

This study sought to describe the progress of learners engaged in one particular pedagogical innovation, [Language Futures](#), assessing the motivational effects of the approach as a whole, as well as exploring the impact of its key features. The study's context acknowledges the generally low level of motivation for language learning in England (Williams et al., 2002; Mitchell, 2003; Davies, 2004; Coleman et al., 2007; Erler & Macaro, 2011; Taylor & Marsden, 2014; Deckner, 2017) and recognises not only that progress depends on motivation (Ellis, 2008; Dörnyei, 2014) but that younger learners' overall motivation for language learning relates most strongly to their classroom learning experiences (Evans & Fisher, 2009). This makes motivation the most compelling and pervasive theme of the study.

Linguistic progress

- EAL (English as an Additional Language) learners of community languages in Language Futures make good to excellent progress, particularly in grammar and writing, which puts them on track to achieve their best GCSE outcome in that language, even when they had low or no prior literacy in the language. The opportunity to develop cultural knowledge of the country of their (or their parents') birth and the prospect of GCSE success are associated with improved self-esteem, a more comfortable sense of identity and a stronger perception of themselves as successful learners.
- In curriculum time, higher attaining Year 9 students make the average linguistic progress that is expected during the first year of learning a new language. By the end of the year they are able to speak about themselves in sentences, give opinions on a range of topics, and talk about activities they do. They have learnt how to form the present, past and future tenses (European languages only) but are not yet able to use them confidently in unstructured conversations or compose written texts without reference to resources.
- Learners who, by the end of Year 9, had a stated intention to continue studying a language at KS4 believed they had become more autonomous in their learning by participating in LF. Students referred to not relying on the teacher, taking responsibility for what they learn, asking more questions, and wanting to find out more, all of which bodes well for outcomes at KS4.
- Lower attaining students predictably make more modest linguistic progress; some acquire individual words and others are able to produce a range of short sentences with support, or exceptionally from memory, by the end of one year.
- Lower attaining students were also, predictably, less able to articulate their independence, but findings suggest strongly that, where the LF approach deliberately targets the development of autonomy, students do increasingly take responsibility for their project work, and that this is associated with greater confidence and enjoyment.
- In the extra-curricular programme, well-motivated language learners make most linguistic progress when their mentors engage in direct tutoring, perhaps because of the limited contact time with LF, compared to in-curriculum models.
- In line with previous research studies, areas for development in linguistic progress with the approach remain long-term retention of language and pronunciation.

Motivation

- LF is generally associated with high levels of motivation, and particularly for lower attaining students, and generates higher levels of engagement than the mainstream languages classroom.
- Having a choice of language was universally and significantly motivating, suggesting that it fulfils a psychological need for self-determination, which is one of the aspects of autonomy.
- Students across the three in-curriculum case studies, irrespective of attainment level, associated the opportunities to direct their own learning in LF with an increased interest in learning. The ability to choose their language of study, the freedom to make choices about how to learn and the speed at which they learn, the use of technology and project-based learning, all contribute to enhanced enjoyment and engagement in lessons.
- Individual differences were evident, however. For some students, the feeling of autonomy was the overriding positive difference between LF and mainstream classroom experiences. For others, the less structured nature of LF learning led to some feelings of frustration, and a sense that progress was slower in LF than in the mainstream languages classroom.
- The link between autonomy and motivation was much less apparent in the extra-curricular LF programme, perhaps because their principal motivation was to learn the language; they welcomed the direct teaching approach of some mentors because it helped them to learn more quickly and securely.

Autonomy

- Some students are not able to take up the opportunities for autonomy as well as they might, and that this might account for less than optimum progress.
- Some students' independent working is characterised by looking things up and writing them down, but not engaging in elaboration and rehearsal tasks that enable long-term retention of new language.
- The time spent out-of-class on language learning is insufficient to consolidate and develop the learning from the LF sessions.
- On the other hand, project-based learning, in all its forms, is universally enjoyed by students, irrespective of attainment level or LF model, even by those who ultimately reported a general preference for teacher-led language learning.
- The aspects of PBL that students enjoy are varied and include: the freedom to work at their own pace, the opportunity to work in pairs or small groups, having a purpose for using the language, learning new cultural knowledge, developing grammatical knowledge and writing skills.
- The strong motivational effect of using new technologies was also evident in this study.

Mentoring

- The mentor-student relationship and its impact on LF language learning emerges as one of the more complex themes in the study. On the one hand, mentors are pivotal to linguistic progress, particularly in pronunciation and speaking. On the other hand, interpersonal relationships are paramount to motivation and this study's findings suggest that, where mentoring is successful, the level of support is contingent on students' learning needs.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Language Futures is, for most students, a very motivating way to learn a language, irrespective of model and cohort. To an extent, all LF models succeed in what they set out to do. Students in the community LF class develop their understanding of grammar, improve their writing and are on track to achieve highly in their GCSE. Cultural knowledge, a more comfortable

sense of identity and improved self-esteem are further benefits of that programme. Lower attaining students enjoy their language learning, acquire words and short phrases in a new language, and in one class improve their overall independent learning skills and world knowledge. It is clear that learning behaviours are positively impacted by engagement with the Language Futures programme, particularly the extent to which learners are resilient, independent and embrace challenge. Higher attaining students become more autonomous and resourceful learners, and learn more about how to learn a language.

With the benefit of additions to the LF programme that specifically equip learners with the skills and knowledge of understanding how language works and the processes by which we acquire and retain language at the start, we may see more consistent progress in terms of language retention, pronunciation and spoken interaction. There may be some students, however, who struggle with this approach and will need more direction from a mentor, acting as tutor, if they are to make good progress. In summary, there are implications for practice relating to both student selection and programme design.

In terms of student selection, the following list of indicators may help teachers to gauge more reliably students' predisposition towards autonomous language learning:

- Students explicitly demonstrate an interest in exploring independent ways of learning.
- There is some indication that teacher-led language lessons might be felt to be proceeding too slowly (a 'coasting' effect).
- There is an interest in learning for its own sake, and less importance placed on measuring their own progress in terms of level or grade.
- Students demonstrate an interest in using language for communicating with others.
- Students demonstrate that they are typically resilient in the face of challenge.
- Students are risk-takers, who enjoy any opportunity to work things out for themselves, and are unfazed by making mistakes.
- Students show an awareness that retention involves repeated language use over time, much of which requires a commitment to regular, self-directed out-of-class learning.