‘French is the Language of Love and Stuff’: student perceptions of issues related to motivation in learning a foreign language

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ABSTRACT This article reports on an investigation into the motivation of secondary school students in the South-west of England to learn foreign languages. A questionnaire was constructed based on a model derived from the motivation literature to examine students’ responses on 16 constructs related to motivation. This was administered to 228 students in years 7, 8 and 9. The analysis revealed a decrease in motivation with age, and higher level of motivation among girls than boys. It also revealed a strikingly higher motivation to learn German than French, which was even more marked when the boys only were considered. These findings were further investigated using interviews. Both girls and boys were able to provide clear explanations for differences between the genders, as well as for the language differences. These included such aspects as French being considered feminine, it not being ‘cool’ for boys to be seen to make an effort at French, and the tendency for boys not to try at anything that appears to be tedious.

Introduction

The teaching of foreign languages within the UK educational system has given rise to a number of concerns over the years. These have been related to such issues as the most appropriate age for commencement of language learning (Burstall et al., 1974), the most appropriate teaching methodologies (Richards & Rodgers, 1986), and the relative achievements of girls and boys (Graham & Rees, 1995; Clark & Trafford, 1996). However, the major concern has undoubtedly been the apparent reluctance of the British to learn a foreign language at all, and the declining level of achievement in this domain (Saunders, 1998). As we move into an era where our future will need to be based on multilingualism (Graddol, 1997), such a situation has serious consequences.

A recent report on behalf of the Nuffield Foundation (Moys, 1998) highlights a
number of key questions regarding the current situation and the future of foreign language learning, as well as emphasising the deeply political underpinnings of a policy on language learning. The Nuffield Inquiry points firmly to the need for foreign languages in the twenty-first century from a European perspective, from a business stance, and because of the increasing necessity for international communication. As David Graddol warns in the report, ‘Speaking English alone will not be enough to ensure a full and productive participation in the 21st Century’ (1997, p. 29).

Forty-four European states now form part of the CDCC (Council for Cultural Co-operation). The Council of Europe language policy specifies as one of its aims the need to foster the study of the languages of other member states. The Council explicitly seeks to promote the exchange of ideas by communication in a variety of languages, and sets the ambitious aim of moving towards large-scale plurilingualism in Europe.

The Nuffield Inquiry further highlights the fact that many employees in Europe can speak a second, third and fourth language. In the European Commission’s White Paper (1995), five general objectives for education are identified, one of which is to develop proficiency in three Community languages. As the Nuffield Inquiry states, ‘Language learning may be seen as a key component in pursuing the objectives of co-operation between states, respect for the identity of others and the promotion of mutual understanding’ (Moys, 1998, p. 9). It raises the sorry question, ‘Is the rest of Europe leaving the UK behind when it comes to learning new languages?’ (p. 13)

In a world where international trade has assumed great importance, both the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) Language Study (1997) and the Nuffield Inquiry indicate that lack of a foreign language has been a major barrier in business. The Nuffield Inquiry points to ‘an inadequate supply of language skills available to industry across a range of languages’ (p. 23) and concludes that ‘UK companies are more deficient in linguistic and cultural competence than their major European competitors’ (p. 23).

Two years later, the Nuffield Report (the Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 2000) endorses such sentiments and recommends that:

> the time is right for the government to declare a clear commitment to setting a national policy agenda for languages, along with an enhanced international dimension in education, as a contribution to economic success and international understanding. (p. 64)

The Report sets out 15 wide-ranging recommendations for promoting foreign languages in education and society.

Educators who take such concerns seriously thus find themselves faced with a number of questions of the following nature.

- How motivated are British students to learn foreign languages?
- What are the reasons for any lack of motivation?
- Are there differences in the motivation of boys and girls in learning foreign languages?
- Are students more motivated to learn some languages than others?
- What can teachers do to enhance motivation to learn foreign languages?

A further important issue related to all of these questions, of course, is the implications that any answers might have for the modern languages aspect of the National Curriculum in the UK. It is the purpose of the study described here to attempt to throw some light
on each of these issues with a view to further opening up the debate on the teaching of foreign languages in schools.

**Motivational Theory Related to Language Learning**

Because of the social nature of learning a foreign language, which is ultimately concerned with the adoption of a new cultural identity and new ways of communicating, many theories of language learning tend to be social-psychological in nature. A highly influential model of this type is Gardner’s ‘socio-educational model’ (Gardner, 1985), which has formed the basis for a considerable body of research in the field of motivation (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992; Gardner & Tremblay, 1994a, 1994b). This framework incorporates learners’ cultural beliefs, their attitudes towards the learning situation, their integrativeness and their motivation. For research purposes, motivation is operationally defined by Gardner and his associates as consisting of desire to learn the language, motivational intensity and attitudes towards the learning situation. These are measured by means of the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), which consists of a selection of self-report items measuring 19 different subscales (Gardner, 1985, pp. 177–184). Gardner makes the distinction between integrative and instrumental orientations in language learning motivation. An integrative orientation occurs when the learner is studying a language because of a wish to identify with the culture of speakers of that language. An instrumental orientation includes a group of factors concerned with motivation arising from external goals such as passing examinations, financial rewards, or furthering a career. These factors have sometimes been treated as though they were antithetical, but Gardner himself has taken pains to point out that in many respects they may well be complementary. Over the last two decades, the AMTB has formed the basis of a considerable number of studies of a quantitative nature which focus on the strength of different factors that affect language learning motivation.

Theories and research in the wider area of motivation in general, however, have been far more disparate (Williams & Burden, 1997). One only has to read the three volumes of collected papers by Ames and Ames (1984, 1985, 1989) to realise the bewildering complexity of ideas and findings on this topic. Researchers in this area are therefore faced with the dilemma of attempting to draw together aspects of these different and sometimes even contradictory approaches, or of selecting one theoretical perspective (e.g. self-efficacy theory) and focusing their research efforts on this. Much of the mainstream psychological research into motivation has tended to follow the latter approach, and many recent studies have attempted to explain motivated behaviour narrowly in terms of one aspect, for example, Zeidner (2000) and Schiefele (2000).

Following his comprehensive review of the main theoretical and research literature into motivation, Dörnyei (1998) concludes that no available theory has yet managed to represent it in its total complexity. At the same time, he also acknowledges that it is not the lack, but rather the abundance, of motivation theories which confuses the scene.

A notable recent attempt to draw together current views on motivation (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996) highlights a shift in emphasis from more traditional views of motivation as a fairly static mental or emotional state reflecting inner forces or behavioural contingencies to a more process-oriented approach in which individuals’ thoughts and beliefs play the predominant part. Key research questions emanating from this perspective have come to centre upon what mental processes are involved in motivation, how these operate and affect learning and achievement, and by what means they can be enhanced and sustained at an optimal level (Dörnyei, 1998).
As a result of his own efforts to draw together the myriad of current approaches to motivation, Dörnyei highlights four subareas of particular significance. In social psychology, the concept of attitude has been particularly well researched with regard to its directive influence on behaviour. Here the emphasis has been upon intentions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) as a function of attitudes towards any behavioural activity in relation to subjective norms or social pressures. This was later extended by Ajzen (1988) to incorporate the notion of ‘perceived behavioural control’ in the development of his theory of planned behaviour.

Within cognitive psychology, work in the area of achievement motivation has given rise to what are generally termed expectancy-value theories. Here motivation has tended to be conceptualised in terms of the interaction between an individual’s expectancy of success on any given task and the value that is attached to such success. The greater the likelihood of goal attainment coupled with a high incentive value of the goal, the greater will be the individual’s motivation to succeed (Wigfield, 1994). Each of these aspects will be influenced in turn by other factors such as attributions (Weiner, 1979), feelings of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993) and of self-worth (Covington, 1992) in the expectancy dimension, while intrinsic and extrinsic aspects will influence the values dimension (Eccles & Wigfield, 1995).

A further subgrouping of theories in this area relates to the replacement of the traditional concept of ‘need’ with that of ‘goal’. Here a further distinction has been drawn between goal setting (Locke, 1996) and goal orientation (Pintricht & Schunk, 1996), where concepts of mastery and performance orientations play a predominant part. Students who are performance oriented seek to perform better than others while those who are mastery oriented aim to master the subject.

Finally, the area of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985) has generated a body of research into the relative influences of intrinsically and extrinsically motivating factors. According to Deci & Ryan, intrinsic motivation refers to motivation to perform an action for the pleasure it gives. This represents highly self-determined motivation and links with positive feelings. Extrinsic motivation comes into play when an activity is undertaken in order to achieve some other goal, such as a job promotion. Originally it was believed that such motivation implied a lack of self-determination. However, Vallerand makes the distinction between different levels of extrinsic motivation which become more self-regulated in nature (Vallerand et al., 1992, 1993; Vallerand, 1977). This theoretical construct was examined in relation to language learning by Noels et al. (1999), who found that the more students felt they had personally chosen to learn a language, the more effort they made and the more competent they felt.

With regard to motivation to learn a foreign language, a unique situation is identified by Dörnyei (1998) in which three specific aspects need to be taken into account. These are that language is at the same time:

- a communication coding system that can be taught as a school subject;
- an integral part of our individual identity, involved in almost all mental activities;
- the most important channel of social organisation embedded in the culture of the community where it is used.

Thus, it can be argued that the motivation to learn a second or foreign language is even more complex than in many other aspects of learning. As Dörnyei points out, there is a requirement to take on some form of ‘L2 identity’ and to relate to at least some aspects of the L2 culture, thereby incorporating additional personality and social dimensions.

A number of writers have called for a broadening of Gardner’s original theoretical
Motivation in Foreign Language Learning

perspective to incorporate into foreign language motivation research the cognitive aspects of motivation prominent in the psychological literature (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994; Oxford 1994; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Williams & Burden, 1997). This has led to a range of investigations into cognitive dimensions of foreign language motivation, mainly involving multifactorial studies of a quantitative nature (e.g. Clément et al., 1994; Tremblay & Gardner, 1995; Ozek & Williams, 2000), largely concerned with learning English as a foreign language in contexts such as Canada, Hungary or Turkey.

In the UK, research in this field has tended to be more pragmatic in attempting to identify the influence of key factors such as gender, age, home background and teacher competence in the motivational process (Chambers, 1999). It is to a review of some of these factors that we will turn next before attempting to draw together aspects of both sets of literature in our main study.

Modern Foreign Languages in England

The National Curriculum for England (1999) has laudable aspirations. A rationale for the importance of foreign languages to pupils is provided in the curriculum specification:

Through the study of a foreign language, pupils understand and appreciate different countries, cultures, people and communities—and as they do so, begin to think of themselves as citizens of the world as well as of the United Kingdom. (p. 14)

Modern Foreign Language is currently a statutory subject at Key Stage 3 (age 11–14 years) and 4 (age 14–16 years). However, guidelines are also provided in the curriculum for teaching a language at Key Stage 2. A few schools in England do make some provision for foreign languages at primary level. The National Curriculum specifies programmes of study at Key Stages 3 and 4. These aim to develop understanding of the target language, language skills, language learning skills and cultural awareness. The focus is on communicating in the target language in a range of contexts. The attainment targets for each of the four language skills consist of eight level descriptions specifying the type of performance pupils working at that level should demonstrate. Modifications are provided for Chinese and Japanese.

The curriculum specification emphasises the importance of language across the curriculum and provides examples of links with other subjects such as citizenship, art and design, and mathematics. It also specifies that teaching modern foreign languages can promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, key personal transferable skills, and thinking skills. A statutory inclusion statement outlines principles for providing an inclusive curriculum in order to make available effective learning opportunities for pupils of diverse learning needs and from different social and cultural backgrounds. Under this section, promoting pupil motivation is highlighted.

Gender and Language Learning

A considerable amount of concern has been expressed recently about the underachievement of boys in a number of curriculum subjects. Wragg, writing in the Times Educational Supplement, claims, ‘As we enter the next millennium it is the underachievement of boys that has become one of the biggest challenges facing society today’ (Wragg, 1997). In the area of foreign languages, according to the Office for National
Statistics (1999), girls consistently outperform boys in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and A level examinations in modern languages. Subsequently, the 2000 GCSE results showed girls outperforming boys in French, German and Spanish (Guardian, 24 August, 2000). The reasons for such a trend are inevitably complex and include a wide range of interacting factors, such as the social environment and family influences, a lack of male language teachers in schools, causing French in particular to be seen as a female-dominated subject, and a remarkably female bias in the topics covered in the syllabus (Clark & Trafford, 1996; Moys, 1996; Callaghan, 1998). Barton (1997) provides a helpful analysis of the possible causes of such differences, which include the home, differences in communication styles between boys and girls, peer pressure, lesson content, the teacher, and pupils’ attitudes towards different languages.

In addition, differences in characteristics and learning behaviour between boys and girls may play a part (Graham & Rees, 1995). Cohen (1998, p. 20), for example, observed, ‘Boys under performed in French because they were shy and reluctant to make an effort with French pronunciation in front of an opposite sex who on the average tend to be more at home in this aspect of their work.’ Holmes (1994) and Swann (1998) similarly express concerns about boys’ inadequacies in oral exchanges in classrooms. Studies in gender and interaction in foreign language classrooms tend to demonstrate that boys talk more, but that the nature of the interactions is different (Batters, 1986, 1987). In a recent investigation into patterns of interactions in foreign language classes, Sunderland (1998) found that even if boys did talk more, the girls exhibited more sophisticated interactions, and ‘actively created learning opportunities for themselves and took advantage of those the teacher provided them with’ (p. 75). She concludes, ‘If girls do do better at languages, this may not be because of an “innate” verbal superiority, but because of the way they comport themselves in class’ (p. 76). Studies of language learning motivation in UK and other countries seem to indicate that girls are more motivated than boys on a number of different factors. Ozek (2000), for example, found that female Turkish secondary students had a higher language self-concept, showed greater interest in learning the language as well as in the target culture, and also perceived a higher degree of parental encouragement and interest.

Other studies of attitudes and motivation related to gender differences have shown similar results; for example, the studies conducted by Bacon and Finneman (1992) and Gardner and Lambert (1972) suggest that females tend to show greater integrative motivation and more positive attitudes to L2 speakers. In an extensive study (32,000 students) in Australia and New Zealand, Zammit (1993) examined the effects of gender and year level on students’ attitudes and foreign language preferences. She found that, overall, male students had a less positive attitude to learning a language other than English than females. Similar results have been obtained in Eastern contexts. For instance, Spolsky (1989) investigated immigrant learners of Hebrew as a second language in Israel and found that girls demonstrated more favourable attitudes to Hebrew, Israel and Israelis than did boys. Kiziltepe (1999) examined gender differences among Turkish high school students with respect to their attitudes towards British and American people, and found that girls had more favourable attitudes towards the British and more integrative motivation than boys did.

In the UK, a more negative picture emerges regarding motivation. A study carried out by Stables and Wikeley (1999) in 10 schools in the West of England found disturbingly negative attitudes to foreign languages among boys and girls, with boys being even more negative than the girls. The respondents rated the subject low in terms of perceived usefulness, enjoyment, difficulty and self-image, and found foreign languages neither
intrinsically nor extrinsically motivating. In addition, Taylor’s (2000) study of six local education authorities in England found that fewer boys participated in exchanges with schools abroad than girls.

**Age and Language Learning Motivation**

Somewhat less has been reported on age differences than gender differences, particularly in the area of language learning, but the general tendency appears to be that motivation decreases with age. Research carried out prior to the introduction of the National Curriculum in England and Wales indicated a sharp decline in the proportion of secondary school pupils learning French between the first and fourth year (Department of Education and Science/Welsh Office ([DES/WO], 1983). This was confirmed by Aplin (1991), who reported that fewer than half of the pupils who completed the pre-16 stage of schooling would have followed a foreign language course for the entirety of their secondary education.

This situation has inevitably been affected with regard to the continuation of foreign language learning by the introduction of the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum. However, this does not necessarily imply that the pupils’ enthusiasm has been increased or even maintained. Chambers’ (1999) study of the motivation of pupils in Leeds to study German showed a decline in enthusiasm between year 7 and 9. Similarly, Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993) report that the early enthusiasm for learning French in their study of six comprehensive schools in the South of England was beginning to wane within a year.

These findings endorse the much earlier research of Gardner and Smythe (1975), which revealed that attitudes towards language learning become less positive as learners became older. They are reflected also in studies from abroad (Zammit, 1993; Ozek, 2000), which show a decrease in motivation over the first three years of learning a foreign language.

There is a need, however, to temper any conclusions on this score with the knowledge that motivation to learn in school in general tends to decline for a significant proportion of pupils during their secondary school years (Keys & Fernandes, 1993; Barber, 1994; Chambers, 1999). It may well be, therefore, that the decline in motivation to learn foreign languages is at least in part a function of this general ‘switching off’ from school-based learning.

**Attitudes Towards Different Languages**

Similarly, there have been relatively few studies into attitudes and motivation towards learning different languages in British schools. Chambers (1999) reports a differential rise in the number of students entering for GCSE examinations in French (4%), German (22%) and Spanish (40%) between 1991 and 1994, although the overall number of entries fell significantly between 1996 and 1997. A survey carried out by the Assessment of Performance Unit for the DES (1985) found that the highest proportion of both boys and girls finding foreign languages useful were those studying Spanish. At the same time, German was reported as being both easy and enjoyable by boys and girls.

The study by Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993) concluded that the majority of pupils of both sexes preferred learning German to learning French and that more boys than girls showed an interest in learning German. Chambers (1994) reports a reasonably positive attitude towards learning German. Students in his study at 10+, 13+ and 16+ viewed
German as comparatively easy, logical, enjoyable and interesting, and useful. Similarly, Thornton and Cajkler (1996) found positive attitudes towards Germany and its culture. Barton (1997) explains that German has a masculine image, and that boys find the guttural pronunciation more accessible than do girls. German is also viewed as more useful by boys for industry and commerce.

The Current Research

Drawing upon the general motivational literature, we constructed a conceptual matrix which was first divided into external and internal factors. The former included such aspects as the influence of significant others and classroom organisation, whilst the latter was divided into three subareas; attitudes, identity and feelings of agency.

The resultant groupings are presented in Fig. 1. It is acknowledged here that not every aspect of the motivational literature has been incorporated, nor has any attempt been made to link the various subgroups in any causal or hierarchical manner to produce a model of the motivational process. Moreover, the allocation of specific aspects of motivation to one or another subgroup inevitably leads to a degree of overlap. It is also acknowledged that any division into internal and external factors is oversimplistic; all aspects of learning are influenced by the social environment, and, in addition, all aspects that are external to the learner are internalised in different ways. Thus, the internal/external distinction is more fluid than might appear at first sight. Nevertheless, the result and matrix proved helpful in providing a foundation for informing the design of the research study.

Questionnaire Construction

The Language Learning Motivation Questionnaire (LLMQ) which was subsequently constructed attempted to take into account as many as possible of the factors presented in Fig. 1. Several statements were constructed which appeared to have face validity in representing the areas of motivation selected, some of which related directly to previous questionnaires such as Gardner’s AMTB. The final version was accomplished by means of several pilot stages within which items were increasingly refined as a result of statistical analysis, student comments and feedback from colleagues and others working in this area. A final pilot study involved 100 students attending a large community college which did not participate in the main study. The responses of the students in this pilot study were analysed by means of SPSS, the results of which indicated the strong internal consistency and construct validity of each of the subareas, apart from locus of control, which is a rather more complex construct than may first appear. It was therefore decided to restrict the items in this latter category to the assessment of feelings of internal responsibility for one’s own learning.

The resulting questionnaire consisted of 16 constructs, with four items related to each construct. Participants were asked to respond to each item using a four-point scale ranging from definitely true to definitely not true. Sample items are shown in Fig. 2, where it can be seen that the central focus of the questionnaire is on students’ feelings of agency (six categories), as this is an area which has been relatively unexplored in previous research into foreign language learning. This is accompanied by items relating to five aspects of attitudes towards learning foreign languages, three categories relating to external influences and two sets of items relating to students’ perceptions of themselves as foreign language learners.
INTERNAL FACTORS

**Attitudes**
What do I think about ...  
... the language?  
... the speakers? (integrativeness)  
... learning languages in general?  
... specific activities?  
Do I find it ...  
... challenging? (flow)  
... enjoyable?  
... intrinsically interesting?  
... valuable? (instrumental)

**Identity**
How do I perceive myself ...  
... as a learner?  
... as a learner of specific languages?  
Do I feel the need to protect  
my feelings of self-worth?  
Do I have a high level of  
achievement motivation?

**Agency**
How capable do I consider myself to be in  
accomplishing what I’m required to do? (autonomy)  
Do I have a strong sense of competence?  
How much effort am I prepared to expend in  
this particular activity?  
How confident am I in predicting my future  
success in any activity from past experiences? (self-efficacy)  
What kind of sense do I make of my perceived  
successes and failures in learning? (attribution  
theory)  
Do I have a strong sense of inner control over  
my learning outcomes? (locus of control)  
Is my motivational style more geared towards  
mastery or performance goals?  
Am I able to set realistic goals for myself which  
are both challenging and within my range of  
competence? (flow/goal theory)  
Do I have a range of learning strategies at my  
disposal?  
Am I able to draw upon the knowledge I gain  
from my previous performance to develop new  
strategies? (metacognition)

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Parental interest and support.  
Quantity and quality of teaching  
(mediation).  
Nature and amount of feedback.  
(informational vs controlling).  
Organisation of learning groups.  
Nature of the learning environment.  
Attitudes and behaviour of peers.

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**Fig. 1.** Factors contributing to the motivational process.
The Present Study

The current study is a preliminary investigation into a wide range of factors relating to the motivation of secondary school students in England to learn foreign languages. Our main research questions were as follows.

1. How motivated are such students to learn a foreign language?
2. How strongly do different factors contribute to motivation in this area?
   (a) Do boys and girls differ in their motivation to learn a foreign language?
   (b) Are there any differences in motivation between secondary school students of different ages?
   (c) Are there any differences in motivation between students of different levels of proficiency?
   (d) Are there any differences in motivation to learn French or German?

The investigation was carried out in three schools in the South-west of England.

School A is a Community College with 1263 pupils in a rural setting at the edge of a small market town and draws from a largely rural catchment area. A choice of French or German is offered in year 7, and a second foreign language in year 8. Students are in ability sets.

School B is a large, split-site community college in a medium-sized town, with 2260 students who come predominantly from the urban catchment area. A choice of French or German is offered from year 7, and a second foreign language from year 8. Classes are streamed from year 9.

School C is a small urban community college of 670 pupils in a small town. The
catchment is both urban and rural. A choice of French or German is offered at year 7, with a second foreign language offered in year 9. Students are in ability sets from year 7.

**Method**

The methodology consisted of a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The LLMQ (described earlier) was first used in order to obtain an overview of the strength of different motivational factors and to examine differences between gender, age and language studied. The results enabled us to identify areas for further in-depth investigation using interviews.

The questionnaire was administered to 228 pupils in class time by the researchers. See Table I for a summary of the sample used. The purpose and significance of the study was explained to the pupils and their assistance was requested. Any pupil who wished to do so was given the opportunity of opting out from completing the questionnaire and/or follow-up interviews. None elected to do so. The questionnaire response format was explained carefully. Most respondents were able to complete the questionnaires within a 45-minute period. They were collected by the researcher and sealed in an envelope. The data were entered into SPSS in order to provide appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics.

As each category consists of four statements to be rated along a four-point scale, the potential range of mean scores runs from 4 to 16, where 4 represents the strongly negative pole and 16 represents the strongly positive pole. It is therefore possible to compare mean scores for groups or subgroups of students across areas of motivation, as demonstrated in Tables IV to VIII.

Twenty-four pupils were subsequently interviewed to follow up aspects of interest arising from the questionnaires. Confidentiality was assured and respected. The data arising from these interviews were coded and content analysed. In this article we report the quantitative findings and illustrate these with extracts from the interviews.
TABLE II. Reliability of subscales \( (n = 228) \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need, importance</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative orientation</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic motivation</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived success</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived ability</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agency</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result of effort</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal locus</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of strategies</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive awareness</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive strategies</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The group</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

(a) Reliability of Language Learning Motivation Questionnaire

The internal consistency of each subscale, as measured by Cronbach’s alpha, is shown in Table II. All figures are considered to meet acceptable levels of questionnaire reliability.

(b) General Findings

Table III provides the overall mean scores for the whole sample \( (n = 228) \) on each of the motivation subareas. These were computed by adding the means of the four items in each area, thus allowing for a score ranging from 4 to 16. Eight is considered to represent a negative stance (not very true) in comparison to a score of 12 representing a more positive position (quite true). Considerable caution must be employed in the interpretation of such figures, particularly in view of the size of the standard deviations and of the complex interacting variables (school, language, age, ability, gender). However, some tentative inferences can be drawn.

On the attitude dimension, there is a general desire to do well in learning a foreign language as well as a positive integrative orientation. Although less strong, there are also indications of a fairly positive interest in/linking for foreign languages. Feelings about the need to learn a foreign language are somewhat more equivocal, as is an integrative orientation.

With regard to agency, a fairly strong internal sense of responsibility for one’s own learning emerged. The respondents generally felt they made an effort in their learning, and had a strong sense of positive results from their efforts. They expressed a fairly high level of awareness of why they did or did not do well in language lessons and a sense
of knowing what they need to do to do better. The limited use of metacognitive strategies reported was notable.

As far as identity is concerned, there appears to be a fairly positive feeling among students of their ability and success. With regard to external factors, the general level of teaching is quite highly regarded, while the attitude of parents was considerably lower, and the cohesive nature of the group in the language class is perceived as low.

(c) Gender Differences

Table IV shows the differences between boys and girls. Means were compared using an independent samples t-test (2-tailed). The assumption of homogeneity of variance was tested using the Levine Test. Where the assumption was not justified, an approximation to the t-test was used which does not make the assumption of equality of variance.

The results indicate that girls expressed a significantly higher degree of liking and desire as well as a greater integrative orientation. Girls also reported a higher level of effort and belief in the result of making an effort. While girls reported a higher level of use of metacognitive strategies than boys, this was strikingly low for both boys and girls, as identified by their responses to items regarding planning, goal setting and self-evaluation. This finding was further investigated as part of the subsequent interviews. Finally, girls were significantly more intrinsically motivated than boys, who scored poorly on this factor.

The gender differences were further explored in interviews. Both boys and girls explained that girls were more inclined to put effort into work that appeared tedious,
while boys needed to find enjoyment in it. As one year 9 boy put it, ‘Girls just do the boring bits which boys just can’t be bothered with’. Another year 9 boy added:

Some girls are better than boys cause it’s been proved that girls get on with their work, but some boys actually enjoy what they’re doing so they get on with it, ‘cause if they don’t enjoy the piece of work they actually don’t do anything.

Several of the participants also explained that it was not ‘cool’ for boys to like languages, and even if they did, it was not appropriate to show it. As a year 7 girl noted:

[boys] probably they don’t like it anyway, but some of them might like it and they just don’t want to show it. I think girls don’t mind, ‘cause lots of us like it, so they don’t sort of pretend that they don’t, like the boys.

A year 9 girl added, ‘They [boys] can do it if they put half a mind to it, but it’s just they don’t want teasing from the other boys.’

(d) Age Differences

Differences between the scores obtained by students in year 7 and year 9 using independent samples $t$-test (2-tailed) are shown in Table V. Significantly higher scores were obtained by year 7 students on seven of the subscales. These students perceived a higher degree of need for the language, had a higher integrative orientation and a more positive attitude to their teachers. Their perception of their ability was higher, as was their perceived success. They also felt that they expended more effort. A noteworthy

## Table IV. Difference between boys and girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boys $(n = 112)$</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Girls $(n = 111)$</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Difference G-B</th>
<th>$t$ value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liking</td>
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<td>11.99</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>-1.74</td>
<td>-3.40</td>
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<td>0.001**</td>
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<td>Desire</td>
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<td>3.70</td>
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<td>2.99</td>
<td>-1.98</td>
<td>-4.33</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need</td>
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<td>11.03</td>
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<td>-1.39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrative orientation</td>
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<td>3.28</td>
<td>12.71</td>
<td>2.92</td>
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<td>-1.39</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>0.165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic motivation</td>
<td>9.64</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>11.40</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>-0.80</td>
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<tr>
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<td>12.52</td>
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<td>0.57</td>
<td>-1.50</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>0.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort</td>
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<td>3.28</td>
<td>13.32</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>-0.56</td>
<td>-1.78</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>0.040**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result of effort</td>
<td>12.89</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>13.64</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>-2.13</td>
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<td>12.98</td>
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<td>0.98</td>
<td>-2.30</td>
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<td>Parents</td>
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<td>11.55</td>
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<td>-1.29</td>
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<td>0.199</td>
</tr>
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<td>Group</td>
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<td>9.88</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>0.629</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Maximum score: 16)

** = Sig at $p \leq 0.01$.

* = Sig at $p \leq 0.05$.  

while boys needed to find enjoyment in it. As one year 9 boy put it, ‘Girls just do the boring bits which boys just can’t be bothered with’. Another year 9 boy added:

Some girls are better than boys cause it’s been proved that girls get on with their work, but some boys actually enjoy what they’re doing so they get on with it, ‘cause if they don’t enjoy the piece of work they actually don’t do anything.

Several of the participants also explained that it was not ‘cool’ for boys to like languages, and even if they did, it was not appropriate to show it. As a year 7 girl noted:

[boys] probably they don’t like it anyway, but some of them might like it and they just don’t want to show it. I think girls don’t mind, ‘cause lots of us like it, so they don’t sort of pretend that they don’t, like the boys.

A year 9 girl added, ‘They [boys] can do it if they put half a mind to it, but it’s just they don’t want teasing from the other boys.’
result again emerged regarding the area of metacognitive strategies. Year 9 students rated all four items of this subscale particularly low, while year 7 students claimed to use significantly more planning, goal-setting, self-evaluation, and personal strategies.

Some of these points are exemplified in the following exchanges between the interviewer (I) and three year 9 students.

*I:* L, you’ve had three years of learning German now. How do you like it?
*L:* No.
*I:* Why is that?
*L:* I just find it boring … all the exercises and stuff. We need a lot of help with that. She thinks we can work it out.

*I:* Are there any things that you find particularly boring?
*D:* Hm … well, learning the new vocab.
*I:* Right.
*D:* ‘Cause you got to write it all out, then say it, then write it all out again.

*I:* Were you pleased to give up French?
*H:* Yeah [laughs].
*I:* What about German? Are you happy to keep it up?
*H:* Yeah, hopefully, but it’s a bit boring.
*I:* If it wasn’t a school subject, would you ever learn it?
*H:* No. I probably wouldn’t learn it if I didn’t have to. I think I need it, but it’s quite hard to learn it sort of as well. I mean we are sort of bottom set, it’s, like, really hard to learn anything.

(e) Differences between High, Middle and Low Proficiency Students

The teachers of each class were asked to rate every student’s language proficiency as A (high), B (middle) or C (low). The differences between each group of students were investigated by means of ANOVA with regard to their attitudes towards language learning and their sense of agency (see Table VI).

In relating these results to the overall mean scores for the entire cohort, it can be seen that students at every level of proficiency felt similarly about the quality of the teaching they were receiving and were equally integratively oriented. However, students rated as displaying high language proficiency reported feeling a significantly greater desire to do well at learning a foreign language than either of the other groups and found language learning significantly more interesting and enjoyable. They also reported a significantly greater need to learn the language than did B or C rated students. High proficiency students also saw themselves as receiving a much higher level of parental support than did low proficiency students, but no significant difference was found here between groups A and B or between groups B and C, despite a detectable trend in the mean scores. A more positive group interaction was detected amongst A rated students than those rated as average, but this was not a particularly strong finding and no other group interaction differences were revealed.

In terms of feelings of personal agency, group A students saw themselves as putting significantly greater effort into their language learning than did group C, and both groups A and B saw themselves as benefiting more from their efforts than did Group C. There were, however, no significant differences between any proficiency levels with regard to
Table V. Differences between year 7 and year 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 7 (n = 125)</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Year 9 (n = 96)</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Difference (7–9)</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Liking</td>
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<td>10.79</td>
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<td>10.79 – 3.95</td>
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<td>11.83 – 2.95</td>
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<td>11.97 – 2.69</td>
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<td>11.64</td>
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<td>11.64 – 2.74</td>
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<td>2.85</td>
<td>8.91 – 2.94</td>
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<td>10.71</td>
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<td>10.71 – 3.21</td>
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<td>3.36</td>
<td>9.80 – 3.05</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>188</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

** Sig at p ≤ 0.01.
* Sig at p ≤ 0.05.

The following interview exchanges illustrate the poor language self-concept in two year 9 low-achieving pupils.

I: Can you think of anything that you did really well?
B: What, in French?
I: French or German.
B: No, I can’t think of anything.

G: Sometimes I can speak another language quite good, sometimes I can’t … Most of the times when the words are quite easy … I can do it, but if they’re really hard, like we have to do a whole sentence of it, then I’m not very good. I have to have help from the teacher.
**TABLE VI. Differences between mean scores according to proficiency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Mean scores by language proficiency</th>
<th>A–B</th>
<th>A–C</th>
<th>B–C</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High (A)</td>
<td>Middle (B)</td>
<td>Low (C)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>n = 91</td>
<td>n = 88</td>
<td>n = 39</td>
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<td>11.87</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td>1.65*</td>
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<td>11.87</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td>1.80**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need</td>
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<td>10.17</td>
<td>10.00</td>
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<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
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<td>12.65</td>
<td>11.39</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
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<td>Result of effort</td>
<td>12.56</td>
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<td>9.64</td>
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<td>12.96</td>
<td>12.28</td>
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<td>Parents</td>
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<td>11.20</td>
<td>9.72</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
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<td>Group</td>
<td>10.76</td>
<td>9.52</td>
<td>9.51</td>
<td>1.23*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Sig at p ≤ 0.01.
* Sig at p ≤ 0.05.

(f) Strategy Use

The issue of strategy use was investigated further in the interviews. Most participants appeared to have great difficulty in discussing different aspects of their metacognitive strategy use and conveyed a lack of sense of control over their learning. High proficiency pupils exhibited a slightly wider range of examples of autonomous learning strategies, though these were not particularly wide ranging. They included using a dictionary to learn, using German computer games, revising at home, buying CD-Roms, vocabulary learning and using the library.

Very little evidence was found of planning behaviour. One year 9 girl (ranked A) commented, ‘I can’t plan very well … I need to try and plan a bit more I think’. In general, there was little evidence of self-evaluation, and when there was, it tended to be teacher-directed. As a year 9 girl (ranked B) notes:

> Our teacher gives us targets at the end of a unit that we’ve done so that we can go back and, if we’ve done the target, can tick it off which also makes you feel good because you feel you’ve got there.

However, a high achieving year 7 girl noted, ‘I look through, I look through, I, I’m surprised I’ve learned so much in one year. It’s quite a lot to learn’.
Lower achieving pupils tended to exhibit apathy towards any suggestion of independent learning. In response to a question about whether he ever decided what he wanted to do, a year 7 boy (ranked C) explained, ‘Well, it’s, you know, like annoying sometimes. See what I mean, it freaks your brain out.’ A low-achieving year 9 girl similarly replied, ‘Not really. She tells us what to do and that’s it really.’ A low-achieving year 7 girl responded as follows:

I: Do you sometimes feel you have something you want to learn and do on your own?
M: Yeah.
I: Can you give me an example?
M: No.

A few of the pupils identified ways of learning vocabulary. A high proficiency year 7 boy said:

N: Before we have tests, we get, like, 20 minutes to revise. I just write all of it in English and translate that into German. That helps me.
I: Did the teacher tell you to?
N: No, I just found it’s the easiest way to try and remember it.

A high-achieving year 9 boy explained his language learning strategy as follows: ‘I just cut my mind off English, just put my brain into French.’

However, most respondents were unable to identify strategies. As a middle-achieving year 9 boy says, ‘It’s up to the teacher what we learn and that’s that, so really you have to do what they say and get on with it.’

(g) Motivation to Learn a Specific Language

The most striking results were obtained from a comparison between responses of students attending French and German classes, with German classes receiving significantly higher scores on 11 of the subscales. Table VII shows differences between those studying French and German using independent samples t-test. Students exhibited a stronger liking and desire for German, a more positive attitude towards their teachers, a stronger sense of parental support, and a more cohesive group feeling. Those studying German also rated more highly their personal ability and success, perceived themselves as obtaining more positive results of their efforts, and showed a greater awareness of why they did well or badly and what they needed to do to improve, as well as perceiving a higher use of metacognitive strategies. The perceptions of use of metacognitive strategies for learning French were particularly low.

When the results for girls studying German and French were examined, the only significant difference to emerge related to need, with girls perceiving a higher need to learn French. However, striking differences emerged between boys in French and German classes, with significantly higher ratings given by those studying German on all but three of the subscales. Table VIII shows the differences between the motivation of boys towards learning French and German using independent samples t-test. The very low ratings for use of metacognitive strategies and intrinsic motivation for learning French were particularly low.

In the follow-up interviews, the participants tended to explain the boys’ preference for German in terms of French being a more feminine language and German more masculine. As a high proficiency year 9 boy put it, ‘French is the language of love and stuff’ while German is ‘the war, Hitler and all that’. A year 9 girl explains:
I reckon girls are really into French; they like the way that French sounds more than boys do. The last class I was in, the boys seemed to like German better.

**Discussion**

The first thing to emerge from these findings is that the general level of motivation to learn a foreign language ranges from moderate to high across all three schools in this study. With regard to the attitude dimension, a strong desire to be successful at French or German is expressed, as well as a high level of integrative orientation and positive feeling about the quality of teaching received. Parents are seen as generally supportive, but group functioning is felt to be neither particularly positive nor negative.

However, these students did not consider it to be very important to learn a foreign language, nor were the lessons found to be particularly interesting or enjoyable, reflecting previous research findings. This finding may well raise broader questions about the way in which different subjects in the school curriculum are perceived as being more or less important to students. This also illustrates the importance of the sentiments expressed in the Nuffield Report (2000).

In considering language learners’ views of their own capabilities and sense of agency, the respondents rated perceived result of effort and feelings of internal locus of responsibility most highly. Slightly above average feelings of competence and self-efficacy were also reported. However, although there were indications of reasonably high cognitive and metacognitive awareness, there was little evidence that the respondents actually used metacognitive strategies. Moreover, learning a foreign language did not appear to be particularly intrinsically motivating in itself. A closer look at the data,

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>French SD</th>
<th>German SD</th>
<th>Diff G-F</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liking</td>
<td>10.28</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>-3.07</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>0.002**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire</td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>0.042*</td>
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<td>Need</td>
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<td>-2.06</td>
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<td>0.013**</td>
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<td>-3.78</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>0.000**</td>
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** Sig at p ≤ 0.01.
* Sig at p ≤ 0.05.
**Table VIII. Differences between motivation of boys towards learning French and German**

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>French</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Difference (G-F)</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Liking</td>
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<td>4.10</td>
<td>11.20</td>
<td>11.20</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>-2.58</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>0.011*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
<td>12.33</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>-2.76</td>
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<td>0.007**</td>
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<td>11.18</td>
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<td>0.015*</td>
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<td>11.69</td>
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<td>0.010**</td>
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<td>2.50</td>
<td>-3.60</td>
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<td>0.000**</td>
</tr>
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<td>Group</td>
<td>9.08</td>
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<td>10.99</td>
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<td>1.91</td>
<td>-3.17</td>
<td>95</td>
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</table>

French = 53
German = 59

**Sig at p ≤ 0.01.
* Sig at p ≤ 0.05.

However, reveals a more complex pattern of findings, where such factors as gender, age, language, proficiency and the specific language to be learnt all play a significant part.

In line with most of the current literature on gender differences in relation to school achievement, girls in this study demonstrated a higher degree of motivation to learn foreign languages than did boys, irrespective of the language to be learnt. Not only did they convey a more positive set of attitudes towards language learning, but also demonstrated a more powerful sense of agency across a number of dimensions. Comments elicited within individual interviews suggest that this might be part of a more general orientation towards schoolwork rather than necessarily relating only to learning languages. These findings mirror those found in other studies, which were summarised earlier. As such, they add to the growing evidence for concern about the widening gap in motivation to learn found between girls and boys. However, we would warn against the simplistic assumption that this means that boys are necessarily underachieving or demotivated.

The findings of this study demonstrate a clear negative trend with age in terms of the students’ integrative orientation, their feelings about the competence of their teachers, as well as the perceived importance of learning a foreign language. This reflects Chambers’ (1999, p. 81) comment:

> Secondary school teachers of German rejoice. The evidence ... suggests that your Year 7 pupils are looking forward with enthusiasm to learning your subject ... Two years later the picture is not quite so encouraging ... The honeymoon is over. The enthusiasm is on the wane. Pupils appear disgruntled. Something has gone wrong.

Perceived success and perceived proficiency both appear to decrease significantly over the first three years at secondary school, as also does the amount of effort expended in
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Moreover, contrary to expectation, student use of metacognitive strategies also appears to decrease over time. Caution must be taken in interpreting these findings as they are the result of a cross-sectional rather than a developmental study. It could be that a real difference existed between the year 7 and year 9 cohorts, but the size and nature of the sample makes this seem unlikely. Nevertheless, a follow-up study at some later date of the year 7 cohort would seem to be warranted.

These findings mirror those of Chambers’ recent study (1999) and those of Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993). They are also in line with the results of Zammit’s Australian study (1993), but may be indicative of a slightly earlier negative trend than was revealed in her large-scale sample. They also reflect the conclusions drawn by the present authors from a previous small-scale qualitative study where learners were found to become more external in their attributions for success and failure in learning a foreign language as they grew older (Williams & Burden, 1999).

There is no reason, of course, as indicated earlier, why such findings should be confined to learning foreign languages. It is more than possible that they reflect a much wider trend reported in the educational literature of a decreasing motivation to learn amongst young people as they move through the formal educational system (Nicholls, 1989; Covington, 1992). One issue which may still need to be resolved, therefore, is whether age-related trends, which may be found in follow-up studies, are due to issues related specifically to language learning or to a more general adolescent disenchantment with the whole process of secondary schooling or, conceivably, with a combination of both.

Discussion of the effects of language proficiency on student motivation must be tempered by an awareness of the potential influence of other related contributing factors, such as the ‘pygmalion’ effect of teacher expectation (Brophy & Good, 1974; Barnes & Lucas, 1974) and the ‘Matthew’ effect (Walberg & Tsai 1983). As Stanovich (1986) has pointed out with regard to reading failure, readers of differing skills soon diverge in the amount of practice they receive in reading and writing. He cites research studies which demonstrate enormous differences in exposure to print according to ability range as early as midway through the first school year, with the average skilled reader reading approximately three times as many words in group reading sessions as the average less skilled reader. This leads to a situation of cumulative advantage, where ‘the rich get richer’, a phenomenon which has been described by Walberg and Tsai (1983) as the ‘Matthew effect’, after the Gospel according to Matthew (25: 9) ‘For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath’. Thus, rather than a linear, one-way causal relationship, a more reciprocal two-way process is likely to be occurring, leading to self-fulfilling or self-reinforcing interactions between motivation and achievement.

In fact, it seems very likely that at least some aspects of the latter effect are in operation here. Students who are perceived by teachers and by themselves as performing well in any subject are more likely to enjoy that subject, to find it interesting and to wish to be successful at it. Again, it is no surprise that such students see their parents as being particularly supportive. (Wolfendale, 1983; Holden, 1997). However, although such differences had clearly emerged early on in these students’ secondary school careers, it is worth noting that they mainly occurred between the extreme levels of perceived proficiency, i.e. between high and low achievers. Few significant differences were found between high proficiency language learners and those of average achievement. This may mean that it is still not too late by year 9 to capture and maintain an enthusiasm for language learning amongst the majority of pupils, but that far more needs to be done in
preventing that early sense of failure displayed by the low achievers (see also Chambers [1999] for further discussion of this issue).

Some particularly interesting findings emerged with regard to the differences between the proficiency groups in their sense of agency. Again, it was clear, particularly at the extremes, that the pupils themselves were well aware of their relative positions within the academic ‘pecking order’ and that this was perceived by successful students as being related to the amount of effort they were prepared to expend on their studies. However, it appears that the C students were already in danger of falling into the trap of ‘learned helplessness’ (Dweck & Wortman, 1982) in that they perceived far less actual and potential rewards for their efforts than did either of the other two groups. It is here that the lessons learned from labelling theory, and from work on attribution retraining (Fowler & Peterson, 1981; Hastings, 1994) could have a significant contribution to make.

The importance of intrinsic motivation is once again emphasised by these results. Successful students claim to enjoy learning languages for their own sake and to be prepared to learn them even if they are not required to do so. Whether this is the result of general high ability, of specific language proficiency, or of orientation towards learning in general and learning languages in particular, has yet to be determined.

A result which would appear to warrant further investigation is the apparent lack of use of metacognitive strategies in their language learning by students at every level, despite the fact that they appear to recognise the importance of using such strategies and even the fact that the successful language learners felt significantly more able to identify the reasons for their successes and failures than did either of the other two groups. This finding reflects that of other studies which reveal the need to build cognitive reflection into all curriculum subject teaching (Burden & Williams, 1998) and the confusions expressed by students receiving mixed messages in this respect from examination oriented syllabi (Burden & Nichols, 2000).

The specific findings of this study which relate to language preference are particularly fascinating and again provide support for those of previous studies (DES/APU, 1985; Phillips & Filmer-Sankey, 1993). This gives rise to a range of questions relating to attitudes to different languages, and even to different curriculum subjects. Further investigation into learners’ perceptions of different languages could conceivably lead to a reconsideration of which language to introduce first into the modern language curriculum. France may well be our geographically nearest neighbour, but if other languages such as German or Spanish are perceived by young people, and boys in particular, as more useful, interesting, or easier to learn, then it may be that helpful lessons can be drawn by schools.

Some important implications for teachers of languages can be suggested. First, teachers have a significant role to play in investing the content of their teaching with value, and in engaging learners in discussion about why they are studying languages. There is also a need to move towards the active development of the cognitive and metacognitive strategies necessary for language learning (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989), as well as the need to help learners to develop beliefs in their own abilities to learn a language and to control the process of learning it. In other words, devoting time and effort to enhancing motivation in terms of agency and attitude will probably be more a valuable investment in the long term than time spent conveying the content of the curriculum, whether grammar, language, skill or function.

Such conclusions are, of course, pertinent to any curriculum area. We would suggest that expanding such studies of motivation into other subjects could be useful in enhancing our understanding of students’ motivation across the curriculum, and conse-
quently, provide insights into ways to enable learners to see value in and take control of, their learning in school.

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