

## English and target language use in the Scottish modern language classroom: Teacher and pupil attitudes and perceptions

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**Abstract:** Modern language teachers in Anglophone contexts face a unique problem in motivating their pupils to learn languages other than English, given its global predominance. In an effort to better cultivate a multilingual society, the Scottish government is currently rolling out the 1+2 initiative, which guarantees pupils the opportunity to learn two modern languages in addition to their mother tongue. Unlike other Anglophone contexts where the amount of target language use may be policy driven, Scottish teachers are at liberty to decide how much target language to use in the classroom. There are few studies to date that explore attitudes toward language use in the Scottish language classroom in general, let alone pupil attitudes specifically. As 1+2 is expected to be fully implemented across Scotland by 2021, an understanding of the factors influencing pupil perceptions, such as the teacher's language use practices, will become increasingly important in raising awareness of the Anglophonic language learning experience. This paper presents an exploratory PhD case study that conducts questionnaires and interviews with teachers and pupils of Spanish, French, German and/or Italian in Scottish secondary schools. Additionally, the use of metaphor analysis and a cartoon storyboard-drawing task offer a creative alternative in seeking to better understand wider social and emotional dimensions influencing pupils' thinking.

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**Keywords:** language attitudes, monolingual culture, Anglophone language learners, language use practices, creative methods

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### Introduction

English is an undeniably useful language. Despite Phillipson's (1992) critique that the assertion of English throughout the world has resulted in the oppression of other languages and their respective cultures, the fact remains that English is still needed and sought after in a way that other languages are not (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). For teachers of modern languages such as French or Spanish, the widespread status of English as a lingua franca poses a problem. This is not a new problem, as Chambers (1993, p. 15) previously pointed out:

*"We can show our pupils maps of where French/German/Spanish/Russian are spoken. We can show them statistics of the numbers of people who speak these languages as their mother tongue. We can discuss their importance in the world of trade and commerce...No matter how hard we try, however, the fact that most of our pupils already have a relatively high level of competence in the world business language #1, and can make themselves understood almost anywhere, can pose us a problem in terms of motivation"*

In Scotland, school uptake in most modern languages continues to decline (Scottish Government, 2012). Gayton's (2016) recent study conducted with 13 Scottish modern

language teachers revealed that what Chambers (1993) stated resonates with them; that English is viewed as more important than other modern languages and that motivating pupils to learn English in other parts of the world is likely to be easier than motivating pupils to learn languages other than English. Additionally, the teachers in that study felt that government initiatives to improve modern language uptake do little to positively impact on pupil and parent language learning attitudes. This is a particularly interesting finding in light of the 1+2 initiative, which is soon to be fully implemented. It remains unclear whether 1+2 will be effective in encouraging pupils to communicate confidently in more than one language. Perhaps an exploration into the practices currently taking place in the language classroom must first be considered before we can fully understand how best to address language learning needs in Scotland.

### **L1 (mother tongue) or L2 (target language)?**

With respect to L1 and L2 use in the language classroom, researchers and practitioners alike have both supported and challenged positions that propose total or partial exclusion of L1 (Macaro, 2001). Proponents of L1 exclusion might argue that even conducting administrative tasks (giving instructions, redirecting off task behaviors, discussing tests and quizzes, etc.) in the target language offers authentic opportunities for language that should not be overlooked (Cook, 2016). Moeller and Roberts (2013) venture that using a so-called 'maximal' L2 approach fosters intrinsic motivation, though there are few to no studies to date that examine a link between high amounts of L2 usage and pupil motivation.

Many teachers likely support the use of L1 in the classroom among earlier-level language learners, and for building classroom rapport regardless of learner level. Forman (2010, p. 71) summarises seven other common principles influencing teachers' decisions to incorporate L1 into the language classroom, which can be seen in Table 1.

1	<b>Cognitive</b>	<i>L2 knowledge</i>	to explain L2 vocabulary, grammar, usage, culture
2	<b>Affective</b>	<i>solidarity</i>	to facilitate easy, “natural” interaction amongst students and teacher
3		<i>interpersonal development</i>	to develop collaborative, team-work abilities
4	<b>Pedagogic</b>	<i>time-effectiveness</i>	to make good use of limited classroom time
5		<i>comprehensibility</i>	to convey meaning successfully
6		<i>inclusivity</i>	to ensure that all students can participate
7		<i>contingency</i>	to respond to immediate teaching/learning needs

**Table 1:** 7 principles of L1 use in L2 teaching (Forman, 2010, p. 71)

In addition to the cognitive, affective (i.e. emotion-related) and pedagogic reasons for using L1 summarised above, the decision of how much L1 to include in the language classroom has also been framed by policy, pupil uptake and sociocultural perspectives in language teaching research.

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages recommends conducting 90% of classroom time in the target language (ACTFL, 2010). Yet according to survey data gathered by Hlas (2016), teachers in American classrooms of Spanish felt they needed to use L1 to combat low pupil energy levels and decreased enrolment; despite potential advantages to maximal target language input, a 90% target language policy could likely pose detriments to the pupil language learning experience. In the UK, where no such language use directives are in place, little is known about teachers’ L1/L2 use practices and beliefs. Historically, L1/L2 research has primarily been investigated through quantitative analysis of the amounts of L1 used in the classroom, and its functions (Lin, 2013). A qualitative focus on L1/L2 use could paint a more complex picture of how language use practices impact on the language learning experience, but this is not enough. Lin (2013) suggests that we also need to “situate the classroom in its larger socioeconomic and political contexts and to re-examine the pedagogic goals of the classroom to see if they are really serving the needs of the students” if we are to continue embracing and broadening alternative perspectives on L1/L2 research (p. 213). Swain and Lapkin (2013) explored the use of L1 in classrooms of ‘linguistically homogenous’ Canadian pupils framed by constructs in Vygotskian sociocultural theory, which emphasises how social interactions play a fundamental role for language development (p. 102). Ultimately, they recommend that pupils be able to use L1 freely in order to negotiate meaning, build confidence and draw comparisons across linguistic

repertoires. While their study takes a critical stance toward principles of immersion education, their contribution still reflects the descriptive, repetitive and arguably defensive nature of existing literature on L1/L2 practices to which Lin (2013) refers.

### **Challenging monolingual language perceptions in the Anglophone context**

Following sociocultural perspectives of the language classroom, Levine (2014) has advanced the notions of L1/L2 use, or codeswitching, as an integrated and dynamic system of codes co-constructed by both teacher and pupils. Levine depicts the language classroom as a multilingual space, but in many Anglophone contexts, the language classroom may still reflect a predominantly monolingual environment. Free use of L1 does not necessarily equate to a systematic and pedagogically effective blend of L1 (predominantly English) and target language. So how does language use in modern language classrooms in the Anglophone world contribute to pupil desire and/or willingness to use the target language? Do the language practices in place have any effect on the way that pupils view language use and on their intrinsic desire to want to speak multiple languages? Situating the Anglophone language classroom within its larger social and political context, as Lin (2013) implores, could reveal implications for how language use practices contribute to attitudes and perceptions toward multilingualism in the English-speaking world. The uncertainty as to whether Scotland will establish stronger relationships than other parts of the United Kingdom with Europe makes the Scottish language classroom a particularly interesting and timely research focus.

What pupils actually know and think about multilingualism remains unclear. Lanvers (2015) states that pupils in the UK tend to have little knowledge about languages across the world. In an effort to enhance pupil awareness, Lanvers, Hultgren and Gayton (2019) designed an intervention lesson pack that explicitly instructed pupils on the cognitive benefits of being able to speak multiple languages, as well as on the global spread of English. They found that transparency regarding these topics could help to change pupils' attitudes, and perhaps even discourage hegemonic attitudes towards English. A study that purposefully draws on pupils' thoughts could be one of the first to share insight from the young learner's mind on topics such as language identity, language learning motivation and multilingualism.

### **Teacher and learner beliefs**

Furthermore, a study that compares teacher and pupil attitudes and perspectives toward language use practices in the classrooms, as well as their wider implications, could reveal crucial mismatches or gaps in the Scottish context worth further investigation. This may offer teachers important opportunities for reflection on their practices. Many studies to date have shown mismatches in teacher and pupil attitudes and perceptions toward the classroom language practices. In a study that investigated the effect that teacher L1/L2 use has on pupil L1/L2 use, Chavez (2016) found that university students in American German-learning classrooms were less likely to imitate teachers who used L2 exclusively than teachers who maintained a more even L1/L2

balance. This suggests that learners are not necessarily more likely to use L2 the more L2 input they receive, contrary to the idea that maximising L2 input primes the learner for more L2 output (Cook, 2001). Brown (2009) pointed out that teachers perceived higher levels of enthusiasm in using L2 among their pupils than pupils actually reported, yet Levine (2003) found that teachers perceived higher anxiety levels associated with L2 use than pupils reported. Investigations of pupil attitudes and perceptions alongside teacher attitudes and perceptions have tended to be at the tertiary level. Hall and Cook's (2013) large scale study revealed that learners wanted more opportunities for L2 spanned across 17 different primary, secondary and tertiary settings. However, this study was conducted in EFL/ESL learning contexts. The question remains as to what extent modern language (ML) learners in Anglophone contexts want opportunities for L2 use, let alone the extent to which they are *aware* of their own attitudes towards L2 use. A study that not only explores attitudes and perceptions among both teachers and pupils in the Anglophone context, but one that also takes an in-depth approach in seeking to understanding how and why they may be important in promoting multilingualism and a multilingual identity among Scottish communities, is therefore pertinent.

### **Rationale for the current study**

To sum up, studies of language learning classrooms have dedicated ample attention to English learning contexts, given the global relevance of English as a *lingua franca*. Teachers of languages other than English are now faced with the difficult task of encouraging their students to see why learning French or Spanish, for example, is just as warranted as being able to speak English. For the 1+2 initiative to be successful, this is becoming an especially relevant challenge in Scotland. Though 1+2 aims to promote communicative proficiency in at least 3 languages, there is little guidance as to how teachers are to most effectively implement this initiative. As a result, teachers make individual decisions on how best to approach L1/L2 use in the classroom, which are likely to be anchored in a wide range of unexplored pedagogical and philosophical differences among Scottish language teachers. Understanding their language use attitudes, and perhaps even more importantly their pupils' attitudes towards language learning and language use, could be a step towards raising awareness on the topic of multilingualism in Scotland as well as in the Anglophone world.

### **Methodology**

The current study, which is part of a doctoral project being carried out within the Moray House School of Education at the University of Edinburgh, aims to provide a snapshot of teacher and pupil attitudes to the English and target language use practices in Scottish modern language classrooms. The study also questions how language use attitudes may relate to wider aspects of the pupil language learning experience in Scotland, such as motivation and identity.

In August 2019, emails were sent to head teachers at over 70 schools in Edinburgh, East Lothian, West Lothian, Falkirk and Fife. Head teachers who approved of the study

forwarded information to their modern language departments. Of the 70, ten modern language teachers expressed interest, with six maintaining contact after initial correspondence. The difficulty of accessing schools in Scotland has certainly presented a challenge. Despite this, I hope that teachers might see the potential value that this research presents in terms of opportunities for reflection and for allowing teachers to glean information on pupils' perspectives. In order to fit around teachers' already demanding schedules, data collection procedures are organised flexibly with each individual teacher's timetable.

I chose to include classes of S1-S3 modern languages (French, Spanish, Italian and/or German) in order to target the crucial period that takes place before pupils choose whether or not to continue learning a language. Ethical approval from the University of Edinburgh and respective councils was sought prior to the distribution of consent forms and data collection.

I addressed the first and third questions relating to teachers' attitudes and perceptions using questionnaires and interviews. With pupils, I decided to integrate traditional methods (questionnaires and interviews) with more creative methods suitable for this age group. For example, questionnaires include a section eliciting metaphors, which Fisher (2017) advocates for their potential in revealing wider affective and social dimensions of pupils' thinking. Additionally, a cartoon storyboard drawing activity serves as both a prop for easing pupils into interviews and as an alternative way to reveal pupils' perceptions on how they associate themselves with the languages used in the classroom (Brenner, 2006; Melo-Pfeifer, 2015).

## Initial Findings

A small-scale pilot study was carried out with a teacher of S2 French and five pupils in one secondary school. The teacher questionnaire revealed that the teacher strongly encouraged ample use of L1 in her classroom by both the teacher and the pupils, as well as an integration of both French and English for many tasks, which are summarised in Tables 2 and 3 below.

Language	Task
English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explaining a grammar topic</li> <li>Discussing administrative information</li> <li>Addressing/redirecting off task behaviors</li> </ul>
English & French	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Giving instructions on a task</li> <li>Introducing a cultural topic</li> <li>Interacting with a pupil outside of class</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building rapport</li> <li>• Assisting during a communication breakdown/lack of comprehension</li> <li>• Establishing class solidarity</li> <li>• Giving oral and written feedback</li> <li>• Responding to pupil use of English</li> </ul>
French	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defining an unknown word</li> </ul>

**Table 2:** Teacher beliefs on teacher English/TL functions

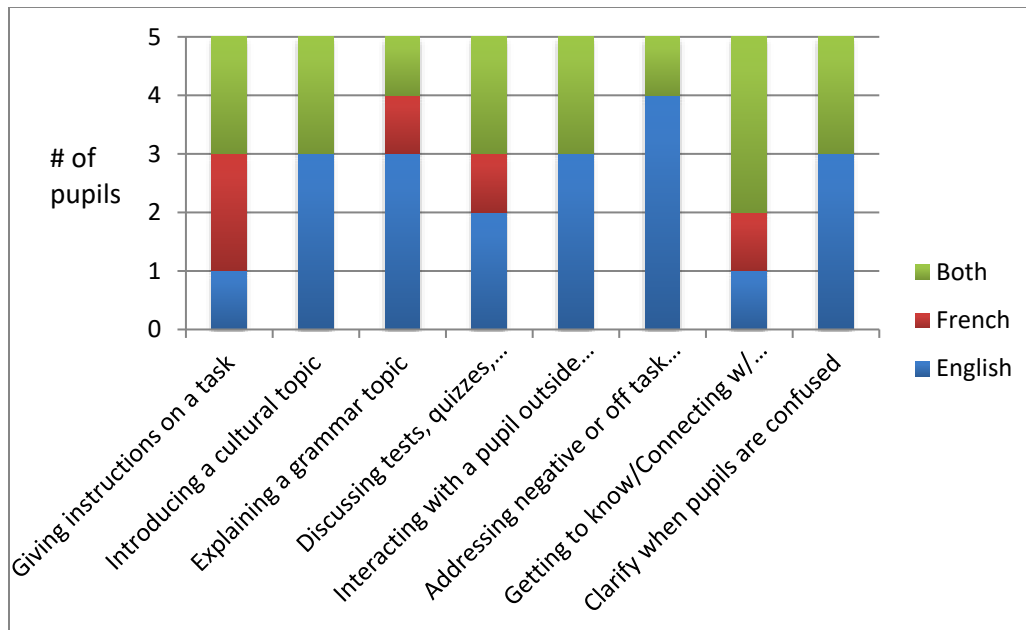
Language	Task
English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking</li> </ul>
English & French	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doing a cultural activity</li> <li>• Doing a grammar activity</li> <li>• Asking a question/asking for help</li> </ul>
French	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During pair &amp; group work/negotiating meaning</li> <li>• Speaking with classmates during class</li> <li>• Using survival phrases (asking to go the bathroom, water fountain, etc.)</li> </ul>

**Table 3:** Teacher beliefs on pupil English/TL functions

Notably, the teacher feels that her own language use should include a mix of French and English, while her expectations for pupils included a mix of English and French, as well as French only for certain tasks (during collaborative work, speaking with classmates, using survival phrases). Contrary to Swain and Lapkin's (2013) recommendations, the teacher believes that pupils should negotiate meaning and collaborate on an activity using the target language. This could likely be an ideal vision for many modern language teachers, which begs the question: How can language teachers encourage pupils to want to use the target language amongst themselves? Is this a realistic goal in the Anglophone learning context between S1-S3 and if not, why?

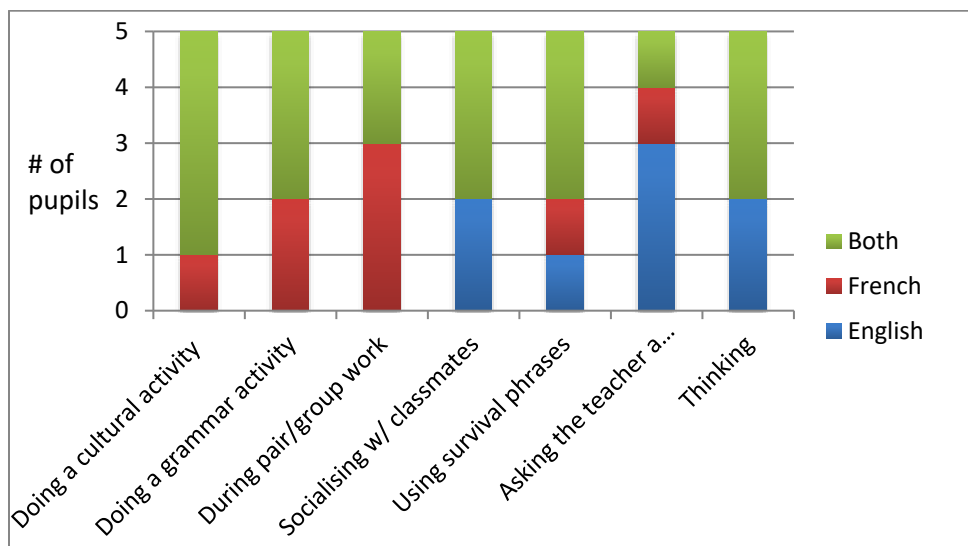
Pupil questionnaires corroborated many of the teacher's sentiments toward English use in the classroom. All five pupils report satisfaction with their teacher's current use of English and target language. Interestingly, four out of five pupils believe that they use too little French and too much English in the classroom. As can be seen in Figure 1, pupils believe that the teacher should use English or a combination of target language and English for many tasks.





**Figure 1:** Pupil beliefs on teacher English/TL use

When giving instructions, two pupils believe that the teacher should use only French and one pupil believes that grammar and administrative items should be discussed in French as well as for the purposes of getting to know a pupil. In terms of their own English and target language use, which can be seen in Figure 2, pupils have a mix of personal expectations.



**Figure 2:** Pupil beliefs on pupil English/TL use

Most pupils tend to believe that a blend of English and the target language should be used for many tasks, though three agree with the teacher in their belief that only the target language should be used during collaborative tasks. Pupils were also asked to relate their experience of learning modern languages in the form of a metaphor, which

was accompanied by a ‘because’ clause to allow for expansion. These were analysed thematically, the themes of which are summarised in Table 4.

Theme	Description of metaphor
Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food that one enjoys</li> <li>• Food that can be built up, has layers adding to its complexity (e.g. burger, sandwich)</li> <li>• Food that is healthy but not enjoyable</li> </ul>
Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Someone difficult to understand (e.g. a baby)</li> <li>• Someone with characteristically dull or bookish features (e.g. monotone voice, glasses)</li> <li>• Someone curious</li> <li>• Someone both quiet and loud/energetic</li> </ul>
Difficult/Impossible task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training a bumble bee</li> </ul>
Painful experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jumping in front of a bus</li> </ul>
Surmountable challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning to ride a bike</li> </ul>

**Table 4:** Pupil metaphors

One pupil stated that learning French was like,

*“learning about another version of myself...”*

...because...

*“...I feel like my personality changes when I speak French. I think I become more confident.”*

This pupil’s insight touches on multilingualism, motivation and identity. The use of French makes the pupil imagine a different self, echoing aspects of Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self-System. This theoretical framework distinguishes between the ideal self (visualising oneself using the target language for personal fulfilment) and the ought-to self (visualising oneself meeting target language goals as a result of external pressures, such as from a teacher or parent, or for instrumental purposes, such as succeeding in an exam).

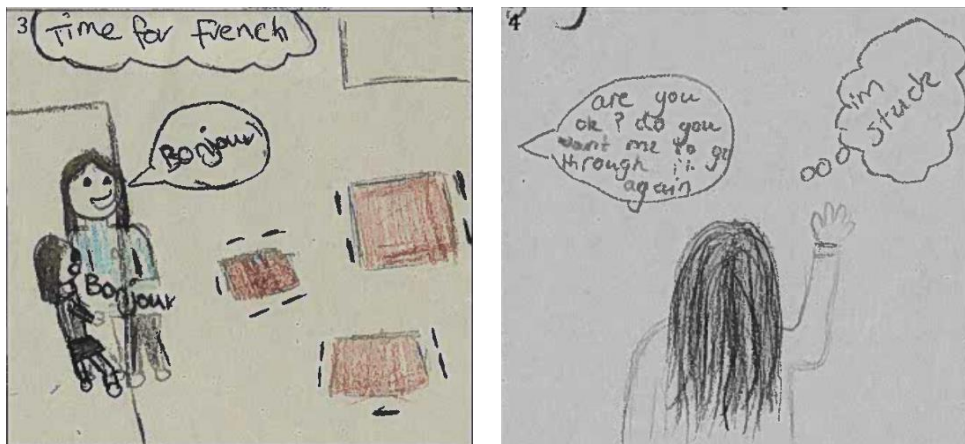
The 50-minute teacher interview explored how the teacher perceives English and target language use in the classroom to relate to topics such as pupil motivation and the idea that Anglophone language learners tend to be poor linguists. The teacher’s thoughts on a target language only policy in the classroom match similar criticisms made toward

target language only policies that marginalise other languages in contexts where English is the language being learned (Li, 2014; Creese & Blackledge, 2010).

*“It would worry me that if I said no English in this classroom, that they would feel, ‘Why can’t I use my own language? Is there something wrong here? Why am I only having to use this when I don’t understand it?’ And I think it might create a wee bit of hostility towards the language they’re trying to learn.”*

The teacher also expressed uncertainty as to whether pupils are aware of dominant and oppressive English ideologies. When asked what the teacher thought pupils enjoy most about French, the teacher responded that pupils’ own use of target language would likely be high up on the list, more so than the teacher’s use of target language. Yet the teacher also expressed the difficulty of trying to encourage pupils to “just sit and ask each other” questions in the target language. Further investigation is needed as to how language use attitudes and perceptions, as well as other influential factors, relate to pupil willingness to use target language.

Before commencing interviews with pupils, they completed a cartoon storyboard activity. The activity prompted pupils to draw 4 scenes taking place in their French classroom. Pupils were encouraged to think about which language(s) best reflect their experience of a typical French lesson. Two examples are shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3:** Pupil cartoon storyboard scenes

The image on the left shows the teacher and pupil exchanging a greeting in target language. The image on the right shows the pupil thinking in English while the teacher provides help and clarification in English. The images were used to warm pupils up for the interview setting and to further prompt discussion.

Of the five pupils, two participated in 15-minute interviews. One pupil describes the teacher’s target language use as a challenge but one that the pupil doesn’t mind. Regarding own target language use, this pupil admitted to using English during walk-around communicative activities on “those days you can’t be bothered.” The other pupil also relayed that few pupils use target language during the same activities, though not for lack of ability. After conducting these pilot interviews, a further follow up has been added to the interview schedule to probe more deeply into why pupils believe

themselves and their peers to be hesitant to use target language, as well as to see whether pupils are aware of notions of English dominance as a potential influential factor. When asked if pupils see themselves using French in the future, one pupil replied,

*“Well if I was in France then yeah, but I don’t think I’d have to do it if I was just workin’ in Edinburgh in an office. I wouldn’t have to speak French.”*

This pupil does not see the need for learning languages in terms of future career, unless the pupil were to move to a French-speaking country. This once again raises the question as to what motivates pupils to want to use target language. Lanvers, Hultgren & Gayton (2019) point out that language policy documents or government reports tend to advertise a need for languages in terms of employability and for university qualification. Perhaps promoting instrumental value is not an appropriate target for early adolescents. Is it possible to get pupils to simply enjoy learning languages?

### **Impact of this study**

Understanding teachers’ language use attitudes could be a step towards helping teachers in Anglophone settings such as Scotland demonstrate the importance of modern languages to their pupils, many of whom may believe that knowing a language other than English is unimportant for future career and/or academic goals due to the pervasiveness of English. The parallel use of qualitative, creative and some quantitative methods with both teachers and pupils may also help to provide a more complete picture of the perspectives that shape the language use and the language learning experience in Scotland. This has the potential to heighten pupils’ awareness of multilingualism and identity in the Anglophone modern language context, which is an area of research receiving more attention (Fisher, Evans, Forbes, Gayton & Lui, 2018). This may in turn heighten teachers’ awareness of the impact of their language use and language teaching practice. This study could be one of the first to inform extensively on pupils’ perceptions in the Scottish secondary school classroom, and could be a catalyst for further research incorporating creative methods. In addition, the snapshot of the Scottish context that the current study will provide may also lead to the possibility for a longitudinal study that observes how motivation in the Scottish 1+2 context fluctuates over time and beyond S3.

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