

Sheehan, M., Havinga, A. D., Kasstan, J. R., Stollhans, S., Corr, A. & Gillman, P. (2024). Teacher perspectives on the introduction of linguistics in the languages classroom: Evidence from a co-creation project on French, German and Spanish. *British Educational Research Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.4009>

Including linguistics in A-level language classes is easy and effective according to teachers

What this research was about and why it is important

This study explored if teaching elements of linguistics could be a useful and coherent addition to A-level French, German and Spanish classes in England and Wales. This is important because linguistics could make language learning more engaging, relevant and inclusive, especially for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. To explore this, the researchers worked closely with experienced language teachers in secondary schools to create and test lesson materials that embedded basic ideas from linguistics into existing curriculum topics. The teachers then shared their experiences and views through surveys and interviews. The study found that teachers, even those without a background in linguistics, felt confident using the materials and saw real benefits: they perceived their students to become more curious, reflective and open-minded about language. However, challenges remain, such as time pressures and a lack of linguistics training in teacher education.

What the researchers did

- The researchers teamed up with experienced secondary school teachers of French, German and Spanish.
- They co-created a set of lesson materials (PowerPoint slides, handouts and teacher notes) related to the A-level specifications that introduced students to basic ideas from linguistics, such as how language varies, changes over time, and relates to identity.
- The resources were designed to fit within existing curriculum topics and could be taught as part of the curriculum rather than in addition to it.
- After teaching the materials, 17 teachers shared their experiences through questionnaires, and a number of them also participated in-depth interviews.
- Teachers were asked how easy the materials were to use, how students responded, and what benefits and challenges they saw.
- The goal was to understand whether introducing linguistics into the classroom was practical, meaningful and beneficial from the teachers' point of view.

What the researchers found

- Teachers found the linguistics materials engaging, easy to use and relevant to A-level language topics.
- Even teachers without a background in linguistics felt confident teaching the lessons with the support provided (in the form of teacher prompts and notes).
- Some teachers observed that students became more curious and thoughtful about how language works and varies.
- Some teachers also reported that the lessons boosted confidence, including for multilingual and heritage language speakers.
- Many saw the materials as valuable for promoting inclusion, critical thinking and real-world language understanding.

Things to consider

- The study highlights the potential of linguistics to make language learning more appealing and inclusive for diverse student groups.
- Some teachers' concerns about curriculum time and exam pressures highlight a key tension: innovative content may struggle to gain traction unless curricula and assessment systems also evolve.
- Although teachers without a background in linguistics found the materials easy to teach thanks to the notes, the lack of linguistics training in teacher education programmes raises questions about how teacher professional development might be improved to support broader approaches to language teaching.
- While feedback was generally positive, findings are based on a small group of volunteers already open to innovation, so results may not fully reflect wider attitudes.

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