

Language diversity will make London a true global player

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Understanding linguistic diversity among London's schoolchildren is key for the city's future as a 'global player', research shows. A study funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) mapped the distribution of languages spoken by London state school pupils. By combining language spoken with ethnicity, researchers have shed new light on patterns of educational inequality.

"London's increasing [language](#) diversity attracts much interest and debate among public service providers, educationalists and the public. Yet little was known about the numbers of people who speak [different languages](#), and the implications of this dimension of [population structure](#) and change," explains Professor Dick Wiggins of the Institute of Education, University of London.

"Our research used data on the language spoken at home, requested for the first time in the 2008 Annual School Census. This shows that 60 per cent of London pupils record English as their first language and nearly 40 per cent a minority language. There are over 40 languages spoken by more than 1,000 pupils. Bengali, Urdu and Somali are the top languages spoken."

The Census showed that pupils in the 'black African' and 'white other' categories were among both the high and the low achievers. Language provided an extra dimension: within the black African category, English Yoruba and Igbo speakers were among the high achievers, while within the 'white other' group, Spanish, English, German,

Serbian/Croat/Bosnian and French speakers appeared to be high achievers.

"The language we speak often says more about us than our broad ethnic group; it gives researchers clues about where people come from and their likely socio-economic position, religion and culture. It is therefore of great value to public services or any organisation that use social data. Knowing where the speakers are can help target services where they are most needed, as well as helping public organisations and businesses find people with language skills, particularly the more unusual ones where there is a sudden need," states Professor Wiggins.

"I believe that a plan is needed for developing and exploiting the linguistic skills we have available. Having speakers of all these languages means we have connections across the globe with other speakers of these languages. We are globally connected, which is an incredible benefit for international trade, particularly at this time when the balance of global economic power is changing and European economies are in such crisis."

"But having all these cultures represented in one city is also a source of cultural and creative enrichment. We benefit from the cross fertilisation of ideas and it means we live in a more dynamic, multi-faceted society. And global cities attract global companies so it's good for inward investment and tourism."

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

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