

**Our Languages Learner Voice:
2008 Pupils' E-Conference Analysis of responses**

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Summary

Key findings

- **Over 300 pupils responded** to the e-survey overall, although not all answered all the questions. The largest response (319) was to the first question, on the languages known by the pupils.
- Pupils claimed knowledge of **33 different languages**: Arabic, Bengali, BSL (listed as sign language), Chichewa, Chinese, Creole, Danish, Dutch, Farsi, French, German, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Kachchi, Konkani, Korean, Kurdish, Latin, Mirpuri, Pashto, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Swahili/Kiswahili, Sylheti, Swedish, Turkish, Urdu and Welsh.
- The **most widely known language was Arabic**, mentioned by over half the respondents to this question (184 responses). Next came Urdu (143), French (140) and Gujarati (137).
- **One-third of respondents (108) said they had at least some knowledge of two languages other than English**; 74 knew three other languages; 56 had some knowledge of four other languages; and 53 knew one language plus English. As many as 19 claimed some knowledge of five languages plus English, two said they knew six other languages, and one said s/he had at least some knowledge of seven other languages.
- Some claimed fluency in two or more languages other than English, but the majority claimed a lower degree of fluency, with varying levels in the different skills of speaking, understanding, reading and writing.
- **‘Communication’ was the most commonly given reason for enjoying learning languages**: almost one-third (29 per cent) made comments about being able to communicate with or understand people in or from other countries and cultures. Comments relating to travel and holidays were the next most frequent (27 responses – 19 per cent), followed by ‘intellectual’ reasons (24 responses – 17 per cent). These further split into two: language learning *per se* (11 – 8 per cent) and the benefits to other learning (13 – 9 per cent).
- By far the **most popular activity in language learning was games** (board, online, interactive whiteboard), mentioned in 29 responses (30 per cent). Other pupils stressed that classes should be ‘fun’. The language lab was quite popular, as were plays and role plays, interactive activities in general, the internet, and visual activities.
- A range of factors in helping language learning outside school were mentioned, of which the most popular was visiting a country where the language is spoken.
- When asked what languages they thought people would be learning in the future, 31 languages were named: French and Arabic in just over one quarter of responses, closely followed by English, then Spanish, Italian, and Chinese.
- Many respondents mentioned languages they thought they themselves would be learning or would like to learn in the future: 16 languages were mentioned, of which the four most popular were all European languages.

Conclusions on e-conference format

Evidence for success of e-conference as discussion forum

- Overall, the open-ended question format did not seem to lend itself particularly well to discussion, although it did provide some interesting responses. Discussion might be better facilitated by asking different kinds of questions.

Suggestions for future e-conferences

- Splitting it into two (survey, to be answered individually, and discussion forum)
- Making as many questions as possible multiple choice
- Sub-dividing questions
- Additional questions (e.g. gender, age, plans to continue learning languages in future, using languages in working lives...)
- Careful consideration of issues to be discussed by pupils and giving suggested topics for discussion forum.
- Considering different possible formats to encourage discussion.

Introduction

The Our Languages project

Our Languages is a consortium project set up by the DCSF in August 2007 to support the teaching and learning of community languages through the creation of partnerships between mainstream and complementary or supplementary schools. CILT, the National Centre for Languages, NRC, the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education which is part of ContinYou, and SSAT, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, have worked together to promote collaboration between the mainstream and voluntary sector and to celebrate the contribution complementary/supplementary education makes to pupils' learning. The consortium website, www.ourlanguages.org.uk, showcases the outcomes of the project.

Background of e-conference¹

The e-conference was set up as a blog, part of the 'Our Languages' project², to get the pupils from the schools participating in the project involved and seek their views on and knowledge of languages and language learning. It was not intended as a research project at the outset, but the responses proved so interesting that it was decided to analyse the data.

Responses to three questions (with sub-questions) were sought over a period of just over two weeks in March 2008, including a weekend to allow participation from complementary schools or as homework assignments.

The e-conference was in the form of a blog to facilitate discussion. Respondents were encouraged to look at other pupils' comments and respond to or comment on them. They were instructed to give their name and school and to 'respond to pupils who are from a school other than your own - this will keep the discussion interesting as you learn about the different languages other pupils know and how they are learned across the country'.

Background of schools and respondents

The nine organisations (four mainstream secondary schools, four complementary schools, and a complementary schools trust) in Birmingham, Leicester, London and Manchester involved in the project were asked to forward details of the e-conference to contacts in other schools that might be interested in participating. It was left up to schools how and when the pupils contributed (in or outside class, all pupils or only some years or classes, etc.), so participation rates are likely to have varied greatly from school to school

The nine organisations involved in the project were:

- Moseley School³, Birmingham (Language College: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Spanish, Urdu).
- Hamza Mosque Islamic Centre, Birmingham (Arabic, Urdu)
- Madani High School, Leicester (Arabic, French, Urdu)

¹ http://www.cilt.org.uk/news/latest/2008/13_03_blog.htm

² <http://www.ourlanguages.org.uk/>

<http://www.ourlanguages.org.uk/>

³ <http://www.moseley.bham.sch.uk/>

- Masjid-Ul-Imam-Il-Bukhari, Leicester
- Lambeth Academy⁴, London (specializing in Language, Business and Enterprise: Chinese, French, German, Spanish)
- Aayatiin Foundation⁵, Lambeth, London (Somali)
- Levenshulme High School, Manchester (Language College: Arabic, Bengali, BSL, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Urdu)
- Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan⁶, Manchester (Gujarati, Hindi, Malayalam)
- Leicester Complementary Schools Trust⁷/SDSA, working with a variety of schools

It can be assumed that all these nine organisations participated in the e-conference, but the extent to which other schools participated is not clear.

The contact in Leicester was particularly enthusiastic, and it seems that all the secondary schools in the city were contacted resulting in a large response. These included Judgemeanow Community College⁸ in Leicester, a centre for excellence for languages and internationalism (11-16) that teaches eight languages (French, German, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Panjabi and Spanish). All Judgemeanow pupils in years 8 and 9 take two modern foreign languages and take-up is being increased at Key Stage 4. The school has language assistants for several of the languages taught, after-school language clubs, and international links involving Japanese and Slovakian in addition to the languages taught at the school.

Madani High School and Community Centre⁹ in Leicester is “the first purpose-built Islamic faith secondary school in the country”, and its modern languages syllabus includes Arabic, French and Urdu GCSE.

Levenshulme High School for Girls¹⁰ is Manchester’s only specialist language college. French is compulsory throughout KS3; at the end of Year 7, pupils have a free choice to take a second language (German, Italian, Spanish or Urdu) in years 8 and 9, and are entered for the Language Ladder Certificates. Saturday classes from beginners’ up to AS/A2 level are offered in Urdu, Arabic and Bengali and there is also the possibility to learn BSL.¹¹ The school has a strong commitment to home/community languages and pupils are also encouraged to take GCSEs in these, including Cantonese, Dutch, Farsi, Mandarin, Panjabi, Polish and Turkish.

Moseley School in Birmingham is also a specialist language college. At KS3, pupils have two hours per week of language 1 (French, German or Urdu). They study another language (chosen from those already mentioned plus Chinese and Spanish) for two years from year 8. Pupils are also encouraged to take A Levels in their home languages, e.g. Arabic, Dutch and Farsi, and Urdu A level results are among the highest in the country.¹²

⁴ <http://www.lambeth-academy.org/>

⁵ <http://www.aayatiin.org/index.html>

⁶ <http://www.bhavan.co.uk>

⁷ <http://www.phf.org.uk/page.asp?id=131>

⁸ See <http://www.judgemeanow.leicester.sch.uk/> for information on languages taught at the school.

⁹ <http://www.madanihigh.leicester.sch.uk/>

¹⁰ <http://www.levenshulme-high.manchester.sch.uk/>

¹¹ <http://www.britishcouncilglobaleyes.org/mod/resource/view.php?id=21>

¹² <http://www.moseley.bham.sch.uk/langhome.html>

Lambeth Academy offers Chinese, French, German and Spanish as mainstream subjects. Portuguese is offered in two intensive after-school clubs; after-school clubs are being set up for Arabic and Russian and Somali will also be offered.

The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan “has established itself as the premier institute for Indian Arts and Culture in the Manchester Area” and offers classes in Gujarati, Hindi and Malayalam. The Aayatiin Foundation for Relief and Development (AFFORD) is a charitable non-profit organization formed in 2005 to operate voluntarily in the South West London and in the Horn of Africa, and is involved in teaching Somali.

Given that all the main organisations involved are either specialist language colleges or involved in complementary language teaching, the generally positive attitude to languages expressed by pupils is probably to be expected but nonetheless encouraging.

Data issues

Over 300 pupils responded to the survey. The exact number is impossible to ascertain because most responses were anonymous, despite the instruction to give name and school, and not all pupils answered all the questions. It is therefore not possible to correlate responses to the different questions, except in some cases where pupils did give their names (or aliases). The exceptions were some pupils who said they attended Judgemeanow Community College and Madani High School in Leicester and Levenshulme High School in Manchester.

The original data giving all the responses on the blog had 360 comments for Question 1, 188 for Question 2, and 197 for Question 3. However, these figures were somewhat inflated for the following reasons:

- Some responses did not answer the question at all, making irrelevant or nonsense comments, or unreliable claims about the numbers of languages known.
- Some responses were more appropriate to different questions, so were reassigned to the appropriate ones.
- Some responses were repeated, either verbatim or paraphrased; this may have been because pupils had technical problems (the blog became overloaded) and were not confident of their initial response having been registered.
- Responses included the initial comments made by the researchers to encourage discussion and comments by one of the teachers involved in the project.

The responses have been carefully checked, and, as far as possible, all of the above have been reassigned to the relevant question or omitted from the data analysed, leaving only valid responses to each question. This reduced the numbers of valid responses to each question to 319 for Question 1 and 179 for Question 3. Question 2 comprised two sub-questions. Some pupils answered both, some just one, and answers often overlapped. Responses were categorised accordingly, with some responses being split into the two sub-questions. This gave totals of 145 responses to the first question and 96 to the second. The process of deciding which responses to omit and categorising responses is inevitably subjective to some extent, so the resulting frequencies and percentages cannot be claimed to be absolutely robust.

The fact that the pupils participating later in the process could read earlier contributions may have had some unintended effects on responses, for example, pupils copying verbatim the initial comments of the researchers (given to encourage discussion), or making responses to

impress or entertain their peers, with some apparently seeking to outdo each other in the number of languages they claimed to know, resulting in some unreliable answers; these are also omitted from the analysis.

Extracts from pupils' comments are quoted as they appear in the blog in terms of spelling etc..

Analysis of responses

Question One:

Which languages can you speak, read, write, or understand?

The original total of 360 responses was reduced to 319 after elimination of repeated, irrelevant and unreliable responses (e.g. those listing a dozen or more widely varying languages including Finnish, Polish and Serbian), and some reassignment of responses from one question to another. Many pupils listed English, but this was omitted from the analysis. Responses such as “odd words in X” were also omitted, but those such as “a bit of Y” were included; this distinction is of course somewhat arbitrary.

A total of 33 languages¹³ were mentioned: Arabic, Bengali, BSL (listed as sign language), Chichewa, Chinese, Creole (French), Danish, Dutch, Farsi, French, German, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Kachchi, Konkani, Korean, Kurdish, Latin, Mirpuri, Pashto, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Swahili/Kiswahili, Sylheti, Swedish, Turkish, Urdu and Welsh. Two respondents also noted “a few other Asian languages”.

It is widely reported that over 300 languages are currently spoken by schoolchildren in the UK¹⁴, so the 34 languages mentioned here represent only around one-tenth of the total, even though the respondents were from schools in the most multicultural and multilingual cities in the UK. As noted above, it is not known how many schools responded to the survey, but they were to a great extent self-selecting. There are likely to be many schools that did not participate, but that have pupils from linguistic backgrounds that are not represented here. Moreover, not all the pupils in each school participated in the survey, as it was not compulsory. It is also likely that there are pupils who have recently moved to the UK and whose command of English may not be sufficient to have allowed participation in the survey.

Most widely known languages

The most widely known language was Arabic, with over half the respondents to this question claiming some knowledge (184 responses, 58 per cent). This top position can be attributed to various factors, particularly the fact that it is taught at at least four of the schools surveyed: 33 pupils said they were learning Arabic at school. The need to learn Arabic to read the Q'ran is also a factor, although only five pupils specifically mentioned this.

Next came Urdu (143 – 45 per cent), French (140 – 44 per cent) and Gujarati (137 – 43 per cent). French is of course the most widely taught foreign language in mainstream schools, and many of the pupils said they were learning it at school. Urdu and Gujarati can be

¹³ Greek was also mentioned by one pupil, but only in terms of “greetings”, so this has been omitted from the analysis.

¹⁴ http://www.cilt.org.uk/research/language/trends/2005/trends2005_community.pdf

characterised as community languages in the UK. Moreover, the high numbers reflects the linguistic situation in Leicester, where many of the respondents live: in the 2004/05 survey of community language provision in UK mainstream and complementary schools carried out by Scottish CILT, data collected by Leicester City on the home languages of its pupils showed that Gujarati had by far the largest number of speakers (10,236), followed by Panjabi (2,400) and Urdu (1,236) (McPake 2005). The most widespread community languages in England are Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Cantonese, Arabic, Turkish, Russian, Spanish, Portuguese, Gujarati, Hindi and Polish (McPake and Sachdev 2008: 11).

There was a big gap before the next group of languages: Kachchi (Memon) (41), Spanish (41), Punjabi (25), Hindi (23), Somali (17), Bengali (16), and German (14). The three Asian languages and Somali are community languages, but it is likely that Spanish earns its place largely on the basis of being increasingly widely taught as a foreign language, although one pupil did mention his/her Latino family background. The relatively low number of pupils mentioning German reflects its decline as a FL in schools: more schools now offer Spanish than German (CILT 2007).

The other languages had much smaller numbers (see Appendix for full details), including only three responses mentioning Chinese. This seems surprising given the size of the Chinese community in the UK; the extremely low figure is likely to be a result of the small number of participating schools and because of their location in areas with concentrations from other language and ethnic communities.

Numbers of languages spoken by individual respondents

Of the 319 responses, one-third of respondents (108, 34 per cent) said they had at least some knowledge of two languages other than English; 74 (23 per cent) knew three other languages; 56 (18 per cent) had some knowledge of four other languages; and 53 (17 per cent) knew one language plus English. As many as 19 (6 per cent) claimed some knowledge of five languages plus English, two said they knew six other languages, and one said s/he had at least some knowledge of seven other languages

i can speak urdu english slightly french and spanish. i understand gujarati. I also understand sign language. I can also speak a little bit of arabic. i also understand panjabi

It must however be said that some of the claims about these higher numbers of languages are rather dubious. There were also a few pupils who listed around a dozen languages, but these were very likely to be cases of exaggeration to impress other contributors and have therefore been excluded. Only eight responses (3 per cent) mentioned English as the only language known.

Sample comments include the following:

my mother tounge iss gujji, urdu and katchi all in one. and in school i learn arabic but i find it very difficult and it is not taught properly therefore i do not know it....

My mother-tongue is Gujarati and i know a bit of Urdu and Hindi because it's similar to Gujarati. I am also currently learning Arabic at school and i can fluently read and write it.

Understand, French, German.Speak Portuguese, Swahili, Konkani and a little bit of German.

*I can also speak and write Gujarati
Although I have been learning French for five years, I find it very difficult but the positive teachers and cooperative students have helped massively.
as well as some swahili, hindi and some panjabi*

Language combinations

There were some language combinations that seem unusual at first sight: Danish or Swedish plus Somali in three cases; Arabic, French and Welsh (one); Chinese, Farsi and Bengali (one); French, Kachchi (mother tongue), Chichewa, Urdu and Gujarati (one); Arabic, Dutch and Somali; Japanese or Korean and some Urdu (one of each). In some cases this was because of where the respondents had lived before coming to England:

I can speak Somali and Danish since my origin is Somalia and i was born in Denmark.i know english since i live in U.K and i am learning Urdu.I am also learning Arabic at school.

i can speak, read, wirt and undeerstand french and english. i can also speak and understand my mother tounge languages which is kutchi. i can also speak chichewa(an african language)and gujurati. i learned african language(chichewa) becasue this was the language spoken my old school in africa. it was within the environment. othe rlanguages i learned it from my family and when i visited india because i wasnt used to communicate woth the people over there because of the language but now i can fully speak gujurati and urdu because it really motivated me to do this.

Other pupils have parents with different first languages:

my mothers tongue is japanese and i was born in japan and lived there for 5 years so i can speak japanese fluently although i cannot read and write and i know english and since my father is pakistani i understand a bit of urdu but find it hard to pronounce.

Different languages, different skills

Many responses simply listed languages and did not differentiate among the different skills, but many others did, and these more detailed responses show that pupils have different skills in different languages, and in very varying combinations. For example:

My mother tounge is Punjabi. I can speak a little but i can't read or write it. My most fluent language is English; I can read and write and speak it. I can also

Speak French, I can speak, read and write French fairly well, I know the basics now I'm learning to more in depth part of it. I can speak, read and write Spanish; but only the basics - all tenses with regular verbs. Plus, my French teacher taught my class some Italian (as she can speak four languages fluently) but only the very basic things like greetings, number up to thirty and the alphabet.

As might be expected, many pupils said they could speak or speak and understand their community languages, such as Kachchi, Gujarati and Punjabi, but not read and/or write them. In the case of Arabic, one might expect a higher degree of familiarity with it as a written language, but in fact, by far the largest number of those who specified skills – 80 pupils (43 per cent) – said they could speak at least a little of the language; 65 (35 per cent) said they could write it, 49 (27 per cent) said they could read it; and 40 (22 per cent) said they could understand it. It is interesting that more claimed to have at least some competence in the productive skills (speaking and writing) than in the receptive skills (understanding and reading); moreover, speaking and writing were often mentioned together. Included in these responses are 33 pupils (18 per cent) who said they were learning the language at school, and this may go some way towards explaining the high numbers able to speak at least some Arabic:

I can speak Lots of languages.. such as ENGLISH and ARABIC ..(A TINY bit) and URDU ..(A LITTLE Bit) and GUJJI ..(A Bit) (=) Howevrrrrrrrrrr.....

Numbah One: ... i can only read and write and speak arabic a little bit because i find it hard to understand, but i like going into the language lab because i like playing the arabic poker games

Numbah Two:..... i can speak udru a little bit and i can read easy parts but i can not write it....

Numbah Three: ... i can speak Gujji..... but only a little bit even though the rest of my family tell me to speak it at home i prefer to speak english because i dont like the way gujji sounds.. i can not read it at all and i can definatley NOT qrite it because i have no understanding of it whatso ever.

My mother tongue is Memon/Katchiy so i can speak it very fluently Memon can not be written.

I can read right and understand Urdu.

I can also understand but cannot speak Gujrati.

In shcool i am learning Arabic, i can read right, and understand bits of Arabic.

My grandparents mainly speak Gujarati, so I've picked that up. I cannot read, write or speak it though. I can speak, read and write English and is the language I use at home. I am learning Arabic and can read and write it, with limited understanding.

Others have Arabic as their first language:

I am an arab, so i can speak, read, understand and write arabic as it is my first language.

Levels of fluency

Although many responses did not mention different levels of fluency, many others went into detail. For example:

I speak the following fluently: English, Urdu, Gujurati, Memon. The next few are not as fluent: French, Arabic.

I speak Somali, English and Danish very Fluently and i can also read, write and understand these languages. I quickly swap about without making mistakes as i have been speaking them for my whole life!

Some are very confident about their language skills:

I Am A Fabulous Arabic Speaker However My English Is Rather Broken. My Gujerati Is Phantastic

Combined with the information on the different skills in different languages, some pupils presented very complex pictures of their individual linguistic skills. It is beyond the scope of this report to look at these in detail, but a multiple-choice format for future surveys might allow these data to be captured and analysed properly.

Where are the languages learnt?

Some pupils mentioned learning languages at school (mainstream or complementary) or that they used them with parents or other family members. Some were more proactive:

I am able to speak, read and write in english, french and spanish. I am able to understand and speak a little bit of gujarati as it is my mother tongue but I cannot read or write in it. At home I am also learning how to speaak, read and write in russian and italian with home learning course.

Question 2:

What do you enjoy about learning languages? What activities help you learn best in and out of school?

Question 2 comprised two sub-questions: ‘What do you enjoy about learning languages?’ and ‘What activities help you learn best in and out of school?’ Some pupils answered both, some just one, and answers often overlapped. Responses were categorised accordingly, with some responses being split into the two sub-questions. This gave totals of 145 responses to the first question and 96 to the second. Nonsense and irrelevant responses were omitted or reassigned as appropriate.

For this analysis, Question 2a) (What do you enjoy about learning languages?) has been assumed to cover general points (e.g. communicating with people from other countries), while answers referring to specific learning activities have been assigned to question 2b) (What activities help you learn best in and out of school?). Thus 2b) covers both the language

learning activities that pupils enjoy and those that they feel help them to learn best, which may or may not be the same.

2a. What do you enjoy about learning languages?

Responses from 145 pupils were categorised under the following broad headings: communication, intellectual, travel/holidays, enjoyment, employment, religion, learning about other cultures, non-specific benefits, and better relationships between different communities/countries. There was some overlap between some of these categories, and such responses were categorised as seemed most appropriate; for example, responses about communicating with people when on holiday were classed under 'travel/holidays' rather than 'communication'.

Many pupils gave more than one reason and these reasons often fell into more than one category, while some responses fell into none of the above categories and are listed separately.

'Communication' was the most commonly given reason for enjoying learning languages – 42 pupils (29 per cent) made comments about being able to communicate with or understand people in or from other countries and cultures, for example:

What i enjoy most is being able to communicate with people from all over the world.

i think that if you learn diffrent l;anguages it is easier for you to understand what people are saying or you could help them if they dotn know what the other person is saying because when i frist started to do diffrent langagues i thought that it was going to be so hard but eventually it came out to be really good i enjoyed it alot i think doing all the worksheets would help me alot to understand what to do!!!!!!!!!!

Comments relating to travel and holidays were the next most frequent (27 responses – 19 per cent), as in this typical response:

I enjoy learning languages because its cool if you go on holiday and meet people you can talk to them and understand them.

The next most popular category of response was that of 'intellectual' reasons (24 responses – 17 per cent). These further split into two: language learning *per se* (11 – 8 per cent) and the benefits to other learning (13 – 9 per cent). Examples of the former are:

I enjoy learning the new and interesting vocabulary of a language and comparing it to the other languages that I know.

I like to learn new languages because you can learn the roots of your own language.

Comments falling under the latter heading include:

I think that learning languages is a good because it improves the way your brain is thinking. The brain also carries a variety of words from different languages which I think is great.

I absolutely love learning new languages, as it helps with nearly everything!

I enjoy language because it will help me build confidence in my learning skills.

17 pupils (12 per cent) commented that they enjoyed learning languages (for their own sake), and several said learning languages was “cool”:

I like telling every1 that i have learnt a new language.

its cool to know how 2 speak a nover language coz u can take a break from speaking just english.

I like attempting to learn languages as it is exciting and adventerous.

‘Future employment/career’ followed closely with 11 responses (8 per cent);

Religion was cited in six responses, all referring to the links between Arabic and Islam and all but one referring to its role in understanding the Qu’ran. ‘Learning about other people’s cultures’ was cited by nine pupils. Five made the general point ‘it will help me’, and three mentioned being able to chat up girls who speak other languages – even though they might be speaking the wrong language:

i luv learning languages as they are fun and you can chat up the brazilian girls (if you know the language)(spanish)

Three linked knowing other languages to better relations among different communities or countries, with comments such as:

i guess its just sooo cool being able to speak to and understanding more people in the world....and i tend to think that leeaning a variaty of languages just shows more harmoiny and less racism, coz you’ve bothered to learn something else about someone else’s language.

In other countries they all learn English so it it good to learn theirs.

Only two mentioned communicating with other family members and/or friends:

I enjoy being able to talk to my French relatives and German friends when I visit them. I enjoy the fact that I am going to do my French GCSE 2 years early.

Eight pupils (6 per cent) said they did not enjoy learning languages, because it is “so dam hard” or “boring and tediuous” or because “everyone seems to know English”. Some noted both the difficulties and the benefits of learning languages:

learning languages are tough but when you know them you feel great.

Learning Arabic would help me to understand the Qur'an. I don't enjoy learning it as it is very boring and tedious. We seem to learn so many rules and all the exceptions to them, as well as loads of vocab.

2b. What activities help you learn best in and out of school?

Responses from 96 pupils were categorised into comments relating to learning languages inside and outside school. Comments related both to activities the pupils said they enjoyed and those that they feel help them to learn best, which may or may not be the same.

Some pupils mentioned a range of factors both in and outside school; for example:

the activities which help me learn new languages are especially games and I love pronouncing new words in new languages. I learned African language (Chichewa) because this was the language spoken in my old school in Africa. It was within the environment. Other languages I learned from my family and when I visited India because I wasn't used to communicating with the people over there because of the language but now I can fully speak Gujarati and Urdu because it really motivated me to do this.

I don't enjoy learning it as it is very boring and tedious. We seem to learn so many rules and all the exceptions to them, as well as loads of vocab. I prefer learning in school as I have the help of my friends who are in the same position as me. Learning using computer software is also fun.

In school

By far the most popular activity was games (board, online, interactive whiteboard), mentioned in 29 responses (30 per cent). The point made next most often was that lessons or activities should be 'fun' (18 comments). The language lab was quite popular, including games played there (11 comments), as were plays and role plays (ten comments), interactive activities in general (eight comments), the internet (for example, websites such as Linguascope.com), and visual activities (e.g. Powerpoint, art) (seven comments for each). A range of other more specific activities were mentioned by individual or very small numbers of pupils. Only two mentioned the role of the teacher – having a native speaker teacher:

because they will know all of the phrases, that can be useful in real life, and the slang words of the respective language

and having a teacher who has 'passion for the job'. However, the question specifically referred to 'activities' and a broader question might have elicited more comments about teachers.

Outside school

The most frequently cited factor in helping language learning outside school was visiting a country where the language is spoken (eight comments), for example:

It is also good that once in a while from school or somewhere you get to go on trips to somewhere where the speak a completely different language and you can understand them (people). It also helps with your listening and speaking skills. It is great to go before a exam/test.

This was followed by friends and family (three comments for each), for example:

I personally have relatives across the world so every time we meet i can practise with them what i already know.....This helps me to keep the vocab. i already know in mind so i do not forget them!!

i love learning songs in french and talking as fluently as possible to my mums friend (shes French) :):)

Two pupils mentioned language clubs, and the following factors were mentioned by one pupil each: attending complementary school; radio; Asian TV; written work, e.g. worksheets; homework; learning from people around speaking the language; having learnt the language when living in a country where it is spoken; writing words in roman script (presumably for a language with a different script, e.g. Arabic); learning songs in the language (see above); relaxing to avoid getting ‘stressed out’; and similarities with a language already known:

i also like learning urdu because it comes down to some gujrati and i know gujrati and so its easy for me.

One pupil commented at length on the importance of written work:

I think for me, the best way of learning languages in and out of school is a lot of written work. Doing worksheets in class and homework or coursework at home. I am not really able to learn through playing games but I am more able to learn when i have been given a lot of written work to do.

Complementary school may be enjoyed more than mainstream school:

I Like Learning Languages Outise Of School..Like I Got To A Arabic And Islamic Class, Which Is Really Fun Compared To My GCSE Spanish Class.

Activities not liked/that don’t help

Activities that were not liked or not felt to help in learning languages were: learning from textbooks and learning pages of vocabulary (two comments for each), “writing or just reading off a board” (one).

Question Three:

What languages do you think people will be learning in the future?

Again, nonsense or irrelevant responses were omitted.

In the 157 valid responses, 31 languages were named. French and Arabic were each mentioned in just over one quarter of responses (42 – 27 per cent, and 41 – 26 per cent, respectively), closely followed by English (36 – 23 per cent). The next group was Spanish (25 – 16 per cent), Italian (24 – 15 per cent) and Chinese (22 – 14 per cent).

German was somewhat behind (13 – 8 per cent), followed by Hindi and Japanese (seven each); the relatively low number for the latter reflects its fall in prominence in the public eye in the UK compared to Chinese in recent years. Interestingly, sign language and Braille (not a language, but interestingly seen as one by the respondents) are each mentioned in four responses, all from Judgemeadow, with two pupils mentioning both.

The only other languages mentioned more than once are: Portuguese and Urdu (four each), Bengali, Greek (three each), and Gujarati, Kachchi, Swahili (two each). The following languages are each mentioned only once: Chichewa (from a pupil who speaks the language him/herself), Croatian, Danish, Dutch, Farsi, Finnish, Hungarian, Latin, Polish, Russian, Somali, Swedish, Turkish and Zulu.

Although there is a great deal of overlap with the languages mentioned in response to Question 1 (about languages known by the pupils themselves), this list includes six languages not mentioned there: Croatian, Finnish, Greek¹⁵, Hungarian, Polish and Zulu, as well as Braille. In contrast, seven languages are known by some of the pupils themselves but not mentioned in response to Question 3: Creole, Konkani, Kurdish, Mirpuri, Pashto, Sylheti and Welsh.

Some responses highlighted languages from certain regions of the world: Asian/South Asian (six), European (five), Scandinavian (one) and Middle Eastern (one).

Eleven (7 per cent) suggested ‘many different or all languages’; four said ‘the same languages as are learnt today’; three said ‘whatever languages people want to learn’; and one said ‘people should learn more than two languages’. Only nine pupils said they did not know or were not sure.

More imaginative responses featured animal languages (six), alien (three), robot language (two), the writer’s own made-up language (one) and a new language not currently understood or newly discovered (three):

I think that in the future people will still probably be studying english, french, german etc, but i think that some other languages may be discovered in the future, maybe if a tribe or something is discovered in a rainforest they may speak a different language which may begin to get studied by people in england.

Finally, reflecting the times, one mentioned text language.

¹⁵ Except for the pupil who mentioned knowing “greetings”.

French was almost certainly cited so often because it is the most widely taught FL in the UK; Spanish and Italian rate quite highly probably because they are languages that pupils would like to learn (see below):

I think people will be learning Italian or Greek because they're languages that aren't very common, but very interesting, so it would be nice to learn them.

Arabic, however, comes a close second to French, because of both the status of countries where it is used and its association with Islam, as noted by some respondents:

Arabic because the Arab countries are improving rapidly and im sure very country would like to have an economy like theris

Maybe Arabic as Arab countries such as Dubai seem to be up and coming. Also more people are becoming Muslims, so more people want to learn Arabic.

Dunno.....maybe more difficult scandinavean languages...or ARABIC which is cool to learn so we understand the HOLY QUR'AN.and we'd be able to communicate while on pilgrimage in Makkah...anyway i hope it is interesting and fun to learn(whatever it is)!!!

Economic reasons are mentioned by some pupils:

I think Spanish, Chinese and English will be the international business languages of the future, and I think Chinese will be the most successful of the three

I think people will be learning the languages of trading countries e.g. China (chinese), India etc.

Demographic factors are also noted:

I think that a bit of Chinese would be good, seeing as it is the most spoken language on the planet

I think that the language that will dominate most language colleges is Arabic and French. I think this because the growing number of foriegn people in the UK is having a positive impact on the languages we learn at school

i think french or spanish as there are more forign people coming into the country.

Social inclusion is mentioned as a reason to learn sign language:

I think sign language would be cool too (so that deaf people feel at home in the community)

More personal reasons feature in some other comments, for example:

i think we will target languages which are rarely spoken in this country like chichewa (an african laguage). i think this would be a very good idea because it would give a wider range of knowledge and learning something different than

languages spoken in europe. i am saying this because i myself speak that language and its really fun and enjoyable language to learn. i would suggest this idea on the basis of my knowledge. i hope its a good idea.

I think or hope that we will start to learn more European languages especially Italian as it is cool and I really like the country.

The following response acknowledges the importance of English as a lingua franca, but also argues for learning other languages and gives an interesting reason for learning Hindi:

i think it will be necessary for people to learn english from all countries; this is so foreign people can understand each other when they have to, instead of communicating by sign language.

Also, i believe people should be able to communicate with others in foreign languages if they have to; these could be arabic, french, spanish, maybe chinese and hindi so they understand bollywood films without using subtitles.

Another response takes English dominance to extremes:

english is the only language u need...everyone should be made to learn english! it is the way forward..ban foreign languages!!

Some unusual languages and combinations appear:

I hope they learn languages such as Sign Language, Braille and some spoken one (e.g. Danish, Swedish, Hungarian and Croatian)

3b) What languages will you be learning in the future?

Many respondents interpreted Question 3 as referring to languages they thought they themselves would be learning or would like to learn in the future. Where this is clear, these comments have been separated out. The 22 responses mentioned 16 languages. Spanish was the most popular (eight – 36 per cent), followed by Italian (five), French and German (four each) and Chinese (three). Arabic, Bengali and Korean featured in two responses each. Given that Arabic is a major world language, taught at several of the schools involved in the survey, and the most widely spoken language among the pupils surveyed, it is perhaps surprising that it does not feature more prominently here. Bengali is taught at Levenshulme, the school attended by one of the respondents who mentions it; the other respondent's school is not given.

One of the pupils who mentioned Korean also answered that s/he spoke the language (Question 1), and the other mention of it is in the next comment on the blog, which suggests that this respondent may have been influenced by the preceding comment. Other choices were also clearly personal: one pupil had learnt Dutch when younger but forgotten it and wanted to relearn it; another wanted to learn Gujarati to talk to her grandparents. Other languages mentioned just once each are Bulgarian, Romanian, Russian, Japanese and Latin. Three pupils said they would like to learn animal languages – once one pupil had suggested it, the idea of being able to talk to their pets became very popular!

animal language. I hope to learn rabbit or dog, because then you understand your favourite animals(and talk to pets!:)D

i want to learn animal languages so we can talk to are pets lol :);) alien too!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

i wanna learn animal language like verity and elenor even though i ain't got a pet

Conclusions

Evidence for success of e-conference as discussion forum

Some pupils were clearly responding to comments made earlier by others, sometimes simply copying entire responses, sometimes explicitly agreeing with others. In some cases an initial comment gave an opening for more humorous ones, as in the following consecutive comments:

i think in the future everyone will have to learn english
Comment by madani high school — March 14, 2008 @ [2:56 pm](#)

WELL HUMMM I SPEAK SHAKESPEAR ENGLISH AS IT IS A TRADITION OF ENGLAND. AND LONG LIVCE THE QUEEN OH I MEAN MY GRANDMOTHER!!!!
Comment by HARRY — March 14, 2008 @ [2:59 pm](#)

WELL WE ARE THE ROYAL FAMILY AND ENGLISH IS WIDE SPREAD EVEN IN ANIMAL KINGDOMS SO IF WE EVER HAVE TO MAKE A TREATYWITH THEM IT WILL COME INTO USE
Comment by HARRY — March 14, 2008 @ [3:00 pm](#)

I think that people will be learning more and more languages in the future especially english because nowadays in every counrty english is becoming popular. However in islamic school arabic and french are being learnt. I THINK EVERY LANGUAGE SHOULD BE LEARNT.
Comment by Shumylah K — March 14, 2008 @ [3:01 pm](#)

Hii i think everyone in the future should speak english and learn english because i speak it all the time. Everyone should speak what i speak.
Comment by edward — March 14, 2008 @ [3:02 pm](#)

i beleive all people should speak english, this is because it is a language that i speak and me and my Charles will rule england soon anyway so go ENGLISH!!! i lurve u charles!!!!
Comment by Camilla_Bukhingham palace — March 14, 2008 @ [3:03 pm](#)

THOU SHALL LEARN THE ENGLSH QUEEN TONGUE. THEE IS A RESIDENT OF ENGLAND THEREFORE THEE WILL LEARN ENGLISH.

Comment by HARRY_PALACE — March 14, 2008 @ [3:05 pm](#)

In one case, comments made by one of the researchers at the beginning to get discussion going were copied verbatim. As noted above, some responses seem to have been intended to impress or entertain their peers, for example, seeking to outdo each other in the number of languages they claimed to know:

i speak urdu french german swahili english arabic welsh gujrati polish russian somalian irish and freshy language

Comment by adam — March 13, 2008 @ [10:03 am](#)

i speak english, italian, german, french(proper),swahili, guji, urdu,scottish, i can also do american accent.lol. Arabic, welsh, i understand polish, cuban, portarican, ivory coast, goan, serbian monta nigro, jamaican, yorkshan,memon(yea right), i can rap tu pac, i can speak football(cmon gunners), chineese, japanese and soooooo much more. BYe, A tu taler(french), salam(arabic). fools do you really beleive me, you best.

Comment by O\$I _madani — March 13, 2008 @ [10:11 am](#)

english, urdu, gujarati, tagalog, french, italian, spanish, german, portugese, greek, latin, arabic, somali, finnish, chinese, japanese, hindi, punjabi, russian, welsh & i am currently looking for new languages to explore. it is good to shout at foreigners!

Comment by Anonymous — March 13, 2008 @ [2:37 pm](#)

Although these comments are clearly unreliable and were therefore excluded from the analysis, they do perhaps indicate that knowing lots of languages can be seen as a positive asset and a target for competitiveness.

However, overall, the open-ended question format did not seem to lend itself particularly well to discussion, although it did provide some interesting responses.

References

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See Appendix for statistics