

Children 'increasingly unlikely' to learn a modern language

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Children are increasingly unlikely to leave school with even the most basic knowledge of modern languages despite Government claims to the contrary, an independent study has found.

Angela McLachlan from The University of Manchester discovered a 'chaotic and ineffective' system of [teaching](#) modern languages in a year-long study of four English primary schools.

The findings, she says, contradict recent claims by Schools Minister Diana Johnson that the Government's strategy to get more young children speaking another [language](#) was working.

They also cast doubt over the viability of one of the Government's key education pledges which entitles all seven to-eleven-year-olds to learn a modern language by 2010.

Ms McLachlan said: "Because the quality and quantity of children's exposure to primary language teaching varies so much, it's often impossible to teach a class in [secondary school](#) with such a wide range of skills.

"Perhaps even worse, some secondary school [children](#) will have to endure lessons which they have been already taught at primary.

"The fact that primary languages are not inspected by Ofsted and that students are still entitled to opt out at the end of Key Stage 3 tells it all.

“Languages - either at primary or secondary level - are just not a priority for the Government despite what they say. If we follow this course, we are doomed to retain our global reputation as the least proficient and most unenthusiastic linguists in the world.

"It's fantasy to expect that somehow this inadequate primary system will magically instil an enthusiasm for languages in secondary school: it's just not happening."

The study, published in the Language Learning Journal, also revealed inadequate training arrangements and the difficulties primary schools have in receiving funding for language teaching.

She added: "It's little wonder primary teachers have little appetite for making time on the school curriculum for this subject - especially as it doesn't contribute to league table places.

"If, for example, a primary teacher doesn't speak a language other than English, there are no funds to bring in an independent specialist.

“And as structured support from local secondary schools is not available, or insubstantial, then that class simply doesn't get any lessons, and both continuity and progression in language learning are severely jeopardised.

"Because modern languages are not part of the statutory primary curriculum, and thus do not contribute to league tables, lessons are often cancelled or moved, and many schools see little point in investing time or money in a subject which has no real priority nationally."

The report's recommendations include:

- Introducing nationally agreed criteria against which achievement in language learning can be measured.

- All schools have equal access to information and resources, and are all working to the same timeline, and to the same purpose.
- A minimum GCSE in at least one modern language should be a formal requirement to all teacher training programmes, supplemented by a language skills test prior to admission.

More information: "Modern languages in the primary curriculum: are we creating conditions for success?" is published in the [Language Learning Journal](#) and available at www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t779637218

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