

## Chapter 4 Case Study 1

### Language Futures as in-curriculum 2<sup>nd</sup> foreign language

As previously mentioned, within the eight schools involved in the study, four distinct models of Language Futures emerged. To provide as meaningful as possible an account of the learning within each, data were analysed and findings presented separately, together with a full description of the context, school, LF model, teacher, mentors and student participants for each of the four models. In addition to increasing research validity, this transparency will support any schools that aim to introduce LF.

#### 4.1 The school

The school (School A) is a mixed gender secondary academy, part of a small, multi-academy trust in the East of England. Rated 'outstanding' in its last Ofsted inspection, the school has a lower than average proportion of pupil premium students (pupil premium being additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, those in local authority care and those with a parent in the armed services). The proportion of students who represent minority ethnic groups is much lower than the national average and so is the proportion who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students who need additional support with their learning; those at school action plus and those with a statement of special educational needs, is approximately the same as the national average.

#### 4.2 The Language Futures model

In School A, the model of Language Futures is an in-curriculum model for two classes of Year 9 (age 13-14 year-old) students. All students at the school learn either French or Spanish from Year 7 (students aged 11-12) and throughout Key Stage 3 (two or three year phase of secondary education, in which language learning is compulsory in England). The groups of students who began LF at the start of Year 9 applied to do so. They were all students in the highest attaining sets in Year 8, who were offered the choice between studying a second foreign language (French or Spanish) in the usual way or a second foreign language of their choice as part of the LF programme. In the year of this study, approximately two-thirds of students given this choice had opted to take part in LF, leaving two smaller groups of students to learn French and Spanish as taught, ab initio options.

Within the model's design, all LF students continued to learn their first foreign language (either French or Spanish), with two hourly lessons of mainstream classroom teaching each week, whilst they picked up their choice of second foreign language, also for two hours per week. This LF model has the full support of the senior leadership team, and as all students involved are higher attaining students, the expectation is that all or almost all students opt to continue with a language to GCSE during Key Stage 4 (two or three year phase of secondary education, in which language learning is a statutory entitlement, but not compulsory). That being said, there is no compulsion for students at the school to take a language during Key Stage 4, and students are given the freedom to choose all of their GCSE options.

In terms of its design, this model of Language Futures sought to include all five core features of the approach, as described below:

#### Student choice and agency

As explained, students in this school choose either to take part in Language Futures or to learn their second foreign language in the classroom. In addition, students who are interested in the Language Futures programme select the language that they want to study. The school commits to allowing students to learn the language of their choice, as long as there are at least two students who want to study it, and as long as a mentor for that language can be found. At the time of this study, the languages that had been chosen and were being studied were Mandarin Chinese, Italian, German, Greek, Russian, Swedish and Japanese. Table 6 shows the number of students learning each language:

**Table 6 LF languages and numbers of learners**

| Language              | Number of learners |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| German                | 14                 |
| Italian               | 11                 |
| Mandarin              | 8                  |
| Greek                 | 3                  |
| Russian               | 3                  |
| Japanese              | 2                  |
| Swedish               | 2                  |
| Total no. of learners | 43                 |

In terms of choices of what and how to learn, students followed a Scheme of Work (SOW), detailed in Table 7, but in lessons and out of school they determined for themselves which resources to use, how to record, practise and retain the new language.

**Table 7 Languages Futures Scheme of Work overview (School A)**

| Theme                                   | Grammar  | Knowledge about language  | Language learning strategies   | Project outcomes           |
|---|--|---|--|----------------------------|
| All about me                            | Present<br>Question words<br>Nouns – singular/plural, gender, articles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pronunciation rules</li> <li>Sound-writing relationship (if applicable)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to retain vocabulary</li> <li>How to research new language</li> </ul> | Spoken presentation        |
| Food and dining                         | Verbs of opinion<br>Asking questions                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing conventions</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to pronounce accurately</li> </ul>                                    | Come dine with me dialogue |
| Celebrations and events                 |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Syntax – basic sentence structure</li> </ul>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to make sense of what you read/hear</li> </ul>                        | Video presentations        |
| Sports and hobbies                      | Past   |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peer and teamwork</li> </ul>  | Cooking                    |
| Music – types, instruments              | Past tense revision  |   |  | Role plays                 |
| School – subjects, opinions, comparison | Future<br>Comparative  |   |  |                            |

### Teacher as designer and facilitator

During the LF lessons in School A, the teachers' role was to support learning and guide students with their use of resources. In addition, the teacher often provided the initial framework for the learning, often by using English or French/Spanish as a point of grammatical reference, setting up a series of questions for students to research and answer about their own target languages. Not a speaker of several of the languages, but as knowledgeable linguists, LF teachers in School A sought to help students to navigate and interpret what they found online, in textbooks or other reference materials.

### School as basecamp

When students choose to take their learning beyond the classroom, this indicates a significant level of engagement in learning, and is suggestive of greater learning progress over time. It is not unique to the Language Futures approach, but School as basecamp is one of its core features. The study therefore explored the extent to which LF students in School A were engaging in extra-curricular learning.

### **Project-based learning**

In their LF lessons, learners in School A completed linguistic and cultural projects in their LF language. Through teacher and student interview and teacher and student questionnaires this study probed the impact of project-based learning on student motivation, knowledge and skill development and overall progress, the analysis revealing both positive outcomes and some limiting factors.

### **Building a learning community**

Affective support and linguistic scaffolding are key components of the LF classroom. Previous models of the project provide evidence that peer support fulfils several important functions. Language expert adult mentors from the community have also proven essential to the success of previous schools' versions of the programme. The main study aimed to extend our understanding of the impact of both sources of support (peer and mentor). In School A, LF mentors were adult members of the local community, native and non-native speakers of the different languages. They were recruited, trained and supported in their role by the LF co-ordinator. The impact of peers, adult mentors, the LF teachers and co-ordinator and that of parents and siblings on students' learning is evaluated in the analysis that follows.

## **4.3 The participants**

### **The learners**

At the time of data collection for this study there were 43 students in two classes. Whilst background data and student and teacher questionnaire data were collected for both groups, lesson observation, teacher and student interviews focused on one of the two classes. In terms of academic profile, both groups were relatively homogenous, higher-attaining students. At the start of the LF programme, one class had an average attainment level National Curriculum 5A in French, whilst the other had an overall average level 6B in Spanish. In the former, three of the learners had some heritage background knowledge of their LF language, including some literacy, whilst the remainder were beginners. The second class was made up entirely of beginners, and this was the focus class for in-depth interviews and observation.

### **The Language Futures Coordinator**

In their LF learning, School A students are supported by their LF teacher, their peers, a community mentor and their parents. In addition, the role of the Language Futures Co-ordinator is key to this particular model. The co-ordinator communicates and liaises with the teacher, the mentors, the pupils, the parents, and senior management. One of the key roles of the co-ordinator is to recruit and supervise the mentors. There is some initial induction and training for new mentors each year, but it is the LF co-ordinator who maintains communication between all stakeholders during the year as well. The LF co-ordinator at the time of the project had worked initially as a mentor, later taking up the role of LF co-ordinator as part of a 20-hour per week role of foreign language assistant within the languages department, spending on average 2 hours per week on LF co-ordination.

### **The teacher**

The Language Futures teacher was a full-time teacher of French and Spanish at the school, and Head of Department. She was, at the time of the study, in her second year at the school, and had been interested to become involved in the LF programme, so as to understand a key element of the department's curriculum provision. She had the opportunity to know the students well, as she taught them also for Spanish in a mainstream classroom.

### **The mentors**

It is a pre-requisite of this LF model that there are mentors for each language being learnt. Whilst mentor attendance varies according to individual mentor commitment and availability, on average mentors attended lessons at least once per week to work with students. Within the focus class

there were therefore mentors for German, Greek, Italian and Mandarin. Interviews were conducted with mentors for three out of the four languages.

### The parents

At the time of recruiting students to the programme, there is a meeting with parents to explain the LF programme's aims and expectations of the students' behaviour and learning. Language Futures aims to harness parents' knowledge of their child and their skills to support their child's language learning at home. To this end parents are given a parental guide which gives them strategies to help them encourage their child's language studies.

## 4.4 Analysis and findings

The analysis and findings in this chapter are organised around the three overarching research questions and draw on thematic analysis of all of the data sources, focusing first on linguistic progress, then detailing a comparison of progress in Language Futures and conventional classroom teaching, and finally offering an exploration of the range of factors that impact on the LF approach.

### 4.4.1 Linguistic progress

At the start of the LF programme in School A, all students in the focus class were beginners. At periodic intervals during, and at the end of the one year LF course, students were assessed in all four skills in their LF language, as well as their first foreign language (FL). In this school, national curriculum levels are still in use to measure attainment at KS3. The average attainment level (and range) for each class in their first and LF languages appear in the table below:

**Table 8 End of Y9 comparative performance data (first FL and LF)**

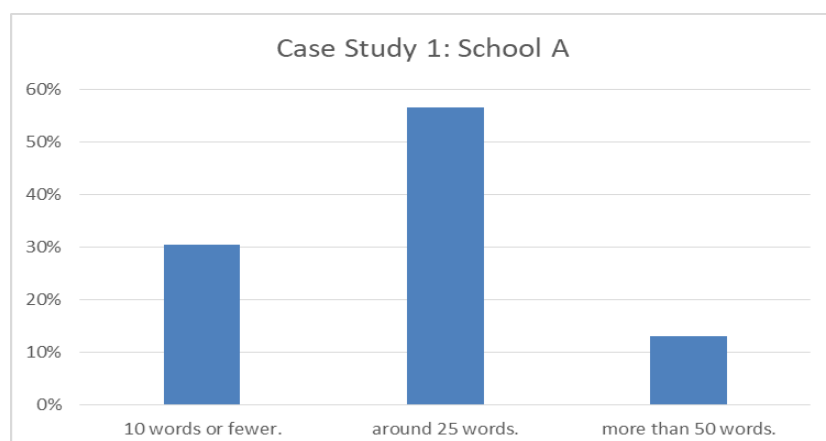
| LF class | End of Y9 average attainment 1 <sup>st</sup> foreign language (after three years' study) | End of Y9 average attainment in LF language (after one year of study) |
|----------|--|---|
| 1        | 6B (range 5A -7C)  | 4C (range 3C – 4A)  |
| 2        | 6C (range 5B – 6A)   | 4C (range 3C- 7A)*  |

\* The wider range of outcomes in the second LF class is accounted for by the three learners with heritage language knowledge, who started and ended the year with a much higher level than the ab initio learners.

Although national curriculum levels were abandoned as national attainment measures in 2014, most language teachers still know what they mean (see Appendix G). Broad expectations for NC attainment in languages at Key Stage 3 were: Year 7 (NC 3 – 5), Year 8 (NC 4-6) and Year 9 (NC 5-7). The data above therefore show reasonable, though not exceptional, progress in LF after one year of study, using these measures. More significant than numerical data, however, are data that illuminate the type of linguistic progress students make in LF, compared with a traditional classroom.

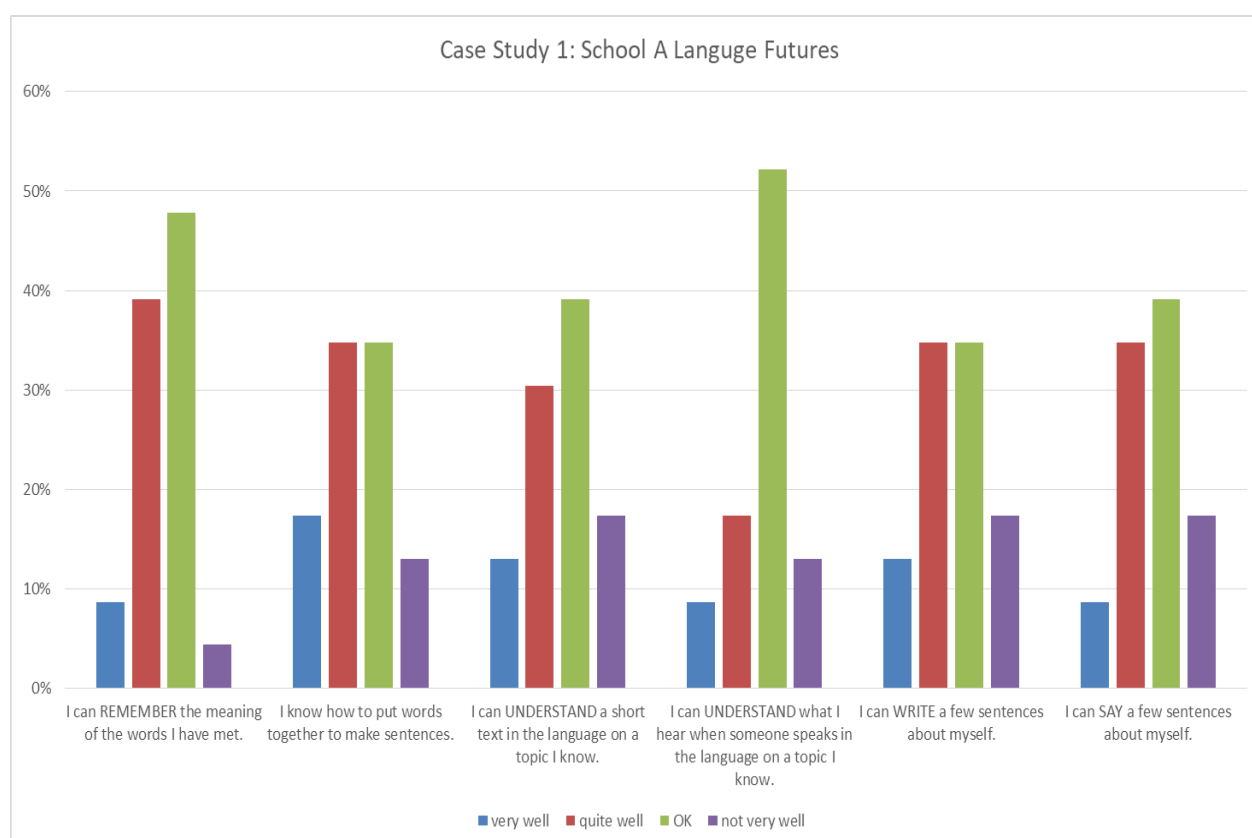
The student questionnaire responses, which included both School A LF classes, were completed approximately four months into the course. At this stage, the majority of students considered that they had mastered a productive repertoire of around 25 words, with 13% estimating a vocabulary of more than 50, and 30% fewer than 10 words.

**Figure 4 Student perceptions of vocabulary mastery**



It is interesting to compare students' perceptions of confidence across the four skills. Although there is the expected spread of responses, overall there are discernibly higher confidence levels in writing and grammar, when compared to the other three skills, listening, reading and speaking, as Figure 5 shows:

**Figure 5 Students' perceptions of their competence in the four skills**



Relative competence across the four skills was identified here as a theme for further investigation in the self-report data.

#### 4.4.2 Comparison of perceptions of progress in LF and mainstream classroom teaching

We have identified that, overall, students make reasonable linguistic progress in LF over three terms of study. The LF teacher summarises their progress:

**LF teacher:** The vast majority can carry out a simple conversation and respond to questions. Er.. kind of along the same lines as they might be able to at this point if they were at the end of Year 7, so they've made rapid progress in that respect.

When seeking to evaluate the benefits of LF as an alternative to classroom teaching, however, it is important to compare students' and others' perceptions of both. Mentor perceptions of student progress were extremely positive, but it is important to remember that mentors are generally not teachers and have no consistent framework of reference for judging student progress in this programme. Students, on the other hand, make direct comparisons between their classroom and LF learning. This researcher found, in common with others in previous studies (Cullingford, 1991; Jelly et al., 2000; Fisher, 2001) that students generate high-quality, thoughtful and reliable data.

When asked to explain the difference between learning Spanish in a classroom and Italian within LF, one student responded:

"Italian's mainly independent work and you sort of do it in our groups or by ourselves with the help of our books, whereas Spanish gets taught to us by the teacher and we do it as a class."

It is interesting how neatly this answer conveys this student's perception of personal agency in LF; the way she learns with the help of books and her peers. In contrast Spanish 'gets taught' to her. In this scenario the teacher does the teaching and those on the receiving end are the whole class.

Students are equally clear about what and how well they learn within the two approaches, too. All LF learners in School A enjoy the ability to choose their language, the freedom to make choices about how to learn and the speed at which they learn, the use of technology (predominantly iPads) and project-based learning. Where differences emerge, these are mainly as a result of their differences in perception in relation to classroom language learning. Some students believe they make better progress in LF because classroom learning is too rigid, and sometimes goes too slowly for them. There is also an acknowledgement that they rely unnecessarily on the teacher for convenience, whereas in LF they are forced to be more proactive. Other students prefer the structure of classroom teaching. They feel they make better progress when there is a teacher in charge, setting and monitoring their tasks more actively than in LF.

Repeated queries to generate positive and negative tabulations of all data related to elements of progress were carried out, and the researcher alternated between bottom-up and top-down views of the data. Data were then compiled in the table below. The wording for each perception is not a direct quote, as often several students expressed the same idea, so for clarity, several instances were combined, synthesised and simplified to summarise to one count of each of the views expressed. However, the language remains as close as possible to the style and vocabulary of students' utterances.

**Table 9 Student perceptions of progress in LF and classroom-based language learning**

|                 | <b>Language Futures</b>   | <b>Classroom learning</b>  |
|-----------------|---|--|
| <b>Positive</b> | <b>Choice of language</b><br>I think it (choice) makes you more excited about learning the language<br>I wanted to learn a really different language  | I'm more interested in Spanish   |
|                 | <b>Freedom about how to learn</b><br>I really like the freedom to choose what and how we learn, and the speed of learning<br>Time goes quicker as I'm with people I like<br>I like using iPads<br>You learn quickly in a small group<br>I am interested enough to do some out-of-class learning   | A teacher teaching it is easier to learn<br>I have to concentrate more in Spanish<br>We do more to learn the language  |
|                 | <b>Project-based learning</b><br>Project-based learning means you're actually using the language<br>Projects are more fun than just learning stuff<br>Projects make things stick<br>Projects give a purpose, an end goal  | Spanish lessons have more structure and I learn a bit more<br>I can pronounce better in Spanish  |
|                 | <b>Meta-cognition</b><br>I've become more independent in the learning<br>I'm more interested in finding out about things in more depth<br>It's taught me not to rely on the teacher to get information<br>I feel like I know what to do now like if I've got a problem I can work it out  |  |
|                 | <b>Language learning strategies</b><br>I think LF has made me understand how important pronouncing stuff is<br>Writing (Mandarin) is very difficult, but the more I do it the more I can do<br>You can look at words and sort of think of them in different languages and guess what they are<br>I now know the skills that I need to learn another language if I choose to |  |
| <b>Negative</b> | I don't remember the language<br>The pronunciation is a struggle for me<br>You can learn it wrong when your mentor is not there<br>I prioritise other subjects where we are set homework and our books get marked   | It's a set course of lessons which you need to get done<br>I work more autonomously in LF because you can always ask the teacher in Spanish if you need to know anything<br>You might already know something they're trying to teach you<br>We don't use iPads and it's all like the same in Spanish |

It is clear from these data that students believe they become more autonomous in their learning when they take part in LF. There are indications that they become more aware of the processes involved in successful language learning. In terms of barriers to the development of linguistic competence, it is also clear that two issues highlighted in previous research, retention and pronunciation, still persist.



#### 4.4.3 Key factors that impact on the LF approach

##### Choice

For the vast majority of learners, the ability to choose the language of study was either one or the main reason for applying to take part in the programme. For some students, the opportunity to learn in a different way was at least part of the motivation, and distinct from the choice of language itself.

Students' reasons given for choosing their particular language were not particularly startling or personal. Those choosing Mandarin did so primarily because it was something completely different from other languages they knew. Those choosing Italian mentioned it as a frequent family holiday destination. Interestingly peer group was a factor in choosing Greek; one student choosing the language because of her Greek grandfather, and the other two students choosing it because they wanted to work together as a peer group.

##### Agency and autonomy

Students in this LF programme reported high levels of freedom with respect to resources, learning methods and choice of exact vocabulary, and rather less with regard to the tasks and topics. This corresponds to this LF model's design, which has a guiding Scheme of Work setting out the overarching topic areas and projects.

Students' references to the freedom they experienced within LF, both to decide what and how they learnt, including the speed at which they learnt, were overwhelmingly, though not exclusively, positive. In their comments, they traced a connection between the opportunities to direct their own learning and increased interest in learning. For some students, the feeling of autonomy (personal agency) was the overriding positive difference between LF learning and mainstream classroom experiences. For others, the unstructured nature of LF learning led to some feelings of frustration. Teachers and mentors were impressed by the independence shown by learners, although the teacher noticed differences in the extent to which students took up the opportunities for self-direction afforded by the LF approach.

There was also evidence that students transferred greater levels of agency to other subjects, including their first foreign language, but also other curriculum subjects. Students referred to not relying on the teacher, taking responsibility for what they learn, asking more questions, and wanting to find out more.

Whilst the student questionnaire data indicate that only a fifth of students in School A saw themselves as more likely to volunteer answers in other subject lessons, the rest saw themselves as just as likely to do so, which could indicate that they were already students with relatively high confidence and participation. As one student explained:

**Interviewer:** Do you think Language Futures has changed you in general as a learner in any way?

**Student 1:** I think it's made me more independent and wanting to find out things on my own, and being more interested in finding out about things in more depth.

**Interviewer:** And how does it change your behaviour in other classes?

**Student 1:** I think it makes me ask more questions like yeah, want to find out more, I suppose.

**Interviewer:** You're more likely to think of questions now?

**Student 1:** Yeah, I think I'm more likely to think of questions. I think I would have asked questions before this, just maybe not so keenly.

In addition, more than half saw themselves as less likely to experience anxiety in lessons, nearly half felt they were more likely to try to work things out independently, and more than a third more likely to show resilience when faced with challenge. One of the Mandarin learners described his



experience of learning how to write characters:

**Interviewer:** Oh, so do you find it easy or difficult to remember the stroke order and what to do line by line?

**Student 4:** Very difficult but the more I do it the more I find it easier and the more I can actually do off by heart.

Interestingly, when asked about transfer of skills or knowledge to other subjects, several students pinpointed improvements in language-specific awareness, which they felt were of benefit to them in their Spanish (first FL) lessons:

**Interviewer:** Do you take any skills that you have acquired about learning and see them in yourself when you go to other lessons?

**Student 2:** Definitely in Spanish, you can look at words and sort of think of them in different languages and guess what they are, more flexible in lessons.

**Student 3:** I think Language Futures has made me understand how important pronouncing stuff is, and words and phrases is, to a language, so I think it has benefitted by Spanish with accent and pronunciation.

In terms of specific strategies that students were conscious of having used and developed by themselves during their participation in the LF programme, to help them learn, the following were mentioned:

- i. reading it over and over again
- ii. using known words to write new sentences or a paragraph
- iii. write it on paper, cover, check and move on to the next card
- iv. create (funny) imagery to make new language stick
- v. put the new language into a role play and practise it

Despite the overwhelming positivity towards the freedom of Language Futures, confirmed in all data sources, some students enjoyed both foreign languages equally (LF and mainstream classroom), and others explicitly preferred their first foreign language, precisely because the lessons offered more structure, which was perceived to be linked to a faster rate of progress:

**Student 5:** I've really liked how much freedom we have, and choosing what we learn and what speed we learn at, but I do think that the Spanish lessons have more structure so I do think I learn a bit more.

The subject of individual learner differences was evident in all previous LF studies and emerged here as a prominent theme, to which we return later in the report.

### **Teacher as designer and facilitator**

Students, mentor and teacher were consistent in their perception that the teacher was there in an overarching, supervisory capacity. The teacher herself reports needing to intervene and create different groupings to re-establish a positive learning environment:

**Teacher:** there are some very bright boys who are clearly very keen and want to get on with it, but they're just slightly held back by the attitude of the others, so in that instance, I've intervened and sort of split them into two separate groups, so given the keen beans to the mentor so she can work with them, and then I've taken the slightly less keen to work with them at a slightly different level to bring them back up again.

She also recognises the different nature of the teacher role within LF, and the impact that it has

begun to have on her whole class teaching:

**Teacher:** I think I have let go of the reins far more, not just in year 9 but in all my other classes, and actually there is a way of doing this independently which is just as powerful as me standing there and drilling, whereas if they're going on these lovely little voyages of discovery on their own, I feel as if they've got more ownership of it and then you have to obviously there are times when you do have to go back to you know the good old standard techniques, but yeah, I think it's changed my attitude to teaching, which is refreshing actually.

Those students who really enjoyed the freedom that LF affords, were also those who enjoyed the teacher's more facilitative role:

**Student 6:** I'd say the difference is it's more independent doing German because there's not a teacher watching you telling you have to do this and that, it's more independent so you can go about it at your own pace and your own method I suppose of working with the language. Spanish is a bit more controlled because it's got a teacher and it's a set lesson pretty much and it's a bit more free in the LF lessons I would say.

On the other hand, there were persistent views that upheld the effectiveness of direct, whole class teaching, claiming that it makes it easier to learn, the language is less forgettable, lessons are more interesting, and the experience is more varied in terms of activities to learn the language. There was also the view that independent learning methods sometimes wasted time because they led to mistakes, which then had to be un-learnt in a subsequent lesson:

**Student 2:** What we've found with LF this year, is sometimes you could learn it in a lesson where we haven't had a mentor or a teacher and then when they turn up and read it it turns out that we've used google translate or whatever wrong, and so then we've had to learn it again, so perhaps if you learnt how to structure it etc with the teacher it might be better before that.

### **School as Basecamp**

According to self-report student survey data, two-thirds of students spent on average 10-15 minutes per week learning their LF language outside the classroom, and around one fifth spent between 30-60 minutes. Very few claimed to spend more than an hour each week, and at the other end of the spectrum, more than a tenth of School A students claimed to spend very little or no time consolidating their learning outside of the classroom.

In terms of the activities undertaken, the most popular were: using apps to learn vocabulary, listening to songs and watching YouTube.

Interview data revealed that some students prioritised out-of-school learning in subjects where homework was set, mainly because non-completion would be noticed when books were taken in and marked and might incur a sanction. Thus the optional nature of LF made it less of a priority, although students still mentioned that they liked to do it. For example:

**Student 5:** The more important subjects that get checked on probably come first, coz you'd get a detention if you hadn't done it, but with the Italian we don't hand in our books, but I still like to do it.

In exceptional cases, individual students were, however, spending up to an hour and a half each week, researching new words, putting together things they'd done in lessons into longer sentences, and using some apps for specific vocabulary.

**Interviewer:** How long would you do you think on average you spend on doing Mandarin outside of in the class time?

**Student 7:** Er, probably every week probably about half an hour to an hour and a half, maybe.

**Interviewer:** And do you use any apps to build up your vocabulary? Do you do anything online?

**Student 7:** Yes, we use some Chinese learning apps, just for, not for the whole sentence, just for specific vocab, like the sports.

**Interviewer:** And this time that you spend, is that because you've been set homework or is that coz you choose to do it.

**Student 7:** Mainly coz I choose to do it.

In the case of Mandarin, learners were particularly well-served by extra-curricular opportunities to engage in a Chinese New Year party, to meet Chinese students on an exchange, all of which were taken up positively and enjoyed by all. However, as with the whole LF class, when it came to choosing to do additional learning at home, there was always variable uptake. One Mandarin mentor remembers:

**Mentor:** for instance, we actually cut up some sort of paper slips and then ask them to ask Chinese words onto it let's say 'sofa' or 'table' and asked them to stick in their house and take photos. Some of them did really send us some photos back and then they said, I shared them with my mum and brother but some of them just forgot to do it.

When there is no compulsion to complete work outside of the lesson, the choice to do so is a strong indicator of intrinsic motivation. Whilst we can draw the conclusion from these data that, overall, students were not sufficiently motivated to spend the sort of time outside of lessons that would have a significant impact on the development of their linguistic competence, we must not overlook the stories of individuals, whose out-of-class learning influenced more than just their LF language development. One student, for example, has independently transferred an out-of-class learning strategy from LF to Spanish:

**Student 8:** So I research new words, and I put things together that we've done in the lessons, so build longer sentences.

**Interviewer:** And do you do that in Spanish as well?

**Student 8:** Yeah

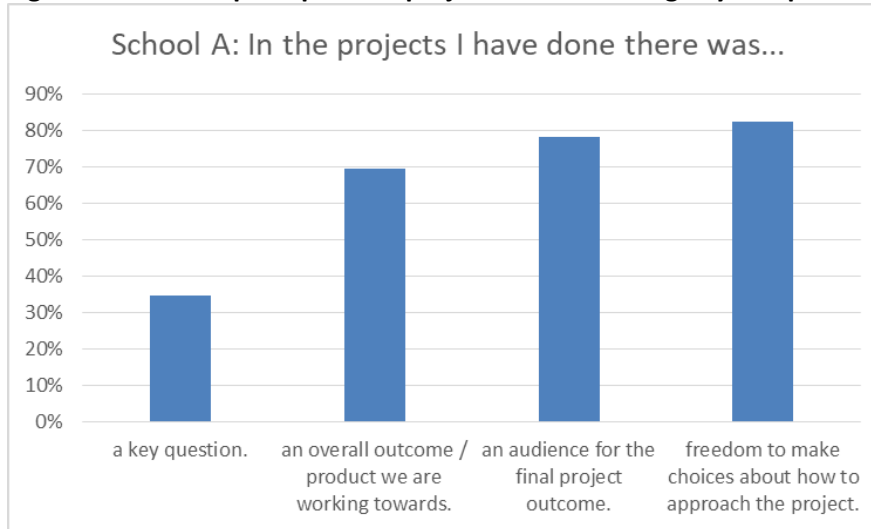
**Interviewer:** And were you always doing that in Spanish before you started LF?

**Student 8:** Not as much, I did do it when I had tests, but now I kind of do it during the week as well.

### **Project-based learning**

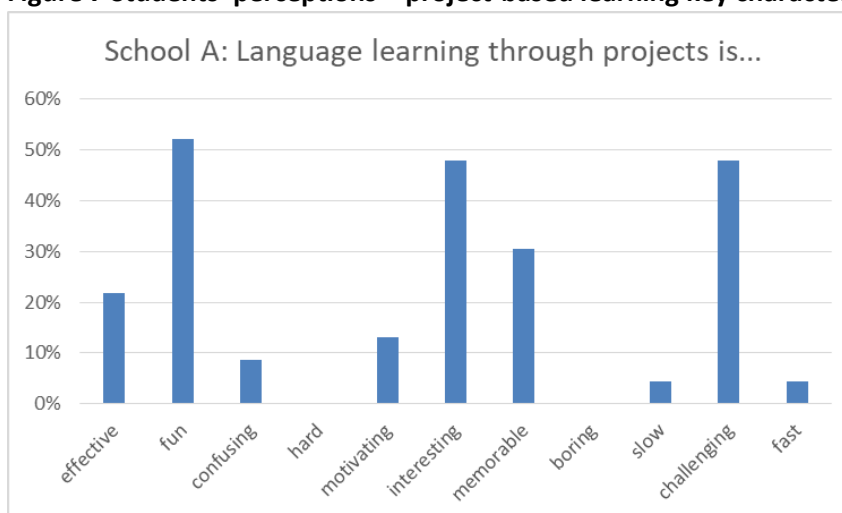
All students involved in this model of LF recognised that their learning involved the opportunity to engage with project-based learning. From the student questionnaire data there was a high level of agreement that their LF PBL involved freedom about how to approach the project, an overall end project, and an audience. Students were less convinced that there was a key project question. This fits with School A's projects, which focused on defining the project outcome (emergency language toolkit, come dine with me sketch, sports video presentation) and criteria, rather than framing a key question. (Figure 6).

**Figure 6 Students' perceptions – project-based learning key components**



Students were overwhelmingly positive about projects. Even those students who said they preferred teacher-led language learning to LF found projects both enjoyable and effective for language learning. Students mentioned the importance of PBL for applying their learning, using the language, giving a focus and purpose for using the language, and providing an authentic context for their learning. They also highlighted the value of projects for making the language stick in their heads. Working in groups made the learning fun, and sharing the project outcomes (e.g. watching the project videos) enhanced the interest because they were able to hear all of the different languages. Students recognised that they were sometimes given the opportunities to work on projects in their Spanish lessons, too, but all felt that they would benefit from more PBL.

**Figure 7 Students' perceptions – project-based learning key characteristics\***



\* Students were instructed to select the two responses that most closely matched their opinion of project-working.

One interesting finding was that for one student in particular, the usefulness of projects was related to the perceived likelihood of using the language it targeted:

**Student 1:** I think the projects are very useful. Some of them a bit more than others...I think the food was a bit and the basic phrases were a bit more useful than the sport that we're doing now... it would probably be a bit more useful if we went to China, so to be able to order in a restaurant, than to talk about our hobbies

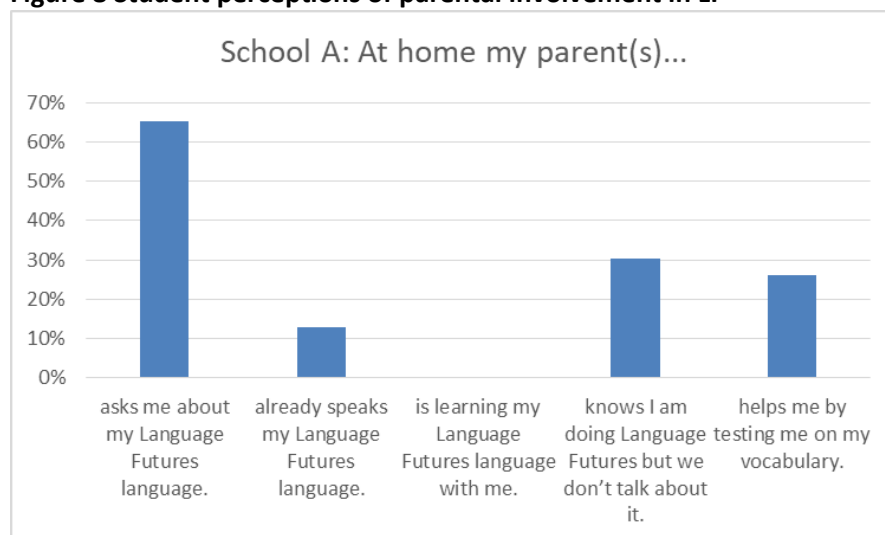
## Building a learning community

School A students are supported by their LF teacher, their peers, a community mentor and their parents. The student questionnaire and interviews sought perceptions about the level and impact of support from others on their language learning. Teacher and mentor interviews, classroom observation notes and teacher questionnaires were triangulatory sources of data.

## Parents

In terms of parental involvement, two-thirds of parents show interest by asking about LF, and around a quarter of parents support by actively helping to test vocabulary.

**Figure 8 Student perceptions of parental involvement in LF**



At the time of the questionnaire, no student reported that a parent was learning the language with him or her. However, interview data revealed that there were instances of parents doing this, as previous studies had also indicated:

**Student 5:** Quite often I show my mum what I've learnt, coz she's interested in learning it too.

**Interviewer:** Does she say the words back to you when you tell her what they are? Does she want to rehearse them with you?

**Student 5:** Yeah, I think so and she like tests me on them.

Although students later confirmed during interviews that their parents were not learning the language with them, there was an indication that parental interest in LF may have motivated students to maintain their out-of-class learning:

**Student 2:** I think I probably do like five or ten minutes, coz like occasionally my dad will ask what I've done.

**Interviewer:** And he's just interested because he's always interested in whatever you're doing for your homework, or is it the fact that you're learning Italian?

**Student 2:** I think it's coz we're doing like the language futures like he wanted to just see what it's like coz it's different to our other subjects.

The family interest in LF also extends to siblings; one student was confident that his younger brother would also want to do LF, whilst another student's sister had completed LF three years earlier:

**Student 9:** My sister who's three years older than me did do language futures but I think she did

Italian or something boring, but she's currently learning Japanese at the same time so it's like we're learning a similar language at the same time.

**Interviewer:** So she's gone on to learn another language after her language futures?

**Student 9:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** What year is she in?

**Student 9:** Year 12.

**Interviewer:** Is she doing a language?

**Student 9:** No, but she's doing like an extra lesson

**Interviewer:** Like enrichment

**Student 9:** Yeah

The implication here is that the seed sown in LF is associated with a long-term motivation for language learning, not necessarily a desire to master one particular language, but an interest in learning multiple languages.

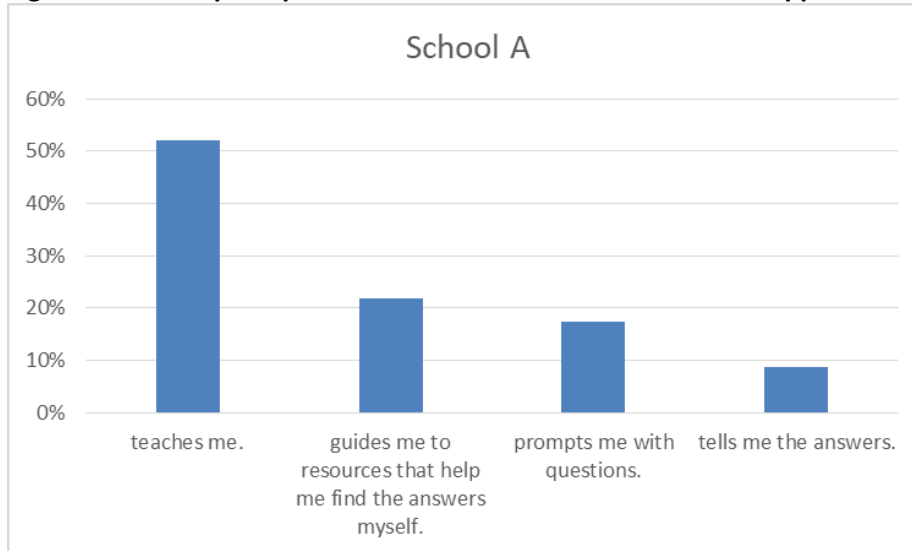
School A's model of LF involves measures designed to distinguish LF from other subjects, and specifically to harness parental support. These include a face-to-face meeting and an information booklet. Data from this study indicate that these measures correlate with a relatively high level of parental awareness about and interest in LF, which sometimes translates into active learning support.

### **Mentors**

Mentors are an integral part of the Language Futures programme. In School A's LF programme, mentors are volunteers from the local community who are expert linguists in the target languages; they may be native speakers or people who are fluent due to an extended period of study or time spent abroad. Key to the co-construction model of LF learning, the mentors are not intended to teach, but to guide learners, and once recruited they receive an induction and training session from the Language Futures Co-ordinator, who maintains communication with them during the year, via email and phone, as appropriate. At the time of the present study, School A had recruited community mentors for all of its LF languages: German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, Russian and Swedish, in itself an awe-inspiring achievement.

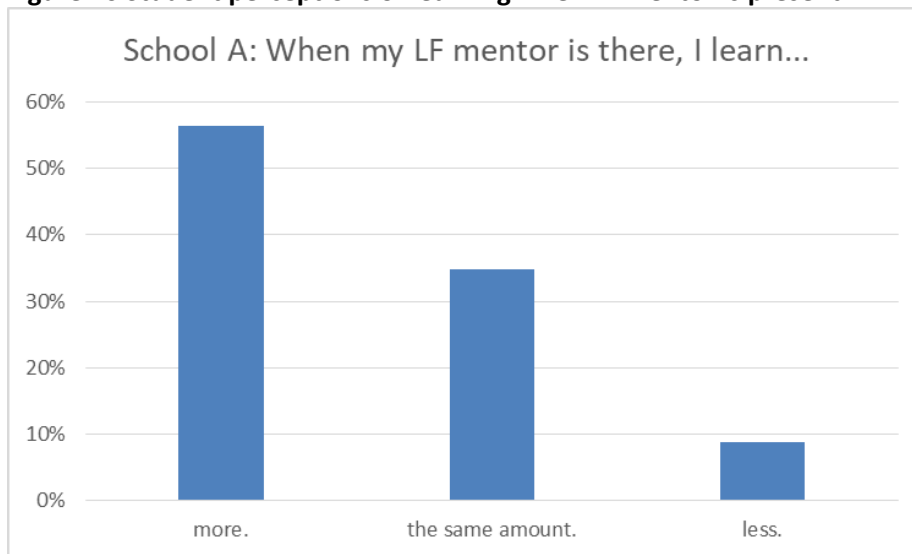
Despite the stated expectation that mentors guide rather than teach, student questionnaire data report that more than half of School A students felt that their mentors taught them, as opposed to a fifth who felt guided, and less than a fifth who felt they were prompted by mentor questioning.

**Figure 9 Student perceptions of what their LF mentor does to support them**



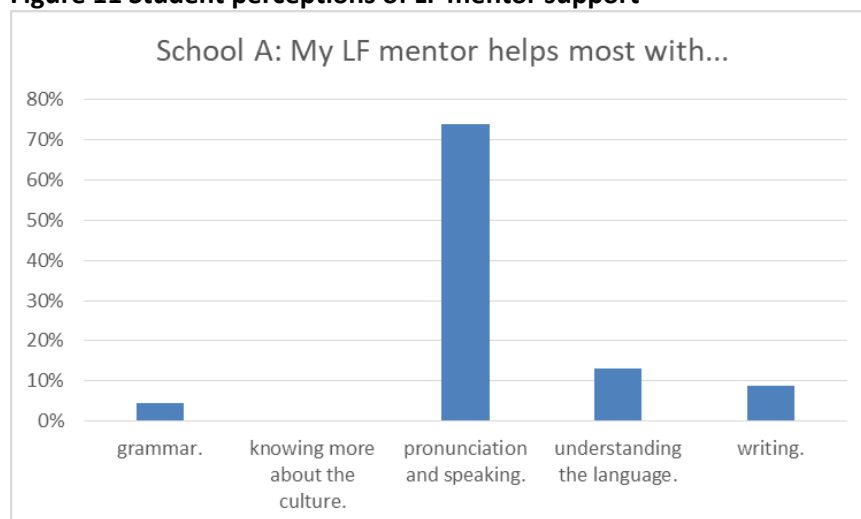
More than half of School A students believe they learn more when their mentor is with them, around a third think they learn the same amount, and a tenth of students state that they learn less when their mentor is there. Around three-quarters of students believe that their mentor supports their pronunciation and speaking development. Students were directed to choose only one response in this question, so whilst mentors may also support with other aspects of language learning, students are clear that they gain most from the mentor input on pronunciation and speaking.

**Figure 10 Student perceptions of learning when LF mentor is present**



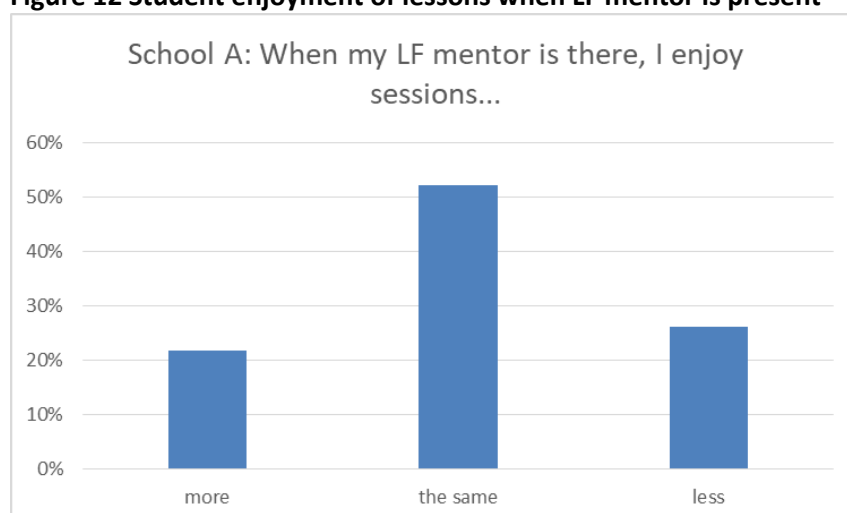


**Figure 11 Student perceptions of LF mentor support**



In contrast, only a fifth of students enjoys the sessions with mentors more than other LF sessions, and a quarter enjoys them less, with over half claiming their enjoyment level is the same, whether their mentor is there or not. This is in a context in which three-quarters of students are supported by a community mentor every week.

**Figure 12 Student enjoyment of lessons when LF mentor is present**



From the sociocultural perspective of co-construction, optimum learning is associated with expert support that is contingent upon learner need. A discrepancy between the levels of need and support may suggest limited progress, but also feelings of learner (and mentor) frustration. In this study, the mentor-student relationship and its impact on L2 (second or foreign language) learning emerges as one of the more complex themes, open to the widest variance of perspective. In order to follow up on the somewhat puzzling indications from the student questionnaire data, several queries and searches were run in NVivo, in particular a cross-tabulation of all negative and positive references to mentors and mentoring. What emerges is a constellation of interrelated factors; the difficulty of the LF language itself (for learners who have previously learnt Spanish only); the regularity / irregularity of mentor attendance; the students' own perceptions about their needs; and the mentor's approach to the mentor role.

Certain difficulties had already been identified by the LF teacher in the teacher questionnaire:

**LF Teacher:** The difficulties this year have arisen out of managing mentor expectation and involvement. Some mentors are trained teachers and therefore have a tendency to “teach” not “lead”. They also expect to have lots more involvement with the students on a teacher level – setting homework, doing vocab tests, tracking their progress and questioning the inclusion of students who aren’t motivated or who have learning, behavioural issues. We have had to tread carefully and make sure mentors feel involved but also understand the independent “collaboration” process of LF.

However, the interview data suggest that successful mentoring is not reducible to whether or not the mentor teaches. Tracing the pattern of perceptions, sifting the comments from all of the stakeholders it was possible to identify clusters of factors that were associated with positive mentor experiences and those which suggested less beneficial learning experiences. As the suggested pattern is correlative rather than causal, the representations are in the form of cluster diagrams.

There were two groups of learners with mentors who actively directed learning, in a manner akin to teaching. Both groups shared other features, including regular mentor attendance and learners with high levels of autonomy. Key differences were the dissimilarity between the LF language and Spanish (the students’ first FL), one a European and the other an Asian language, and a difference in the perceived need for support, which may or may not be directly related to the LF language dissimilarity. In the group where learners were conscious of needing direct support with pronunciation and writing, in spite of their high levels of autonomy, direct mentoring was positively perceived and led to progress. In the other group, students’ very clear preference for working autonomously was at odds with the direct teaching style of the mentor, and the perception that they could learn most aspects of the language without support led them to want only occasional help with pronunciation.

**Figure 13 Factors impacting on success of mentors actively directing learning**



**Figure 14 Factors associated with a negative mentoring experience**



At the other end of the spectrum there was a mentor whose modus operandi was to wait for students to initiate a request for help, which often didn't extend beyond the provision of a word meaning or the correct pronunciation of a new word. Whilst this level of non-intervention might have matched the needs of some learners, the perceptions of learners in this group were, at best, ambivalent. It was clear that they worked as a cohesive group; that they made the most of the links between their LF language and Spanish, that they had plenty of online and other resources to draw on, and that they kept themselves on task. However, the group's preference for Spanish lessons, and their comments about lack of retention of the LF language over time, suggest that this group may have been better served by a greater level of mentor guidance. In an observation with the class, audio from iPads was often heard modelling key language, but students seldom repeated the language aloud themselves. More autonomous learners might have taken the initiative for themselves, but this group didn't, and their preference for teacher-led Spanish lessons become more firmly entrenched:

**Student 3:** sometimes we play like a game and then we separate off into our pairs that we're sitting in and we do more activities to learn the... just the language but then in Italian we just write it down and it just stays there in our books.

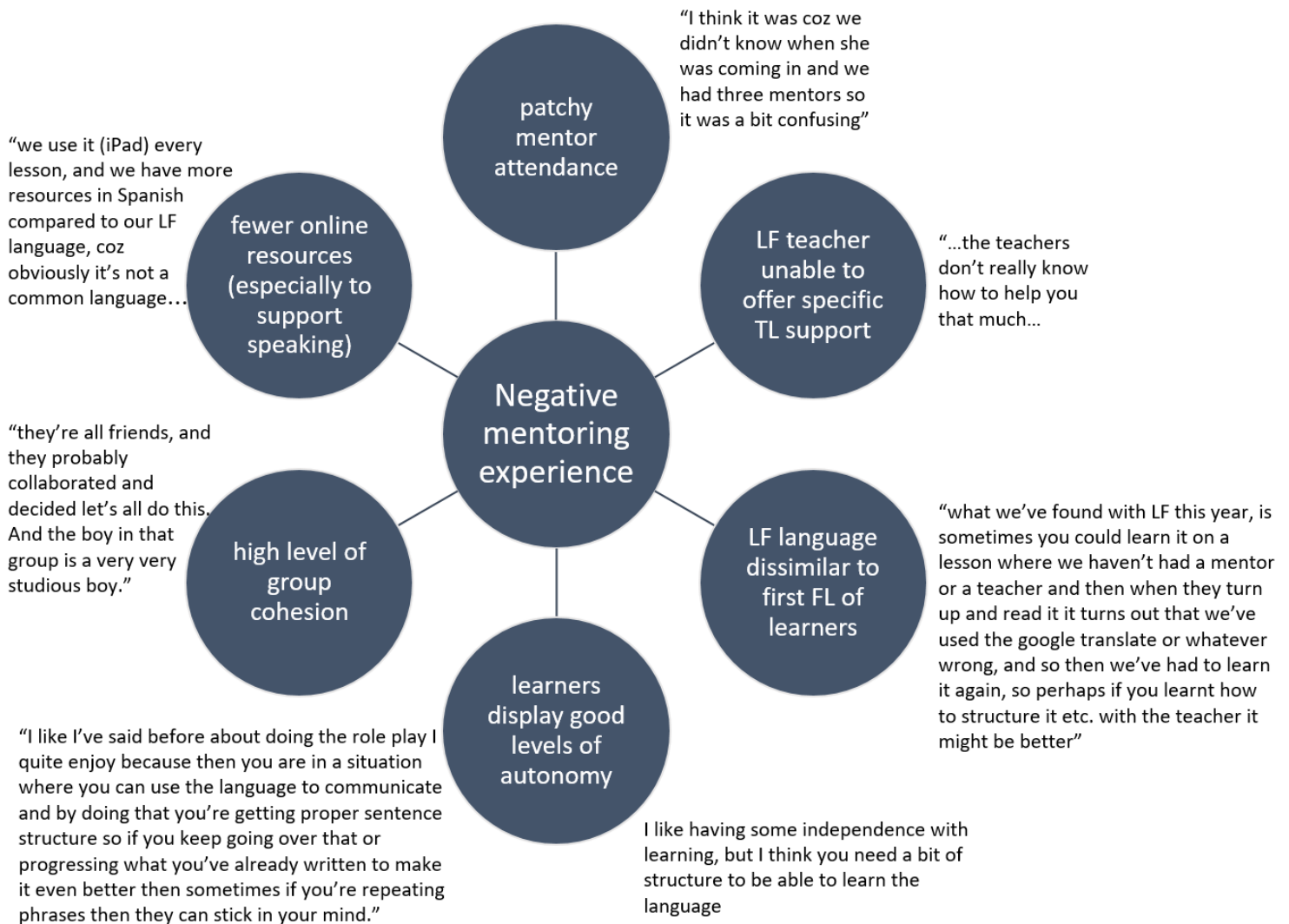
**Figure 15 Factors associated with an ambivalent mentoring experience**



There are other factors associated with a negative experience of mentoring. With one group inconsistent mentor attendance was associated with poor progress. In this situation there were other factors that may also have contributed. The language was not similar to Spanish, the LF teacher was not able to provide language-specific support, and there were fewer online resources to support independent learning. This collection of factors was believed by all stakeholders to impact negatively on progress, despite the high levels of group cohesion and student autonomy. All students in this group said that they felt they would learn more during the year than they did:

**Student 8:** I think at the beginning of the year I thought we were going to learn a bit more, and have a bit more of a structure to the lesson, but er.. yeah it's we've still learnt a lot though, but, yeah.

**Figure 16 Further factors associated with a negative mentoring experience**



In summary, there are many factors implicated in the success of mentoring, and there is no simple recipe that will work with all learners. Instead, what seems to be important for positive mentoring is that the level of support, direct or indirect, is in proportion to students' learning needs. Given that there are negative as well as positive experiences of mentoring in this small-scale study, we can conclude that it is challenging to get mentoring right, if by right we mean such that it supports optimum language learning. What this analysis has shown, however, is that it is possible to identify clusters of factors that might suggest the positive benefit of more or less direct mentor support. Informed by this knowledge, LF teachers and co-ordinators may more easily be able to identify a lack of contingency in the mentor-student relationship and be able to intervene to help to adjust it. The findings do, at the very least, provide an empirical basis on which to start the conversation.

## 4.5 Conclusion

This model of LF is offered to two top set classes in Year 9. Learners choose either to learn either French or Spanish (whichever they have not yet studied) or to learn a new language of their choice in LF, with the support of at least one other student, a community mentor, their LF teachers and their parents. The students in the top two sets represent approximately a third of the Year 9 cohort. Of those 66 students, 43 chose LF. The remaining 23 students learnt French (13 students) and Spanish (10 students).

In School A students choose their GCSE options in Year 9 to start in Year 10. Languages are not compulsory and students choose whether or not to continue with a language to GCSE. These are the options of those students in the present study:

**Table 10 KS4 Uptake Year 9 top set students in School A**

|  | No. students opting to continue with a language to GCSE | Total number of students | % cohort |
|--|---|--------------------------|----------|
| LF                                     | 30  | 43                       | 70%      |
| Classroom 2 <sup>nd</sup> FL (French)  | 9   | 13                       | 70%      |
| Classroom 2 <sup>nd</sup> FL (Spanish) | 7   | 10                       | 70%      |

There are several observations to be made, here. First, the data from this study indicate that participation in LF does not make students any more or less likely to continue with a language at KS4 than if they study a second language in a traditional classroom setting. Second, set against the government expectation that by 2025 90% all students will study a language at KS4, this level of uptake represents a significant shortfall, given that the 70% is, in fact, 70% of the top third of the cohort. However, we need also to remember that the LF students who chose to continue with a language now believe themselves to be more independent and resourceful language learners, as a result of taking part in the programme. This bodes well for their progress at KS4.

There is no doubt that LF holds a lot of value for these students. It is equally clear that some students feel they benefit much more than others. Individual differences play a key role in determining which students can make the most of the LF learning affordances, and whilst the programme already has well-established procedures for selecting students, it may be useful to use the findings from these data to identify a cluster of factors correlated with high levels of success and enjoyment of LF. One such list might include:

1. As a motive for joining LF, students explicitly demonstrate an interest in exploring independent ways of learning.
2. There is some indication that teacher-led language lessons might be perceived to be proceeding too slowly (a 'coasting' effect).
3. 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.
4. Students demonstrate an interest in using language for communicating with others.
5. 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.
6. Students demonstrate that they are typically resilient in the face of challenge.
7. Students are risk-takers, who enjoy any opportunity to work things out for themselves, and are unfazed by making mistakes.
8. The application to participate is not dependent on friends.