Teaching modern foreign languages in multilingual classrooms: An examination of Key Stage 2 teachers' experiences

Article

Accepted Version

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Abstract

The statutory inclusion of modern foreign languages (MFL) into the Key Stage 2 curriculum in England in 2014 aimed to raise the language skills of younger learners in preparation for their secondary education. This change to the curriculum has occurred at a time in which the linguistic diversity within primary schools across the country has been consistently increasing. This study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to qualitatively examine the impact of the curriculum change on teachers implementing it in multilingual classrooms in Greater Manchester. Six teachers with varying experience in teaching MFL participated in semi-structured interviews focussing on different aspects of the curriculum change. This paper focuses on the teaching of MFL, as well as on teachers' perceptions of English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils' aptitude for language learning in comparison to their monolingual peers. The superordinate themes identified from the data included the inconsistent delivery of MFL in primary schools, and the role of multilingual classrooms as opportunities for augmented MFL provision. The findings from this study will have implications for teachers, head teachers, and policy-makers regarding the effectiveness of the initial implementation of MFL into the primary curriculum, with specific reference to the EAL school population.

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Keywords: EAL, modern foreign languages, teacher perceptions, IPA

Introduction

The statutory entitlement for all Key Stage 2 pupils (aged 7-11) to access Modern Foreign Language (MFL) teaching was implemented in England in September 2014 (DfE, 2013). With data collected two years post curriculum change, this research qualitatively examines the experience of primary school teachers who were teaching MFL in the 2015/2016 academic year. Within the study there is a special focus on those working in multilingual classrooms, as the introduction of language teaching in primary schools comes at a time in which the linguistic landscape of the country is becoming increasingly complex. Growing multilingualism, resulting from both mass-migration and globalisation (Extra & Verhoeven, 1998; Lin & Martin, 2005), is reflected in the 20.6% of primary school pupils in England now speaking a language other than English at home (National Statistics, 2017). Therefore, the inclusion of MFL in the primary curriculum adds a further linguistic dimension to the diverse makeup of contemporary English schools.

MFL teaching has been a traditional staple of secondary education for decades, with the most common languages taught in schools in England - French and Spanish - remaining consistently popular (Board & Tinsley, 2014; DfE, 2016;). However, an overall decline in the popularity of language learning in secondary and post-compulsory education in England has been apparent since the beginning of the 21st Century. This has raised concerns about the future of languages in education from both teaching professionals and politicians (Macaro, 2008).

In response to such downward trends, the government's National Languages Strategy, announced in 2002, ensured financial support was in place to promote and enhance language provision for children of all ages in England. For primary education,

this resulted in the proportion of schools providing languages provision increasing from 22% to 92% between 2002 and 2008 (Wade, Marshall, & O'Donnell, 2009). Such figures suggest that the strategy had been successful in generating a solid base for the introduction of the 2014 statutory Key Stage 2 MFL entitlement.

In addition to the inclusion of foreign languages into the primary curriculum, the growth in the number of English as Additional Language (EAL) pupils has created further levels of linguistic and pedagogical complexity in the classroom. The achievement of EAL pupils attracts significant attention from academics and government departments, with considerable focus on outcomes in core subjects from Key Stage 2 SATs and Year 11 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams (Demie, 2013). However, little research has been conducted on the attainment of EAL pupils in languages other than English and this is an area requiring further study. How teachers perceive the attainment and abilities of EAL pupils, compared to their monolingual peers, could also give researchers a useful insight into how this growing group of students is engaging with the curriculum (DeMulder, Stribling, & Day, 2014).

With interview data collected two years on from the inclusion of MFL in the primary curriculum, this paper evaluates the experiences of teachers delivering languages at Key Stage 2.

Our main research question is:

> *How has the introduction of statutory Modern Foreign Language teaching at Key Stage 2 impacted upon teachers in multilingual classrooms?*

We address this question by focussing on two main areas:

- *How do teachers perceive statutory MFL teaching in linguistically diverse primary schools?*

- *What perceptions do teachers have regarding EAL pupils' attainment and MFL learning?*

Foreign language teaching in primary schools

A well-used argument for the introduction of languages into the curriculum at an early stage is the apparent enhanced capacity that younger children have for learning languages (Hunt, Barnes, Powell, Lindsay, & Muijs, 2005). However, successful progression in the foreign language cannot be automatically assumed. It appears dependent on factors such as linguistic continuity in secondary education (Martin, 2000a), as well as other variables such as the length of exposure to the language, individual aptitude, teaching quality and motivation (Johnstone, 2003).

One factor that influences the quality of teaching that children receive in MFL is the attitudes teachers hold regarding the subject and the role this plays in establishing an effective curriculum. (Mellegard & Pettersen, 2016), and the fact that many teachers do not attribute sufficient importance to languages, in a timetable that is already overloaded (McLachlan, 2009).

Another important factor in the quality of the teaching relates to the lack of detail within the national MFL curriculum. The Key Stage 2 languages programme of study only sets out broad skills that should be focused upon (DfE, 2013), and therefore teachers rely on ready-made schemes of work or internal planning when choosing topics that are appropriate for their MFL classes. A third factor that affects the quality of MFL teaching is the worrying lack of confidence amongst existing primary teaching staff regarding the pedagogical demands of MFL (Barnes, 2006; Woodgate-Jones, 2008).

. To help address this issue, initial teacher training (ITT) centres across the UK began to offer an integrated MFL specialism into their courses (Woodgate-Jones, 2008). For the one-year primary Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) this has involved an optional 4-week placement overseas in a country using the target language which is not available to existing teachers.

In addition to teacher confidence, the impact of linguistic competence and teachers' perceptions of their own language ability are dominant themes in past primary MFL research. From the outset, trainee teachers' subject knowledge is the most influential factor on their subsequent confidence teaching MFL (Barnes, 2006). For in-service teachers the demographics of the school, and the burden of time needed to teach and plan for an additional subject, are additional obstacles (Legg, 2013). Finally, the status given to MFL by the individual school is also a factor; without the support and enthusiasm of the management to provide training and resources, it is difficult for MFL to be truly integrated into the primary curriculum (Legg, 2013).

EAL pupils and attainment

Although the current educational model in the UK promotes the integration of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) into the mainstream classroom (Edwards & Redfern, 1992), the physical presence of a child in a lesson does not necessarily equate to equal access to the curriculum or to academic achievement (Franson, 1999). Teachers' perceptions of EAL pupils' attainment and engagement with the education system are an important measure of how effective the syllabus is for a steadily growing group of children in the UK (Archer & Francis, 2006). With one in five primary school children now speaking a different language at home than they do in school (National Statistics, 2017), there is an inevitable impact on both teachers'

delivery of the curriculum (Butcher, Sinka, & Troman, 2007), and the attainment results on which pupils, teachers, and schools are evaluated (Strand & Demie, 2005).

Multilingualism, or proficiency in more than one language, is internationally gaining positive support and is viewed as an educational goal by many countries (McPake, Tinsley, & James, 2007). Yet, in McPake, et al.'s (2007) study, British teachers identified a lack of training and support for working with increasingly diverse groups of children from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Thus, the challenges multiculturalism and multilingualism bring to the classroom appear to be a concern for educators (Theodorou, 2011).

Past research into the attainment of EAL children in primary school has often focussed on their progression in English (Demie, 2013), with attention paid to their advancement in reading and comprehension (Burgoyne, Whiteley, & Hutchinson, 2011), fluency in English (Demie, 2013) and writing abilities (Cameron & Besser, 2004). These studies advocate extra targeted support for children as soon as they embark on formal education to help them meet expected standards in English.

Research into the attainment of EAL pupils across the core subjects of English, maths, and science at Key Stage 2 by Strand & Demie (2005) found that EAL itself is not a clear indicator for achievement. However, the children's level of fluency in English had a marked affect on results in Key Stage 2 assessments. Although children with developing fluency gained lower overall results, children with full fluency performed better and received higher test scores in all areas in comparison with their monolingual peers. This suggests that, given the heterogeneity of EAL pupils' language profiles, studies with this group need more sophisticated analyses.

One area of the primary syllabus which has received little attention is how EAL pupils respond to a foreign language curriculum. Cross-linguistic research from Reder,

Marec-Breton, Gombert, & Demont (2013) suggests that the metalinguistic awareness of children who speak more than one language is enhanced in comparison with monolingual children. This is further supported by third language (L3) research; with bilingual children out-performing monolingual counterparts (Cenoz, 2013; Jessner, 2008). However, this advantage has been debated, with other studies finding EAL children performing at a comparative or lower level than their peers on metalinguistic tasks (Bialystok, 2001; Simard, Fortier, & Foucambert, 2013). Therefore, although teachers may worry about EAL pupils coping with a new language before they have an adequate skill in English (Legg, 2013), the possibilitiy that their multilingualism could in fact equip them with the skills to excel as foreign language learners should be considered.

To summarise, the recent introduction of statutory MFL teaching for Key Stage 2 children comes at a time in which the linguistic diversity of classrooms in England is increasing. The addition of MFL to the primary curriculum has placed increased demands on teachers who often have limited training in foreign language pedagogy and who may perceive themselves as underprepared to teach the subject through a lack of linguistic competence. The growing number of multilingual learners in primary schools adds further linguistic complexity to the MFL classroom. Although EAL pupil attainment in core subjects gains much attention, less is known about how they respond to the foreign language curriculum. Previous research indicates that speaking more than one language may confer advantages when it comes to learning other languages (Cenoz, 2013), and therefore, MFL could provide an area of the curriculum where EAL pupils excel. With concurrent changes to cohort demographics and curriculum content, it is timely to address the research questions of this study:

- How do teachers perceive MFL teaching in linguistically diverse schools?
- What perceptions do teachers have regarding EAL pupils' attainment and MFL learning*?*

This insight could help inform teachers developing MFL curriculum in multilingual settings and promote increased consideration of the role of language diversity in the MFL classroom

Methods

Participants

Ethical approval was gained for the study through the University of Manchester's research ethics committee. An online questionnaire was distributed to 25 teachers from schools across Greater Manchester, who responded to an invitation to participate. 16 teachers returned a signed consent form and completed the questionnaire in full. The questionnaire focused on 4 main areas: teacher experience, the pupil demographics within the school, the current MFL provision, and ideas for MFL best practice. The questionnaire data were used to identify teachers to take part in more in-depth interview. The inclusion criterion for involvement in the interviews being involved in teaching MFL at Key Stage 2, and the presence of both EAL and monolingual children in the class cohort. Eight teachers met these criteria, but two did not consent to the interview component of the study, resulting in six participants. In this study we focus only on the analysis of the interview data.

The six teaching staff interviewed for the project are profiled in Table 1.

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 their 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.

Interviews

Prior to the interviews, the schedule was piloted with an experienced primary teacher who had been teaching MFL to their class for two years. This resulted in the order of some questions being changed and the removal of those questions that appeared repetitive (Turner, 2010). The interviews were semi-structured, with the use of preliminary open-ended questions to allow the participants the opportunity to speak freely about the area of their teaching experiences they felt most comfortable with (Turner, 2010). Subsequent questions focussed the interview more closely on specific areas. The six interviews conducted were all carried out within the workplace of each teacher and lasted between 38 and 62 minutes.

The audio recordings were transcribed by the first author using denaturalized transcription methods. During the transcription process, the data were anonymised and the use of vague descriptors for places and specific people ensured no individual could be recognised from the data.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA was chosen to analyse the data from the six semi-structured teacher interviews. The analysis technique addresses the idiosyncratic lived experience of an individual participant, using a social constructionist lens (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2010). Therefore, the study's focus on teachers' personal experiences of curriculum change, and the implementation of MFL teaching, support the use of IPA as the method of analysis. During the interviews, participants verbalised their own practices and experiences while simultaneously interpreting them in relation to their personal and social domains (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The researcher subsequently further interpreted the data provided by the teachers employing relevant analytical techniques. This resulted in a double hermeneutic perspective of the experience being developed (Brocki & Wearden, 2006).

Due to the relatively recent introduction of the curriculum change involving MFL in primary schools in 2014, and the novelty of examining the position of EAL children within the MFL classroom, an inductive analysis grounded in the data was appropriate (Smith, Michie, Stephenson, & Quarrell, 2002). Existing models regarding the introduction of primary MFL and the teaching of the subject in multilingual classrooms are being developed, but are both still under-researched, therefore there were insufficient theoretical frameworks available for a deductive analysis that could test a pre-determined hypothesis. Initially, the analysis involved immersion in the data

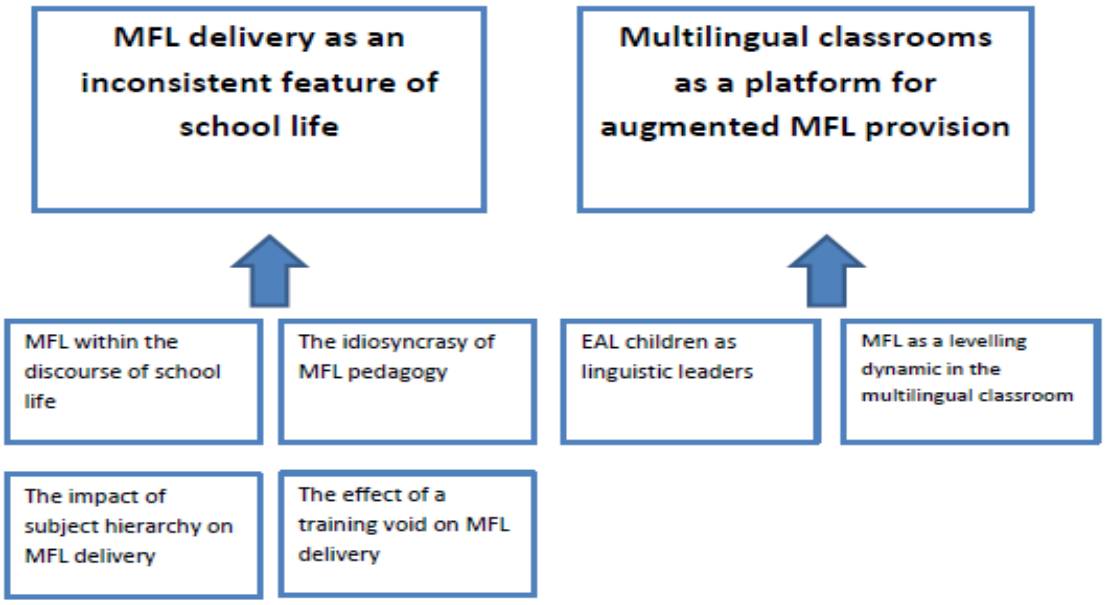
on an individual case-by-case basis through multiple readings of the transcriptions. This was followed by the notation of exploratory comments regarding content, language, and preliminary researcher interpretations of the transcripts (Smith, Michie, Allanson, & Elwy, 2000). These preliminary notes were made on each text in isolation, without reference to the content of the other interviews.

Next, emergent subthemes were identified through the application of a more psychological conceptualisation of the notes. This involved researcher interpretation and re-labelling of the initial notes to include formal linguistic terminology that encompassed the variations within the data, for example labelling the 'impact' and 'idiosyncrasies' of MFL provision as well as highlighting the 'dynamics' that may be present in multilingual classrooms This resulted in a concise phrase being devised by the researcher which still reflected the participant's account, yet was an interpretative result of the analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Once these subthemes were completed, they were added to a theme log, with a short quotation from the transcripts as an example. Once all the interviews were completed and coded, iterative analysis was conducted to identify common subthemes between the participants. This was done by repeatedly combining similar themes and re-labelling them in order to reduce the total number, whilst still ensuring all the data were suitably represented by the theme name. We addressed the convergence and divergence within the sample as teachers had varying opinions and experiences encapsulated within the same theme (Smith, 2011). By clustering subthemes together, a number of superordinate themes were then identified, each containing related subthemes. This process involved some overlapping subthemes to be merged together, as well as the renaming of themes to ensure they suitably reflected the data collected from all six of the participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Results

All six teachers perceived both positive and negative aspects to the curriculum change. Each teacher highlighted issues emphasising the inconsistencies surrounding the implementation of MFL, yet positive insights into the position of EAL children and the role of linguistic diversity in the MFL classroom were also presented. These components have been separated into two superordinate themes and a range of supporting subthemes. The themes focussed on for this paper from the IPA of the interview data are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Superordinate and subthemes from the IPA of interview data



MFL delivery as an inconsistent feature of school life

The perceptions teachers have of how MFL fits into the overall primary curriculum appear to present the subject as inconsistent in both its delivery within schools and in relation to other subjects attributed greater priority.

MFL within the discourse of school life

The way MFL is discussed within the school environment and the position it holds in the discourse of each school can vary greatly. For Ruth, working at a school in a diverse but affluent area of Greater Manchester, MFL is enhanced through enrichment and actively encouraged through support from a dynamic parent and community voice:

> I did a fiesta week, they helped loads at that. They came and offered their expertise… I had an au pair that came and we went round every class in the school and we taught them traditional Spanish nursery rhymes. (Ruth)

For Amy and Michelle however, MFL is a subject notably absent from school events and discussions; with little mention of the subject between staff or with pupils or parents.

> They wouldn't see it. They wouldn't know it was part of the curriculum…. They wouldn't know they even did French. (Amy)

> We don't talk about French really. The transition things are just English and maths and any results. As we don't have any tests in a different language... It isn't something you would discuss, really (Michelle)

Similarly, for Maria, the absence of MFL from the school discourse appears to stem from the allocation of a teaching assistant, rather than a teacher, to deliver the subject:

> You know class assembly, and week after week, in literacy we have been learning, in numeracy we have been learning, in science we have been learning, and then that's it.

> Because it's what the teachers teach,...we won't put Spanish in as that's nothing to do with us (Maria)

The idiosyncrasy of MFL pedagogy

The methods for teaching MFL to primary school children appear to have an impact on how the subject is perceived by both teachers and pupils. For Lucy the pedagogical differences between language teaching and other subjects can raise barriers for subject delivery within a school:

> One of the challenges about teaching it, is that it is not just like history… I'm not very good at history at all, but if I am planning a history unit I go and get a history book and I learn about it. But for me, it isn't about how much language do they know by the end of year 6, it is about the language learning skills. And that is something that almost, unless you have been there and done that, you can't teach it (Suzie)

However, for other teachers, the positive pupil response from the unique pedagogy utilised in MFL classrooms creates an opportunity for children to engage with the subject in a different way and gives it an alternative position within school life. The teaching of MFL is predominantly based on the use of games and hands-on activities, and has a ludic dimension that is not present in core subjects like English and maths. This more playful aspect of the MFL classroom sets it apart from what children view as regular schoolwork.

> They are really upbeat about it and we have games and things to do. I don't think they see it as an actual lesson, I don't think they do as we don't get books out and things. (Lucy)

> I think it is just like that there is no pressure on them and we play games and things like that. In English and maths there isn't a lot of time for playing games (Michelle)

> Every child, well I guess it is the way you teach it, loves doing it, they love learning languages, I've found. It's the way you present it, it's so different to other academic subjects. (Amy)

The impact of subject hierarchy on MFL delivery

Across all teachers, the low status of MFL within the hierarchy of subjects in the primary curriculum has an impact on its provision. For many teachers like Lucy, Michelle and Amy it is perceived as 'way down the list' (Lucy), and is a dispensable subject which can easily be omitted from the timetable. Even with statutory entitlement status, MFL is not deemed equal to other subjects, partly because it is not assessed as other core subjects.

> If you are having a busy week then it is just trying to fit it in desperately somewhere….it is one of the things that they are not being assessed on or checked on, then it is one of the things that you can let slip (Michelle)

> It is definitely the first thing to drop off the timetable… they are very busy and you know there is a lot of pressure to focus on maths and English. It does seem to be the subject, along with say RE that does get forgotten about (Amy)

Maria questions the status of the subject and what prompts such a low position of MFL within the hierarchy. In her view, her role as a teaching assistant (TA) teaching Spanish, positions it in an inferior context within the school:

> I don't know if it's because I'm a TA or because it is a subject other people don't have to teach or if people genuinely don't believe it is as important as literacy and numeracy (Maria)

Emphasising the low status of language teaching provision in primary schools, Suzie perceives the inferior position as not only an educational issue, but a reflection of British society.

> I just don't think it is of that level of importance to people in society for it to be of that level of importance for people in primary schools. (Suzie)

This perspective, from a professional who is supportive of MFL's place in the primary curriculum, highlights the difficulties schools and policy makers have in successfully embedding the subject in the educational psyche of English primary schools.

The effect of a training void on MFL delivery

The lack of opportunities to access suitable training was an issue raised by all teachers. The delivery of MFL appears to be negatively affected by the absence of developmental support. For those teachers confident in their linguistic competency, such as Michelle, there is a desire to access pedagogical training:

> We've not had any meetings about it or training. I feel kind of prepared just because of my A level…. I would like to know more things about what I should be doing with them. You know, how do I go about teaching it? (Michelle)

The lack of innovative training is also an issue, with opportunities often presenting repetitive material which does not allow for professional development:

> They were showing us all different games and to be fair you've always seen the games before, because they do games everywhere. Every time you go on the course you think oh god, not that again (Maria)

With a lack of CPD opportunities and core subjects overshadowing MFL at a local level, many staff tasked with delivering the teaching are left with little guidance or professional preparation.

Multilingual classrooms as a platform for augmented MFL provision

All teachers highlighted the enhanced abilities of children with additional language learning experience within MFL lessons. Some acknowledged how MFL can offer pupils with limited English fluency an equal opportunity to engage with the curriculum.

EAL children as linguistic leaders

EAL children are highlighted as the prominent language learners within their cohort by Amy in a school context where their linguistic profile can often be a burden:

> I think it is important to know that they are the language learners, aren't they? They are the children who have got the talent… I think it's nice for the children to recognise that because often it is the language barrier that holds them back (Amy)

Lucy suggests that the language switching that EAL children need to do in everyday life can benefit them in the MFL classroom:

> 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)

Both Michelle and Maria highlight the advanced progression EAL children make in MFL lessons and their increased confidence due to their exposure to multiple languages:

> I do think they pick it up quicker. And they have more of a go at pronunciation….I think they are more confident. (Michelle)
>
> I've noticed that because they are used to hearing different languages, my theory is that they pick up other languages quicker. I am quite convinced about it…They are used to hearing things as being different and so they tune in more. (Maria)

The acknowledgement of a child's learning skills is made by Suzie, who suggests that if a child has good learning behaviours already, their more complex linguistic background can be incredibly advantageous:

> I think if they have got really good learning behaviour, they are in a really, really strong place to be excellent linguists. And be able to go from bilingual to multilingual in a really short number of steps (Suzie)

MFL as a levelling dynamic in the multilingual classroom

For many teachers, teaching in a multilingual classroom presents them with the challenge of ensuring the curriculum can be accessed by all pupils, no matter their linguistic fluency in English. However, most of the teachers interviewed perceived the MFL classroom as a place where the dynamics were altered for EAL children and they had the equal access and engagement with the curriculum that is not always possible in other subjects.

> I think it puts a lot of kids on a level playing field. They are all learning and it is not necessarily the ones who are good at numeracy or literacy that are on top table for those, that are the best speakers….. It can be the EAL ones or the SEND ones (Maria)

This is supported by Michelle who also suggests that academically able children sometimes shy away from MFL.

> I think it might actually be those stronger ones who are a bit more wary of it, as it is like, oh this is something I don't actually know. With the SEN and EAL children, they are all starting at the same level. They all don't know. (Michelle)

Both Amy and Suzie highlight that the enthusiasm of EAL children in MFL ensures they participate and have an equal opportunity to engage with the subject:

> We are all using the same way of communicating, we aren't having to go through Google Translate or anything else. So yeah, it is a huge leveller. And I think their attitude has been to get involved and have a go (Suzie)
>
> It is a level playing field you know, in French…it is the way you teach it, isn't it? It's the enthusiasm and it is the fact we are all the same and everyone is having a go. (Amy)

Discussion

The IPA of the interview data has highlighted a number of novel points regarding teacher perceptions of teaching MFL in multilingual settings that could be developed in subsequent research and could ultimately assist teachers and managers with the future implementation of primary MFL.

The teaching of MFL in primary schools

The data suggest that the crowded curriculum in primary schools appears to have had a universally negative impact on MFL provision. All teachers interviewed perceived the subject as one which is overshadowed by other priorities within the school and is therefore often absent from discussions in day–to-day school life, as well as from the overarching educational discourse. This perception of 'overcrowding' is well represented in the literature (Legg, 2013; McLachlan, 2009) and may well be further exacerbated by teacher perceptions of their current workload. 93% of teachers in 2016 reported that excessive workload was a serious problem in their school (Higton, et al., 2017). Therefore, it seems likely that the introduction of an additional, non-externally assessed subject, in which most teachers have limited training or experience (Woodgate-Jones, 2008), will be avoided in favour of core, assessed subjects such as English and maths. From 2014, the increased focus on core-subject summative assessment in the primary phase is reflected in the amount of the weekly timetable dedicated to these subjects (Harlen, 2014) with a further risk that assessment preparation will add to their pre-eminence (Torrance, 2007). The importance attributed to these subjects by external agencies could be a significant factor which prevents the

consistent presence of languages in the classroom (Wyse, McCreery, & Torrance, 2008).

A consequence of the prominence of core subjects is the low status attributed to MFL within the hierarchy of class subjects. Although parental and academic support for primary MFL has been recorded in the past (Nuffield Foundation, 2000), it could be that this approval in principle is not strong enough to push the subject into the educational fore. Although the majority of teachers interviewed displayed positive support for MFL, which aligns with previous work by Hunt, Barnes, Powell, Lindsay, & Muijs (2005), the impact of sampling bias within this study must be considered. The linguistic competency and managerial responsibilities present in the sample may not be representative of the general teaching population, with colleagues not sharing the same commitment to the subject. Most of the teachers interviewed had access to a community of practice, a vital tool for building confidence and promoting subject engagement (Jones & Coffey, 2017), or alternatively, had strong linguistic competence to support their teaching (Woodgate-Jones, 2009). In contrast, the interview data regarding the regular omission of MFL from the weekly timetables by their colleagues suggest that primary language learning is often viewed as dispensible and is attributed little value within the hierarchy for those without such support. This perspective supports the previous findings of McLachlan (2009) regarding teacher outlook on primary languages and the lack of importance and esteem teachers hold for the subject.

The challenges the subject faces, if it is to be viewed as more than a low-status, peripheral extra for students, must be addressed at both a national and local level. Effective and enthusiastic leadership with investment in suitable training appears paramount if primary MFL is to transition into a mainstay of the curriculum (Board & Tinsley, 2014; Legg, 2013). If managerial teams were prompted by national initiatives

to perceive MFL as integral to primary school education, as is the case for the promotion of STEM subjects by the Primary Science Quality Mark ®, teachers might be more motivated to engage with the subject and deliver higher quality, consistent teaching. Furthermore, the utilisation of the wider school community such as teaching assistants, parents and governors to promote languages through events or the management of specific projects may also help to lift the subject's standing (Jones & Coffey, 2017). However, for many schools it seems that only those subjects that are currently included in national attainment figures can be afforded sufficient time and commitment in the timetable (Wyse, McCreery, & Torrance, 2008).

The perceived pedagogical difference between MFL and other primary subjects appears to be both a strength and weakness for the subject. Teachers appear to see a need to utilise alternative and additional skills in order to deliver quality language teaching, and for many this is a daunting prospect (Maynard, 2012; Board & Tinsley, 2014). The concerns of non-specialist staff regarding the demands of acquiring any language-specific pedagogical skills could be expected, given the time required to develop these skills (Woodgate-Jones, 2009), and the current workload of staff (Higton, et al., 2017). Although links between MFL teaching practices and other subjects, such as literacy, have been made (Maynard, 2012), teachers appear aware of a uniqueness within MFL teaching that they may not feel prepared for due to a possible lack of linguistic competence aswell as the more ludic nature of many MFL activities. Therefore, support from leadership teams and CPD opportunities are paramount (Barnes, 2006; Legg, 2013). Furthermore, by more effectively integrating MFL into the curriculum and encouraging a whole-school approach to languages with increased cross-curricular learning, for example, the anxiety experienced by teachers could be reduced (Jones & Coffey, 2017; Barnes, 2015). Without such support, the perceived

"idiosyncratic" pedagogy may continue to alienate teachers and prompt them to avoid the subject, further reducing the standing of MFL in primary school life.

"Although the data suggest that teachers perceive MFL as a subject that requires alternative pedagogical tools when compared to other lessons, it may be that a lack of guidance and certainty as to what constitutes appropriate pedagogy for primary MFL (Macaro and Mutton, 2009) is the real issue; with clearer guidance being called for at a national level (Cable et al, 2010). However confidence in teaching MFL can be improved if it is planned for as robustly and cohesively as other subjects. MFL pedagogy would benefit from exploiting cross-curricular and cross-linguistic opportunities offered by the SPaG (Spelling, punctuation and grammar) English curriculum, possibly from Key Stage 1. (Jones and Coffey (2017)".

Although teachers may retreat from the teaching practices of language learning, the data support studies, such as that by Bolster, Balandier-Brown, & Rea-Dickens (2004), that the opposite is true for primary school pupils, who instead display considerable enthusiasm for the subject. Active participation, communicative pedagogies, and opportunities for group work are now promoted in the foreign language classroom (Kramsch, 2014; Richards & Rodgers, 2014), and the findings here suggest that this engages children and places MFL more favourably within the syllabus for them. The altered pedagogy offers pupils valuable opportunities to communicate with peers that may be absent in other subjects (Maynard, 2012). This view is supported by studies into teaching instruction across primary schools, with McNess, Triggs, Broadfoot, Osborn, & Pollard (2001) suggesting that collaborative work and interactive activities are rare in core subjects and that assessment can often overshadow important formative learning. Although inclusive differentiation for MFL is still in its infancy for many primary MFL teachers (Beltran, Abbott, & Jones, 2013), the communicative focus

of the subject may offer an opportunity for schools to engage all pupils, in particular those who may not excel in the less communicative environments of some of the other lessons. If inferior language provision is delivered, or the subject omitted altogether, schools may miss out on this opportunity to develop the skills of those pupils for whom traditional pedagogy can be a barrier to learning.

EAL children and primary MFL

Interviewees repeatedly suggested that EAL children have a predilection for language learning that is less apparent in their monolingual peers. All teachers were able to give examples of children being better equipped for the MFL classroom, and attributed this to their multilingual background. As experienced language learners, EAL children may be equipped with linguistic knowledge that gives them an advantage in MFL (Maluch, Neumann, & Kempert, 2016). If this translates to an increased confidence in the foreign language classroom and encourages a positive emotional attitude to the subject, this may boost their language learning ability (MacIntyre & Gregerson, 2012). In contrast, if monolingual children feel a sense of anxiety in the MFL lesson, possibly due to their accessibility to class content being diminished by use of the target language (Meiring & Norman, 2002), research suggests their attainment in MFL will also be reduced (Dewaele, Witney, Saito, & Dewaele, 2017). Therefore, the EAL cohort may well have a notable lead in the subject that teachers can easily identify.

However, teacher use of the target language in many MFL lessons may not be consistent or significant (Chambers, 2016) and therefore any levelling effect created by linguistic accessibility may not fully explain such increased confidence and subsequent improved performance in EAL pupils. Alternatively, it could be that the motivation for learning a new language and the value attributed to language learning is heightened in

communities in which multilingualism is the norm (Canagarajah, 2007). In monolingual English-speaking households and across English society, a lack of confidence and competence in foreign languages may result in pupils not attributing any sense of importance to the subject and therefore not engaging sufficiently with the lesson content (Coleman, 2009). In addition, the small amount of time given to the subject in English primary schools may reinforce this notion that it is not a priority for pupils (Macaro, 2008) and success in the subject is not necessarily advantageous.

Although motivation and positive affect towards the subject may account for a proportion of the findings in this study, previous research focussing on bilingual children learning a third language (L3) suggests a number of alternative explanations for a perceived EAL pupil advantage in MFL. Firstly, as EAL children have existing knowledge of at least two languages when they approach their MFL studies, they are able to draw on a broader repertoire of linguistic skills as they learn (Cenoz, 2013). The advantages may come in the form of more accurate pronunciation through phonological or prosodic similarities between the languages spoken (Gut, 2010), or from a wider lexicon that can assist in the decoding and learning of new vocabulary (Cenoz & Todeva, 2009). Cross-linguistic transfer of morphology and syntax, for example the notion of grammatical gender which is non-existent in English, could also assist in L3 learning (Mahbube & Aliakbar, 2014), alongside heightened sensitivity to pragmatic cues that could help in foreign language communication (Soler, 2012). These linguistic advantages, however, may be reliant on the languages involved being closely related, in order for the full benefits to be gleaned by the learner (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008); this linguistic relationship may not be present for many EAL pupils learning French or Spanish in school.

If, as the participants in this study perceive, EAL children do perform better in MFL than their monolingual peers, it may be due to a potential development of enhanced metalinguistic awareness, which gives them a greater ability to manipulate and control language (Galambos & Goldin-Meadow, 1990; Cenoz, 2013). Jessner (2014) suggests that this awareness is vital for the development of multilingualism and the successful learning of additional languages. Research in this area has produced mixed findings (Bialystok, 2001; Bruck & Genesee, 1995; Reder, Marec-Breton, Gombert, & Demont, 2013; Simard, Fortier, & Foucambert, 2013) with an overarching conclusion that metalinguistic benefits may be limited to those with a more balanced bilingual profile (Bialystok, 2001). It should also be considered that the extent of any metalinguistic advantage may again be determined by the specific home language of the individual child. Cross-linguistic similarities between the L1 and the MFL in pronunciation, spelling and word order could significantly aid comprehension (Ringbom, 2007). The proximity and characteristics of the languages may play a vital role in how the languages interact (Jessner, Megens & Graus, 2015) and on how successful the learner is in the target foreign language (Reder, et al., 2013).

EAL children may also come to the MFL classroom with a more active learning approach paired with a stronger realisation that language is a system to be utilised for communication (Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1996), and may be more likely to approach foreign language learning in metacognitive ways that are different from monolinguals' (Jessner, 2008). Those with prior language learning experience will also adapt the strategies they use more effectively (Thomas, 1992) and show more self-direction in doing so (Bowden, Sanz, & Stafford, 2005). Such approaches may well account for the teacher observations of linguistic leadership in EAL pupils.

Nevertheless, there is great diversity within the EAL population of English schools (NALDIC, 2016) with many children possessing varying degrees of fluency in the languages they use (Strand & Demie, 2005). For some, there may be little literacy instruction in their home language which could hinder their written skills in the MFL (Maluch, Neumann, & Kempert, 2016). Furthermore, the advantages found in some studies with bilingual participants may be constrained in English EAL cohorts due to the socio-economic background of many pupils (Cenoz, 2013), as well as by their absence from formal education during periods of migration (Strand, 1999). As suggested by Jessner (2014) there appears to be a need for further research with multilingual children from lower socio-economic status families.

Conclusions and recommendations

Although the perception of a unique language teaching pedagogy can deter some staff from delivering MFL, the perceived "idiosyncratic" style of language lessons can engage a wide range of pupils, including those who may find the traditional methods of core subjects difficult to access. The positive response from children at Key Stage 2 towards MFL may act as a motivator for teachers to engage with it. However, further training and curriculum guidance may be needed to ensure teachers feel confident when teaching the subject. With limited space in the timetable to deliver MFL, pedagogical and linguistic confidence seems vital for ensuring staff are able to meet the challenges of teaching primary languages and consequently ensure the subject is well integrated into primary education. .

Furthermore, MFL classes could offer EAL children improved opportunities to access the curriculum through a reduction in the linguistic barriers that may often hinder their attainment. This levelling effect promotes high levels of participation in lessons

from EAL pupils and the interactive pedagogy encourages involvement. Moreover, EAL children are regularly perceived by teachers as linguistically more capable than their monolingual peers due to their exposure to multiple languages and this may be linked to improved learning strategies and enhanced metalinguistic abilities.

Further consideration needs to be given by teachers, leadership teams and policy makers regarding how to utilise MFL pedagogy effectively in increasingly diverse English schools. Research is needed to empirically address whether EAL children have the perceived enhanced metalinguistic skills and awareness which could see them excelling in MFL. By exploring how EAL children may differ from their monolingual counterparts in the way they approach and react to MFL provision, there could be an opportunity to develop curriculum that caters well for the diversity within multilingual classrooms.

Funding

This research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council – grant number ES/J500094/1.

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