Pupil perception of MFL lessons and GCSE uptake

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The University of York
The table shows the aggregate of all non-mother tongue skills in each country (i.e. the percentage saying they speak French plus percentage speaking German, etc).
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MFL GCSEs 1998-2011
(Tinsley & Han, 2012, p. 13)
Previous studies

- **External speakers**
  - can enhance interest and KS4 MFL uptake (Filmer-Sankey & Marshall, 2010)
  - can raise pupils’ general educational aspirations (Passy & Morris, 2010)
- **Language ambassadors schemes**
  - successful in raising the profile of languages with pupils (unpublished evaluations; anecdotal evidence)

**Experimental trials?**
CURRENT PROJECT

Influencing the perceived relevance of Modern Foreign Languages in Year 9: An experimental intervention
Methodology

- Funded by the British Academy
- 3 maintained secondary schools in N. Yorkshire where languages are not compulsory in Year 10
- 498 Year-9 pupils

- Sept-Oct 2011: **Questionnaire survey (I)**
- Dec 2011: **Intervention** (randomised controlled trial)
  - ½ pupils: panel discussion with 6 external speakers
  - ½ pupils: language lesson with external tutor (active control)
- Feb 2012: **Questionnaire survey (II) + interviews**
- Mar 2012: **School uptake data**
Methodology
Randomised matched grouping

- each class split into two: one half joined with half of another class to form a new group

- each new group given
  - one language lesson
  OR
  - one panel discussion

- balanced proportion of MFL GCSE intentions (yes/ no/ not sure) and gender (randomly assigned within sub-groups)
Intervention
Panel discussion

- 1 hour long; groups of 25-35 students; audio-recorded
- 6 external speakers (chaired by FT)
- selected out of 36 volunteers, based on the message they would have for Year 9 pupils
- ‘success’ and ‘regret’ language learning scenarios
- male (4): IT consultant, sports journalist, musician, home delivery executive
- female (2): student, housewife (ex Marketing Director)
- debriefed, but spontaneous
- same panel for all discussions
Intervention
MFL lesson (active control)

- French, German or Spanish lesson
- 1 hour long; groups of approx. 20 pupils
- most lessons taught by native speakers
- Christmas-themed lesson (mid-December)
- approximately the same content for all languages, planned by tutors and researchers together
PRELIMINARY FINDINGS
### Recent MFL GCSE uptake
All pupils in participant schools

% of Year 9 pupils opting to study a MFL in Year 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>45.17</td>
<td>32.55</td>
<td>43.98</td>
<td>48.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>57.28</td>
<td>45.91</td>
<td>57.35</td>
<td>68.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>29.75</td>
<td>26.19</td>
<td>36.20</td>
<td>TBC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recent MFL GCSE uptake
All pupils in participant schools

- School A
- School B
- School C

Year:
- 2009
- 2010
- 2011
- 2012
Recent MFL GCSE uptake
All pupils in participant schools

EBacc introduced (DfE, 2010)
NASUWT (2011) survey of 2,400 secondary school teachers in England

- ‘43% of respondents confirmed that as a direct result of the introduction of the EBac, schools had put in place plans to restrict the degree of choice pupils are able to exercise over their Key Stage 4 subject options’

- ‘the curriculum opportunities available to pupils are... driven to a disproportionate extent by the requirements of the school accountability regime rather than the educational needs of learners’ (p. 5)
Table 6: Measures introduced or planned in response to the EBacc, maintained schools, 2011/12
(multiple responses permitted)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>8%</td>
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Base number: maintained schools reporting changes or intentions to change provision 349 100%
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GCSE uptake
Group & gender

Chi square

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panel</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GCSE uptake
- Group (non-sig.)
- Gender ($p < .001$)
GCSE uptake
Group & gender

Chi square

Group (non-sig.)

Gender ($p < .001$)
GCSE uptake
Group & gender

Chi square

Group (non-sig.)

Gender ($p < .001$)
GCSE uptake
Group & gender

Chi square

Group
(non-sig.)

Gender
(p < .001)
GCSE uptake
Group + gender

Chi square

panel
\( (p = .055) \)

lesson
\( (p < .001) \)
GCSE uptake
Group + gender

Chi square

panel
$(p = .055)$

lesson
$(p < .001)$
GCSE uptake
Group & school

Chi square

School B (sig.)

School A (non-sig.)
## GCSE uptake
### School B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Y9 pupils</th>
<th>MFL GCSE uptake</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>took part in the main</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>project (intervention)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>took part in the pilot*</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(not the intervention)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* *Helped pilot the questionnaires and interview schedules*
GCSE uptake
Student reactions

Chi square

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>positive</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive + negative</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GCSE uptake
- yes
- no

**to panel discussion**
(non-sig.)

**to language lesson**
\( p = .052 \)
GCSE uptake
Student reactions

Chi square

to panel discussion (non-sig.)
to language lesson (non-sig.)
Reactions to panel

- Interesting because they were talking about personal experiences rather than an hour long lecture on how it helps you in the future. (M, NYY)*

- It was good as you could find out how useful taking a language is in the future and how it can help with getting jobs and how you can get the opportunity to do something someone can’t. (M, YYY)

- It was interesting to learn how languages helped people even if it wasn’t a language career. They got across to me that it is a good thing to have it and it may come in use one day. (F, YNN)

* M = male; N = survey 1 GCSE intention; Y = survey 2 intention; Y = GCSE uptake
N = no; Y = yes; Ns = not sure
Reactions to panel

- I found that it helped me because they reassured me that even though I’m not that good at languages I can still do it. (F, YYY)

- It changed my mind about learning a language, because I learnt that it is not just useful in University applications but is also useful in situations you can’t anticipate. (M, YYY)

- My first impression was that I already knew that it was a good choice to have a language, but there were stories with incidents of people who could not speak that language, it did bring good thoughts to take a language. (M, YNN)
Reactions to lesson

- I thought the lesson was very fun and interesting because it was interactive and I got to learn Christmas words in French, and it wasn’t boring because we did speaking and sheet work. (F, YYY)

- I thought the language lesson was good because not only did we learn about Christmas in Germany we learnt about it in other countries like Switzerland and the Netherlands. (M, YY?)

- People learnt new vocabulary while also taking a role in the lesson. Everyone had a turn and overall everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves. (M, YYY)

- I liked the Christmas aspect and the interaction. (M, NsNY)
Reactions to lesson

- It was interesting and fun. I don’t think I’ll want it otherwise. (M, NYY)

- I thought it was quite interesting because we learnt more about German culture as well as the language with it; this made the lesson more fun. Also the variety of tasks was fun also. I learnt new words very quickly. (M, YYY)

- I thought it was quite good. I liked it because it wasn’t copying out of the book. (M, YY?)

- It was good. It was interactive. It was informative. Had fun, was enjoyable. (M, YYY)
GCSE uptake
General perceptions and attitudes

MANOVA (survey 2)

$p = .040$

everything else, $p < .001$

all variables: time point 2
Perceptions and attitudes
Questionnaire item examples

● perceptions of language classes:

1. What foreign language(s) are you studying at the moment, and how do you feel about your lessons, in general? Please write the language on the left and then place an X in the box that best represents your opinion (for example, ___X___|____|____|____ or ___|____|____|____|____)

   In foreign language 1
   (please write the language below)

   ____________________________

   I have fun.  ____|____|____|____|____ I get bored.
   I learn a lot. ____|____|____|____|____ I don’t learn much.
   I feel engaged. ____|____|____|____|____ I feel disengaged.
   It’s easy for me. ____|____|____|____|____ It’s hard for me.

● attitude to language learning:

7. In your opinion, how true are the following sentences, about language learning in general? For each of them, please circle ONE answer that best represents your opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>very untrue</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only people who want to be language teachers/ translators need to learn foreign languages.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who speak foreign languages have more opportunities in life than people who don’t.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning a foreign language can be a rewarding experience in itself.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You only need to learn another language if you are planning to live in another country.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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</table>
Perceptions and attitudes
Questionnaire item examples

❖ language use in future job:

What kind of job would you like to have in the future?

How much do you think you’ll need foreign languages in that job? Please circle: very little 1 2 3 4 very much

❖ languages important for me/ for others:

6. In your opinion, how important is it to learn foreign languages? Please tick one box and tell us why you think so.

For you: □ not at all important; □ a bit important; □ quite important; □ very important

Why? __________________________

For other people: □ not at all important; □ a bit important; □ quite important; □ very important

Why? __________________________
MFL GCSE intentions
Reasons why/ why not

Open answers (survey 2)

Why I will take a language

- Instrumental
- Intrinsc
- Other

Why I will NOT take a language

- It's hard/ I'm not good
- It's useless
- I don't like it
- Other
MFL GCSE intentions (survey 2)

Reasons why/ why not

Open answers

23.4% to get into a good university
22.7% useful in the future

why
I will take a language

why
I will NOT take a language
GCSE intentions (2)

Will choose a language: why

to get into a good university/higher education
useful in the future
it's easy/ nice/ I like it
prefer to learn this language (easier/more enjoyable)
to get a good job
it looks good on your CV/ good qualification
for travelling/ holidays
want to be able to speak another language
I've studied it before
to have a language GCSE
interesting/ different language
spoken by many people
interested in the country/ history/ culture
to communicate with family/ friends
to live/ work there
my parents want me to
other

Percent
Will not choose a language: why

GCSE intentions (2)
In the three participant schools
- GCSE uptake has increased since 2010
  - effect of EBacc? – (e.g., Tinsley & Han, 2012)

In the two schools where uptake data are available at the moment
- our project appears to have helped to an extent
- significantly higher uptake in school B (both panel and lesson), compared to pupils who didn’t participate in the project
In the two schools where uptake data are available at the moment
- pupils’ impressions of the panel/lesson seem to be related to uptake more than the group they were in (panel/lesson)
  - BUT positive reactions to such interventions may not necessarily lead to higher uptake (see School A and open/qualitative answers)
- pupils’ perception of MFL classes and their attitude to language learning – significantly related to GCSE uptake
  - corroborates previous research (e.g., Evans & Fisher, 2009)
In the two schools where uptake data are available at the moment

- reasons for choosing a language were mainly instrumental (mostly ‘to get into a good university’ or ‘useful in the future’)
  - EBacc?
- reasons for not choosing a language were mainly perceived difficulty and irrelevance
  - e.g., Graham (2004); Stables and Wikeley (1999)
In the two schools where uptake data are available at the moment:

- More girls opted for languages than boys
  - e.g., Carr and Pauwels (2009)
- Boys appeared to react more positively to the panel discussion than the lesson
- More boys opted for a language from the panel group than the lesson group
  - Could it be that we had 4 male and 2 female speakers, and no male language teacher (none available)?
  - The need for male role models? (e.g., Clark, 1995)
ETHICAL DILEMMAS, REMAINING QUESTIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH
Ethical dilemmas

Experimental interventions

- ‘treatment’ group
- control group, to enable comparisons (Marsden & Torgerson, forthcoming)

- designing experiments in education
- eliminating variation & subjectivity
- length of ‘treatment’
- depriving controls of the ‘treatment’?
- measuring effects
Remaining questions and future research

- What will uptake in the 3rd school show?
- How generalisable/replicable?
- How context-dependent?
- How helpful in practice?

- Interviews with heads of MFLs
- Interviews with MFL teachers
- Other schools data
- Research into the impact of assessment on teaching, learning and GCSE uptake


Thank you!