, thus also addressing the crisis of HE uptake.

Finally, we believe that a continued failure to build FL policy and curricula around a coherent and robust research-evidenced theory of motivation, as represented by the OCCR, poses a significant threat to the future of FL learning in the UK and risks worsening the language learning crisis. Instead, building FL policies and curricula with due attention to each of the SDT components of competence, autonomy and relatedness offers the realistic perspective that more students will enjoy FL study and decide to continue beyond the compulsory phase, thus safeguarding a throughput of linguists into A level, higher education and the future supply of professional linguists, including language teachers.

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