

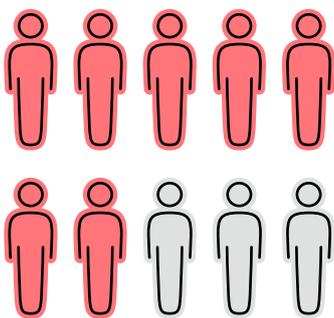
Secondary learners and languages

Students' take on language learning

At Pearson, we believe that language learning is about more than words; it's about unlocking new forms of communication, culture and connection.

Many secondary students see languages as a direct route to thrive in their future lives, supporting long-term development, preparing them for new careers and relationships, and helping build confidence in themselves and their abilities.

In November 2023, we asked 1,000 secondary learners across the country to share their perceptions, predictions and hopes around language learning in UK schools. The results were weighted to form a nationally representative picture of students and modern languages today. Here is what they told us.



7 in 10

secondary students can only speak **one** language.

Speaking

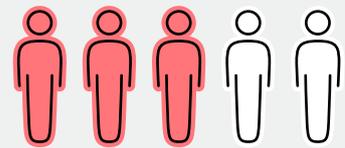
- ▶ **69%** of UK students speak one language only.
- ▶ Less than a quarter (**23%**) of students are happy knowing just one language
- ▶ Despite the low numbers of language learners, **58%** of all students agree that being able to learn a language would be beneficial to them now, while three-quarters believe it would be beneficial to them in the future.
- ▶ The majority (**56%**) believe language learning is more important now than it was 20 years ago, compared to **45%** of adults who said the same in an earlier survey.



The barriers to language learning

- Only **34%** feel their current language learning is setting them up for life in an interconnected world.
- On the whole, boys find languages harder than girls (**59%** versus **54%**).
- While **60%** of 11-year-olds find language learning enjoyable, less than half of 16-year-olds (**46%**) feel the same way.

But there are opportunities to improve engagement in languages for students.



Almost **3 in 5**

students say learning a new language is 'too hard'.

What, if anything, do you think would encourage you and your friends to learn a new language? Student vs adult views

Student views

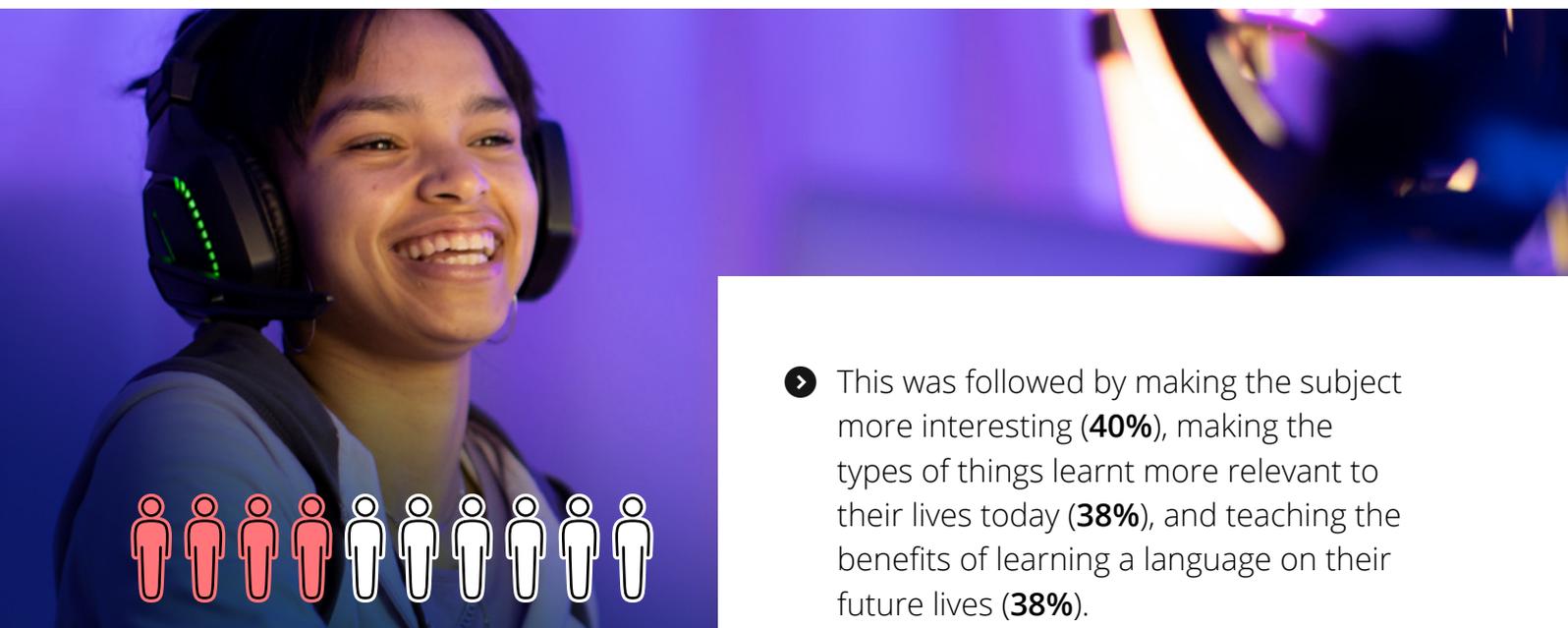
Making the subject more interesting		50%
Learning about different cultures and lifestyles		39%
Making exams less stressful		39%
Teaching benefits of learning a language		37%
Making the type of things learnt relevant		37%
Greater use of digital learning		29%
Making topics learnt more diverse/inclusive		22%
Making exam gradings more comparable		18%
Nothing		7%
Other		0%

What, if anything, do you think would encourage you and your friends to learn a new language? Student vs adult views

Adult views

Teaching them the benefits of learning a language on their future lives		44%
Making the subject more interesting		43%
Making the type of things learnt more relevant to young people's lives today		38%
Learning about different cultures and lifestyles as well as vocabulary		38%
Making it accessible to more people		37%
Making the topics learnt more diverse and inclusive		24%
Nothing		11%
Other		2%

The responses of older students – aged 15 and 16 years old – show a difference in priorities around language uptake at GCSE and beyond. Their answers may help us better understand the continued decline in language uptake at late secondary level.

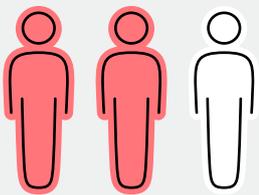
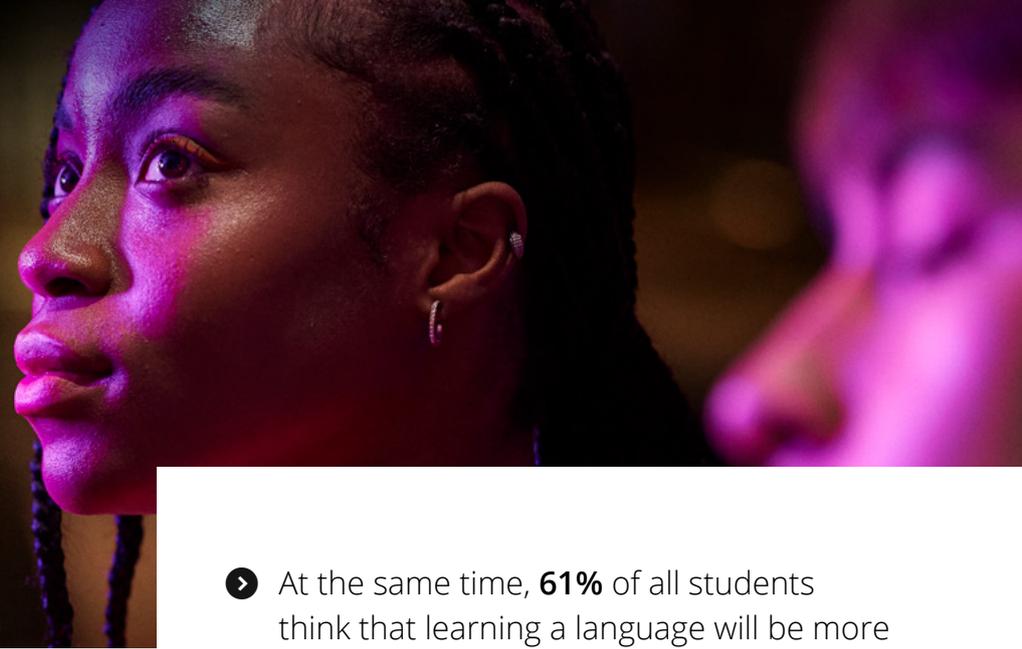


42% of students

agree that **making the exams less stressful** is the primary factor that would encourage learners at GCSE age to learn a new language.

- This was followed by making the subject more interesting (**40%**), making the types of things learnt more relevant to their lives today (**38%**), and teaching the benefits of learning a language on their future lives (**38%**).
- The current model for language learning in school is also not perceived to be setting learners up for life in an interconnected world by all learners, in particular those taking their GCSEs – **45%** of whom agreed with this statement.

What matters to students?



Almost **two-thirds**

of learners believe that knowing a language will be important to society within the next two decades.

- At the same time, **61%** of all students think that learning a language will be more important in society when they are aged 25 compared to now.
- 7 in 10 students (**69%**) say being able to use another language in a professional setting is important to them.
- The same proportion (**69%**) feel languages are important to them to help them work abroad.

Their answers suggest that learners see the value of knowing another language in the early stages of their careers.

The most important things for students when it comes to learning languages:

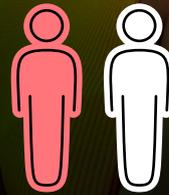
To feel comfortable in another country		79%
To develop a different skill		76%
To learn about the culture of a different country		72%
To be able to order things like a meal in a different country		72%
To be able to use another language in a professional setting		69%
To help me work abroad		69%

Inspired by language

Among students who already feel motivated to learn a language, the number one incentive to study is gaining confidence to travel the world.

- Across the board, learners who already speak another language and those who live in multilingual homes are more motivated to learn.
- For 16-year-olds specifically, the three biggest incentives to learn are: living and working abroad (**38%**), advancing my career (**29%**), and making friends who speak another language (**28%**).
- Learning languages to increase confidence is important to **64%** of all students, and **74%** of students believe learning a language supports brain development.

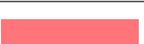
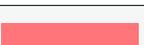
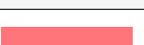
Their responses suggest that language learning is valued by students as a significant tool for long-term career and social opportunities. It is also seen as valuable for personal development in the short term.



1 in 2 learners

say learning a language to be able to build relationships with their local community is important.

What, if anything, motivates you most to learn a language?

Having confidence to travel the world		39%
Living and working abroad		36%
Making friends in other countries		27%
Building self-confidence		27%
Learning about and understanding other cultures		24%
Making friends in this country		24%
Advancing my career		23%
Building relationships in my community		13%

Technology and languages



7 in 10 learners

think that learning a new language will become easier as technology evolves.

- Currently, more than **1 in 4** learners across all age ranges are using translation apps or language apps to help them learn languages, with more 11 to 13-year-olds using AI to help them than 14 to 16-year-olds.
- **84%** of students who are learning a language already use technology to help them. Learners who have a household/family who speak another language are also consistently using technology to help them learn languages more than students who only speak one language.

At Pearson, we continue to collaborate with students, schools and teachers to address the ongoing decline of language uptake at secondary level. By working together, we can significantly improve access, enjoyment and empowerment in languages through the provision of student-centred qualifications that meet the needs of every learner, regardless of their background, needs or abilities.

Combining clear, concise and straightforward assessments with engaging, meaningful and relatable content, our new 2024 Pearson Edexcel GCSE Modern Languages qualifications are built on a foundation of inclusivity, accessibility and transparency.

Survey conducted by Censuswide

To find out more about our new 2024 Pearson Edexcel MFL GCSEs, please visit go.pearson.com/MFLGCSE24