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The study of MFLs in England: uptake in secondary school and progression to Higher Education

Conference Paper Abstract

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Abstract

The decline in the numbers of students learning foreign languages in secondary schools in England, together with the low and decreasing number of top grades in these subjects, has raised concerns among educationalists, employers and politicians in the last few years. The aim of this research was, therefore, to investigate the uptake of and progression in foreign languages in order to better understand the challenges these subjects are facing and their position in schools and universities.

The analyses presented in this article showed that the number of 16-18 year old students choosing to study a language continues to decline. However, combinations of languages with science subjects and with mathematics were relatively popular. Regarding progression, achieving good grades in language subjects was one of the factors with greatest influence on continuing to study language subjects (for example, in higher education). However, performance in languages was, in general, worse than average performance at school.

The research concludes that the current position of languages in schools in England might lead to very low levels of participation in the learning of languages other than English by the end of compulsory education. This will have an impact on higher education provision and languages, an already vulnerable area in higher education, is likely to become more so.

Full paper

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