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Modern foreign languages: Decision-making, motivation and 14-19 schools

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Abstract
This article reports on an exploratory study comparing motivation and student choice in modern foreign language lessons in secondary schools (11-16 or 11-18) and schools for 14-19 year olds in England. The study uses data gathered from 634 Year 10 students (aged 14-15), and uses self-determination theory to compare motivation amongst students in the two types of schools. It finds that student motivation differed significantly in each, with students in 14-19 schools displaying more autonomous motivation. Students in schools in this category were less likely to have been given a choice as to whether or not to take the subject than their peers, suggesting that they may feel autonomous in ways not governed by subject choice. Possible reasons for the differences in motivation in the two kinds of school are discussed and directions for future study proposed.

Key words
Modern foreign languages, 14-19, motivation, Self-determination theory

Introduction

In recent years, the English school landscape has changed. New types of school have been introduced, new methods of funding and governance have emerged and new expectations have been established. It is no longer useful, if it ever was, to conduct a study in 'schools' and expect to see findings that can be generalised across all institutions in that phase, given that there is now such a variety of schools, each with their own specific characteristics (see Courtney, 2015). The new school inspection framework setting out what inspectors expect to see emphasises the individualised nature of each school's curriculum offer (Ofsted, 2019), further crystallising this issue. This article compares student motivation and student choice in modern foreign language lessons in two types of school in England – those providing for the 'traditional' secondary age range, and those for students aged 14-19.

Some of the types of school shaping the current English educational landscape are very high profile, such as academies[1] and free schools[2], and have received a lot of media and public attention. Developing more quietly have been schools specifically for 14-19 year-olds aimed at those looking for a more vocational or employment-focused education. This age range encompasses Key Stages 4 (age 14-16) and 5 (age 16-19) which represent the phases which are usually characterised as involving an element of subject choice, where students are able to choose some of the subjects they take forward to examination level. Two sub-types of school fall into this category and will be considered here – Studio Schools and University Technical Colleges, or UTCs. Studio Schools were initially overseen by the Studio Schools Trust with the first schools opening in 2010. The now-defunct website of the trust described them as 'a new

[1] Schools which receive funding directly from central government, rather than the local authority, and run by an academy trust. They do not have to follow the National Curriculum, but in practice the majority do so. See https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school

[2] Similar to academies, but set up by charities, parent groups etc.

concept in education, which seeks to address the growing gap between the skills and knowledge that young people require to succeed, and those that the current education system provides' (Studio Schools Trust, 2011).

In a similar vein, University Technical Colleges aim to provide a technical education for 14-19 year olds, and each has their own specialism (see http://www.utcolleges.org). Both types of school teach the national curriculum, but what this means in terms of subjects offered varies from school to school given the more fluid nature of Key Stage 4 entitlements. Both types of school form part of the English policy approach of increasing choice between schools and extending the compulsory phase of education – a contrast to Welsh and Scottish policy (Gunning & Raffe, 2011; Hodgson & Spours, 2011).

The subject focus of this article is Modern Foreign Languages (MFL). As the subject is currently not compulsory for the 14-19 age group, having been made optional in Key Stage 4 in 2004 (Department for Education and Skills, 2002), the decision as to whether or not to teach it in schools catering exclusively to this age range rests entirely with the individual school, and not all offer a language. Against this background, student motivation becomes particularly relevant. Studies in the UK tend to show poor levels of motivation (Coleman, Galaczi and Astruc 2007; Lanvers 2017; Williams, Burden and Lanvers 2002), as do those conducted in other Anglophone nations (East 2009; Group of Eight 2007; Lanvers 2017; Lo Bianco 2014). Throughout Key Stage 4, some schools offer the subject only to certain students, sometimes described as following particular 'pathways', and often decided on the basis of their predicted attainment (Education Datalab, 2015; Lanvers, 2017), where others provide a free choice or retain compulsory language study. This leads to complex patterns of choice availability which vary from school to school.

Although UTCs and Studio Schools differ in their educational intentions, both focus on preparing students for working life in particular areas. Whilst they are 'organisationally and discursively' different (Courtney, 2015, p. 803) in many ways, for the purposes of this study, they can be considered alike in the sense that both types of school serve the same phase of education, characterised by a level of subject choice, and both focus specifically on preparing students for work. This level of similarity means that decision-making around the place of MFL in the curriculum can be hypothesised to be approached in similar ways in both sub-types of school, and they are thus here treated homogenously as '14-19 schools'.

As these schools are comparatively new and make up such a small proportion of the school landscape, there is very little research which touches on them, and no studies have been located which have been conducted specifically in such schools. Studies outlining the development of 14-19 education in England generally consider it problematic (Higham & Yeomans, 2011) as it has traditionally been a phase which has straddled compulsory and post-compulsory education, although this is no longer the case (gov.uk, 2014a). Further, it has always been 'weakly institutionalised and at the mercy of successive governments' policy commitment to the concept' (Higham & Yeomans, 2011, p. 220). Nevertheless, the phase can be considered a separate entity due to the specialisation of students' education which begins with the selection of optional subjects at age 14, regardless of the type of school they attend (Anders, Henderson, Moulton & Sullivan, 2018). Part of the purpose of 14-19 schools is to provide continuity of education for this more specialised phase, rather than from age 11-16 as is traditional.

An analysis of information provided on the websites of UTCs and Studio Schools during the design of this study in 2014 showed that of the 36 Studio Schools which were open at that point, 19 did not offer a language at KS4 and a further three did not give any information. As well as

whether or not to offer a language, and in common with all schools in England, the decision as to which language(s) should be taught is also devolved to school level. Seven of the fourteen Studio Schools surveyed which offered a language offered French, either on its own or in combination with German (one school) or Mandarin (one school).

Again, some UTCs offer an MFL while some do not. The majority of websites for the 58 UTCs open in 2014 or scheduled to open within the following two years advertised the fact that students could take a language; only five of the schools which outlined the options available did not mention languages, suggesting that they were not offered. Eight did not include any information on GCSE options. Seven schools stated only that 'a language' may be studied, and of those which specified, in a reversal of the order of popularity amongst the school population as a whole where French dominates (Tinsley & Doležal, 2018), German was the most common, offered solely or in conjunction with another language by 22 UTCs, followed by Spanish (21) and French (16). According to the most recent data available, German emerges as the second most in-demand language from employer surveys after French, and the most commonly requested language in job adverts (Tinsley, 2013), so this distribution is likely to reflect the employment focus of these schools.

Discussing the development of 14-19 schools, Fuller & Unwin (2011) note that:

> in the contemporary rhetoric, the 'traditional pedagogy' associated with academic education is seen as alienating many young people and, hence, an alternative 'practical' pedagogy is seen as the organising principle for new types of institutions and forms of provision (p. 196).

This is certainly true of UTCs and Studio Schools, which have such students, those who might find themselves alienated by a traditional academic curriculum, as their target 'market'. This notion of student choice between academic & vocational (or employment-focused) developed under New Labour (Higham & Yeomans, 2011), and the notion of school choice has developed further under successive governments, in line with an increasing neoliberal marketization of education.

For such schools, which are established to provide education targeted at specific employment sectors, the challenge is overcoming what has sometimes seemed to be an impermeable academic-vocational divide. The fact that languages are designated as 'academic' is problematic given the applied nature of language use (Hagger-Vaughan, 2016), and particularly when business needs for languages are considered – a student who undertook vocational courses in engineering for example, might also need language skills to make the most of their career opportunities in the future, but these 'academic' skills may not be available on their vocationally-based pathway (Heaps, 2004), or indeed at their vocationally-focused school. Whilst UTCs and Studio Schools do provide a 'core' of GCSEs alongside the vocational qualifications (Gomery, 2018), this is not the main selling-point of such institutions, and languages are not automatically included. Looking globally, it tends to be at tertiary level or in adult education that Language for Specific Purposes classes are available to meet the need of vocational career pathways, and these generally focus on English (see Basturkmen, 2012) rather than meeting the needs of Anglophone learners of other languages.

When the government revisited the compulsory core curriculum at the beginning of this century, considering languages as academic did not bring with it the benefit of being considered one of the 'essential' subjects (Department for Education and Skills, 2002) and it did not retain its

compulsory status. As the government moved towards a more traditional academically-focused curriculum within the past decade, the status of languages was raised somewhat, although the effect was not necessarily borne out in terms of exam entries (Tinsley & Doležal, 2018). The only survey of languages in Further Education estimated that less than 1% of students on vocational courses were studying a language (CILT, The National Centre for Languages, 2006). More recent reports also note the lack of language provision on vocational courses (Tinsley & Board, 2017). There is a clear mismatch between the messages coming from business, defence, diplomacy and other sectors regarding the need for languages, and the skills of school leavers (All-party parliamentary group on modern languages, 2019; CBI, 2012; UKCES, 2012; Mann, Brassell, & Bevan, 2011; Tinsley, 2017) which is compounded by decisions made at policy level.

As well as the light-touch curriculum policy regarding modern foreign languages, which devolves decision-making to school level (Department for Education, 2013d), and the devolving of curriculum decisions to individual institutions which has come with a move towards a greater proportion of academy schools, accountability measures imposed by the government send contradictory messages regarding the importance of language study. The two main accountability measures introduced in recent years are the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) and Progress 8. The EBacc measure is academically-focused and is attained when a student passes GCSE exams (at age 16) in a predetermined suite of subjects and is reported as part of school league tables. MFL is included as one of the five subjects making up the measure. Progress 8, which is a newer addition to schools' accountability measures, considers students' scores in eight subjects, three of which must be EBacc subjects. The flexibility built into this measure means that any, all or none of those EBacc subjects might be a language, so if 14-19 schools prioritise this measure above EBacc then they need not offer a language. That said, since this study was conducted the

government has announced ambitious targets for the proportion of students who should be entered for the full suite of EBacc subjects and Ofsted have included this as a focus for school inspections (Ofsted, 2018; 2019), suggesting that 14-19 schools may increasingly be under pressure to offer the subject. This is likely to prove challenging given the documented shortage of teachers of MFL (Allen, 2016). A 2018 report found that just 14.6% of UTC pupils entered all EBacc components in the preceding academic year (Dominguez-Reig & Robinson, 2018).

Motivation

This study uses Self-Determination Theory as its theoretical framework. This theory, developed by Deci & Ryan (1985) encompasses a range of sub-theories, including Organismic Integration Theory which is used here due to its flexibility to conceptualise language learning motivation as comparable with other learning motivation. This is in contrast to other language learning motivation frameworks, grounded in Second Language Acquisition, which tend to assume some level of agency attributed to the learner. For example, Dornyei's (2005), Second Language (L2) Motivational Self System is widely used and focuses on learners' 'ideal' and 'ought-to' selves – conceptions of themselves as competent language users for some future goal. Arguably, in English MFL classrooms, these concepts do not apply universally, and are likely to be far removed from the lived experiences of many learners who see the subject as just that – a school subject, rather than a distinct form of undertaking, particularly where the subject is compulsory (see Gayton 2010; McPake et al. 1999). For this reason, Self-Determination Theory, which can be applied in many domains, provides a more useful framework for considering motivation amongst school-level learners. A range of studies have used this framework to investigate language learning motivation in other contexts (see for example Comanaru & Noels, 2009; Davis, 2018; Noels, Pelletier, Clément, & Vallerand, 2003; Oga-Baldwin, Nakata, Parker &

Ryan, 2017). SDT studies have also found a link between motivation and the provision of choice (Assor, 2012; Katz & Assor, 2007; Reeve, Nix & Hamm, 2003).

Organismic Integration Theory considers extrinsic motivation to consist of increasingly internalised elements, with external regulation the least autonomous (see Ryan & Deci, 2000). This type of regulation is characterised by working to gain a reward to avoid punishment. Moving up the continuum, introjected regulation indicates working to achieve a feeling of pride or to avoid a sense of failure, and identified regulation being motivated by instrumental reasons. This type of regulation is more autonomous and followed on the continuum by intrinsic motivation. As motivation moves up the continuum and becomes more internalised, or autonomous, educational outcomes have been found to improve (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004; Taylor, Jungert, Mageau, Schattke, Dedic, Rosenfield & Koestner, 2014).

The standard instrument for Organismic Integration Theory in schools is the Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ-A) (Ryan & Connell, 1989), which was used in this study. The instrument has been designed for high school (secondary) students and used in a range of studies in a range of subjects to address why students do aspects of their work, and ten items were selected to address students' work in modern languages in particular. This instrument allows (language) learner motivation to be seen as part of a dynamic relationship between extrinsic (controlled) and intrinsic (autonomous) elements (see Parrish & Lanvers, 2019)

This study

Given the landscape outlined above, this study investigates student choice and motivation in 14-19 schools around modern foreign languages compared with their peers in 11-16 or 11-18 schools (the more common model for secondary education in England, hereafter referred to as

11-16+ schools) with a view to identifying and understanding any differences in the two types of school.

The data reported here were collected as part of a wider study (Parrish & Lanvers, 2019; Parrish, 2019) and can be considered exploratory findings acting as a precursor to further in-depth investigation of student motivation in the 14-19 phase. The study reported in this article considered the following main research questions:

1. To what extent does student motivation in language learning differ in 14-19 schools compared to 11-16+ schools?
2. How does student choice differ in 14-19 schools compared to 11-16+ schools?

Method

Data was gathered by means of questionnaires issued to Year 10 students (aged 14-15). Responses were obtained from 634 students from ten schools in nine local authorities (administrative areas) in England. Of these, 139 were from 14-19 schools (22% of the sample). Students were recruited via the head teacher survey that formed part of the wider study (Parrish & Lanvers, 2019; Parrish, 2019), with head teachers who indicated their willingness for their students to take part being contacted with a further invitation. As part of this process, head teachers at 437 schools in twenty-two local authorities were contacted directly by email and invited to take part. This included heads of all University Technical Colleges (UTCs; n = 31) and Studio Schools (n = 35) that were open in the 2014/15 academic year as well as representing a spread of geographical areas and a mix of urban, rural and coastal schools.

No identifying data was collected from students and all data was anonymised, in line with the relevant ethical frameworks.

A breakdown of student responses by school type is shown in Table 1.

[Table 1 near here]

Participants were asked whether or not they were taking a language for GCSE and then whether or not this had been their choice. Students who were taking a language were given four response options written in student-friendly language: Yes, it was up to me; School gave me a choice but basically I had to take one – I felt under pressure; No, everyone in my school has to take a language; No, not really – because I get good grades my school said I had to take one. Those who were not taking a language were also given four options: Yes, but I didn't want to do language at all; Yes but it didn't fit in with my other subjects; No, I wasn't allowed; Yes, but I didn't want to do any of the languages on offer.

Participants then completed items taken from the SRQ-A (Ryan & Connell, 1989). In line with the standard operational procedure, participants were asked to indicate whether the items were Very true, Sort of true, Not very true or Not at all true and the responses allowed motivation to be located on the continuum described above. Table 2 shows the continuum and the responses used to identify students' position on it.

[Table 2 near here]

Results

Student motivation

In total, 483 students indicated whether or not they were taking a language. Of these, 125 attended 14-19 schools. 35 students (28%) from such schools were taking a language, compared with 319 students (89.1%) in 11-16+ schools.

Of the 35 from 14-19 schools, one student (2.9%) indicated that taking a language had been up to them and two (5.7%) that they had felt under pressure. Nine students (25.7%) indicated that languages were compulsory and 23 (65.7%) that they had been made to take a language because they got good grades. In 11-16+ schools, 147 indicated they had had free choice (57.6%) and 60 that they had felt under pressure (23.5%). 21 students reported that languages were compulsory (8.2%) and 27 that they had to take a language because of their grades (10.6%). This is represented in Figure 1.

[Figure 1 near here]

In line with established procedures for analysing SRQ-A data (Ryan & Connell, 1989), the items were combined into four subscales representing the three types of external regulation, and intrinsic regulation. These were subsequently combined to generate a score on the Relative Autonomy Index (RAI) using the formula:

$$2 \times \text{Intrinsic} + \text{Identified} - \text{Introjected} - 2 \times \text{External}$$

The make-up of the scales and subscales is shown in Table 3.

[Table 3 near here]

Mann-Whitney U tests carried out on the student motivation data after it was found to be non-normally distributed revealed significant differences for some of the items, as shown in Table 4. All effect sizes were small.

[Table 4 near here]

The findings show that where significant differences were found, the scores were always higher for students in 14-19 schools than their counterparts in 11-16+ schools. Students in 14-19 schools were significantly more likely to do their work in order to feel proud or because they might get a reward, although these differences were not sufficient to make either of the subscales they contributed to significantly different, or the controlled scale. These students were, however, significantly more likely to do their work for reasons which contribute to the identified and intrinsic subscales and the autonomous scale.

Discussion & conclusion

Student motivation

The motivation data gathered through the SRQ-A show significant differences in students' motivation in the two types of school. In 14-19 schools, the students were more likely to be motivated by autonomously controlled reasons such as wanting to understand the subject, feeling it was important and finding it fun. They were also keen to feel proud, and worked for the prospect of a reward. The wording of the question was deliberately ambiguous as to what reward might motivate the students, in order to encompass small rewards such as sweets which might be given for a correct answer in class, as well as larger rewards which might be given by parents or schools for exam success, for example. The higher scores given to this item by students in 14-19 schools may point towards a stronger culture of such rewards in the schools from which the students were recruited. Indeed, the websites of UTCs suggest a strong ethos of rewarding students with trips.

Overall, the findings suggest that students in 14-19 schools have a different approach to their learning in modern foreign language than their peers in 11-16+ schools. They seem to place greater value on the subject, as evidenced by their higher scores on the identified regulation

items, and enjoy it more, as evidenced by their scores on the intrinsic regulation items. These are both positive, autonomously regulated types of motivation, linked to higher attainment (Reeve et al, 2004), and so the findings suggest that something in the nature of provision in 14-19 schools increases student motivation in languages. This may be due to the nature of the schools themselves, which represent an active choice made by students to leave their previous schools and attend an institution with a different ethos & focus. Within Self-Determination Theory, a choice which allows students to feel a sense of autonomy has been found to increase motivation (Katz & Assor, 2006) suggesting this may play a role. It may also be a reflection of the way these schools market their subject portfolio and the value of the courses to students' future careers, minimising the problematic academic-vocational divide. A further study might include a qualitative element that would allow these possible explanations to be unpicked further.

Student choice

The data show that it was much more common for students in 11-16+ schools to be taking a language than it was students in 14-19 schools. It was also much more common for students in 11-16+ schools to be given free choice, with students in 14-19 schools more commonly reporting that they were made to take the subject because of their grades. This approach suggests that they were selected by the school to follow an EBacc pathway, something which is common (Education Datalab, 2015; Lanvers, 2017). However, it must be noted that the 14-19 data come from only two schools, and so the findings are not clear-cut and would certainly need further investigation in a future study. It can be concluded then that the findings of this study give an indication that choice is offered in a different way in the two types of school, but the data is insufficiently clear to be able to draw strong conclusions.

The findings reported here suggest that substantial differences exist between the two broad types of school considered. Students who have made the choice to disrupt the status quo by

leaving their school and moving to one which offers a different type of provision seem to be more motivated in their language study, despite reporting that the reason they were taking a language was because they had been made to take the subject due to their high attainment. This contrasts with the findings of the main study (Parrish & Lanvers, 2019), which found that students who were taking a language for this reason were less motivated than their peers who had been given free choice or who were in settings where languages were compulsory. This discrepancy points to differences in the motivational profiles of students in 14-19 schools when compared with their peers which certainly bear further investigation and may extend to other subjects. Given the provisional, exploratory nature of this study, further work in these schools would be valuable in adding to our understanding of student motivation.

Wider implications

Although this study is firmly situated within an English context, it is likely to have wider-reaching implications. A tentative link between school choice and increased motivation emerged from the findings, with students in 14-19 schools reporting higher levels of autonomously regulated motivation than their peers in 11-16+ schools, despite being more likely to report not having had a choice about taking the subject. This raises questions about the nature of the choices which can be linked to autonomous regulation in language learning which further work may illuminate; these may perhaps in this case be related to a transition between schools at age 14.

The increase in autonomously regulated motivation in 14-19 schools compared to 11-16+ schools may be attributable to the more vocational nature of the curriculum in these institutions, and the perceived relevance of the subject. Links between choice and relevance have been found in previous SDT studies (Assor, Kaplan & Roth, 2002; Noels et al, 2003; Parrish & Lanvers, 2019) as well as language learning studies which do not use this

framework (Taylor & Marsden, 2014). This suggests that the findings of this study may be applicable beyond the 14-19 sector of English education.

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Tables

Table 1

Breakdown of student responses by school type.

Category	Number of schools	Number of participants
14-19	2	139
11-16+	8	367

Table 2
The Self-Determination Continuum and SRQ-A Responses used

Type of motivation	Amotivation	Extrinsic motivation			Intrinsic motivation
Type of regulation	Non-regulation	External	Introjected	Identified	Intrinsic
Characterised by	Lack of intent, lack of value placed on outcome	Compliance, seeking external rewards, avoiding external punishments	Self-control, allocation of internal rewards and punishment	Personal importance, conscious valuing of outcome	Interest, enjoyment, inherent satisfaction
Identifying responses		Because that's what I'm supposed to do	So my teachers will think I'm a good student	Because I want to understand the subject	Because it's fun
		Because I will get in trouble if I don't	Because I'll feel bad about myself if I don't do well	Because it's important to me	Because I enjoy it
		Because I might get a reward if I do well	Because I will feel proud of myself if I do well		

Table 3
Translation of SRQ-A items into scales

Items	Subscales	Composite scales	Scale
Because I want my teacher to think I'm a good student Because I'll feel bad about myself if I don't do it Because I'll feel proud of myself if I do well	Introjected	Controlled	Relative Autonomy Index
Because I'll get in trouble if I don't Because that's what I'm supposed to do Because I might get a reward if I do well	External		
Because it's fun Because I enjoy it	Intrinsic	Autonomous	
Because I want to understand the subject Because it's important to me	Identified		

Table 4
Results of Mann-Whitney U test comparing student motivation responses between students at the two types of school.

	U	*z*	*p*	*r*
Good student	12444.5	-1.204	.229	-0.06
Feel bad	11777.5	-1.950	.051	-0.10
Proud	11703.5	-2.077	.038	-0.11
Introjected	*12056.0*	*-1.698*	*.090*	*-0.09*
Reward	11322.0	-2.494	.013	-0.13
Trouble	13650.5	.285	.776	0.02
Supposed	13384.0	-.027	.978	0.00
External	*12455.0*	*-1.223*	*.221*	*-0.06*
Controlled	**12881.0**	**-.784**	**.433**	**-0.04**
Understand	11200.0	-2.736	.006	-0.15
Important	11284.0	-2.550	.011	-0.14
Identified	*11555.5*	*-2.270*	*.023*	*-0.12*
Fun	11674.5	-2.030	.042	-0.11
Enjoy	11405.0	-2.324	.020	-0.12
Intrinsic	*11829.0*	*-1.909*	*.056*	*-0.10*
Autonomous	**11697.5**	**-2.152**	**.031**	**-0.11**
RAI	***12601.0***	***-.969***	***.333***	***-0.05***

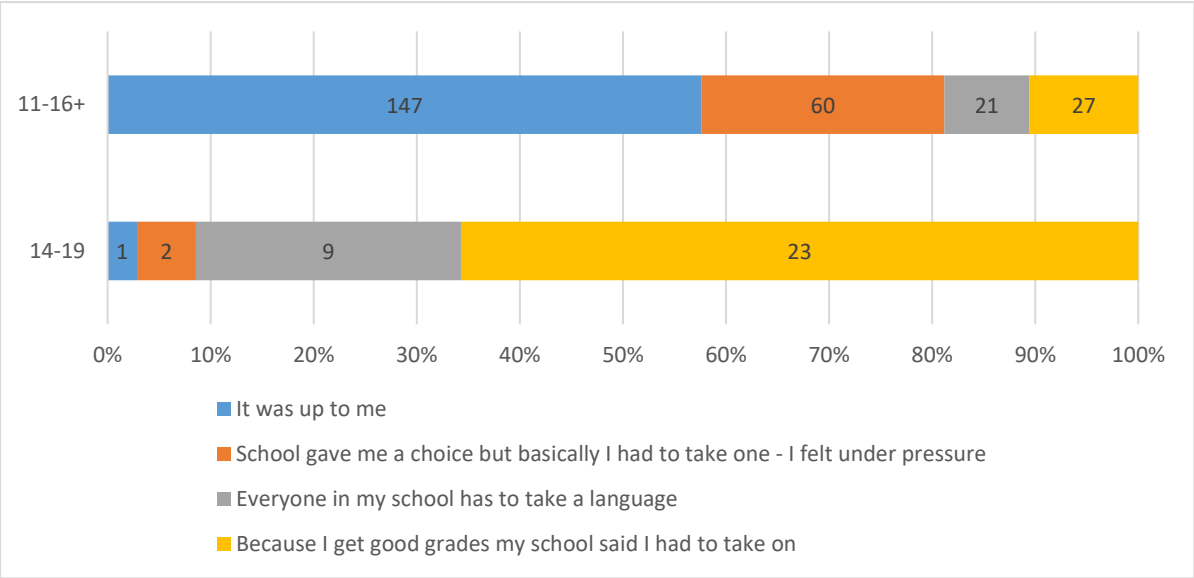

Figure 1: Students' responses to choice items. Numbers of students are shown within the bars.