

## Teaching modern foreign languages in multilingual classrooms: teachers' experiences

### What this study was about

The study examined the impact that the 2014 statutory inclusion of foreign languages (FL) at Key Stage 2 (KS2) has had on teachers' perceptions of FL teaching and learning in the classroom. It also asked about MFL teachers' perceptions of children with English as an additional language (EAL).

### What the researchers did

16 MFL teachers in the Greater Manchester area completed an online questionnaire which asked about their teaching experiences, the make-up of the school population, current FL provision in the schools, and ideas for best FL practice. The teachers had varying levels of teaching experience. Six were chosen for interview (see, right, p.4). The interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately 30 mins. to one hour. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and coded. Themes and sub-themes were identified.

Table 1. Profiles of interviewed teaching staff.

Teacher (pseudonyms used)	Profile
Maria	A teaching assistant with linguistic proficiency in Spanish through adult education courses. Teaching MFL across the school to all classes in both Key Stages 1 and 2 once a week
Amy	Year 6 class teacher and MFL co-ordinator. Linguistic proficiency in French through a French degree and completed an MFL specialism as part of her PGCE teacher training. Only teaches French to her own class
Ruth	Year 5 class teacher and head of year group in 'Outstanding' school. Completed a degree in Hispanic Studies and a MFL specialism as part of her PGCE teacher training. Teaches Spanish across upper Key Stage 2 and is the MFL co-ordinator for the school
Lucy	Year 5 class teacher and MFL co-ordinator across the school. Has an A level in Spanish but is delivering French. Teaches MFL only to her year 5 class
Suzie	Year 4 teacher and MFL co-ordinator across the school. Completed a MFL specialism as part of her PGCE teacher training. Has proficiency in Spanish through a Spanish degree. Only delivering MFL to her class
Michelle	A year 3 and 4 class teacher completing her NQT (newly qualified teacher) year. Has French A level. Teaching MFL only to her class, with no added MFL responsibilities

The researchers wished to use a qualitative approach to find out how teachers perceived MFL teaching in their primary schools, and what perceptions they had regarding EAL children's aptitude for language learning and attainment compared to children with English only.

### What they found

Teachers made both positive and negative comments.

- Teachers felt that MFL was 'inconsistent'. In other words, other subjects tended to have greater priority, and MFL was taught differently to other subjects (more playful approach).
- The crowded curriculum was perceived as having a negative effect on MFL provision.
- All teachers noted that MFL had a low status on the subject hierarchy, meaning that it was often seen as 'dispensable', and received low provision of materials and training.
- Teachers were aware that they needed to use alternative and additional skills in teaching MFL.
- With regard to pedagogy, the different and often 'unique' teaching methods were seen as raising barriers to learning on the one hand, but as invoking a positive pupil response to learning on the other hand.
- MFL was not seen as equal to other subjects as it was not assessed in the same way as the core subjects.
- Teachers reported a lack of innovative (i.e. not just games) training, and professional development.
- The small amount of time dedicated to MFL suggested to pupils that learning a language was not a priority.

- All teachers highlighted the enhanced abilities of EAL children to access MFL.
- EAL children were perceived as having more developed metalinguistic (language) awareness than English only children.
- Children with limited English had the chance to participate on an equal footing in MFL classes, which was not always the case in other subjects.
- Teachers reported that EAL children progressed faster in MFL, were better equipped to learn another language, had more confidence, and a more positive attitude to learning; they were more willing to 'have a go'.

*I do think they pick it up quicker. And they have more of a go at pronunciation ... I think they are more confident (Michelle). p.8.*

*I feel like, from my perspective that those [EAL] children I have had have thrived in French and MFL because they can do it and they are doing it all the time so what's another language? (Lucy). p.8.*

### Things to bear in mind

The study was a small-scale study from only one area of England.