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Mapping school-level language policies across multilingual secondary schools in England: An ecology of English, modern languages and community languages policies

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Abstract

Language plays a crucial role in education; yet, while issues of language are undoubtedly relevant to all teachers, school-level language policies, which aim to provide explicit guidance underpinned by a clear set of principles, are too often conspicuous by their absence. In a range of educational contexts around the world it has been found that where such policies do exist, they are frequently fragmented and underpinned by monolingual ideologies that do not reflect the linguistic diversity of schools today. The aim of this study, therefore, is to map the provision of school-level policies from a representative sample of secondary schools in England ($n = 998$) and explore the extent to which they address (either implicitly or explicitly) the following dimensions of language: (a) English, both as the language of instruction and in relation to support for English as an additional language (EAL) learners; (b) modern languages in the curriculum; and (c) other home or community languages. Drawing on an ecologically informed approach, where these three dimensions of language are conceptualised as systems, analysis was conducted to identify areas of divergence and (potential for) intersection. Findings suggest that policies relating to languages, where they exist, are largely compartmentalised and tensions emerged between the various systems. However, we also note several promising points of intersection which indicate that

there is scope for developing cohesive and holistic languages policies at a whole-school level.

KEYWORDS
EAL, English, modern languages, school language policy

Key insights

What is the main issue that the paper addresses?

The aim of this scoping study is to explore the extent to which policies addressing a range of dimensions of language (i.e., relating to English, modern languages and other home languages) are present in secondary schools in England and, crucially, to identify areas of divergence and (potential for) intersection.

What are the main insights that the paper provides?

The findings suggest that policies relating to languages, where they exist, are largely compartmentalised and tensions emerged between the various dimensions of language. However, we also note several promising points of intersection which indicate that there is scope for developing cohesive and holistic languages policies at a whole-school level.

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in education; it is the means through which students access content knowledge across the entire curriculum and the medium through which they express themselves, negotiate understanding and are assessed in most subjects studied. Yet, on a daily basis, teachers and school leaders must navigate a complex web of competing and often conflicting priorities in relation to various dimensions of language education. In the context of England, these relate primarily to: (a) the English language, both as a curriculum subject and a medium of instruction—this also involves paying particular attention to students who speak English as an additional language (EAL) (currently around 20% of students in state-funded schools); (b) sustaining the teaching of modern languages in the curriculum; and (c) considering the role of other community or home languages.

However, both school guidance (where it exists) and research in this area has a tendency to focus on just one of these dimensions of language in isolation and, as such, we lack a more holistic understanding of how languages are positioned in schools. Indeed, while issues of language are undoubtedly relevant to *all* teachers, school-level language policies, which aim to provide explicit guidance underpinned by a clear set of principles, are too often conspicuous by their absence in the context of England. The overarching aim of this scoping study is therefore to explore the extent to which policies addressing each of these dimensions of language are present in secondary schools in England (either implicitly or explicitly) and, crucially, to identify areas of divergence and (potential for) intersection. This constitutes the first stage of a broader project which ultimately seeks to develop research-informed guidance for schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

School language policies

Situated within the broader field of language planning and policy (e.g., Cooper, 1989; Spolsky, 2004), a school language policy can be defined as 'an action statement outlining the solutions necessary for addressing the diverse language needs of a school' (May, 1997, p. 229). While they are necessarily influenced by national, macro-level policies, they are intended to address the local, meso-level needs of a specific institution. While the relevance of such policies has long been recognised across a range of contexts, it was Corson (1990) who undertook the first comprehensive study of the theory and practice of school language policies in New Zealand. Crucially, he extended the focus of such policies beyond the first language to encompass foreign language learning, bilingualism and wider social justice issues related to the privileging of certain languages over others. He considered language policies a 'powerful discursive text that works directly in the school's interest' (Corson, 1999, p. 25) in terms of detailing their various linguistic commitments, priorities and intended actions. Yet, in spite of enthusiastic endorsement of such policies in the literature, schools often face a range of challenges in successfully developing and implementing such policies, such as a lack of time and resources and overcoming the often deep-rooted compartmentalisation of subjects in secondary schools (May, 1997; May & Wright, 2007).

Similarly, in the UK context, while school language policies have previously been recognised at the national level, little effort has been made to implement these in schools. For example, the Bullock Report published almost five decades ago stated that 'each school should have an organised policy for language across the curriculum, establishing every teacher's involvement in language and reading development throughout the years of schooling' (Department of Education and Science, 1975, p. 514). Yet, as noted by Flynn and Curdt-Christiansen (2018, p. 419), any references to 'language' in National Curriculum documents have dropped substantially over the past two decades, and since 2010 those which remain typically portray 'a monolingual, subject-based context that does not acknowledge a multilingual classroom'.

Tensions around policy in England have been further exacerbated by changes in the schooling system over the past decade, which has seen a rapid shift towards academisation; that is where state-funded schools are moved out of the control of Local Authorities and given more autonomy. Given that academies are self-governing and not required to follow the National Curriculum, schools are then largely left to develop their own policies and practices. While this may be seen as an opportunity for schools to create specific policies tailored to the demographic of their student body, there is no national guidance on how such policies can be systematically developed or implemented. Indeed, as noted by Thompson (2004, p. 83), the absence of a formal policy for language education at a national level in England in itself 'can be understood as a statement by omission'.

This has led to huge variation in practices (Evans et al., 2020) and, while we fully acknowledge that the absence of a written policy does not necessarily mean the absence of a consensus on issues, this is certainly an indication of the potential disparities in provision both within and between schools. This could lead to a lack of coherence and consistency within institutions which could, in turn, cause confusion for both teachers (in making day-to-day decisions about pedagogy) and students (in developing their own linguistic skills and agency). Given the existing compartmentalised approach to school language policies, both in terms of research and practice, the remainder of this literature review outlines key issues regarding policies relating to each dimension of language identified above.

School policies relating to the language of instruction (English)

In predominantly Anglophone countries such as the United Kingdom, English understandably holds a privileged place in the curriculum—both as a subject in its own right and as the medium of instruction through which most other subjects are delivered (OFSTED, 2012). Policies relating to English therefore have important implications for all students and teachers in a school. However, national-level policy in England around the teaching and learning of English (Department for Education, 2013) has been criticised for placing too much emphasis on 'standard English'; that is, the form of English associated with powerful social groups (Cushing, 2020). This macro-level policy has, in turn, fed into school-level policies; in a study of policy documents from 264 primary schools in England, for example, Cushing (2021, p. 332) found that 'teachers are constructed as language role models and regulators of their students' language [and] granted power to police classroom discourse in ways which politically marginalises and stigmatises speakers of non-standardised forms'. This not only has potential implications for how students and teachers with regional dialects and accents use language in school but may also have unintended consequences in terms of damaging students' sense of self and active participation in the classroom (Snell & Andrews, 2017, p. 308).

It is similarly important to recognise that schools around the world are becoming increasingly linguistically diverse, which, in turn, has different implications for policy related to the language of instruction. In England, for example, around 20% of students are recorded as EAL (Department for Education, 2023), with similar patterns evident in other Anglophone nations around the world (Evans et al., 2020). Such a shifting demographic raises questions not only about how best to support newcomers in learning the language of schooling, but also about whether and how to support students in maintaining their home language(s). The vast majority of schools in England adopt a mainstreaming approach to supporting EAL students; that is, where newly arrived students are integrated into normal timetabled classes from an early stage, with responsibility for providing subject-specific language support broadly devolved to individual teachers. As a result, EAL is not 'a tangible or recognised curriculum entity in England' (Costley, 2014, p. 288), which has implications for the training and continuing professional development of all teachers. While some national-level policy guidance is provided, the nature and tone of this has shifted substantially in recent decades; for example, Flynn and Curdt-Christiansen (2018, p. 424) note a considerable reduction in policy references to EAL since 2010, alongside a shift 'from a positive construction of bilingualism as an asset to one that is more concerned with bilingualism as a barrier'. This suggests that current macro-level policy is written predominantly for a monolingual (standard) English context, which is at odds with the multilingual reality of most schools today.

School policies relating to community languages

This, in turn, has implications for the way in which community or home languages are perceived and used (or not) in schools. For example, in their study of two schools in the East of England, Liu and Evans (2016, p. 561) note that the current inconsistent national-level policies in relation to EAL have led to huge variation in school practices, where teachers' attitudes towards languages in the classroom range from '"free use of languages" to "use of English only" and to "restricted use of home languages"'. Such decisions are often devolved to individual teachers rather than being part of a wider whole-school discussion on language policy, which, as a result, can lead to a huge disparity in approach and provision for EAL learners not only between schools, but also within the same school or even department. Similarly, in a study of the families and teachers of Chinese migrant students in UK

schools, Curdt-Christiansen (2020) noted that while teachers may support the notion of additive bilingualism in principle, this is not necessarily reflected in their attitudes and teaching practices, which remain largely shaped by prevailing monolingual ideologies. Similar trends have been found in other contexts; for example, Goossens (2022, p. 309) notes that even in a self-declared 'multilingual' Dutch-medium school in Brussels, there were tensions as teachers attempted to negotiate a balance between 'their pedagogical goals and concerns about monolingualism in the wider society', which led to the correction or even sanctioning of the use of languages other than Dutch. Indeed, the explicit positioning and valuing (or not) of languages other than English in school-level policies also has implications beyond the school itself. For example, this can influence family language policies and encourage or inhibit the maintenance of community languages more broadly (e.g., Ballweg, 2022; Curdt-Christiansen, 2022).

School policies relating to modern languages in the curriculum

Yet it is important to remember that it is not only EAL learners in a school who can be considered as multilingual, but *all* students, given that language learning is a compulsory part of the curriculum in England between the ages of 7 and 14. While currently only around half of students choose to study a language beyond this compulsory phase, that is from the ages of 14 to 16 (Collen, 2023), the government's ambition is that this should rise to 90% by the year 2025 (Department for Education, 2019). A key challenge in meeting this target is the reality that, unfortunately, motivation to study languages in England remains relatively low. This is partly due to broader socio-political factors such as the global dominance of English as a lingua franca and, more recently, Brexit, but may also be due to accusations of harsh grading in public examinations, which can affect both students' individual grade profiles and schools' league table positions (Parrish & Lanvers, 2019). In light of a lack of policy support at national level in England to increase uptake in modern languages, schools are therefore largely left to their own devices to make school-level policy decisions about (a) which languages they teach, (b) the degree of choice offered to students as to whether they study languages and (c) the amount of curriculum time which can be allocated. Each of these policy decisions has important implications for the success of languages education (Fielding, 2022). For example, while there is flexibility in the National Curriculum over which language(s) schools offer, due to pragmatic factors such as staffing and timetabling, teaching is largely confined to one or more of French, Spanish and German, which may influence students' motivation to start or continue studying a language (Dobson, 2018; Parrish, 2020).

In addition, there are also (often unexplored) opportunities for schools to go beyond these 'top-level' decisions and create more holistic school language policies, which seek to encourage synergies between language-related subjects in the curriculum; this is particularly relevant for secondary schools where subjects are often heavily compartmentalised. As a result of the 'linguistic conservatism and linguicism of current UK curriculum policy' (Cushing, 2020, p. 443), modern languages are too often left out of broader discussions of school language policy. For example, there is evidence to suggest that the skills and strategies developed in the modern languages classroom can also contribute to improving students' literacy skills more broadly, including in their first language (Forbes, 2020). Yet, this is most powerful when there is dialogue and collaboration between English and languages teachers, which would benefit from support at a more strategic level. As such, schools have to carefully consider provision for language learning and to make crucial decisions about how these languages are positioned in the curriculum.

As explored above, schools and individual teachers must negotiate a complex range of issues relating to various dimensions of language education on a daily basis. In the absence

of clear guidance at the national level, there is therefore a need to explore the extent to which policies addressing each of these dimensions of language are present in individual secondary schools in England (either implicitly or explicitly), with a view to identifying areas of divergence and (potential for) intersection.

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical framework: An ecological systems-informed lens

In order to address this research question, the theoretical framework of the current study is informed by ecological systems theory. As noted by Chong et al. (2023), in educational research the notion of 'ecology' or 'ecosystem' has been increasingly used 'to refer to the environments where learning takes place' (p. 334) and puts particular emphasis on various levels of context. In particular, issues related to language and education are seen as multiscalar (Lemke, 2002) and, as such, researchers in the field of language policy have often drawn on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which considers an individual as part of a microsystem (e.g., a classroom), situated within a mesosystem (e.g., a school), within an exosystem (e.g., the education sector), within a macrosystem (e.g., the national context with its associated ideologies).

However, while we acknowledge that any individual policy created at the 'meso' level of the school will inevitably be shaped (implicitly or explicitly) by the demographics of individuals within the school and the wider local and national context in which the school is situated, the focus of the current paper remains primarily at this 'meso' level. Nonetheless, we feel that the notion of interacting 'systems' inherent in ecological systems theory remains a useful construct for further understanding policies at the level of the school. We therefore propose to further draw on this theory by using it as a means to conceptualise policies related to English, modern languages and community languages as 'systems' in themselves. The overarching aim, therefore, is to explore the ways in which these language policy 'systems' (which are often developed and implemented independently of each other) intersect (or not) and to begin to consider how they may ultimately be reconciled into a more cohesive, ecologically informed language policy 'system' across the whole school. As suggested by Steffensen and Kramsch (2017, p. 17), an ecological approach crucially brings to the fore 'the mediating function of language in the educational enterprise', which we would extend further to the consideration of *languages* more broadly. Adopting such an ecologically informed lens will allow us to take a 'granular and systematic approach' to exploring policies related to the various language systems, while also acknowledging that the boundaries between such systems are often 'blurry' (Chong et al., 2023, p. 333).

Research design

A qualitative research design was adopted, which involved the initial compilation of a dataset followed by document analysis, broadly defined as the analysis and interpretation of data generated from the examination of documents relevant to a particular study (Schwandt, 2011). The first step was to compile a dataset of relevant policy documents collected from the webpages of a representative sample of secondary schools. To do so, we adopted a random stratified sampling approach, which involves 'dividing the population into homogenous groups, each group containing subjects with similar characteristics, and then randomly sampling within those groups' (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 216). We therefore downloaded a list of all secondary-level schools in England from the Department for

Education website, defined as all those which include any Key Stage 3 (age 11–14) and/or Key Stage 4 (age 14–16) students. We excluded special schools as they were likely to have a very specific set of local policy documents and any schools listed as 'closed'. This left us with 4988 schools. We sorted the list by Local Authority and then school type (i.e., state-funded or independent) to ensure a representative geographical spread and then selected every fifth school to provide a random sample of 20%. There were 998 schools in the final dataset, of which 77.7% ($n = 775$) were state-funded and 22.3% ($n = 223$) were independent.

We then manually searched the websites of each of these schools for any policies or webpages relating to the various dimensions of language outlined above. To capture this, the following key search terms were used: language(s); literacy; specific named languages (e.g., English, French, Urdu, British Sign Language); and English as an additional language and/or EAL. The final dataset consisted of 1457 distinct documents. The main limitation which should be acknowledged here is that we were only able to download and analyse documents or information which were publicly available on school webpages, although we recognise that schools may have had a range of additional policies as internal documents. The decision to conduct a purely desk-based study was primarily made because schools were experiencing continued disruption and pressures resulting from the pandemic during the period of data collection and we felt, therefore, that requesting data from a large, representative sample of schools across the country would not be feasible. However, given that state-funded schools are advised by the Department for Education to publish certain information online (including information about their curriculum, the values and ethos of the school and key policies for supporting students), we were aware of the wealth of publicly available information. We were therefore interested in exploring whether and how issues of language are positioned in the documents which schools must (and, additionally, choose) to make publicly available, and were aware that an absence of explicit considerations of language would, in itself, also constitute an important finding.

The initial stage of analysis involved an element of content analysis; that is, adopting a systematic approach in order to quantify the frequency of elements within documents (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This was particularly helpful for identifying key patterns in the dataset, such as the number of languages offered by schools and whether these were compulsory or optional. Further analysis was then informed by the ecological systems-informed approach outlined above, where policies related to English, modern languages in the curriculum and community languages were considered as 'systems' in themselves. As such, these broad terms were used as initial high-level codes with more specific features within these identified inductively from the dataset. This enabled us to explore, firstly, how these groups of languages were positioned within the schools and, secondly, the ways in which these language policy 'systems' intersected (or not). Institutional ethical approval was granted before undertaking this study and no names or geographical information is provided for individual schools in the reporting of the findings.

FINDINGS

Overview of policies

In order to contextualise the more detailed analysis which follows, we first present an overview of the policies identified which constituted the dataset. The first finding of note is that fewer than two-thirds of the schools (63.3%, $n = 632$) in the sample made *any* reference to language whatsoever in their policy documents, and only *six* schools had a dedicated whole-school language policy. This evidences the distinct lack of dedicated and cohesive

language policies in schools. Where references to the key search terms were found, they were dispersed across a wide range of policy types, as shown in Table 1. This highlights the relevance of language-related issues across a range of different policy areas but, conversely, also increases the potential for such references to language to be compartmentalised and therefore potentially contradictory.

English as a medium of instruction: Promotion of standard language ideologies

When considering policies relating to English as a curriculum subject or medium of instruction, the most prominent theme undoubtedly related to the explicit promotion of a standard language ideology, which was found across 114 schools. These school policy documents most commonly quoted or paraphrased the 'Teachers' Standards' document produced by the Department for Education (2021, p. 11), which states that teachers should 'demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English, whatever [their] specialist subject'. Indeed, responsibility for modelling language was often explicitly devolved to all teachers, with documents across 76 schools explicitly stating that *all* teachers are teachers of language and/or literacy. Where explicit references to standard English use among teachers were made, this typically also extended to an expectation that students would, in turn, use standard English in the classroom, for example, 'students are encouraged to speak clearly and convey ideas confidently using standard English' (EAL policy, independent school).

Perhaps more surprisingly, there were occasional instances when an expectation of standard English extended beyond the bounds of the classroom itself. For example, one school stated that 'outside of lessons, students are still expected to maintain high levels of standard English' (Literacy policy, state-funded school) and another document in a school with a higher-than-average proportion of EAL students stated an expectation that parents or carers should 'explain when their child should use standard English appropriately' in the home (Literacy policy, state-funded school). In light of the increasing linguistic diversity of schools, the extension of such policies into social spaces in the school and even into the home could have broader implications for students (and perhaps also their parents) in establishing a sense of belonging and legitimacy.

TABLE 1 Prevalence of policy types.

	Schools in sample	
Policy type	***n***	**%**
Special educational needs	264	26.45
Equality, diversity and inclusion	231	23.15
Curriculum	202	20.24
English as an additional language	149	14.93
Literacy	110	11.02
Behaviour	39	3.91
Other (e.g., international policies, communications policies)	38	3.81
Teaching and learning	34	3.41
Marking, assessment and feedback	23	2.30
Language policies	6	0.60

While the emphasis in policy documents was overwhelmingly on standard English, we found some references to dialects or non-standard forms across 37 schools. Eleven of these involved students learning *about* variation, for example, developing an appreciation of 'the differences between standard English and non-standard dialect forms' (Literacy policy, state-funded school), presumably as part of timetabled English lessons. The remaining references suggested that all languages, dialects and accents should be valued, although three of these added a caveat, such as: '*however*, we aim to teach standard English' (EAL policy, state-funded school, our emphasis). Only one document went as far as to state that students 'must be allowed to talk in their natural dialect as and when they need to' (Equality policy, independent school). What emerged in some of these policies was a tension between a desire, at the level of whole-school ethos, to acknowledge and value variations of language (in line with policies of equality and inclusion), and a desire to enforce the explicit focus on standard English enshrined in national policies.

English as an additional language: Positioning and integration

In addition to the above policies around the use of standard English which will be of relevance to all teachers and students, it is also important to consider policies around English for EAL learners. These provide insights into how EAL learners are positioned within the school and the support provided to help students (particularly new arrivals) with language development and social integration. In our sample, only 14.9% of schools ($n = 149$) had a dedicated EAL policy document available on their website. Yet what was particularly striking was the discrepancy between the presence of an EAL policy in different types of school, with only 6.5% of state-funded schools ($n = 50$) in our sample having an explicit EAL policy, in contrast to almost half (44.4%, $n = 99$) of independent schools. This is surprising given that around one in ten of the state-funded schools in our sample had more than 40% of students recorded as EAL (note: this information was not available for independent schools). One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that while state-funded schools were much less likely to have a dedicated EAL policy, they were over seven times more likely to incorporate references to EAL learners into special educational needs (SEN) policy documents. While such references were often brief, this nonetheless has wider implications for the way in which multilingual learners are positioned within the school and in relation to other students. While the 'Special educational needs and disability code of practice' (Department for Education, 2015) makes it clear that 'difficulties related solely to learning English as an additional language are not SEN' (p. 85), such distinctions were made explicit in fewer than a quarter of schools in our sample ($n = 237$). In fact, we found 33 instances where EAL was explicitly considered as a special educational need and 15 instances where a more deficit view was taken and EAL was positioned, for example, as a 'barrier to learning' (SEN policy, state-funded school) or a 'disadvantage' (EAL policy, independent school).

Where schools had a dedicated EAL policy, these often outlined a range of structures put in place to support students' integration into the school. The majority of these initiatives related to linguistic support, the most common being the provision of bi/multilingual resources ($n = 85$) such as dual-language books, access to online dictionaries or, in one case, drawing on bilingual teaching assistants. Such references position students' home language(s) as a resource to help them to access the curriculum and recognise that, for example, 'the use of the first language enables students to draw on existing subject knowledge and to develop English skills in context' (Language policy, state-funded school). However, what was most concerning was the small number of schools ($n = 7$) which openly discouraged and, in some cases, 'banned' the use of languages other than English. For example, one selective school stated that they accept EAL students on the understanding that 'the children will speak English at

school and not their first language, both in teaching and social situations' (EAL policy, independent school). Another school took a stronger position, stating that 'all talking should be subject related and in English ONLY […] students should be reprimanded for speaking in other languages' (Classroom procedure policy, independent school). This represents an incredibly wide range of perspectives on home language use and raises questions about the basis on which some schools are making such policy decisions around the use of languages.

In terms of supporting EAL students' social integration, the most common strategy outlined in EAL policies was pairing newly arrived students with another student as a 'buddy' ($n = 87$) to help them get to know the school. In some of these cases, policies specifically recommended pairing students (where possible) with someone from the same language background ($n = 14$), while others ($n = 53$) recommended selecting a student who would act as a good role model for English. Thirteen schools organised clubs either specifically for EAL students (e.g., an international society) or open to all students but with a focus on learning about other cultures (e.g., an international film club). Four of the schools in the sample organised activities to develop connections between the school and the parents of EAL students (e.g., a 'chatty families' coffee morning). Overall, as noted above in relation to broader policies around English, tensions continued to emerge across schools in terms of how EAL students are positioned and supported. While the vast majority of policies broadly promoted the role of English in students' linguistic and social integration, at times this came at the expense of recognising and valuing the role that their other languages can play in this process.

Modern languages in the curriculum: Provision and (dis)entitlement

We then moved on to consider policies around modern languages in the curriculum, that is timetabled subjects such as French, Spanish or Mandarin. In reporting our findings, we will first consider broader policies around provision in secondary schools and then look at more nuanced policies around (dis)entitlement within that provision.

Given that the study of modern languages constitutes a statutory part of the curriculum at Key Stage 3 (age 11–14), it is not surprising that almost all of the schools in our sample offered at least one language in this phase. In fact, there were only two schools (one state-funded and one independent school) which did not have any language provision. Yet the number of languages offered varied considerably, as shown in Figure 1 (which shows data for the 889 schools in our sample where this information was provided). What is most evident here is that independent schools were much more likely to offer a wider range of languages compared to state-funded schools. In terms of the particular languages taught, French was the most widely offered (in more than 75% of schools), followed by Spanish (62%) and German (26%). All other languages, such as Arabic, Mandarin, Italian and Urdu, were each offered in less than 5% of schools, with several (e.g., Turkish, British Sign Language) offered in only one school in our sample. While the main focus of this section is on modern languages, it should also be noted that Latin was offered in 13% of schools.

Where more than one language was offered at Key Stage 3, we also looked at the extent to which students had an element of choice. This was only clear in policies for 121 of the schools in our sample. In almost half of these (47%, $n = 57$) students had no choice as to which language they studied, however, this varied according to school type, with 52% of students in independent schools having a choice versus only 22% of students in state-funded schools. There was also a small number of schools which provided a rationale for limiting provision and/or choice at Key Stage 3, with two schools noting that offering more than one language may cause confusion or disengagement and two schools citing staffing issues.

We then noted a shift in terms of the positioning of modern languages in the curriculum at Key Stage 4 (age 14–16). Here, languages cease to be a compulsory part of the National

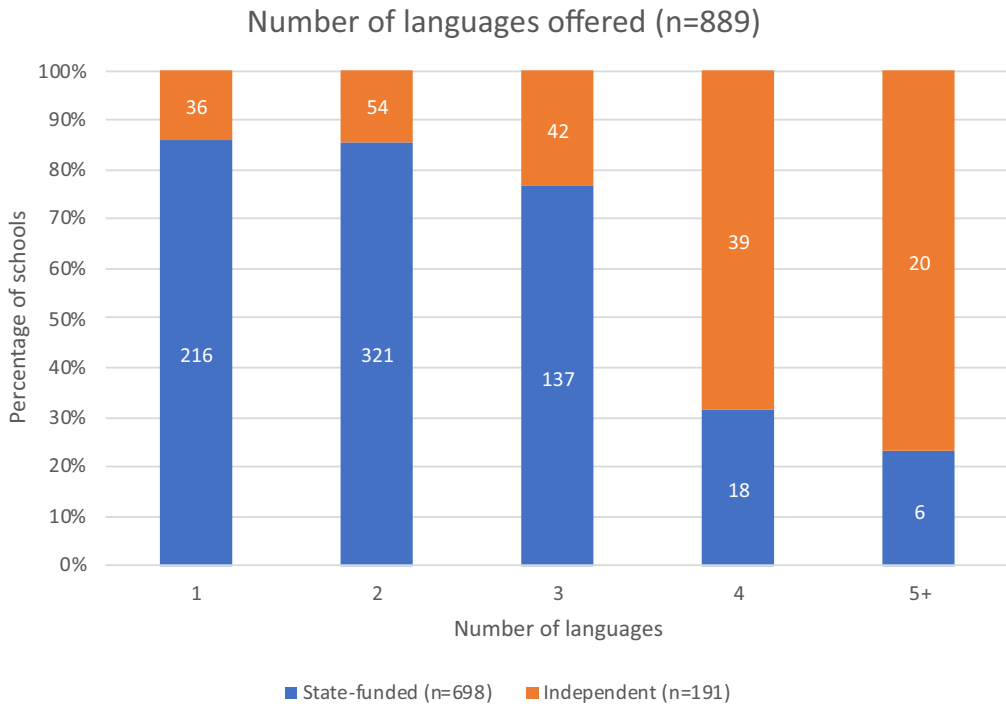

FIGURE 1 Number of languages offered by type of school.

Curriculum and individual schools therefore have more agency in terms of whether they mandate or (dis)encourage the study of modern languages. In order to explore this, we coded each school according to whether their policies or webpages indicated that languages at Key Stage 4 were compulsory (e.g., 'a distinctive part of our provision is that all students study a modern foreign language'; Curriculum webpage, state-funded school), encouraged (e.g., 'students are strongly encouraged to choose at least one modern foreign language'; Curriculum policy, independent school) or optional (e.g., 'we recognise that "modern foreign languages for all" is not an appropriate approach'; Curriculum policy, state-funded school). There were 759 schools in our sample where this information was provided, and the results are shown in Figure 2. Once again, we see a stark distinction between policies in state-funded schools, where only around a quarter of students are required or encouraged to study a modern language at GCSE level, in contrast to over three-quarters in independent schools.

Interestingly, among the state-funded schools which required or encouraged the study of languages at Key Stage 4, the most common reason provided was to maximise take-up of the English baccalaureate (Ebacc). The Ebacc is a school performance indicator linked to students' attainment in the following five subject areas at GCSE: English language and literature, mathematics, science, geography or history and a language. This is another clear example of how wider national policy is shaping decisions made at school level.

Yet provision of modern languages in schools is only one dimension; we found that even where languages are framed as a compulsory part of the curriculum, this does not necessarily mean that all students are *entitled* to study languages. In fact, we found an alarming number of policies in our sample around the disapplication of students from studying modern languages (11.7%, $n = 117$). Where it was felt that a student would benefit from a reduced curriculum, modern languages were overwhelmingly the go-to subjects for disapplication. Reasons for this included using this time to provide a 'practical focus on life skills' (SEN

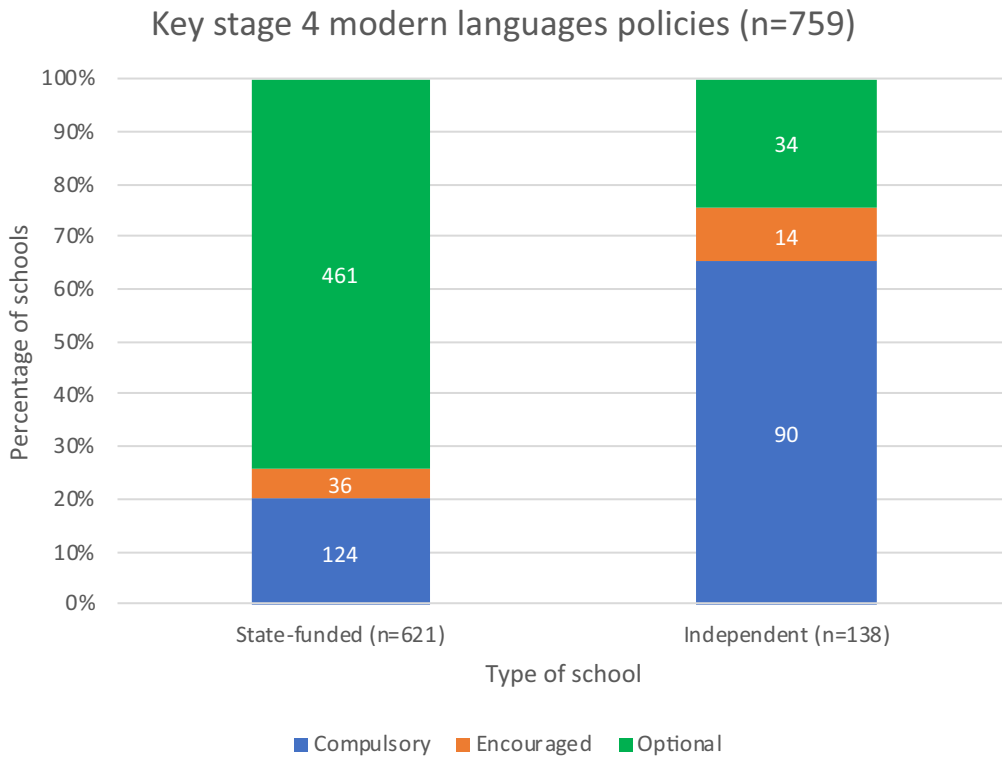

FIGURE 2 Key Stage 4 modern languages policies by type of school.

policy, state-funded school), additional support for developing 'core skills such as literacy' (Curriculum policy, independent school) or, in one case, simply because some students may 'find languages a challenge' (Curriculum policy, independent school). Many of these disapplication policies made specific reference to EAL students who, in some cases, were automatically disapplied from modern languages classes in favour of additional support in English. There were few schools which considered that languages lessons might, in fact, be an area of strength for EAL students. The overall message from such disapplication policies unfortunately seems to be that languages are not, in fact, for all.

Community languages: Multilingual students in a monolingual system

In addition to exploring policy surrounding curriculum languages (i.e., English and other taught languages), we were also interested in considering whether and how other home or community languages form part of school policies. We acknowledge that, for some students, home languages may indeed be offered as part of the curriculum (albeit more commonly for speakers of French or Spanish than Urdu), however, the focus here is on recognition (or not) of home or community languages outside of the formal curriculum. This was manifest primarily in relation to their contribution to the overall multilingual and multicultural ethos of the school, which was explicitly highlighted in the webpages or policy documents of 14.1% of schools in our sample ($n = 141$). For example: 'we celebrate the cultural and linguistic diversity in the school and create an environment where this is valued in its richest sense'

(EAL policy, independent school). Such positive comments were reasonably common on school webpages to indicate an inclusive and welcoming environment, and also appeared most typically in EAL policies and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies. However, what was less evident was information about *how* the diversity of languages and cultures would be valued. Some specific examples include the presence of multilingual displays in the school ($n = 27$) and special assemblies or activities to celebrate specific cultural events or occasions, such as the European day of languages ($n = 23$).

Yet we also noted some tensions between the desire for schools to promote an environment where cultural and linguistic diversity are valued, and the desire to create a sense of 'equality' through promoting English as a unifying language. This is also linked to the pressure on schools to uphold high levels of standard English, as noted above. Such tensions not only emerged across different documents within the same school, but also sometimes within the same document, for example: 'All languages, dialects, accents and cultures are valued; *however*, we aim to teach standard English' (EAL policy, state-funded school, our emphasis); 'The Trust views linguistic diversity positively. The Trust values the natural language of students and staff alike, *although* the first language to be used within the school is English' (Equal opportunities policy, state-funded school, our emphasis). Such statements encapsulate some of the challenges faced by schools in integrating an increasingly linguistically diverse student community into what is often a rather rigid monolingual educational system. A slightly different position emerged in relation to the use of other languages to communicate with parents, with 16.7% ($n = 167$) of schools explicitly mentioning policies around translating messages into parents' first language, either routinely or upon request, for example, through the use of online translators.

Another key area where community languages were incorporated into policies was in relation to provision for students to take home language qualifications (e.g., GCSE or A Levels), which was mentioned across 96 schools in our sample. While these schools were typically not able to provide explicit teaching in these languages, they facilitated students with sufficient knowledge of the language to take qualifications (where available). Most schools emphasised the benefits of such qualifications for academic reasons (e.g., to boost the number of GCSEs or help with university admissions) and/or for personal reasons (e.g., to strengthen connections to their heritage culture). However, one school specified that while universities highly value qualifications in modern languages (i.e., taught languages within the curriculum), they 'are less impressed by qualifications in a "home" language' (Curriculum policy, state-funded school), which sends a clear message about how the various languages in a student's repertoire may (or may not) be valued.

DISCUSSION

Overall, we noted a surprising lack of holistic policies related to languages in schools across England and, where individual policies did exist, they tended to be heavily compartmentalised, sometimes contradictory and often did not reflect the multilingual reality of schools. In this Discussion section we reflect on these trends with a view to identifying possible implications for developing cohesive and holistic languages policies at a whole-school level.

Compartmentalisation of policies related to languages

Our findings suggested a distinct lack of explicit school policies related to languages, with only six schools in our sample having a dedicated whole-school language policy document which endeavoured to reflect on the various language systems in a more holistic way. On

the whole, any references to language tended to be dispersed across a wide range of policy types and typically made isolated reference only to one language or aspect of language. The overwhelming majority of these referred only to English; any references to modern languages were largely separate and confined to curriculum policies or subject webpages, which identified compulsory/optional subjects, while any references to community languages tended to appear only in the context of promoting an ethos of multilingualism and multiculturalism in equality, diversity and inclusion or EAL policies. Overall, this compartmentalisation of policies related to languages increases the potential for possible contradictions, which will be explored further in the following section.

Our school-level data also aligns with Flynn and Curdt-Christiansen's (2018) finding that national-level policy documents produced in England since 2010 are largely underpinned by monolingual ideologies and do not reflect multilingual classrooms today. Indeed, in some cases we found evidence of schools taking a deficit approach to the positioning of EAL students as disadvantaged or as having a special educational need, therefore adopting a 'language-as-a-problem' rather than 'language-as-a-resource' orientation (Ruiz, 1984). Interestingly, we also did not find a strong connection between the linguistic diversity of a school and the presence of a related policy. For example, while Vanbuel and Van den Branden (2021) in their study in Flanders found that schools with a linguistically diverse student body were more likely to have an explicit school language policy, this was not the case in our data, where only 6.5% of state-funded schools had an EAL policy. As noted previously, while we fully acknowledge that the absence of a written policy does not necessarily mean the absence of a consensus on issues, we believe that the existence (or lack) of visible policy documents in schools provides a useful indication of priorities. We therefore identify a need not only for schools to develop their own policy in relation to languages, but for this to extend beyond the language of instruction to acknowledge and consider the role of other languages learned and used by students.

Tensions and contradictions in policies related to languages

By considering each of the language dimensions as systems in our analysis, we noted a number of tensions and, at times, contradictions between these systems within individual schools. One key example stemmed from the tension between a desire to promote an ethos of multilingualism and the pressure to maintain high standards in English, which sometimes led to the active suppression of multilingual practices. This was evidenced by statements such as 'all languages, dialects, accents and cultures are valued; *however*, we aim to teach standard English' (EAL policy, state-funded school, our emphasis). As such, what emerged was an often implicit, yet stark, hierarchy of languages with (standard) English at the top (in line with Cushing, 2020), followed by other taught languages (particularly the more 'powerful' European languages such as French and Spanish), followed by other home and community languages. While there were some references to superficial recognition and 'celebration' of these community languages, their use largely tended to be devalued (often by omission) or, in a small but concerning number of cases, actively discouraged or stigmatised (in line with similar observations by Curdt-Christiansen, 2022 and Fielding, 2022). In light of the increasing linguistic diversity in schools across many countries today, there is therefore a need for schools to reflect on and make efforts to reconcile such tensions. This is not to dismiss the importance of English, but rather to highlight the need to acknowledge rather than suppress other languages present among the school community.

Another key contradiction emerged in the provision versus entitlement to study modern languages. While language learning was often framed as a *provision* for all (in line

with being a statutory part of the National Curriculum between the ages of 7 and 14), this did not necessarily equate to being an *entitlement* for all. This was evidenced by the explicit policies to 'disapply' students (including EAL students) from statutory language learning found across 117 schools in the sample, often in favour of providing additional support for students in English. In light of Parrish and Lanvers' (2019, p. 292) reflections on the 'climate of quantified accountability' in schools in England, and accusations of harsh grading in high-stakes examinations, perhaps one explanation for schools' active disapplication or discouragement of students from studying languages beyond (or even during) the compulsory phase may be related to external pressures to maintain high results. However, given the growing body of evidence which suggests that learning other languages can actually improve literacy skills and meta-linguistic awareness in the first language (e.g., Forbes, 2020; Murphy et al., 2015), such disapplication policies are highly concerning. There are, therefore, perhaps opportunities for schools to reflect on possibilities at the level of local policies to encourage more joined-up, cross-curricular thinking related to languages with a view to supporting learning.

At the intersections: Towards developing a cohesive and holistic school languages policy

It is important to note that, in spite of the tensions identified above, we also found a number of encouraging points of intersection between the various language systems among the policy documents. Such intersections took the form of, for example, drawing attention to the role that studying modern languages can play in improving skills in English (contrary to the rationale offered by some disapplication policies mentioned above), or in demonstrating an awareness that strong literacy skills in a home language can provide a solid basis for EAL students to learn English and, indeed, other languages. While these statements did not often come with specific pedagogical strategies to support such connection-making, they provide an indication that there is scope for developing cohesive and holistic languages policies at a whole-school level. Figure 3 therefore illustrates some key examples of the points of intersection which emerged from the data and places 'school languages policy' at the nexus. This is where we aim to situate our continuing work in this area by further exploring practical possibilities for developing and implementing a cohesive and holistic school languages policy to support students' learning.

CONCLUSION

Through analysis of school-level policy documents from a representative sample of 998 secondary schools across England, this paper has explored whether and how these policies address the following language systems: English (both as a language of instruction and for EAL students), modern languages in the curriculum and other community or home languages. Given that most policies related to language (and, by extension, associated research into such policies) tend to focus on just one of these dimensions, one of the key contributions of this paper therefore lies in providing a more holistic understanding of how languages more broadly are positioned (or not) in schools in relation to each other. One of the key findings which emerged was the distinct lack of *cohesive* language policies in schools, with any references to languages (where they existed) typically dispersed across a range of other policy documents. Such compartmentalisation of policies gave rise to a number of tensions and contradictions, such as promoting a wider ethos of multilingualism and multiculturalism while simultaneously insisting upon monolingual practices. As such, we would encourage those working in and alongside schools

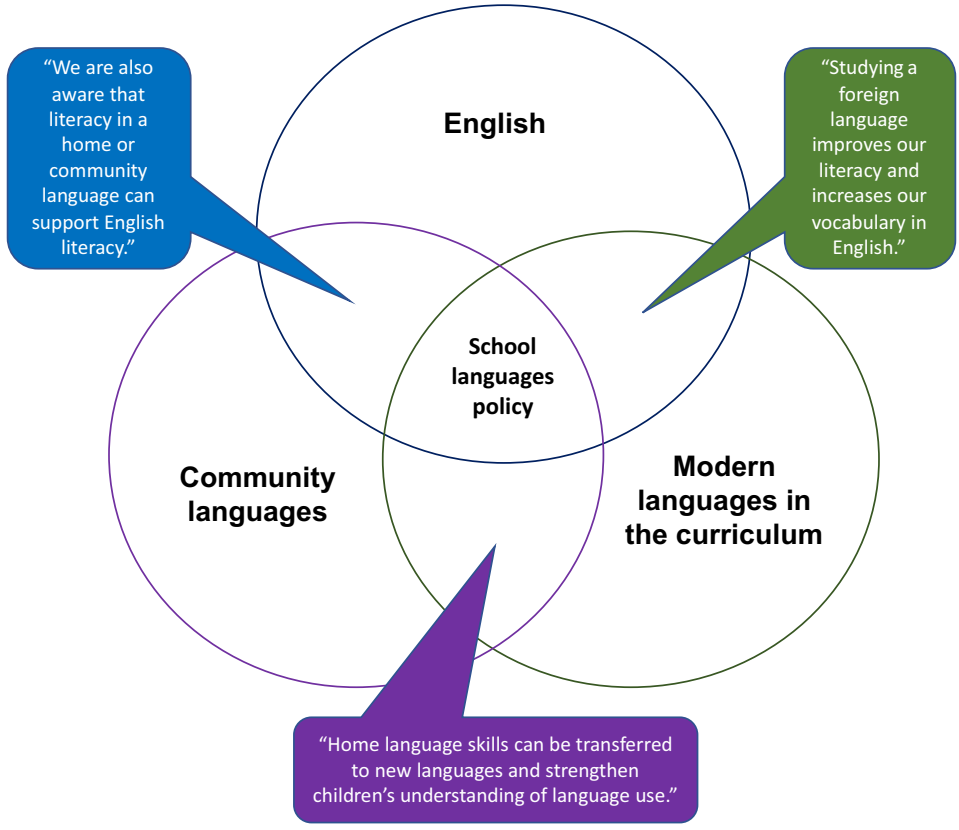

FIGURE 3 Points of intersection in a school languages policy.

to look critically at their current policies and practices with a view to identifying and resolving any such tensions and looking for opportunities to develop a more cohesive school languages policy. As indicated in the Findings section, there were indeed some promising points of intersection which demonstrate the potential for such connections between the various dimensions of language in schools to be made explicit and encouraged at the level of policy. Developing more cohesive policies around language may therefore, in turn, help teachers in making day-to-day decisions around pedagogy (e.g., in relation to how students' home languages may have a place in the classroom) and help students to develop their own linguistic agency.

However, there are two key limitations which it is important to acknowledge. The first, as noted previously, is that our analysis is based solely on written policies which were made publicly available on school websites, and we fully acknowledge that some schools will have additional internal policies and practices which we were unable to access. Nonetheless, the large sample size provided valuable insights into general trends across a representative sample of secondary schools in England. The other key limitation is that the focus of this paper has been necessarily restricted to analysis of 'declared language policy' (Shohamy, 2006), that is the conceptualisation of language policy as text, without consideration of what Bonacina-Pugh (2012) refers to as 'perceived language policy' and 'practiced language policy'. While we note some potential implications for schools above, we are acutely aware that this can only be considered as a starting point and are mindful that we cannot provide more specific guidance for schools on the basis of a purely desk-based study alone. The next step in this research agenda, therefore, aims to further understand how explicit language policies influence pedagogical approaches

in the classroom, how this shapes students' learning and conceptualisations of language, and how to encourage much needed dialogue between colleagues involved in different aspects of language teaching. We hope that the findings from this initial scoping study will constitute an important first step in ultimately developing research-informed guidance for schools on how to develop a cohesive, contextually appropriate school-level language policy to support students' language development and learning across the curriculum.

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Research data are not shared.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Institutional ethical approval was granted by the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge before undertaking this research. As a desk-based study involving publicly available policy documents from school webpages, no participants were directly involved. BERA ethical guidelines were followed and no names or identifying information is reported when presenting data from individual schools.

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