

Press Release

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The future of language learning: putting students at the heart of the curriculum, creating social cohesion. Lessons for the mainstream languages classroom and beyond

The Association for Language Learning (ALL) is the UK's major subject association for teachers of modern foreign languages, at all levels, and in all sectors. ALL has today published the findings of a two-year research study looking at [Language Futures](#) - an innovative approach to language learning. The findings have implications for mainstream languages teaching, examining crucial messages about choice and motivation, student autonomy, project-based learning, and the all-important learning beyond the classroom.

The study sought to describe the progress of learners engaged in the 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.

The report is authored by Dr Rachel Hawkes, the Education Researcher for **Language Futures**. Rachel has a PhD from Cambridge University, focusing on teacher and learner interaction in the secondary languages classroom. She is currently Director of International Education and Research at the CAM Academy Trust and is a practising languages teacher.

The motivational power of choice

Language Futures is associated with high levels of motivation, particularly for lower attaining students. 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 **Language Futures** 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.

Lessons for social cohesion

EAL learners and the implications for heritage languages. EAL (English as an Additional Language) learners of community languages in **Language Futures** make good to excellent progress, particularly in grammar and writing, putting 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. Progress made in the **Language Futures** language also has a positive impact on their other curriculum subjects.

Linking the school community to the wider community. The support of additional adults or older learners in the classroom, as role models, conduits of culture, one-to-one explainers of structures or vocabulary, is invaluable. All teachers know students whose understanding is suddenly accelerated when they spend a few minutes after-school with them individually. This is often done as an intervention in response to an identified lack of progress. We might usefully consider the benefits of recruiting community volunteer mentors or sixth-form mentors to support classes from the start of Year 7. Providing additional learning support in the classroom earlier for learners may promote less anxiety for lower attaining learners and more stretch for higher attaining learners. Many schools no longer employ foreign language assistants (FLAs) for many reasons including issues relating to resourcing and curriculum planning. Evidence from the vast majority of schools in the study suggest that there are, more often than not, adults and sixth-formers (within school and the local community) who can provide in-class support. There are models of this sort of support already in some schools and these show how adopting language volunteers or having other adults support students can support learning but also potentially link the school and wider community, promoting social cohesion.

The 21st Century classroom

The multilingual classroom. In **Language Futures**, students learn in small language groups where there is peer support and collaboration. They also learn ACROSS language groups thus appreciating the differences and similarities between languages illustrating the power of the multilingual 'experience'.

Putting students at the heart of the curriculum. The holistic nature of the project based learning approach of **Language Futures** is recognised as a key strength and students enjoy: 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.

Students leading their own learning. Students articulated their enthusiasm for **Language Futures** because it allows them to work at their own pace. For some students, this undoubtedly means a slower pace than the mainstream classroom, but other students are seemingly held back in the mainstream classroom because they are ready to make links for themselves and work more independently. They relish the opportunity that **Language Futures** gives them to do this in their language learning. There was also evidence that students transfer greater levels of agency to other subjects, including their first foreign language, but also other curriculum subjects. Students refer to not relying on the teacher, taking responsibility for what they learn, asking more questions, and wanting to find out more.

Students, envisage an 'ideal scenario' in which there is a mix of direct teacher-led instruction and more independent work. They suggest that independent work would not always follow instruction, but that they would sometimes have the chance to discover for themselves and then have a teacher-led lesson to take the learning on further or confirm their hypotheses. These were higher attaining students, typically boys. This could be part of an answer to how we might engage certain higher ability boys in language learning.

It is clear that successful language learning requires positive motivation, sustained effort and, above all, time. It needs enthusiastic, resourceful teachers and resilient, independent learners who embrace challenge. There is no perfect model and one size will never fit all because the process is dynamic, in constant flux and relies on interpersonal relationships. Download the full [Language Futures Research Report](#) or read the [Language Futures Research Study Headlines](#). For more information about the Language Futures initiative, please contact Project Manager Clodagh Cooney at ccooney@all-languages.org.uk

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Notes to Editors:

1. **The Association for Language Learning (ALL):** is the UK's major professional association for teachers of foreign languages, with a reach of over 4,500 professionals across all stages and educational sectors. www.all-languages.org.uk
2. **Language Futures** is an exciting initiative for creative primary and secondary schools interested in developing languages beyond the classroom. It works in tandem with the languages provision already in place in school, and is not designed to 'teach' a language, but to equip students with the skills to develop as independent learners supported by school, home and a language proficient mentor from the community. First developed in 2009 by Linton Village College in Cambridgeshire it was part of the [Learning Futures](#) initiative led by the [Paul Hamlyn Foundation](#), in partnership with the [Innovation Unit](#).
3. **Language Futures** background <https://www.all-languages.org.uk/research-practice/language-futures/background/>
4. The **Language Futures** approach <https://www.all-languages.org.uk/teaching/language-futures/background/the-approach/>
5. Explore ideas on how the approach can be used in a variety of curriculum settings. <https://www.all-languages.org.uk/research-practice/language-futures/getting-started/an-adaptable-model/>