

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER**

**Second language learning in secondary schools: The role of power and agency in Institutional –  
level decision making.**

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**This Thesis has been completed as a requirement for a postgraduate research degree of the  
University of Winchester.**

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents who truly believed in the power of education.

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## ABSTRACT

Second language learning in secondary schools: The role of power and agency in institutional-level decision making

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This thesis reports on a study conducted in English secondary schools where an investigation took place to critically understand what influences institutional-level decision-making when determining the provision of second language studies in post-14 education. Crucially, an examination of the impact of the decision making practices in MFL is offered, and the extent to which they exercise authority in discourse within institutions, such as secondary schools.

The theoretical framework for this empirical research was grounded in the lens provided by Foucault and some critical theorists as it offers conceptual tools to understand institutional level decision-making in relation to the provision of MFL beyond post -14 education and provides the basis to unpack how situated power dynamics shape the way senior leaders convey, seek and use information to inform practice.

This research took place in three secondary schools on the south coast with similar contrasting catchments: A Studio school; a comprehensive school and a joint Roman Catholic Anglican 11-18 school. Data was collected from three headteachers and three heads of Modern Foreign Languages to critically explore the extent to which senior leaders are positioned with power and agency to enact strategic curriculum changes with a view to afford prominence in the provision of L2 studies beyond KS3. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and the analysis was data driven, where a thematic approach was undertaken whilst establishing clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data. In order to add further rigour to the study, the thematic analysis was overlaid with critical discourse analysis.

The findings indicate that decisions relating to MFL provision beyond KS3 are devolved to senior leaders, and this decision-making process is underpinned by their values and beliefs about the importance of L2 learning. Moreover, these findings strongly suggest that the fundamental beliefs and philosophies about inclusive practices and opportunities for all are misaligned with the external accountability measures which serve to widen the participation and attainment gap. It was also found that school leaders in the schools in question continued to pursue their agenda and offer

MFLs to their students regardless of negative perceptions imposed by socio-political and historical landscapes.

Key words: [ Second Language Studies, Discourse, Values, Beliefs, Power, Agency, Institutional Level Decision- making, school senior leaders]

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# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This study focused its primary research interest on understanding the influences on institutional level decision-making (ILDM) when determining the provision of second language (L2s) teaching and learning in secondary schools in England. It also seeks to examine the way in which policy tools and frameworks influence the decisions senior leaders make about second language provision in their schools and the extent to which the views of the wider school community on MFL studies learning impacts on schools' decision-making.

This chapter presents a rationale for the relevance of researching the influences on decisions made by schools, in light of issues of power and agency when determining the provision of MFLs in secondary schools in England with a view to increase take up, before reflecting on my personal and professional journey as both researcher and practitioner and its influence on the research process (Greenbank, 2003).

An outline of the research background is offered, with the statement of the issues and my own motivation behind this research. In addition, consideration is given to the impact of the decentralisation of language policies and how this affects school leaders' decision-making regarding L2 studies in secondary schools, considering their unique power and agency to determine who learns languages and to what level (Johnson and Jonson, 2015). The chapter ends with the plan of the structure of the thesis.

## **1.1 Research context**

Increasingly, voices can be heard similar to that of Power's (2005) who contends that 'competence in at least two if not three languages and the capacity to work effectively in multicultural teams should be the minimum criteria for employment' (p. 43). Such voices present the view that despite English being a global language, the learning of other languages should not be underestimated. In this regard, the present study in seeking to critically understand institutional level decision-making when determining the provision of MFLs in secondary schools in England has been undertaken at a critical time of Britain exiting the European Union (EU).

Currently in England, any language can be taught (Department for Education, 2013) and most schools are specifically required to teach an L2 to pupils aged 7-11 in primary schools (Key Stage 2), and aged 11-14 (Key Stage 3) in secondary schools, thus making the subject compulsory only for pupils aged 7–14. Beyond KS3, all decision-making remains with individual schools who are free to set their own policy (Parrish & Lanvers, 2019), including whether or not to teach a language to pupils

older than 14. This decentralised nature of L2 policy in England has been coupled with a well - documented language-learning crisis, particularly in post-14 studies and beyond (Tinsley, 2020; Tinsley, *et al.*, 2018). As such, it is not surprising that such crisis brings to the forefront the role of senior leaders and the impact of their decision-making regarding L2 provision in secondary schools in England. In light of the devolution model of school decisions and policy- making, head teachers have a crucial role in enacting strategic curriculum changes with a view to increase take up in L2 studies (Earley and Weindling, 2004:118). Consequently, the power and agency to determine who learns languages, and to what level, lies increasingly with school leaders (Johnson and Johnson, 2015).

The removal of state driven hegemony leads to power shifting from the state to the head teachers and management teams and permeates institutional level practices and discourses and consequent curriculum conception (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 2010:140-151). Such power is theorised by Foucault's notion of governmentality as 'government of oneself' when the state is run efficiently, individuals behave as they should (Johnson, 2013b; Pennycook, 2002; Foucault 1991). Thus, it is paramount to identify and expose the role of power and agency in shaping senior leaders' decision-making in relation to MFLs. Particularly the focus on the entanglement of power/knowledge on the perception of the value of L2 and how this might constrain or support agency in the decision- making process, in post-14 education. It must be emphasised that senior leaders' agency to shape policy and or curriculum decisions may be 'constrained by structures and rules constructed within wider agendas, which in turn influence the cultural norms and practices of society and the institutions within which they operate' (Hamersley-Fletcher and Strain, 2011). My alignment with the critical paradigm views knowledge as both socially constructed and influenced by power relations from within society (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). Thus, knowledge is directed by the social and positional power of the advocates of that knowledge [Ibid]. Consequently, the theoretical underpinning of this study is based upon ideas regarding agency and power drawn from the 'Foucauldian' concept of power/knowledge which also share some affinity with critical theory (Wandel, 2001), with the ultimate ethical and political function of 'eventalization'<sup>1</sup> that question the institutions of power that hinge on traditional ideas for their legitimacy and acceptance [Ibid]. This translates into questioning taken for granted assumptions and wondering how else things might have been (Foucault,1980). Eventalization focuses on 'the event' in its historical and situated entirety, thus avoiding the 'temptation to invoke a historical constant' therefore interrupting the pull to self-evident solutions (Wandel,2001).

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<sup>1</sup> 'eventalization/ a 'making visible of a singularity in places where there is a temptation to invoke a historical constant, an immediate anthropological trait, or an obviousness which imposes itself uniformly on all' (Wandel,2001)

## 1.2 Positionality and its impact on the research

I was born in Portugal in an environment dominated by education; my mother was a head teacher during the dictatorship of Salazar and Marcelo Caetano<sup>2</sup> (Stoer and Dale, 1987). She perceived education as ‘the most empowering force in the world’, as it creates knowledge, builds confidence, and breaks down barriers to opportunity. My formative education followed the Portuguese curriculum (Santos, 2018) where the study of languages was deemed important, particularly English, French, and German. Interestingly and despite the proximity to Spain, Spanish was not included in the curriculum due to political and historical factors (Romão, 2008). The curriculum of the time, reflected the political intents of the government with an educational system ‘inherently linked to ideological agendas’ (Spolsky, 2004), and often used for political ends (Scollon, 2004).

Besides schooling and throughout my childhood<sup>3</sup> I was exposed to a full range of languages and language-related experiences and these have enriched my language socialization (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011; De Silva e Lopes, 2019a). My passion for languages continued to grow over the years. And when Portugal became a democracy<sup>4</sup>, using my language skills, I travelled in Europe and eventually, began working as a language teacher in England; my experience and perception of languages was extremely positive and naively, I believed such assumption to be felt by all. However, this was soon to be cut short, as my professional experience in a large secondary school in the south of England stood in stark contrast: the disengagement of students in MFLs was evident. This was then further exacerbated when the study of languages was made optional in KS4<sup>5</sup> (De Silva e Lopes, 2019a). As a

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<sup>2</sup> Marcello José das Neves Alves Caetano, was born in Lisbon, Portugal. He was the premier of Portugal from September 1968, when he succeeded Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, until the revolution of April 1974. Trained as a lawyer, Caetano served with Salazar (then the finance minister) in 1929 and helped to draft the Constitution of 1933 and other legal documents of the ‘Estado Novo’ ‘New State’. Caetano’s scholarly writings on civil and legal and constitutional history, some of them still in print, influenced generations of the educated elite. He was minister of the colonies (1944–47) and deputy prime minister (1955–58), among other posts, before leaving political life to become rector of the University of Lisbon. When Salazar suffered a stroke in 1968, Caetano was appointed prime minister. He allowed an opposition and rectified the constitution. However, he was unable to curb inflation or appease his critics. Foreign criticism of his economic and energy policies in Portuguese Africa, together with dissatisfaction in the army over the colonial wars in Africa, led to the “Revolution of the Carnations,” which in 1974 overthrew the New State and drove Marcelo Caetano into exile. He settled in Brazil and served as head of the Institute of Comparative Law, Gama Filho University, Rio de Janeiro, until his death on the 26 of October 1980 (Stoer & Dale 1987[online]).

<sup>3</sup> I had various contacts with English family friends and my mother’s former pupils to many other contacts from foreign visitors during the summer periods.

<sup>4</sup> On 25 April 1974, a military coup toppled one of the longest-lasting authoritarian regimes in Europe, the Estado Novo (New State) that had been installed in 1933. Spain and Greece followed quickly in the footsteps of the Portuguese democratisers in a process that culminated in the consolidation of Southern European democracies: a process that was sealed in the 1980s when Greece, Portugal and Spain joined the European Union (Lobo, Pinto & Magalhães, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Key Stage 4 (KS4) is the legal term for the two years of school education which incorporate GCSEs, and other examinations, in maintained schools in England normally known as Year 10 and Year 11, when pupils are aged between 14 and 15 by August 31st. (In some schools, KS4 work is started in Year 9.)

result, I conducted an exploratory study on students' perceptions of success and failure in Modern Foreign Languages (MFL). Its outcome pointed to the 'interplay between political and social contexts, motivation, self-efficacy, attribution and achievement in MFL, yielding to clear explanations to the perceived success or failure of students in learning L2 language' (De Silva e Lopes, 2017:75). This prior study left unanswered issues, such as the impact of societal perceptions on the value of L2 studies and how these might indiscernibly support or constrain senior leaders' agency in relation to curriculum enactment and provision in L2 education.

Undoubtedly, my life experiences have shaped and informed my research (Greenbank, 2003). Therefore, it is incumbent upon me '...to consciously and deliberately acknowledge, interrogate and disclose my own self in the research, seeking to understand my part in, and influence on, the research' (Cohen, Manion *et al.*, 2018:303). Denzin (1986) asserts that, 'Interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher' (p.12). In this context, the interplay of biography, the sense of identity, positioning theories and research, informed my choice of approaches and representation of my research (Sikes, 2004; De Silva e Lopes, 2019a). Whilst I frequently (re)negotiate my various attachments and my diasporic dilemmas of local, national and international belongings, encountering other people's varied identities encourages me to seek passionately their stories too. As researcher, I strive for the understanding of the stories of others, whilst being very clear 'about one's social background, political and ideological assumptions' (Carter, *et al.*, 2014 [online]).

My background affects how I 'make meaning and interpret events', and my identity also 'shapes how I am perceived and impacts upon my relationships in research sites' (Edgeworth, 2014:30). Accepting the premise that there is neither neutrality nor impartiality in teaching, education, or research (Denzin, 1989; Smyth and McInerney, 2013), this impacts upon my self-awareness, my views and my research design. It is therefore pivotal to understand that the subjective-contextual aspects of a researcher's positionality changes over time (Dean *et al.*, 2018). Freire (2000) advocates, that objectivism and subjectivism meet and co-exist in a 'dialectic relationship' (p.50), hence, we can never truthfully separate ourselves of subjectivity. We must be mindful of our subjectivities and acknowledge who we are as individuals, as members of groups, and as resting in and moving within social positions. Such is positionality. Thus, I am conscious of my sense of objectivity in order to tell my story (Letherby *et al.*, 2013:13-32). How the researcher relates to his or her story 'shapes how we can legitimately interpret it' (Riessman, 1993:70). As a white southern European teacher of languages, what does it then mean to critically understand the influences on school decision-making regarding MFLs in secondary schools in England? Mindful of Freire (2000), it is important that I do not attempt to speak for the research participants who are northern European; senior leaders and

colleagues living in the south of England and working in the public sector and that I do not attempt to impose my own convictions and experiences. Such efforts on my part would in fact be counter-productive [Ibid]. Rather my work must reflect the voices of those who participate in the research process. The choices and positions I adopt during the research journey must ensure that participants' voice is valued and respected. Researcher and participants '*journeying together as active producers of reality, emphasising a collaborative and democratic journey*' (Shah, 2014:42).

### **1.3 Research Aims**

My research topic emerged with a central idea permeating all discussions: the role of power and agency in shaping school decision-making in relation to MFL studies in secondary school in England. Arguably, there might be a correlation between current social, economic and political landscapes and perceptions and values of learning a L2 (De Silva e Lopes, 2017; Lanvers, Doughty and Thompson, 2018). It is then plausible to accept that such factors will influence, even if unknowingly, the decision-making process. Therefore, this study seeks to understand the influences on senior leaders' decision-making when determining the provision of second language teaching and learning in secondary schools in England. My research questions were as follows:

- To critically understand institutional -level decision making regarding language learning in secondary schools and the role of power and agency.
- To critically examine the way in which policy tools and frameworks influence the decisions senior leaders make about second language provision in their schools.
- To critically explore the extent to which the views of the wider school community about second language learning impacts on institutional- level decision making.

### **1.4 Thesis outline and organisation**

The thesis is divided into six chapters, including this introduction. Chapter 2 begins by presenting a review of the literature and offers an overview of the relevant information which underpins this study. The impact of the devolution of language policies and curriculum is explored, followed by considerations on issues of school leadership and institutional level decision-making. This is then ensued by reflections on the tension between government ideology and practitioners' beliefs and values. Literature on the hegemony of English is then offered, before an exploration of the link between language and power is investigated. Furthermore, a discussion on the impact of 'seismic' events on perceptions of MFLs is afforded, before finally providing an analysis of the role of power and agency, and the extent to which it influences schools' decision-making. The chapter provides a

rationale for understanding the focus of the current study within a critical perspective of educational theory.

Chapter 3 explores the methodology adopted in the study, highlighting the philosophical nature of its qualitative approach, and how it has affected the study's overall design. The research approach is outlined, followed by a detailed overview of the research design. This considers the decisions made regarding instruments, procedures, participants and analysis as well as outlining the ethical concerns and procedures.

In chapter 4 the findings from my research are outlined, discussed and analysed in relation to the current literature on Second language Studies and scholarship on institutional level decision-making. The research questions are addressed and conclusions based on each question are drawn.

Chapter 5 presents the researcher's ontological and epistemological beliefs as a backdrop to the theoretical frame of this research, based upon the Foucauldian principles of power/knowledge designed to help contextualise institution level decision-making regarding second language studies in post-14 education. A discussion of the main findings is offered, with empirical evidence to support this framework that raises underlying issues of power/knowledge, that can both constrain and support the agency of school leaders in the decision-making process, and how such concept shares some affinities with critical theory (Wandel, 2001). The chapter elaborates on the tenets of both theories and the application to the setting of the current research.

The thesis draws to a close with recommendations in chapter six and presents the contribution and originality of the research study. The threads of the thesis are drawn together, and a precis of its key findings is summarised and its significance explored so that implications for both research and L2 education and practice might be considered. In addition, the limitations of the study and directions for future research are highlighted.



## CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 reviews the literature relating to this research study and provides both context and rationale for its focus, providing crucial insights in determining what factors influence institutional level decision-making (ILDm) for L2 studies in post-14 education in England.

Attention is given to the literature which offers possible explanations for what is argued to be a continuous decline in Second Language (L2) studies in secondary education in England (Tinsley, 2020; Tinsley, *et al.*, 2018). Whilst alluding to post-16 education for the purpose of this review, the focus is on the uptake of L2, predominantly at secondary level (KS3 & KS4). This chapter also examines the impact of the decentralised nature of L2 policy making in England [Ibid] and how this affects senior leaders' decision-making with regards to curriculum enactment and provision in L2 studies. Equally, an insight into the relationship between the state and schools regarding Second Language Studies is offered, namely how this relationship has been reshaped and how it has impacted on head teachers' decision-making, who appeared to have become the ultimate 'power holders' in their own settings. In this regard, an introduction to the notion of discourse is offered, as it is in discourse that both knowledge and power are joined together (Foucault, 1997). Indeed, this scholar argued that some discourses have more power to persuade than others and are reiterated more often across a wide range of sites and/or by those who are believable and understood to be an expert [ibid]. This is followed by a reflection on the tensions between senior leaders and practitioners' beliefs (Pajares, 1992) regarding the value of L2 studies.

Equally, an insight is offered into the global spread of English and its impact on perceptions of the value of L2 studies; leading to a lack of motivation within society, arising from the acknowledgement of the international status of English and its perceived hegemonic and global dominance globalization (Guo and Becket, 2007; Lukes, 2005; Phillipson, 2003; Wodack, 2009). This is then followed with a discussion on issues of 'language dominance and power' (Morrison, 2000:471). The extent to which seismic events affect individuals' perceptions on the value of L2 studies and how this is transferred into decisions about secondary education is also considered. In the final section there is a discussion on the role of power and agency in shaping institutional level decision-making.

## 2.1 Language Learning in England

This study was carried out at a critical time for L2 studies, as the current situation in schools in England is less than satisfactory<sup>6</sup> (British Council, 2021, 2020; Lanvers and Coleman, 2017; Tinsley and Board 2017) and there is little consensus about possible causes and ways of bringing about improvement. The National Curriculum (NC) specifies that MFLs must be taught in all local authority-maintained schools in England and its framework indicates that languages are mandatory from age 7-14 (British Council, 2020). Schools are specifically required to teach an L2 to pupils aged 7-11 (Key Stage 2)<sup>7</sup> and to pupils aged 11-14 (Key Stage 3<sup>8</sup>). In Key Stage 4, from the age of 14-16, the GCSE<sup>9</sup> (General Certificate of Secondary Education) exams are taken<sup>10</sup>. The subjects to be taken to GCSE level are selected by students at the end of KS3, though recently some schools have condensed the Key Stage to two years (Department for Education and Skills, 2006). This has led to many pupils discontinuing language learning either before or just after their 13th birthday (Ayres-Bennett and Carruthers, 2019). Equally, in 2004, compulsory language learning for ages 14–16 was abolished (QCA, 2004); Department for Education and Skills, 2002), which means the decision whether to take up an L2 rests entirely with the individual school (Parrish, 2018).

Swarbrick (2011) suggests that schools increasingly perceive languages as dispensable for some pupils and that learning them is perceived as unpopular and difficult (Blenkinsop *et al.*, 2006; Davies, 2004). Whilst the removal of the requirement to study an L2 at KS4 intended to allow pupils to study a wider range of qualifications and subjects, this has ultimately led to a disturbing reduction in the numbers of students taking an L2, both in this key stage and within KS3 (Board & Tinsley, 2016; Tinsley & Board, 2017). Only 40% of Year 11 pupils in 2011 took an L2, compared to 78% in 2001 (Tinsley and Board, 2013).

At this point however, it must be acknowledged that when considering the data presented by the various Language Trends reports, this is not representative of all schools in England, as only a smaller percentage tend to respond to the survey. Out of 3,456 schools only 320 took part. However, there has, been a steady increase in the number of participating schools, as shown below:

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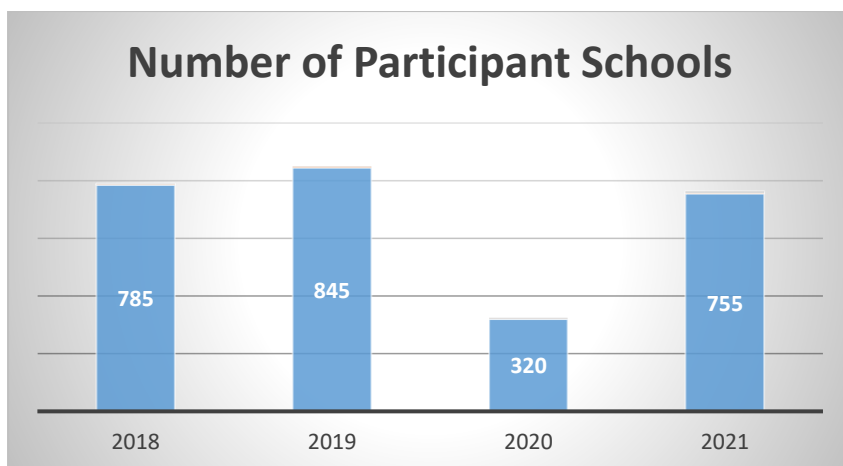
<sup>6</sup> There are various devolved education policies affecting the teaching and learning of L2s in the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern-Ireland), but this review is limited just to England.

<sup>7</sup> Key Stage 2 is the legal term relating to the four years of schooling in maintained schools in England and Wales, otherwise known as Year 3, Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6, for pupils aged between 7 and 11 years old (Gov.uk [online]).

<sup>8</sup> Key Stage 3 is the legal term relating to the three years of schooling in maintained schools in England and Wales, otherwise known as Year 7, Year 8, Year 9, for pupils aged between 11 and 14 years old (Gov.uk [online]).

<sup>9</sup> GCSE = nationally standardised and accredited tests in a variety of subjects at age 16+

<sup>10</sup> Other qualifications are available such as the IGCSE or vocational qualifications such as BTEC but are taken less frequently. Between 1992 and 2007, the General National Vocational Qualification or GNVQ was also available (Jephcote, 2014).



*Figure 1 Numbers of participant schools (Language Trends, 2021).*

Unquestionably the figure suggests increased levels of participation (Full description in Appendix 2), with the exception to the 2020 survey when the data collection phase coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic when all schools in England closed on 20th March 2020. It must be noted that participating schools are generally from areas that are more affluent; 7 out of 10 state secondary schools have a more favourable Free School Meal (FSM) percentage than the England averages of 15.8% and 14.1% respectively (Appendix 2). Also, the schools who tend to respond are the ones who might view MFLs favourably. Therefore, the picture emerging from responding schools may appear to be more positive than the national reality. However, Macaro (2008) established that GCSE entries began to decline in 2002, prior to the removal of compulsory language learning at KS4 in 2002 (Appendix 1).

#### 2.1.1 Intermediaries between the State and Senior Leaders

In 2000, The Nuffield Inquiry (The Nuffield Foundation, 2000) put forward recommendations on all aspects of language learning at all stages. In this regard, The National Strategy for Languages for England (DfES 2002) implemented many of the Nuffield recommendations including the appointment of a National Director for Languages in 2003. This was then followed by a plethora of initiatives, such as the 'Framework for Languages' at KS3, produced by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (Evans & Fisher, 2009) which set out a set of teaching objectives for MFL, to support teachers in their planning [ibid: 1]. In addition, the 'Asset Languages' scheme, which offered students an alternative route to GCSE and access to a qualification in a wide range of languages for which GCSE was also made available (ALL, 2012). Equally, a national 'Links into Languages' programme was set up, in order to offer further support with regional hubs with access to specialists, as well as resources for the targeted professional development of MFL practitioners

(Dobson, 2018). Moreover, a network of specialist Language Colleges, first established in 1995, together with the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT), founded in 1966, offered a ready-made platform for MFL practitioners, as well as a unique specialist library resource. MFL teachers also had access to information, advice and training via the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) and the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA).

Crucially in 2010, this policy on support and intervention fundamentally changed as the Conservative–Liberal Democrat Coalition Government (2010–2015) came to power, and the infrastructure charted above came to an end (Dobson, 2018). Both the CILT and the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) ceased operating. The Teaching Agency replaced the Teaching Development Agency (TDA), which then merged with the National College for School Leadership. Moreover, The Specialist Schools programme, the National Strategy, ‘Links into Languages’ and Asset Languages were all withdrawn. The post of National Director for Languages was also abolished in 2011 (Dobson, 2018). However, the Association for Language Learning (ALL) and the National Association of Language Advisers (NALA), as well as the British Council continue to be active, despite uncertainties due to funding and the exit from the European Union [ibid]. Importantly, The National Strategy for Languages of 2002 together with flexible options for accreditation were dependent on substantial government funding that ceased to exist following the effects of the financial crisis (Bowler, 2020/21). Whilst it could be argued that the Coalition government sought to have a less interventionist approach, it has unquestionably made radical policy changes, implementing economic austerity measures and discontinuing the National Strategy (Bowler, 2020/21). This included removing the Framework for Languages, which offered structured guidance and teaching objectives for Key Stage 3 teaching, and the Links into Languages programme, which provided regional hubs, specialist help and useful resources (Department for Education, 2010 to 2015). Undoubtedly, one of the implications of the described shut down of support for L2 studies has also meant that any funding previously kept solely for second language studies was also moved to the general school budget (Bowler, 2020/21). Despite promises that school funding was ringfenced, school budgets in England became increasingly under pressure and have triggered staff cuts and scaled-back curriculums (Ratcliff, 2017). This also meant when language uptake and expert staffing dwindled, it was no longer possible for senior leaders to prioritise second language studies (Bowler, 2020/21).

In an effort to respond to concerns about the decline of entries in ‘facilitating’ subjects,<sup>11</sup> including MFLs, in 2010 the coalition government<sup>12</sup> introduced the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) (DfE, 2010). This was also intended to be an accountability measure for schools in 2011 (Department for Education, 2013a; Tinsley and Dolezal, 2018). The rationale behind this measure was two-fold: firstly, to encourage more pupils to study ‘traditional’ academic subjects rather than vocational and also to increase progression to Higher Education. It was thought that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds were less likely to take individual academic subjects. In 2009, data showed that less than one in five students did History and fewer than 15% took Geography or French. The EBacc requires pupils to gain GCSE grades A\*- C in English, Maths, Science, MFL and History or Geography. Consequently, in 2014 the numbers increased to 49%. Since then however, numbers have continued to drop [ibid], despite the government’s ambition for 90% of pupils to obtain the EBacc by 2025. In the 2016/17 Language Trends Survey, schools expressed concern that the introduction of new GCSEs would decrease numbers further (British Council, Language Trends Survey, 2017). Undoubtedly, the Ebacc in 2010 had a temporary effect on improving the uptake of languages at GCSE in 2013, and many schools sought more teachers for MFL. Nevertheless the effect has been uneven, and has led to organisational changes, such as the altering of the GCSE option blocks (53% of responding state schools) or making language study compulsory for some pupils (36%) (Board & Tinsley, 2014). However, some of these changes were short-lived, with 11% of responding state schools reporting that changes were made but subsequently reversed (Board & Tinsley, 2014). But in 2017 only 38.2% of pupils in the state sector were entered for the EBacc, and of those who entered 4 out of the 5 components, 80.4% missed the language component (Ayres-Bennett and Carruthers, 2019). Together with the EBacc, the Progress 8<sup>13</sup> performance measure, which first appeared in the league tables in 2016, was anticipated by the Department for Education to lead to many schools further changing their curriculum (Department for Education, 2014c).

Despite the EBacc still being reported on and still including MFLs, these are not necessarily included in the Progress 8 measure. Importantly, in the calculation, MFLs can be replaced with Science or humanities subjects, which appear to have a greater positive impact on league tables. Moreover, recent evidence suggests that schools are prioritising Progress 8 over EBacc with negative consequences for MFL entries (Wiggins, 2016). The combination of the Progress 8 measure and how

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<sup>11</sup> These are all subjects that universities *require* students to have in order to be accepted on too many degree courses.

<sup>12</sup> The 2010 general election resulted in a hung parliament, and the Conservative party, led by David Cameron, formed a coalition with the Liberal Democrats in order to gain a parliamentary majority (The editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010 [online]).

<sup>13</sup> This measure considers progress made in eight subjects, including English, Maths, three EBacc subjects (this could include more than one from each area, e.g. Spanish and French, whereas in the EBacc itself only one subject from each area can count), and the remainder made up of other eligible qualifications. Science would fall within the EBacc group (Department for Education, 2014c).

it is manipulated at the school level, together with the (perceived) difficulty of languages at GCSE (Coe, 2008) poses a hindrance regarding MFL take up in post-14 education. This is then coupled with staffing concerns in relation to expanding language provision, poor student motivation (Allen & Thompson, 2016), lack of curriculum time (Tinsley and Board, 2017a) and ‘harsh’ grading, which is perceived by both students and teachers (Parrish, 2018). Consequently, the ‘EBacc effect’ of increased uptake noted in Language Trends (Board & Tinsley, 2015) is then tempered somewhat as head teachers choose to take other routes to securing high Progress 8 scores and rank high in the league tables. Indeed, in the literature there is evidence that schools frequently direct students towards or away from subjects, such as MFL, based on their ability or the predicted outcome for that student (Harris and Haydn, 2012; Ryrie *et al.*, 1979; Stables, 1996). Gaskell (1970) called this, ‘streaming of students ability’ (p. 19). Adding to senior leaders’ concerns is also the principle of OFQUAL’s system of comparable outcomes (Benton, 2016), which was introduced in 2010 to safeguard against grade inflation. Comparable outcomes<sup>14</sup> mean that from one year to the next, the grades awarded in a specific subject will be similar to those in previous years, considering any change in the prior attainment of the students taking the particular subject [ibid]. It could be said that whilst ‘harsh’ grading of MFL prevails, together with the principle of comparable outcomes, the new GCSE content and assessment proposals appear to remain short of making a marking difference to MFL uptake (O’Farrell, 2021). Conversely, such measures appear to pose substantial threats at a time when the MFL uptake is already in crisis. Rather than achieving the desired outcome of broadening the qualification’s appeal, they appeared to have led to a further decline in second language studies.

Arguably, in the last few years, several developments have occurred which hoped to have a lasting impact on second language studies in England. One of such developments has been the new Ofsted (2019) inspection framework, which has seen the implementation of languages being taught in both primary and secondary schools as part of a ‘broad and balanced curriculum’ (Ofsted, 2019). However, such measure poses a challenge, namely for primary schools due to the lack of language specialist practitioners at primary level (Sturt-Schmidt, 2020). Nevertheless, this framework aimed to ensure Key Stage 3 includes years 7, 8 and 9, thus meaning MFL will be compulsory for the first three years of secondary school. The rationale behind such measure hoped to tackle the ‘loophole’ many secondary schools have used to reduce Key Stage 3 to two years (7 and 8) and in this way opening the way to students in secondary school to drop language studies subjects following the first two

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<sup>14</sup> The “comparable outcomes” approach was first (officially) applied to new GCSEs introduced in 2011 2 (see OFQUAL, 2011). This means that, under usual circumstances, the aim is that ‘roughly the same proportion of students will achieve each grade as in the previous year’ (OFQUAL 2012: 2).

years of secondary education [ibid]. Arguably, this new framework can be perceived as a positive measure by way of ensuring that MFL is taught to all students in KS3. But it is clear that such framework has had the opposite effect beyond KS3. The introduction of this revised Ofsted framework saw a slight rise in entries risen. But importantly, in this framework accountability is a key curriculum driver and changes to GCSE MFL entries are inextricably linked to the pressures it exerts on schools (O'Farrell, 2021). And, although recognising that one of the key reasons behind the introduction of the Ebacc was to increase take up of language studies beyond KS3, senior leaders are fully aware of the pressures imposed by accountability measures[ibid]. Therefore, it could be argued that the Progress 8 measure appeared to have answered their concerns, as it seems to have made it easier for schools to score a higher Progress 8 score when students are entered for sciences and humanities to fill the requisite Ebacc entries, rather than second language studies. And this is due to the acknowledge recognition by senior leaders of the 'severe' exam grading (Dearing and King, 2007; Graham 2002; Taylor and Marsden 2014; Thompson, 2016b) at GCSE, in MFL studies. The consequence being that on average, the gained grades are lower by up to one grade than other Ebacc subjects (Thompson, 2016). It is clear that performative measures are key curriculum drivers and any changes to MFL provision are inextricably linked to the pressures it exerts on schools (O'Farrell, 2021), and this can but lead to a further decrease on uptake beyond KS3. The last decade has, without a doubt, seen renewed importance afforded to MFL studies from 'the top', with the British Academy's (2019) statement that monolingualism is 'the illiteracy of the 21st Century' (Roberts *et al*, cited in The British Academy, 2019: 3) and the government's inclusion of L2 studies as a requirement to obtain the EBacc. However, numbers are still lower than they were before the removal of MFL as a compulsory subject at GCSE (Dobson, 2018). This suggests that such views of MFL are not so widely shared amongst students and the parental body [ibid]. Recent research into the current situation of MFL in England (Tinsley & Doležal, 2018; Tinsley, 2019) corroborates such a view claiming that much still needs to be done to improve the status of languages and consequent take-up in post 14. The continuing decline in uptake of foreign languages over recent years, demonstrates that the government's range of measures to address this situation has had limited impact and many underlying reasons for the decline remain unaddressed. Measures, such as the EBacc, are unlikely to achieve a shift in culture unless they are underpinned by a coherent and consistent national language policy based on pedagogy and a sound philosophical approach (Evans 2007; Macaro, 2008). Equally, curricula with mainly tedious content and perceived by learners to be inept, (Bell 2004; Coyle 2000) also accounts for the continuous decline. Finally, the perception that L2 studies are difficult subjects, together with severe grading at the point of GCSE examinations and

some seeing them as unimportant (Dearing and King, 2007; Graham 2002; Taylor and Marsden 2014; Thompson, 2016b), adds to the picture of national degradation.

The 2018 Language Trends Survey acknowledged that for some teachers ‘... the introduction of new, more rigorous GCSEs and A levels is a depressing take up and the increase in GCSE numbers delivered by the English Baccalaureate policy is now in reverse’ (British Council, 2018). There is a widening gap between schools: those which are moving towards the government’s ambition of 90% of pupils taking a language, and those where languages are not a priority [Ibid]. The latest figures for students passing language exams suggest the continuum of this downhill trend, (Language Trends, 2020; Tinsley & Dolezal, 2018). In addition, MFL A Level studies have also suffered a big decline in the number of students choosing MFL Higher Education courses, leading to the closure of some University MFL departments (Bawden, 2013). Equally, by excluding alternative and vocational language qualifications as qualifying subjects for the Ebacc has led to reducing the flexibility of language-learning opportunities (Davies, 2012). The scheme ‘Asset Languages’, which previously had provided access to voluntary accreditation for all ages in a variety of community languages, could not be sustained (Dobson, 2018). Hence, foreign language education has become increasingly restricted to highly academic GCSE and A-Level qualifications, therefore failing to suit the needs of all students, and consequently fewer gain any proficiency (Sturt-Schmidt, 2020). Within the state sector the uptake of MFLs beyond KS3 acts as a social marker (Board and Tinsley, 2015). Indeed, the 2020 Language Trends Report, 34% of state secondary schools and 46% of independent schools<sup>15</sup> reported fewer pupils taking a language post-16 than in previous years (Language Trends, 2020). Across the UK, independent schools teach considerably more MFL than all state schools, as do state schools with a predominantly middle-class intake (Board & Tinsley, 2014; Lanvers, 2017b). Only 20% of state schools make a language compulsory in KS4, as opposed to the independent sector where the figure is 74%. However, the last year’s report acknowledges that the uptake of MFLs at post-16 education is also decreasing (Language Trends, 2021). This is strongly linked to levels of social deprivation of a school’s intake: schools with high percentages of students entitled to free school meals<sup>16</sup> (an indicator of a degree of social deprivation of a school’s cohort) have low participation rates on L2 studies beyond the compulsory phase (Tinsley & Board, 2016). The same applies to schools with: a higher allocation of Pupil Premium Funding; lower Attainment 8 results; Sponsor Led Academies; and those who have a higher proportion of students identified as having English as an

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<sup>15</sup> Independent schools (also known as ‘private schools’) charge fees to attend instead of being funded by the government. Pupils don’t have to follow the national curriculum [online].

<sup>16</sup> In England a Free School Meal (FSM) is a statutory benefit available to school aged children from families who receive other qualifying benefits and who have been through the relevant registration process.



additional language. They are also slightly more likely to be in the North of England.<sup>17</sup> The inequity in language learning across the social divide continues to increase[ibid]. Importantly, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds have fewer encounters with language studies due to factors such as, lack of parental language skills, limited travel, absence of international contacts and international mobility. These students do not see the values of language learning beyond practical needs (e.g. jobs or travelling), hence, they find themselves in a monolingual mind-set or habitus (Lanvers, Doughty, and Thompson, 2018). This critical interpretation of social exclusion leads to criticism of the education system and its failure to counter inherent social inequalities. And such unequivocal segregation in MFL uptake is a key feature of the UK language learning setting, where 'Languages become the preserve of social and intellectual elite' (Coleman, 2009). In order to expose or challenge these inequalities, there is a need to consider discourse regarding second language studies as it can be perceived as a reflection of the social world (Tabrizi and Behnam, 2014). It is then paramount to discuss the extent to which senior leaders' discourse might reinforce or challenge stances towards the importance of L2 studies.

### 2.1.2 Issues of Discourse

As evidenced above, the historical limitations for increased take up in MFL in England have led to a loss of infrastructure support for MFL practitioners (Dobson, 2018). But crucially it has had major implications for school leaders (Board & Tinsley, 2015; Coe, 2008; Allen & Thompson, 2016; Parrish, 2018; Tinsley and Board, 2017a). Namely the introduction of performative measures led to further constraints to the decisions senior leaders might make in schools regarding MFL provision (Benton, 2016; Harris and Haydn, 2012; O' Farrell, 2021; Ryrie *et al.*, 1979; Stables, 1996). This begs the question as to whilst remaining accountable, how can school leaders contain the further plunge of second language studies beyond post-14 education, and in turn convey a clear message of the recognised benefits of learning other languages [ibid]. In this regard, it is fundamental to consider the impact of their 'discourse' on the values of second language acquisition within their educational settings. Foucault (1991) defines discourse as more than ways of thinking and producing meanings. Discourse goes beyond ways of creating knowledge, in conjunction with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them [Ibid; Weedon, 1997].

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<sup>17</sup> The data taken from the 2020 report showed that in 2019, 54% of schools in the highest FSM quintile stated that 'some groups do not study a language' as opposed to only 21% of schools in the lowest FSM quintile. 57.1% of Sponsor Led Academies stated that 'some groups do not study a language', in contrast to 32.6% of Community schools and 30.9% of Academy converters (British Council, 2020).

Generally, educational discourse may reflect and reproduce beliefs, attitudes and social practices of education, and that links between educational practices and the sociocultural beliefs and attitudes in which they are embedded, may be exposed (Goldstein, 2004). Arguably, the withdrawal of the network of support in place prior to 2010 (Dobson, 2018), could be perceived by many as a move to marginalise other languages and cultures (Pennycook, 1995), and in this way continue to sustain perceptions of neo-colonialism and racism (Becket and MacPherson, 2005) whilst widening the gap in education. As an example, the removal of vocational language qualifications from the Ebacc (Davies, 2012) has led to a further increase in inequity in Second Language acquisition. Indeed, Professor Mike Kelly (2019), a language expert and advisor to the 'All-Party Parliamentary Group' (APPG) recommended 'opening up the range of qualifications that are available and looking at wider types of accreditation' with 'a focus on helping disadvantaged students to learn languages' [ibid]. Although the level of autonomy granted to schools was welcomed (Hubb & Moe, 1990), at the same time it placed greater emphasis on the role of school leaders regarding curriculum provision, specifically in MFL. Autonomy comes with a price tag, accountability (Brighouse, 1983; Department for Education, 2013a; Glatter, 2012; Tinsley and Dolezal, 2018) and this becomes the main point of reference for informing school leaders' decision-making. Such measures, combined with the removal of the support framework for MFL provision have led to a hierarchy of subjects, where MFL studies are seen to be devalued in relation to core subjects. As a result, these views became entrenched in schools with negative outcomes for second language provision. A new 'truth' becomes established. Foucault argues that the 'will to truth' is the major system of exclusion that forges discourse and which 'tends to exert a sort of pressure and something like a power of constraint on other discourses' (Foucault, 1970, cited in Shapiro 1984:113-4). It is therefore essential to examine the perception of languages as an elite capital, which appears to be reproduced at institutional level by head teachers' decision-making regarding L2 studies in post-14 education. In this regard, Foucault (1997) argues that part of the answer to these questions lies in the relation between power and discourse. Some discourses have more power to persuade than others and are reiterated more often across a wide range of sites and/or by those who are believable and understood to be an expert. Indeed, the policy of minimal intervention compounded with the removal of the support structures for MFL, as previously outlined, besides reshaping the relationship between the state and schools, has led to a greater empowerment of head teachers, who in turn are perceived as the ultimate 'power holders' [my emphasis]. Consequently, their discourse is paramount as it can both sustain or abate the current decline in MFL studies. This is covered by the notion of technologies of power, which 'determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivising of the subject' (p.225). The relationship between head teachers and MFL practitioners

illustrates how these technologies operate in schools, where day to day decisions are left to the latter (Parrish, 2018). Conversely strategic decisions are held by the school leader and the views of the heads of MFL are often disregarded [ibid]. Institutions, such as schools, act as specific sites where particular techniques of power are channelled and applied to individuals in systematic ways (Foucault, 1997). Through its organisation, curriculum and daily practices, school becomes a disciplinary site which draws on particular regimes of truth (discourses) to legitimate its existence and to define what it does. Consequently, particular pedagogical practices associated with MFL provision, beyond KS3 can work to produce 'normalising', 'regulating' and 'classifying' effects. This intricate relationship between power/knowledge and discourse underpins schools' decision-making and it is significant in underpinning this study. Consequently, a deeper explanation is offered in section 5.2, by way of developing this theoretical perspective and using it to offer an analysis of the findings.

### 2.1.3 Conclusion

To conclude, there is a lack of coherent policy support at national level in England to increase the take up of L2 studies and equally, there is a large body of evidence suggesting that low student motivation is the greatest contributor to the continuing decline (Coleman, Galaczi and Astruc, 2007; Tinsley, 2018). However, this is only part of the story. Whilst school leaders face systemic problems with the documented language-learning crisis (Tinsley, *et al.*, 2018) it also seems that their interpretation of curriculum and policy is results-driven, rather than what might have been initially intended by policy makers (Wang, 2010). This decentralised nature of MFL policy in England, coupled with the documented language-learning crisis (Tinsley, *et al.*, 2018) brings to the forefront the role of head teachers and the impact of their decision-making regarding L2 studies in secondary schools in England.

## 2.2 Senior leaders' decision-making: practice and policy

In England, some schools have been afforded new levels of autonomy, depending on the type of school. However, this does not imply that all centralised control is removed (Agasisti, Catalano, and Sibiano, 2013). The reality is that schools have become more accountable (Caldwell, 1993)<sup>18</sup>. with school leaders' decision-making being considerably constrained by the league tables of results for GCSEs, the main indicator of academic success (Glatter, 2012:564).

The growing accountability performance measures pose significant and well-documented hindrances in deterring the decline of MFL in post-14 education (Board and Tinsley 2014; Lo Bianco, 2014; Long

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<sup>18</sup> The flexibility provided by government policy on L2 studies, allows senior leaders and MATs control over admissions, budget and curriculum provision and enactment. As a result, 57% of English state secondary schools now have such autonomy (*Academies or Free Schools*) (Board & Tinsley 2015). Consequently, competition between schools has increased (Ball *et al.*, 2012).

and Boulton, 2016; Staufenberg 2017; Thomson 2016a). Additionally, the difficulty of attaining good grades in MFL, compared to other subjects (Coe 2008; Ofqual 2015; Thomson 2016b; Vidal Rodeiro, 2017), has exacerbated an already challenging situation. L2 studies are subject to disproportionately severe grading at GCSE level (Taylor & Marsden, 2014; Thompson, 2016b) and subsequent qualifications at A-level<sup>19</sup>. At GCSE level, students score on average one full grade below results in other subjects, based on both individual grades in other subjects and earlier grades, and A-level languages are subject to greater attrition in relation to other subjects [Ibid]. Schools with high levels of language take-up at GCSE may therefore have comparatively worse 'League Table' results (Board and Tinsley 2015:4), leading schools to permit only high-achieving students to continue with MFL studies beyond KS3 (Parrish and Lanvers, 2018). Consequently, within the state sector, schools with good academic records are more likely to make languages compulsory than those with a poorer record (Lanvers, 2017b). Therefore, school leaders who are continuously under pressure to improve their league table standing, become disincentivised to enter students for GCSE MFL (Education Datalab 2015; Harris and Burn 2011; Lanvers, 2017b). Hence, the decision taken in 2004 to make MFL optional in post-14 has been well-received by head teachers. However, it has also been found that students link the optionality of MFL with low value (Coleman *et al.*, 2007; Fisher, 2011). Thus, the ways in which school leaders make decisions regarding the provision of choice at GCSE, undoubtedly affects student motivation (Parrish, 2018). Research in L2 studies has found that the level of motivation declines over KS3 (Coleman *et al.*, 2007; Williams *et al.*, 2002) and where the learning process conflicts with students' sense of identity, motivation remains a problematic issue (Bartram 2006; Fisher 2001). Davies *et al.*, (2004) have shown that students' perceptions of a subject are important in their GCSE choices, as well as perceptions of their ability (Blenkinsop *et al.*, 2006)<sup>20</sup>.

School leaders, even if willing to increase their MFL take up, are faced with constant policy changes suggesting: a lack of direction in relation to the purpose of teaching an L2 [ibid]. This inconsistency and array of policy changes sends contradictory messages regarding the importance of MFL. The

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<sup>19</sup> A- Level =Advanced level, school-leaving qualification enabling university entry, typically taken age 18+(Myers, 2006)

<sup>20</sup> Arguably, the increased autonomy to individual schools seems to account for a stark social segregation in MFL studies. Beyond the post compulsory phase, such measures appear to support a 'classed nature' of curriculum choice in schools (Abraham, 2018; Coffey, 2018; Lanvers, 2017a), which contradicts the government's pledge for a fair educational reform regardless of background (DfE, 2015 [online]). Increasingly, school leaders are able to shape their school according to socio-economic factors, namely, the social mix of their intake (Braun *et al.*, 2011) and offer opportunities to schools to 'cream off' the best pupils (Goldring, 2005). Thus, social segregation in UK schools is likely to increase with devolution (Pachler, 2007), as socially disadvantaged families cannot afford to live in catchment areas with more successful schools (Allen 2007; Burgess *et al.*, 2014) due to disproportionate house prices. This enables middle-class parents to 'buy into' the catchment area of popular state schools (Cheshire & Sheppard 2004). The end result is an increasing social divide in language learning uptake (Pachler, 2007).

EBacc measure, for example, includes a language at GCSE, whereas Progress 8 does not. Lastly, but not least, governmental accounts into the decline of L2 studies (Board and Tinsley 2015; Dearing 2007; Nuffield Foundation 2000) tend to focus solely on the practical benefits of L2 studies, such as economic requirement and the job market (Lanvers, 2016). Conversely, the benefits of language learning, such as, tolerance and world citizenship, not to mention personal enrichment, societal cohesion and intercultural understanding, are completely disregarded [ibid].

Despite constraints imposed by policy tools and frameworks in relation to L2 provision (Parrish, 2018), the ultimate decision-making process resides with the head teacher and MTPs (Johnson and Johnson, 2015). Decisions, such as which languages should be taught to which students, are generally perceived as a key responsibility of the leadership team and the school governing body (Earley and Weindling, 2004:118), although heads of department may contribute to this strategic thinking in their areas of expertise [ibid]. Their role is merely to implement strategies within the department (Parrish, 2018). Therefore, the impact of their decision-making can potentially be constrained by that of the headteachers. Ironically, both the heads of department and their school leaders perceive themselves as highly constrained by government requirements in spite of the decentralised model of school decision-making (Glatter, 2012). The accountability measures in place warrant that, even institutions that are not officially bound to the NC, such as academies, feel obliged not to diverge from it and comply with the centralised testing and reporting regime (Parrish, 2018). School leaders may have the vision, but the agency within their specific contexts may be limited (Earley, 2013).

Against this background, the obstacles for curriculum provision and enactment in MFL are relevant to the consideration of schools' decision-making. It is ultimately the senior leaders' decision to create curriculum changes [ibid], and, despite the constraints discussed above (Glatter, 2012), head teachers appear to hold the power to determine who learns languages and to what level (Johnson and Johnson, 2015). However, the agency of heads of languages and teachers of MFL can also be constrained and challenged by explicit policy contexts that privilege conformity and standardization over change (Ball, 2006). Such contexts appear to be underpinned by potential hegemonic forces that continue to shape public education and preserve the established social order and its intrinsic power [ibid]. Tollefson, 2013b argues that within critical approaches, 'language policies are viewed as mechanisms for creating and sustaining systems of inequality that benefit wealthy and powerful individuals, groups, institutions and nation-states' (as cited in Johnson, 2015). In this regard, dominant-group language ideologies act as a model that validate policies and curriculum decisions that restrict educational access and privilege dominant groups (Shohamy, 2006). School leaders with

access to institutional power tend to make policy decisions in line with dominant discourses that withstand and normalize linguistic, economic, and ethnic/social hierarchies (Ball, 2006).

In some instances, the devolution of language in education policy is welcomed by head teachers, given the ability to act and tailor decisions according to individual needs and circumstances that autonomy brings (Hubb & Moe, 1990). However, it must be emphasized that these same policies can also be limited by the internal politics of the school or department (Priestly, 2011). Moreover, the priority placed by the school leadership on league tables and performance measures also dictates policy, (Brighouse, 1983:15). Devlin & Warnock (1977) argue that education entails value judgements being made by a select group as to what should or should not be taught.

It can therefore be argued that it is politics which determines which languages are most 'useful' or 'in demand,' and the current approach has been described as 'cultural retrenchment' (Hurcombe, 2016 [online]). Pennycook (1989) shares the view that 'all education is fundamentally political' (p.590) and given the levels at which policy decisions are made, education is subject not just to change in line with changing governments, but also in line with change in school-level leadership. But that is not all. Because language policies are created and implemented by individuals, it is then pivotal to consider their beliefs. Spolsky (2009) noted that the most noteworthy beliefs to language policies are the values or status afforded to named languages. Whether they are perceived from the perspective of attitudes or ideologies, they are crucial, because the efficacy of a language policy depends on buy-in from stakeholders, albeit a classroom policy, an institutional policy, or a national policy (Wiley and Garcia, 2016). The implementation of language educational policies is also dependent on the beliefs about languages that each key actor, who interprets policy meaning, might hold at both local and state level (Compton, 2013). The wider ideological climate of the society will also affect the potential for national language policies (Hult and Hornberger, 2016).

### **2.3 Teachers' beliefs and decision-making**

This section explores the influence of teachers' beliefs and social context, how they affect individuals and in turn how such beliefs affect institutional level decision-making regarding L2 studies in England. The focus on teachers' beliefs is relevant to get a sense of the individual and collective discourses that inform teachers/school leaders' perceptions, judgements and ultimately the decision-making process that motivate and drive their action. Therefore, in order to understand how head teachers and teachers make individual decisions about curriculum provision concerning L2 studies, it is necessary to consider how individuals make their decisions about many things on a daily basis.

### 2.3.1 Defining beliefs

Whilst beliefs have been described as the most valuable psychological construct to teacher education (Pintrich, 1990), they are also one of the more difficult to define. In the field of L2 education, beliefs are perceived to be central to teacher learning (Pajares, 1992) and they play a crucial role in informing a teacher's practical and pedagogical content knowledge (Borg, 2003; Rosiek, 2003). Therefore, an understanding of the influences on the development of beliefs is seen as being of great importance for those seeking to understand what informs educational practice in ways that prevailing research agendas have not (Pajares, 1992). Consequently, teacher beliefs have increasingly become the focus of research studies in recent years (Borg, 2011).

Defining the notion of beliefs is rather complex, as these are abstract in nature, making them challenging to research (Pajares, 1992). There are scholars who seek to make a clear distinction between teacher subject knowledge and pedagogic belief. For example, Nisbett and Ross (1980), Ernest (1989) and Pajares (1992), assert that knowledge is the more cognitive component of teacher thinking and is more receptive to reason and critical examination. The table below illustrates the different views:

Nisbett and Ross (1980), Ernest (1989) and Pajares (1992)	Knowledge is the more cognitive component of teacher thinking and is more receptive to reason and critical examination.
Pajares (1992)	Beliefs and knowledge are associated with subjectivity and emotion, whereas knowledge tends to be more empirical.
Alexander and Dochy (1995)	Individuals understand beliefs as being part of a level of perception, rather than constituting knowledge or being part of a tangible reality.
Brown and Coney's (as cited in Pajares, 1992)	Pointed to a differentiation between beliefs and knowledge also supported this view.
Nisbett and Ross (as cited in Pajares, 1992)	Viewed beliefs to be a sub-category of knowledge and not a different isolated concept itself.

*Table 1 Knowledge and Pedagogical Beliefs*

In his review of research in the field of second language studies, Borg (2003) espouses the term 'teacher cognition' to incorporate both the knowledge and beliefs held by teachers. He asserts that research should reflect the important relationship between beliefs and knowledge, as opposed to create potentially false divisions between them, with a multitude of 'labels' used to explore the notion of teacher beliefs (p.83). He argues that this diversity of terminology has led to significant and unnecessary 'conceptual ambiguity'. This view that knowledge and beliefs are inextricably

intertwined is also supported by (Pajares, 1992). Moreover, both knowledge and beliefs are subject to the powerful influences from previous episodes or events that coloured the comprehension of subsequent events (Nespor, 1987). This stance is also supported by Goodman (1988) who discovered that teachers were influenced by guiding images from past events that created intuitive screens through which new information was filtered. This is prevalent in this study, as institutional level decision-making can also potentially be informed by senior leaders' very own personal experiences as MFL students themselves, thus affecting their perception of value of language studies beyond KS3 studies. In more recent studies, teachers' beliefs were claimed to be 'psychological understandings, premises or propositions felt to be true' (Tondeur *et al.*, 2008: 25-43).

However, Richards and Lockhart (1994), state that beliefs can be both objective and subjective. These scholars assert that beliefs can originate from academic and empirical concepts as well. They highlight that even experience in teaching turns into beliefs acting under the '*I have done before, I'll do it again*' formula. This stance is also supported by Lewis (1990) who argued that the origin of all knowledge is rooted in belief, in that ways of knowing are basically ways of choosing values. Specifically, when learning is due to personal discovery or insight, for example, individuals begin by believing their own senses, their intuition, the laws of nature and logic. There is indeed a growing body of evidence, which supports that teachers are influenced by their practice and their beliefs which are closely linked to their values and views of the world, and also to their understanding of their place within it (Pajares, 1992). Borg (2011) defines 'belief' as a proposition, which consciously or unconsciously is upheld by the individual and serves as a guide to thought and behaviour. These beliefs will undoubtedly inform present and future situations (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

For Rokeach (1968) beliefs stem from direct encounters with determined objects and have a 'taken-for-granted character' (p. 6); they are rigid and belong to the most inner-core type of beliefs. Furthermore, he argued that these beliefs are also associated with self-identity and any disturbance affecting these can cause instability within an individual. Equally important for this scholar are 'authority' beliefs which are described as those originating in the different spheres of society [ibid]. This means that individuals tend to identify with 'authorities' who will help them to decide what to believe and what not to believe [ibid]. As an example, school leaders tend to identify closely with government policies, hence they perceive themselves, and are perceived, as the holders of 'knowledge' and absolute 'truths' [ibid]. In this sense, teacher practice is inescapably influenced by such authority beliefs, as we look to such authorities for information about what is (and is not) true [ibid]. Arguably, such beliefs may have a detrimental impact on MFLs in post-14 education, as teachers are also shaped by the institution, and their head teachers, who are often perceived as the 'authority' in these social contexts. Therefore, belonging to a specific school family and a particular



set of beliefs may shape teachers' beliefs, both positively or negatively and influence their practice, and most importantly, their beliefs. This is advocated by Rokeach, who asserts that individuals accept or reject beliefs depending on how well they identify with them and form a sense of 'group identity' (Rokeach, 1968: 11); family, class, peer groups, religious and political groups, and country itself shape these beliefs [ibid]. As such, individuals develop a belief system that encompasses all the beliefs acquired through the process of cultural transmission (Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Rokeach, 1968). Additionally, they are closely related to what we think we know, but provide an emotional filter, which screens, redefines, distorts or reshapes subsequent thinking and information processing (Nespor, 1987).

Arguably, there are authors who would argue against this stance about beliefs being influenced by 'authority' and assimilating into social contexts. It is claimed that teachers bring their own set of beliefs which in turn influence their decision-making. Since beliefs act as a filter for human behaviour, they are an important feature of reflective teaching (Richards & Lockhart, 1996), which encourages teachers to reflect upon and question their beliefs to understand how they teach. In particular, beliefs are an important feature of educational and teacher change, since a change in teachers' practices requires a change in their beliefs (Barcelos, 2015). This is pertinent to head teachers and institutional level decision-making, where arguably a change in beliefs might lead to a change in curriculum provision in post-14 education with greater affordance given to L2 studies. Teacher beliefs, which are often drawn from memory and experience, are argued to be the more effective and profoundly seated personal truths (Borg, 2011; Ernest 1989; Nespor, 1987); and their influence must be acknowledged within school's decision-making process. This is believed to be a conscious process, and the extent of consciousness varies from clearly motivated selections to unconscious decisions (Kansanen, 2008). This same principle can be extended to teachers' and school leaders' decision-making. Both stakeholders select one alternative amongst other potential choices. Thus, behind the processes of identifying the problem, generating, evaluating and selecting an alternative, are the systems of teachers' personal beliefs and knowledge (Borg, 1998a; Da Silva, 2005). For the purpose of this study, 'beliefs' reflect the way in which the participants, senior leaders and heads of MFL, interpret information and experiences of second language studies in post-14 education in England and how this affects their decision-making (Cabaroğlu and Roberts, 2000:388).

### **2.3.2 The influence of social context on beliefs in relation to institutional level decision-making**

It is contended that the context in which teachers and or senior leaders find themselves working, together with their subject knowledge and educational beliefs, affect their decision-making in

relation to curriculum provision in MFL (Clandinin, 1985; Gudmundsdottir, 1990; Pajares, 1992; Cabaroglu and Roberts, 2000; Pinar *et al.*, 2008). Beliefs are dynamic and emergent, socially constructed and contextually situated (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2011; Mercer, 2011). Therefore, it is important to consider whether or not teachers' beliefs align themselves with the prevailing group identity. In this perspective, the notion of beliefs may reflect the tensions between head teachers' own beliefs and values, as well as government ideology. In other words, beliefs originating from an 'institutionalized ideology' (Rokeache, 1968:10) may be incongruent with those of school leaders. Therefore, it is relevant to discuss which holds the most influence in relation to L2 studies in post-14 education, as head teachers' decision-making appear to align itself with dominant institutional discourses (Biesta *et al.*, 2015). As practitioners become immersed in the culture and values of a school, the influence of social context on beliefs in relation to schools' decision-making is driven by the view that any decisions regarding MFL in post 14-education may be informed and determined by contextual factors. Borg (1998) agrees that MFL teachers' behaviours may be shaped by their beliefs, and crucially he asserts that they are also influenced by environmental factors inherent in the school contexts in which they are working, such as school policies, leadership directives, curriculum and assessment practices (1998). This was further corroborated later by Borg (2003) and by Lee (2008) who provide abundant evidence of the way in which contextual factors and situational constraints act to 'mediate the extent to which teachers can act in accordance with their beliefs' (Phipps and Borg, 2009:381). Equally, Chacón (2005) perceived teaching context as of primary importance and asserted that within the complex process of teaching, teachers' actions, and in this instance, senior leaders' decision-making, represent the interplay between their beliefs (e.g. perspectives, perceptions, and assumptions) and their contexts. Flores and Day's longitudinal research (2006) revealed how the interplay between contextual and cultural factors influenced teachers' thinking. Similarly, Cabaroglu and Roberts (2000) emphasized both personal and social aspects of teacher beliefs by stating that these are developed through non-stop interactions between personal meaning-making, and social validation and invalidation of these meanings. Arguably, such interactions may lead to inconsistencies in a teacher's beliefs (Raymond, 1997). In the case of education, issues such as time constraints, limited resources, accountability measures and tensions created by standardized tests can lead to 'an inconsistency of beliefs' (Lester, 2007:272).

A number of studies have examined the contextual factors influencing teachers' beliefs, such as language policies, mandated curriculum, school culture and resources (Zhang and Liu, 2014). Bruner (1996) noted, culture shapes minds. Many traditional beliefs held by teachers mirror deep-rooted cultural values and conventions [ibid]. Such values have evolved from social context and from the institutions; they hold the power to create or perpetuate the dominant discourse in society (Zhang

and Liu, 2014). Arguably, the same could be said of head teachers and practitioners, who tend to legitimize and reproduce discourses regarding curriculum provision in relation to second language studies that are embedded in institutions (Ball, 1996). The lack of affordance given to MFL beyond KS3 reflects such an assumption (see sections 2.1 & 2.2). Therefore, if and when the opportunity arises to contemplate change, there is a need to incorporate reform ideas into their belief systems before they can enact changes within MFL curriculum provision.

However, research has shown that teachers' beliefs are deeply entrenched and resistant to change (Pajares, 1992; Tsui, 2003), and this because innovation entails the encounter of conflicting values and goals (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011). These socio-cultural conflicts coupled with the complex daily work environment of teachers and school leaders may hinder changes in their beliefs and practices [ibid]. Teachers and senior leaders bring their personality, interests, abilities, talents, and ways of interacting with others', and importantly their background, to their classes or their institutions (Kaplan and Owings (2011:5). These internal factors will greatly influence their decision-making, whether, in the classroom, in their school setting or in society (Ellis, 2011). In a study conducted by Waters and Vilches (2008) the implementation of curriculum innovation in the basic education sector in the Philippines, found that English teachers continued to hold traditional beliefs and used methods not aligned with the principles of the new curriculum.<sup>21</sup> This situation is mirrored in post-14 education, where head teachers' decision-making regarding MFL appears to be constrained by accountability measures (see section 2.1) and crucially by socio-cultural, economic and historical factors (see sections 2.4 & 2.6). Therefore, in order to ensure the successful translation of a curriculum where MFLs are given prominence, teachers' beliefs and the context that shapes such beliefs must be unveiled and understood. There are examples in this study, where during the interviews, senior leaders felt that their decision-making in relation to L2 provision in post-14 education was driven more by influences beyond their control than by choices arising from their beliefs about the value of second language studies. This seems to suggest that the capacity of head teachers to actively shape their own actions is significantly curbed (Johnson, 1996). Arguably, when potential tensions arise between teachers' beliefs and decision-making, the extent to which head teachers feel they have the agency to enact those beliefs is limited or even curtailed.

To sum up, the school environment and its culture, in short, the context, is able to steer the formation of the pedagogical beliefs and practices of both teachers and senior leaders (Johnson, 1996; Borg, 2003 and Lee, 2008), inevitably affecting their decision-making. As a result, it is necessary to consider the influence of context on beliefs, as these are dynamic and emergent,

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<sup>21</sup> Even though the teachers were willing to apply the new approaches, their efforts to do so were constrained by such factors as: shortage of resources, lack of professional training, and importantly prevailing cultural norms and some historical-political factors.

socially constructed and contextually situated (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2011; Mercer, 2011). In this way, head teachers can be both enabled and restricted by their social contexts (Priestley *et al.*, 2012; Toom *et al.*, 2015). As a consequence, it is important to consider the extent to which senior leaders feel they have the agency to enact their beliefs, and the factors that can both support or inhibit their agency; both are relevant to this study.

### 2.3.3 The role of beliefs in teacher agency

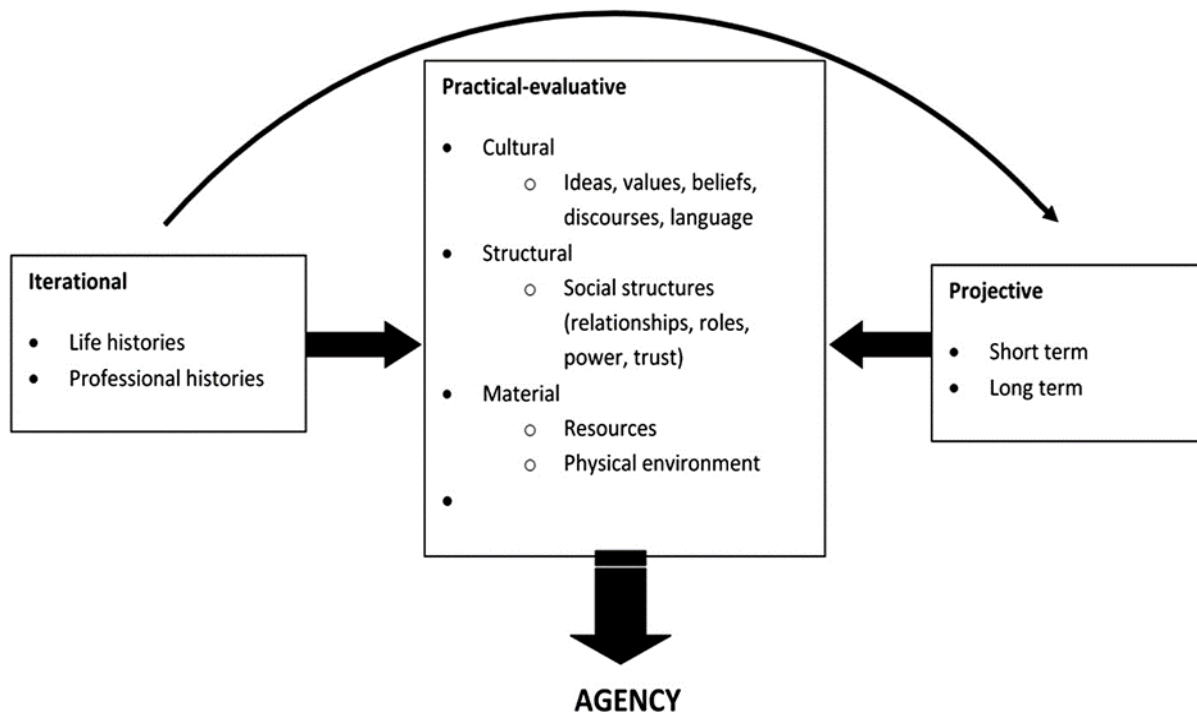
Various scholars perceive the conceptualisation of teacher agency differently, leading to a variety of terms being used and often with different understandings being offered (Priestley *et al.*, 2015).

Lightfoot (1986) argues that agency is understood in relation to terms such as choice and responsibility, whereby individuals are perceived as active entities who possess the capacity to act with intent and autonomy in order to 'transform and refine their worlds and thereby take control of their lives' (Oolbekkink-Marchand *et al.*, 2017:38). In the context of L2 teaching this autonomy can be considered in relation to both the individual's classroom practice and to the individual's influence on wider school policies and practices (Bolin, 1989).

However, there are others, such as, Eteläpeltö *et al.*, (2013), who contend that the responsibility for agentic practices is based on an individual's capacity. However, this view is short of addressing the way in which social contexts can either support or limit individual action. Instead, Higgins and Leat (2001) offer the notion of 'situational agency'. In other words, although the individual teacher/senior leader may have the intent and capacity to act in accordance with their own personal beliefs, they are only able '*to act by means of their environment rather than simply in their environment*' (Biesta and Tedder, 2007:137). It could therefore be argued that school leaders are not in complete control of their actions, but are instead heavily influenced and constrained by the particular professional environments and contexts in which they find themselves. As a result, their agency is not just seen as a personal attribute that they can possess and apply directly to their working practices, but is rather something that senior leaders do in response to their environments (Priestley *et al.*, 2015). Agency is then achieved in specific contexts in and through particular ecological conditions and circumstances (Biesta and Tedder, 2006). This understanding of agency is concerned with the way in which actors 'critically shape their responses to problematic situations' (Biesta & Tedder, 2006: 11).

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) make a case for a conception of agency which encompasses the dynamic interplay between 'iterative', 'practical-evaluative' and 'projective' dimensions and which takes into consideration 'how this interplay varies within different structural contexts of action' (Emirbayer & Mische 1998: 963). In their view, agency is to be understood as an interplay of influences from the past, orientations towards the future, together with an engagement with

the present. In concrete actions all three dimensions play a role, but the degree to which they contribute in concrete achievements of agency varies. The figure below illustrates this process:



*Figure 2 A model for understanding the achievement of agency (Biesta et al., 2015).*

For the purpose of this study, this model helps to understand the role of beliefs in the achievement of agency: where do teachers' beliefs come from (the iterational dimension); how do beliefs 'motivate' action (the projective dimension); how do beliefs influence and function as resources for engagement in concrete situations in and through which teachers act. It highlights that the achievement of agency is always informed by past experience, including personal and professional biographies; that it is orientated towards the future, both with regard to more short-term and more long-term objectives and values; and that it is enacted in the here-and-now, where such enactment is influenced by what is referred to as cultural, material and structural resources.

It is therefore important to understand that agency is achieved in the interaction between individuals and contexts rather than being solely about the capacity of actors. The importance of context must be taken seriously by policymakers, as contexts may disable individuals with otherwise high agentic capacity and they may encounter a context in which change may prove to be too difficult or too risky to enact. The extent to which they feel they have the agency to enact their beliefs may be curtailed. Teachers and school leaders' granted autonomy may fail to achieve agency as they habitually reproduce past patterns of behaviour. Conversely, agency may be shaped and

enhanced by policy that specifies goals and processes, enhancing the capability of teachers to make decisions and frame future actions.

#### 2.3.4 Conclusion

The concept of teacher beliefs focuses on teachers' thoughts and knowledge, which depicts teachers as knowledge constructors (Borg, 2006). Understanding teachers' beliefs enables understanding of both teachers and school leaders' actions and decision-making processes in schools (Borg, 2003; Johnson, 1999; Pajares, 1992; Woods, 1996). Consequently, it is fundamental to understand the relationship between beliefs and the decision-making process (Barcelos, 2013), and more specifically, how beliefs affect senior leaders' decision-making. Teachers' beliefs encompass beliefs about related educational components such as the role of schools in society, beliefs about students, and the role of teachers in the education process (Porter and Freeman, 1986). Beliefs are therefore a major influencing factor in many areas of education (Borg, 2003), and senior leaders' decision-making regarding L2 studies is not exempt from this influencing phenomenon.

Teachers' beliefs affect their decision-making and this undoubtedly extends to school leaders. This is true of curriculum provision in MFL, specifically beyond KS3 where senior leaders have to contend with measures such as the Ebacc and Progress 8 (see sections 2.1 & 2.2). Nevertheless, it could be argued that teachers' own beliefs have greater influence on teacher practice than government ideology. These beliefs are a form of subjective reality: what they believe is real and true (Heather *et al.*, 2009). They influence teacher consciousness, teaching attitude, teaching methods and teaching policy, which might lead to a change in learners' lives or in the structures of the institutions. In this study, how such beliefs impact upon school leaders' decision-making is relevant and in particular whether head teachers' beliefs are in congruence or dissonance with institutional discourse and the impact that this might have in their decision-making regarding L2 studies in post-14 education.

Whilst research suggests that beliefs play an important role in teachers' work, it is also apparent that there might be a discrepancy between teachers' individual beliefs and values and wider institutional discourses and cultures (Biesta *et al.*, 2015). As a result, societal perceptions can play a crucial role in affecting beliefs as well as the decision-making process. In this regard, an exploration of the idea of English as a global language will ensue in order to determine its impact, if any, on schools' decision-making in relation to L2 studies.

#### 2.4 Global English

The term 'Global English' <sup>22</sup>suggests that English is spoken in every part of the world, both among speakers within a particular country who share a first language, and across speakers from different

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<sup>22</sup> Graddol (2006) contends that 'global English' has replaced English as a foreign language – that English is now a global lingua franca, learned for international communication rather than specifically to communicate with native speakers. Its value is increasingly not in its

countries/first language. Data collected in the 2020 Language Trends Survey showed that there was some evidence that 'global English' could be detrimental to the uptake of foreign languages as it threatens motivation in English first-language speakers to learn any MFLs at all (Lanvers, 2014; Lo Bianco 2014). Marsh (2006) suggests that globalization has led to a further growth and embedding of the use of English in professional arenas and in the curriculum across the full age range in the educational sector. He posits that, '*for some people, the words globalization and 'Englishisation' are inseparable*' [Ibid: 30]. He goes on suggesting that the position of English as 'a lingua franca' for socio-economic development over the next one hundred years is in little doubt' [ibid].

Therefore, it is not surprising that this rise of English as a global language has led to a widespread belief that there is little point in learning other languages since 'everybody else speaks English anyway.' Thus, large numbers of students opt to drop the study of MFL in schools at the age of 14 [Ibid]. This is congruent with the findings of the 2020 Language Trends Report, with both independent and state sectors reporting this as a significant issue to providing high quality language teaching (British Council, 2020). Therefore, the dominance of English is a major concern for scholars such as Robert Phillipson (1998), who pointed to the phenomenon of '*linguistic imperialism*' as a key factor in the spread of English (Phillipson 1988; 1992). He argued that linguistic imperialism is a strategy of linguistic planning which occurred in many colonial contexts, at a time when the colonial elite promoted its own language through power structures. With this ubiquity stemming from British imperialism and its relative simplicity, the dominance of English continues to be a prevalent issue affecting the perception of value of second language studies. Anderson (2000) asserts that for English speakers, the status of English as a lingua franca encourages a notion of superiority and Bartram (2005) points to the idea that historically, other languages are unnecessary. In this way, Graddol (2006) warns that the development of global English should not be a cause of celebration for native speakers. Quite the opposite is true, as native English speakers can be given a 'false sense of intellectual superiority', possibly even leaving 'the impression of an arrogance, rooted in imperialist attitudes' (Trim, 2004: 2).

This dominance of the English language has been a source of interest in language policies for a very long time – Spolsky questioned whether this was a direct result of language planning, or simply incidental to colonialism and globalization (2004). Phillipson contests this view, arguing that this dominance is underpinned by evidence of explicit or implicit language policy that aims to advantage one language at the expense of others (2007). It could therefore be argued that the increasing domination of the English language is underwriting a neo-colonialist approach by empowering those

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association with Anglophone nations, but in its trans-national communicative value (Cha & Ham, 2010). Graddol (2006) predicted that by the end of 2020 global English could potentially lead to the end of 'English as a Foreign Language' in many parts of the world.

who are already powerful, and further ostracising the disadvantaged (Beckett and MacPherson, 2005). The hierarchy of languages of colonial times has been maintained, with English as the key medium for prestigious purposes, and its proficiency in English correlating with socio-economic privilege (Phillipson, 2003). Phillipson argues that such assumption influences negatively on civil society and democratic participation in the political process, turning English into the language of the powerful (2003). Guo and Becket (2007) also corroborate this view. For them, the global spread of English is not only a product of colonialism, but also the most powerful instrument of cultural control and cultural construct of colonialism (2007). The increase of globalisation and its associated escalation in the numbers of speakers of English including EFL (English as a Foreign Language) has yet again reinforced the 'they speak English, so why learn an MFL' mentality. This has translated into large numbers of students opting to drop the study of languages in post-14 education (Stables and Wikeley, 1999). This status of the English language gives further credence to both students and parents not to engage with other languages (Dobson, 2018). One of the important symbolic functions of language is political identification and cohesion. In the context of the USA, Saville-Troike (2006:20) states that 'the preserve of languages other than English is often discouraged, whilst the teaching of English as an L2 is encouraged, promoted and supported'. He goes further by asserting that unless there is visible gaining, either economic or social, learning an L2 is deemed unnecessary (Ibid:121). Regarding institutional forces and constraints, he importantly outlines some of the issues associated with L1 dominance. Among these, there is the view that acquisition of a dominant L2 may lead to loss or attrition of the minority L1, leading to potential distancing from the minority language community [ibid]. Language is more than a means of communication; it stands for and symbolizes peoples (Fishman, 1995:51). Identity formation takes place through languages (Alred, 2003). It is possible to extrapolate such views and place them in the context of L2 learning in England, where schools' efforts to encourage the study of MFLs also have to contend with a prevalent political and public climate, which is largely hostile to multilingualism (Coleman, 2009).

The Brexit<sup>23</sup>-induced politicization of language learning suggests that the UK's reluctance to learn languages is indicative of Europhobia, while others contend that the 'global English' phenomenon is the root cause (Lanvers, Dought and Thompson, 2018 [online]). Dewaele and Thirtle (2009) assert that 'the wider societal and political context is undoubtedly linked to the relative unpopularity of FL learning in the UK' (p.644). Thus, it poses a potential barrier to increasing L2 uptake in post compulsory education (Lanvers, Dought and Thompson, 2018). This seems to have been the case in the UK, where 54% of the population wanted to leave the EU (Eurobarometer, 2012b). This

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<sup>23</sup> Brexit is an abbreviation for "British exit," referring to the U.K.'s decision in a June 23, 2016 referendum to leave the European Union (EU).



declining interest in other languages is also present in Europe<sup>24</sup> (Phillipson, 2004) and globally (Hu, 2009). Arguably then, the linguaphobe attitudes in England could also be perceived as part of the same global 'ideology' of 'monolingualism' (Wiley, 2000), rather than Euroscepticism. Trim (2004) pointed out that this negative stance towards any foreign languages was a consequence of the UK turning away from Europe towards the USA. A decade later, Lo Bianco (2014) attributes this decline to the changes in the value of individual languages and foreign languages in general to the process of globalization. Prior to the EU referendum, Pachler (2007) identified a 'retrograde step' towards monolingualism which he believed to be a threat to European integration' (p. 5-6). Already in 2002, the UK did not follow other European countries in taking the Barcelona agreement of two additional languages more seriously and adopt effective measures to develop novel means of teaching and learning languages (Eurydice, 2006). Conversely, the increasingly standardised and prescriptive English curriculum appears to eradicate from the agenda any kind of prioritisation regarding MFL provision in post-14 education.

Importantly, the decision to learn a language is the result of a complex interplay of factors – socio-political attitudes at a variety of levels from the familial to governmental, and the pedagogical context and personal motivational characteristics (Dewaele & Thirtle, 2009). Coleman (2009:12) has argued that the cliché of a British public who are 'no good at languages,' reproduces socially validated, monolingual values. England has remained essentially monolingual, as there has been little apparent practical need to learn foreign languages as long as other nations have been willing to learn English [ibid]. Equally, the impact of public opinion and public discourse prevail over most educational initiatives [ibid]. The lack of shared motivation society appears to have emerged from the acknowledgement of the international status of English and its hegemonic and global dominance. English has become a language of political and economic power, blended with geographical spread (Ricento, 2015). However, it is questionable to justify the decline of L2 studies in post-14 education solely with such a premise. Therefore, I explore this further by drawing on the work of critical theorists who perceive a close relationship between language and power and how it affects society as a whole (Morrison, 2000:471).

## 2.5 Language and power

Language and power are concepts fundamentally related. Language can be defined as 'fluency in, and comfort with, a high-status, worldwide language which is used by groups who possess economic, social, cultural and political power and status in local and global society' (Morrison 2000: 471). This implies that individuals and groups speaking global and majority languages, such as

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<sup>24</sup> In many European countries the global status of English has also led to a decreased interest in other MFL (Bartram, 2010; Busse, 2017): 94% of secondary and 83% of primary school students in the European Union are learning English (Lanvers, Dought and Thompson, 2018).

English, have considerable advantages over their counterparts with benefits ranging from prestige and honour to educational credentials (Guo and Beckett, 2007; Nic Craith, 2007). In other words, speaking the 'right' language becomes a form of capital or investment, which can consolidate or enhance one's credibility in the non-material sector (Wodak, 2012 [online]). Conversely, Foucault's thinking points to discourse and how it can mirror particular ideologies and, in this way, reflect and generate power (Foucault, 1980). And this sits in contrast with the traditional Marxists, who believe that social class positions stem from structural inequalities and favour those from economically advantaged backgrounds. They see education as representing a highly dependent system within capitalist societies, reflecting the conflict between classes in society (Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998). Therefore, the class system sets the stage for the exercise of power<sup>25</sup>. Here dominant groups have an interest in preserving the status quo, whilst the others use instruments of power to reduce or overturn the prevailing power structures (e.g. race, gender, social class) that ripple through many social situations and institutions in society throughout history (Jessop, 2014).

Prevailing power structures shape how power is defined and how we understand the ways in which power shapes society, highlighting the bases of power associated with social class in terms of political influence, control of institutions, access to essential commodities, and material resources (Jessop, 2014). It could be argued that despite a plethora of studies pointing to the importance of second language studies beyond KS3, some of the decisions that are taken by schools and their leadership teams lead to MFLs being only offered to privileged minorities (Coffey, 2018; Lanvers, 2017a; Pavlenko, 2003; Taylor & Marsden, 2014). Hence power is exercised for effecting the will of the state, achieving ethnic domination, and importantly in this study influencing education by way of limiting MFL curriculum provision in post-14 education and perpetuate the status quo. Therefore, power is not merely the 'cutting edge of class conflict' (Little, 2008 [online]). Conversely, Foucault sees power as 'ubiquitous', is neither an agency nor a structure (Foucault, 1978: 93). It is more diffuse and pervasive. It is perceived as a 'regime of truth' that pervades society, and which is in constant fluidity and negotiation; it is a function of the relationship which is dispersed among individuals and institutions in societies (Foucault 2007, 311-316). Power is exercised within the institution, it circulates amongst individuals (Scott & Hirschkind, 2006), as they move continuously from the position of one who suffers the power, in that of one who exercises it (Foucault, 2009 & 2010). In a 'Foucauldian' way, power refers to sets of relations that exist between individuals, or that

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<sup>25</sup> It must be acknowledged that these two notions, power and class, represent theories about how modern society works, but they are not entirely compatible in order to view power relations, despite some fundamental relationships between them. They are separate social factors. Class is fundamentally concerned with the economic structure of a society, the systems through which wealth is created and distributed; power on the other hand is concerned with the expressions of politics within a society (Jessop, 2014).

are strategically deployed by groups of individuals. Institutions, such as schools are simply the crystallization of rather complex sets of power relations, which exist at every level of the social body (Foucault, 2010).

Importantly, Foucault asserts that power is based on knowledge and makes use of knowledge; it produces power and power produces knowledge by reciprocating each other (Foucault, 1998). Hence, power and knowledge are intricately related - knowledge is always an exercise of power and power is always a function of knowledge [ibid]. However, it is important to note that Foucault also understood power/knowledge as productive as well as constraining [Ibid] and this is prevalent in my study. Senior leaders feel empowered to enact curriculum provision in MFL and bring change, but they are also constrained by centrally imposed accountability measures which can prevent them to give further affordance to language studies. For Foucault (1999), 'any system of education is a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledge and powers which they carry'. Despite claims of education to differentiate based on merit, differentiation follows social class positions: the higher one is in the educational system, the greater the predominance of people from capitalist, 'middle-class', and professional backgrounds (Fairclough, 2001). In this sense, the educational system appears to reproduce these inequalities and maintain the status quo [Ibid]. However, such inequalities are not caused by the education system in itself [Ibid]. Rather, power is diluted through the various social institutions, including education, and its origins potentially emerged from the system of class relations at the societal level [Ibid]. Saville-Troike (2006) notes that linguistic social control occurs where official or unofficial policies and practices regulate which language is to be used in particular situations (p.123). Policy is political: it is about the power to determine what is done (Bell and Stevenson, 2006).

Language policies also incorporate the use of language 'for purposes of cultural governance', which reflect and produce 'constructions of the other' (Pennycook, 2002:91). Pennycook refers to Foucault's notion of governmentality which focuses on the operation of power at the 'micro level of diverse practices, rather than macro regulations of the state' (Foucault, 1991). In essence, he claims that while a language policy might be present at state level, the recommendations may or may not be implemented by those at ground level working in schools. However, with the devolution model of school policies in England, power shifted from the state to the head teachers. Hence, Bell and Stevenson (2006) argue that leaders in educational settings become both policy makers and implementers, as they are able to shape policy through professional bodies or their favoured position within government policy forums and think tanks. Foucault refers to this apparent shift of power in the theory of governmentality as 'government of oneself'. When the state is run efficiently, individuals behave as they should (Pennycook, 2002; Foucault, 1991). In other words, governing the

forms of self-government, structuring and shaping the field of possible action of subjects [Ibid]. This sits in conflict with school leaders' premise of having power of decision over their own policies. Instead, it could be said that powerful structural forces of an economic, ideological and cultural nature are decisively shaping policy (Bell and Stevenson, 2006). Language policy should be free of hegemony or of the imposition or exercise of power over individuals or social groups. In political discourse, for example, political posters, advertisements, slogans and other means of persuasive communication are widely used (Referendum June 2016). Such powerful language in the hands of politicians serves to persuade people of intentionally established boundaries (Klemperer, 2005). 'Power over discourse' generally means the extent to which specific actors become seen and heard [Ibid: 57] and the 'power of discourse' implies 'the influence of historically grown macro-structures of meaning, of the conventions of the language game in which actors find themselves' (Ibid). These struggles for power are not always visible, but sometimes happen beneath the surface. Lukes (2005) who formulates the ideological-hegemonic aspects of power contended that the exercise of power is done in such a devious way that people unquestionably accept the order of things as natural or valued as intended and useful (p.28).

It is evident from the above discussion that there is a pressing need to develop a strong critical perspective on the impact of 'historically grown macro structures' and how they both, visibly and invisibly, shape perceptions contributing to neo-colonialism and racism through linguicism, by empowering the already powerful and leaving the disadvantaged and powerless further behind (Becket and MacPherson, 2005). By sustaining the idea that English is the only gateway to education and employment, other languages and cultures will continue to be marginalised (Pennycook, 1995). Arguably, those pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds are also at risk of disadvantage and powerlessness as they are not able/willing to learn an L2. However, the question here is that such feelings of hopelessness or lack of willingness stem from hegemonic discourses deeply rooted in the fabric of society. Therefore, future policies need to reinforce the values of L2 learning through critical multiculturalism and multilingualism (Guo and Becket, 2007). Multilingualism in particular asks for a critical examination of the relationship between language and power (Fairclough, 1995; Pennycook, 1998). When considering the latter, Foucault (1980) advocates that every exercise of power depends on a scaffold of knowledge that supports it. And claims to knowledge advance the interests and power of certain groups whilst marginalising others [ibid]. Clearly, this is the case in relation to the dominance of English and its impact on L2 studies in post-14 education, in England. The discourses of the dominant groups have formed and generated meaningful systems that have gained the status and currency of 'truth' (Foucault, 1972/1977). Thus, such discourses perpetuated by the state become normalised and any other linguistic practices become devalued, as arguably,

they become perceived as non 'truths'. A value system is therefore established. This seems to be the case in secondary schools in England, in particular in relation to the value of L2 studies against other subjects.

Monolinguals are a powerful minority in the contemporary world. They are nevertheless those defining what kind of language is regarded as the linguistic capital [ibid]. This power structure has implications in the educational sector. Davies (2004) emphasizes the necessity to learn about society power in order to challenge the system. Since there is a strong relationship between education and the nation-state, education can never be 'neutral' or objective. It reflects the power relations and structures in the wider society and is central to the hegemony since it often legitimizes the existing power structures (Torres, 1998; Davies 2004). Because symbolic power is also represented in the wider society, power and status relations between dominant and dominated groups have a major influence on the students' progress and achievement (Cummins, 2000b). Consequently, the power relations in a democratic and multicultural society are visible in this context. The reproduction of a dominant power relationship within the school and the larger society can take place if different cultures and languages represented in the classroom are not given respect and legitimacy [ibid]. The decline in L2 studies certainly appears to mirror this premise. The existence of languages of differing status results in linguistic hierarchies in democratic societies. The function of languages is related to the power of the social classes using them (Biseth, 2009). Hence the issue of power enables those who can use language to pursue their own interests. It is therefore not surprising that language domination and power are intrinsically connected (Wodak, 2012).

I have now drawn on critical approaches to language policies and language planning, such as those proposed by Shohamy and others (Wodak, 2012; Phillipson 2003; Spolsky, 2004; Ricento 2005). I have discussed the relationship between language domination and power (Becket and MacPherson, 2005; Pennycook, 1995; Fairclough, 1995; Wodack, 2012). I have presented the view on how power appears to enable the perpetuation of 'historically grown macro-cultures' that shape views (Becket and MacPherson, 2005) even if imperceptibly, leading to a landscape impoverished of other languages and cultures, and contributing to the continuous decline of L2 studies in post-14 education. Such historical, social and political contexts will affect decision-making regarding L2 studies. Hence, education provision and enactment in MFLs, and indeed all education policy, is inherently political and therefore linked to ideological agendas (Spolsky, 2004; Freire, 1972). This politicization tends to intensify during seismic political events (Kramsch, 2005). The 2016 vote to leave the EU illustrates this clearly and the UK government will be under increasing pressure to make the 'fundamental' choice of whether to 'be content with monolingualism or whether to aspire to multilingualism or plurilingualism' (Pachler, 2007: 9). Consequently, in the next section,

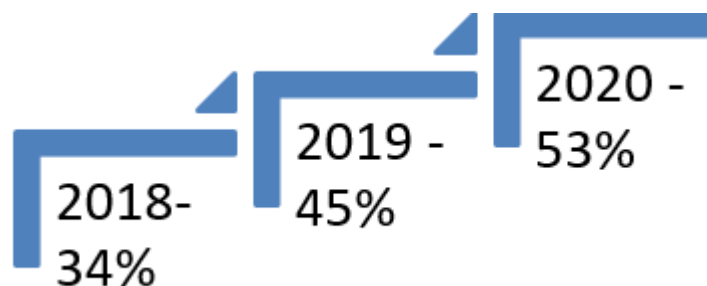
considerations are made regarding the impact of Britain's exit from the EU on perceptions of the values of learning a second language.

## 2.6 Impact of the current political scene

Far reaching and deep-rooted in the fabric of its people, is their vision, more so than the content of government policies and rhetoric. This was conveyed by Lord Hutton (2012) on the need of raising the profile of L2 studies. He suggested that the 'hangover' from Empire, with its colonial legacy together with the reality that the US being an English – speaking nation has led to an idea that to learn another language is a 'nice to have', but unnecessary (Hutton, 2012:37). Hence, the recognition of the UK for the need to learn other languages has been slow. Therefore, it is pertinent to question the extent to which the politicization of 'Brexit' can be of either benefit or harm to L2 studies in the UK. Some texts discussing this, suggest a logical link between xenophobia and reluctance to learn languages (Lanvers, Doughty and Thompson, 2018). Coleman (2007) points at the press, suggesting the UK as a 'hostile climate' in which 'a rather nationalistic press exalts ethnocentrism or xenophobia as Britishness or Euroscepticism' (p.253). Coleman (2009) considers that 'casual xenophobia is, regrettably, an accepted and widely unchallenged feature of British society' (p.117). What he describes as the 'deliberate refusal' of the government to promote the advantages of EU membership has led to a climate where 'xenophobia, and particularly Europhobia, is seen to be officially sanctioned, both by government and by big business' [ibid].

Despite xenophobia being perceived as lingua phobia in some contexts, it should not be the reason for inducing negative attitudes towards foreign languages. When defining attitudes of Japanese learners regarding English, Kubota (2016) demonstrated how L2 studies can take place within xenophobic contexts, where learners are driven by practical rationales as opposed to developing cross-cultural understanding and communication (467-480). Equally, the UK could be perceived as a tolerant country, which accommodates 'otherness', due to the low support for the extreme right. Hence one could refute this 'xenophobia'. There is nonetheless a prevailing attitude that learning an L2 is futile (Bartram, 2005) and this was intensified as soon as the outcome of the referendum was announced.

The decision to leave the EU has certainly been one of the most powerful events in shaping policy. The recent surveys on languages in England (Tinsley, 2019; Tinsley and Dolezal, 2018) reported that Brexit had led to further negative attitudes by pupils and parents towards language learning. This is illustrated below:



*Figure 3 Increase in negativity towards L2s learning (Data from Language Trends Surveys, 2018/19/20)*

In addition, and specifically in the state sector 27% of teachers reported a decrease in funding for new initiatives to promote the study of MFLs. Moreover, 31% of teachers claimed that MFLs are less valued by the school community. Crucially, in the months following the exit from the EU, students' perceptions of the 'English is enough' assumption grew considerably. Coupled with some parental views on the decision to leave the EU, many students are once again questioning why they should even have to learn a language (British Council, 2020).

The reports also found that the negativity regarding the acquisition of second language studies was more prevalent in schools that perform below average and have a high percentage of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, with medium to high levels of pupils eligible for FSM, and are Community Schools or sponsor-led Academies [Ibid]. These negative attitudes were also very strongly linked with schools with a low intake of English as an Additional Language pupils (Tinsley, 2019; Tinsley and Dolezal, 2018). The surveys also accentuate how 'Brexit' heightened the difficulty of schools in recruiting L2 teachers, as many schools employ EU citizens to teach languages [Ibid]. The unequivocal segregation in L2 uptake in post-14 studies is a key feature of the UK language learning landscape, where 'Languages become the preserve of social and intellectual elite' (Coleman, 2009). The same socio-political interpretation applies to any links made between Brexit voting behaviour and social background (Hobolt, 2016), where areas of greater social and economic disadvantaged were synonymous of greater support for Brexit.

Coupled with the decision to leave the EU, devolution has enabled school leaders to shape their school to fit their own individual context (Lanvers, 2016). Thus, the context exerts an influence on the policies, but the policies also shape it (Braun *et al.*, 2011). In more prosperous areas, motivation in MFL learning can increase, as what is gained from interacting with people abroad is visible (Grenfell and Harris, 2013). Consequently, head teachers can emphasize the benefits of MFLs. Conversely, in areas of greater deprivation, the opposite occurs with senior leaders belittling the benefits to their students of language study. This tendency means that language learning continues

to be split on socio-economic lines (Lanvers, 2016). Equally, since the withdrawal of alternative qualifications (Steer, 2015; Tinsley, 2012), the opportunity to continue L2 studies in post-14, at a level lower than GCSE does not exist, therefore effectively excluding some students (Swarbrick, 2011). Particularly in deprived areas, students are likely to have their aspirations for any language study curtailed, regardless of their own choices. As a result, socio-economic status, already a strong predictor of a student's general academic performance (Hartas, 2011), becomes the strongest predictor for L2 studies in secondary schools in England. Therefore, the next section of this study exposes the role of power and agency in institutional level decision-making in relation to L2 studies beyond the compulsory phase.

## 2.7 The role of power and agency

The implementation of policies and curriculum is in the hands of head teachers in their own settings (Johnson and Johnson, 2015). Often educational institutions have been required to subscribe to the 'ideological aspiration' of monolingual competence (Shohamy, 2006), therefore language policies reinforce this view which is shared in the UK, where it is believed by many that monolingualism in English is the natural and desirable state (Blackledge & Creese, 2010).

Simultaneously, 'a growing paranoia and intolerance towards speakers of other languages' (Crawford, 2008:1) has developed in society. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the relationship between language and power (Fairclough, 1995; Pennycook, 1998). In education some of the elite discourses translate into legislation, and they are granted the legitimacy of the state and potentially prevent many from gaining access to other languages (Blackledge & Creese, 2010). Philipson (2006) argues that when some talks are valued over others, it entails the valuing of some ideologies over others. It is therefore essential to take a critical view and understand the role, value, status and practice afforded to MFLs, because powerful and repeated discourses argue against multiculturalism and perceive it as one of the causes of problems in society (Blackledge & Creese, 2010). In the beliefs and attitudes of the powerful, multiculturalism has become a means of constructing social difference [Ibid]. Consequently, English becomes the language of hegemonic institutions to the detriment of any other languages because both the dominant and the subordinate groups recognize its 'superiority'. Such recognition of the legitimacy of a dominant language is only possible because the institutions produce obedient citizens who comply with social norms, as a result of their behaviour being constantly sculpted to ensure they fully internalise the dominant beliefs and values (Foucault, 1998).

Fairclough perceives power mechanisms as the power of the dominant capitalist class. Nevertheless, his analysis of language and power is embedded within the Foucauldian framework of social and



discursive orders and practices that act on each other (Foucault 1972, 1980). He states that orders of discourse reflect the power structure of society that is determined by the conflict between the dominant and dominated classes of modern capitalist society over ownership of the means of production [ibid]. On the surface, the power to influence policies or curriculum provision could be perceived as the extent to which such school leaders are able to persuade or coerce others into making decisions, and following certain courses of action (Gaventa, 2003). Nonetheless, their agency could be further supported or constrained by 'invisible' structures and rules constructed within wider agendas, which, in turn, influence the cultural norms and practices of society, and the institutions within which they operate [ibid]. For example, hegemonic power is built into the structures of society through a long-term historical and political process of consent and coercion (The Open University, 2018). This leads to 'normative' expectations of ways of how people should behave. 'Normative' is synonymous with what should and should not be done in specific circumstances. These expectations are supported by hierarchical structures in society, such as educational institutions [ibid]. Therefore, to understand what is meant by 'agency' of individuals and the very constraints which affect it, it is important to take in to account the rationale which underpins senior leaders' decision-making: namely, how they have reacted to and developed practices within what has been a predominantly neo-liberal political agenda for education (Hammersley-Fletcher & Strain, 2009).

As discussed, it appears that head teacher' agency is constrained by social structures that can be seen as determining their human behaviour, e.g. social class, economics and family (Calhoun, 2002). However, Giddens (1984) argued that individuals have the capacity for reflective thought about their actions and use this knowledge to both create and change the structures within which they live. He claims that structure and human agency are therefore mutually dependent [ibid]. How agency is understood, shapes how the potential for change and autonomy is also perceived, in the case of this study and by those engaged in decision-making in schools. Crucially, the understanding of social structures and individual agency closely relates to the way that power operates in society. Consequently, agency presumes a context of constraints and as Giddens explained (1998) is 'an elemental basis of power' (p.84-85). This social process leads to patterns that are long lasting, transferable from one context to another (Navarro, 2006) and also shift in relation to specific contexts and over time. Therefore, social structures and individual agency is closely related to the way that power operates in society. Nevertheless, Barber (2005) contends that practitioners, many of whom are school leaders, have a certain degree of autonomy. Whilst this perception is debatable, what remains as an issue is the level of control Barber attributes to the state. Whitty (2006) corroborates this view arguing that the state increasingly controls the characteristics of the

practitioners and or the senior leaders. Power relations are shaped by particular historical and institutional contexts (Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain, 2009).

Understanding agency is therefore crucial as it shapes how to understand the potential for change as well as the autonomy of the head teachers regarding senior leaders' decision-making in MFL studies in post-14 education. Weber (1964) perceives agency as the 'probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance' (P.152). Lukes (1974) suggested that both forms of agency entail 'the power to' in contrast with 'the power over' (p.30). Although both forms of agency involve 'power over', it is just that one is power over behaviour, while the other is power over either others or social structure in general. Therefore, it could be argued that school leaders are simultaneously autonomous, creative agents, but their demeanour is mainly determined by social and cultural elements. Although contradictory on the surface, this is because individuals frequently need to avoid some of their basic power of agency to maintain and strengthen the power of agency itself (Campbell, 2009).

Despite believing in the importance of developing a good educational experience that will benefit all children', Forrester (2005) states that school leaders are more anxious to do a good job as arbitrated by inspection findings, than to guarantee positive experiences for all the students that they teach (272-287). This demonstrates that accountability measures place a great deal of pressure upon all practitioners, including school leaders (Patterson, 2000). This leads to teachers' agency being curtailed regarding decision-making. Ball argues (1993) that 'the teacher is an absent presence in the discourses of education policy' (p.108). Not only 'what is said' but also 'who is entitled to speak' are important indicators of what is at stake. Whilst head teachers have the power to speak, practitioners lose their autonomy under a totalising form of control that derives from the privileging of certain values and interests. This, Ball explains, is a 'micro-technology of control' (p. 111), articulated by patterns of self-regulation. Furthermore, he argues that both managers and the managed are implicated in power relations, where 'the manager's autonomy becomes the teacher's constraint' (p. 118). These power relations are self-reproducing and immanent and they are exercised and embedded in the educational system. In this way, institutions, such as schools shape and form a compliant population where teachers' work is driven by technical factors and their professional autonomy is reduced (Ball, 1993). Ball suggests that the management of education in terms of policy provision and enactment is a *new* Panopticon in contemporary society and under its influence, teachers' freedom is constrained as power is exercised [ibid]. Through techniques of management, control is exerted over teachers' work, and schooling governed this way, becomes embedded in the logics of industrial production and market competition (Ball, 1990a). The very concepts of self, agency, and individuality are 'fabricated' within the social structure (Wheatley, 2019 [online]).

Foucault rejects the idea of the agency-structure dichotomy and moved towards a 'decentring of agency', that generates new issues of agency as discourse, which is linked to emancipatory discourses that redefine the relationship between agency and change, resistance and power in institutions and society (Caldwell, 2007)<sup>26</sup>.

With this context, when considering the role of power and agency in shaping the decision-making process in schools, I consider the entanglement of power and knowledge, and how this entanglement might either constrain or support agency in the decision-making process regarding MFL curriculum provision in post-14 education. This is particularly important, as power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and truth (Gaventa, 2003).

Power/knowledge may limit decision making, however, it can also lead the way to novel ways of acting and consequently bring change into the MFL landscape in England. Despite his rejection of the concept of agency-structure dichotomy, Foucault has postulated possibilities of agency in the form of discursive resistance. 'Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but it also undermines it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it' (Foucault 1979: 100–101).

## 2.8. Chapter Summary

The previous section focused on the power of agency and distinguished it from agentic power. It was argued that potentially individuals might be possessed of significant power of agency, but equally they might lack agentic power. In addition, a discussion of Foucault's stance rejecting the idea of the agency-structure dichotomy took place, therefore moving towards a concept of 'decentring of agency', that yields novel issues of agency as discourse (Caldwell, 2007[online]). Underpinned by the 'Foucauldian' nexus power/knowledge a discussion on the relationship between the role of power and agency was explored in seeking to provide a basis for understanding the influences on institutional level decision-making regarding MFL studies in post-14 education. A more detailed explanation regarding this theoretical lens will follow in chapter 5, in light of the gathered findings and analysis.

The following chapter presents the methodology adopted and it links my ontological and epistemological position to the debate on methodological considerations and ethical issues arising from understanding the influences on schools' decision-making when determining the provision of L2 teaching and learning in secondary schools in England regarding agency and power. It explains

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<sup>26</sup> Critics of Foucault argue that he has no concept of agency because he permitted autonomous 'discursive practices' to become subject-less (Newton, 1998). Conversely his advocates argue that agency and realist ideas of self, truth and objectivity must be formally removed from the exploration of discursive practices and the programmatic goals of postmodern organizational theory, organizational discourse analysis and social constructionism (Gergen, 1999, 2003).

how the research design was developed, with a specific focus on the choice of methods and chosen analysis, in light of the study's subsequent research questions.

## Chapter 3- Research Methodology and Design

### Introduction and outline

In previous chapters I reviewed the literature related to the research themes and a theoretical framework was proposed through which to interrogate the research questions. This chapter outlines the methodology and design of the empirical research study. It considers the philosophical nature of its qualitative approach and how this has affected the study's overall design. Justification of the selected methods is offered in light of the previously discussed philosophical positioning of the study, together with some methodological considerations due to the Covid-19 pandemic<sup>27</sup> and how this impacted on the selected methods of research. Following this is an outline of the consequential rationale for the selection of methods. Finally, how the researcher conducted the research will also be described.

### 3.1 Ontological and epistemological considerations

The study concentrates on understanding institutional level decision-making (ILDM) and the role of power and agency in language learning in secondary schools. Its focus is on eliciting the voices of senior leaders and heads of MFL, and to explore the extent to which their views, as well as external factors, such as: policy, school leadership, school context, English as a global language and political landscapes affect their decision-making. It is important to consider the methodological premises on which both the research questions and methods for data collection were formulated and developed.

The conceptualisation of this study sits within the critical paradigm (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Saunders *et al.*, 2012) and the choice of paradigm arises from ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of reality [ibid]. Guba and Lincoln (1994) assert that these assumptions are inter-related; answering one question informs how the others are answered. The ontological assumption is the starting point for most debates among researchers (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008)<sup>28</sup>. Punch (2014) contends that methods of inquiry in research evolve from assumptions that are formed through an understanding of its nature and what constitutes knowledge of the reality being studied. This is referred to as a paradigm<sup>29</sup>. Both scholars assert that inquiry paradigms should address the ontological, epistemological and methodological positions of the researcher. Clough and Nutbrown (2002) advocate that the examination of research inevitably suggests that many assumptions have been made about how the world exists and how it is interpreted. Grix

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<sup>27</sup> Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus (<https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>).

<sup>28</sup> Ontology relates to theories on the nature of social entities, and epistemology deals with theories on the nature of knowledge and what is regarded as acceptable knowledge given the ontological stance (Bryman 2004). As Crotty (1998) suggests, ontology is concerned with 'what is', whereas epistemology is concerned with 'what it means to know' (10).

<sup>29</sup> Paradigms are ways of looking at the world, and making different assumptions about what the world is like and how we can understand or know about it (Hammersley, 2001:15).

(2010) contests this, claiming that answers to questions can only be formulated if the researcher's ontological and epistemological perspectives are made transparent. He deems it necessary to consider theoretical positions and social phenomena, whilst also recognising the philosophical position of both ourselves and others. It is therefore vital to define the meaning of these terms. Blaikie (2000) contends that ontological positions are based on the nature of social reality, what exists, what it looks like and how it is interpreted. This view suggests that each researcher may have a different ontological perspective since they have individual experiences and views of the world that influence their understanding of social reality. Bryman (2012) refers more specifically to a social ontology that could be perceived as either objectivism or constructivism (See Appendix 3).

My ontological position within this research lends itself to a constructivist approach, where categories and meaning are socially constructed (Bryman, 2012). Though it recognises the objectivist position by considering the structure and culture of the setting, it recognises that 'there is no objective truth to be known' (Hugly and Sayward, 1987:278) and that a multiplicity of interpretations could be applied to the research data. The constructivist approach enables me to form an impression of the research data (Ratner, 2008) whilst continually reviewing my meaning through social interactions with the senior leaders and heads of MFL involved. The research is seen as a continuous process where meaning evolves all the way through, instead of one with a preconceived outcome; researchers continuously reflect on their values (Parahoo, 2006) whilst recognizing, examining, and understanding how their 'social background, location and assumptions affect their research practice' (Hesse-Biber, 2007:17).

As researchers, we are part of the social world that we study (Ackerly and True, 2010). Jootun *et al.*, (2009) acknowledge that it is difficult not to influence and be influenced by the research participants (p.45). The key is then 'to make the influence of the researcher and the participants explicit' [ibid]. This process, otherwise known as 'reflexivity', determines the filters through which researchers are working (Lather, 2004), including the 'specific ways in which our own agenda affects the research at all points in the research process' (Hesse-Biber, 2007:17). The research process and the researcher's positionality do not exist independently and do not completely determine the research process. Rather it challenges perspectives and assumptions about the social world and of the researcher himself. This enriches the research process and its outcomes (Palaganas *et al.*, 2017).

Individuals have their own views of themselves (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:25). They are more than just decentred carriers of specific roles; they are diverse and different and may carry contradictions and tensions within themselves [ibid]. Foucault argues that individual agency has prominence [ibid]. Clearly in this study, the views of senior leaders and heads of MFL on institutional level decision-making regarding second language studies in post-14 education may impact upon their individual

agency and create dissonance within themselves. Therefore, one of the roles of the researcher is to place the findings within the views of the self that the participants hold, and to identify the meanings, which the participants accord to phenomena [ibid]. Hence, it is paramount to depict the participants' views in relation to the ideas being explored and that these are clearly differentiated from any personal stance held by the researcher. The view of the researcher has to be discerned, as well as those of the participants, the audiences and the readers of the research [ibid]. The researcher's role is to 'deconstruct', acknowledge and understand a multitude of meanings, as well as how knowledge is produced, legitimised and used [ibid].

### 3.2 Research Approach

The ontological and epistemological stance of the researcher informs the choice of methodology<sup>30</sup>. This study's objective is to explore rich descriptions and understand senior leaders' decision-making regarding MFL provision in secondary schools in England and the role of power and agency. Therefore, the knowledge that is sought is predominantly, 'a human product that is socially and culturally constructed' (Hartas, 2010:44). A qualitative approach is therefore considered to be a more pertinent methodological approach to explore the complexity and multi-faceted drivers and motivations of school leaders in relation to their decision-making regarding MFL studies. Individuals perceive the world differently, and together co-construct reality. These 'multiple constructions and interpretations of reality are in flux and change over time' (Merriam 2002:3). This resonates with this study in two ways. Firstly, not all head teachers perceive L2 provision in the same manner. For some, it might be that greater affordance should be given to such studies. For others, the reverse might be the case. Certainly, the driving forces behind such decisions are also varied and play a crucial role in the decision-making process, hence changes occur at various times. Secondly, when considering the views of heads of languages regarding MFL provision, the interpretation of the same phenomena can be perceived differently due to their vested interest in the subjects, amongst other perceptions.

A qualitative researcher aims for a replicable study allowing for generalisation from the findings (Bryman, 2004) and the context of any research is seen as significant, meaning generalisability is not a focus (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). This study involved a small number of participants in the natural settings of three different school contexts (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005:3) Therefore a predominantly qualitative approach with a focus on richness, honesty and depth of description was adopted as a means of producing the most 'trustworthy' data (Patton, 2002). It could be argued that having a

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<sup>30</sup> Qualitative paradigms are broad and can encompass exploratory, explanatory, interpretive or descriptive aims. Examples include: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory and ethnography (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Although unique in approach, each methodology stems from the motivation to explore, seek understanding and establish the meaning of experiences from the perspective of those involved (ibid; see also Merriam, 2009).

small sample size could limit generalisability of findings (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:254-255), hence constricting the drawing of conclusions which are sought to potentially influence policy and practice. However, I adopt the views from Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Eisenhart and Howe (1992:647), who contend that the typicality of a situation - the participants and the settings - enable group comparisons to occur and indicate how data might translate into different settings and cultures. Qualitative data can be generalised by studying the typical for its applicability to other situations (Schofield, 1996:2009). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) contend that in qualitative inquiries, the question of the settings, people and situations and how they might be generalisable is more relevant than generalisability in its widest sense (45). In addition, having had to contend with the constraints imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the focus of the inquiry was on the quality of the data (Patton, 2002) and not on the size of the sample. Therefore, data is collected in ways which do not lend themselves to statistical analysis and an inductive approach is taken. Here the data drives the theory, in contrast to the deductive quantitative approach (Robson, 2011). In this study, data was collected through individual interviews (Robson, 2002). This method has provided sufficient data to be analysed in depth, thus presenting opportunities to reflect on what was revealed, rather than focusing on the breadth and size of the sample. The remainder of this chapter outlines the practical decisions taken in following this methodological approach.

### 3.3 Aims & Research questions

This study sought to critically explore the extent to which the devolution model of school decisions and policy-making positions senior leaders with power and agency to enacting strategic curriculum changes with a view to afford either prominence or invisibility in the provision of L2 studies in post-14 education. In addition, an exploration of the extent to which senior leaders' action and decision-making is in congruence or dissonance with their beliefs and how this affects their decision-making occurred. Equally, the views of heads of languages were also considered, namely in the way they weigh on school leaders' decision-making process. Lastly, a consideration on the impact of political, historical and social landscapes on schools' decision-making regarding MFL was also undertaken.

In this regard, a clear understanding of the role of power and agency in school decision-making was required by way of looking at what influences the decisions of school leaders and heads of MFL in relation to MFL, as well as exploring the impact that their decision-making might have on post-14 education and potentially revert the current decline. Consequently, this project is built on three main research questions and associated sub-questions:



1. RQ 1: To critically understand institutional level decision-making regarding language learning in secondary schools and the role of power and agency.

1.1 How do senior leaders make decisions regarding L2s provision in schools?

1.2 Is there congruence or dissonance between senior leaders' decision-making and beliefs?

2. RQ 2: To critically examine the way in which policy tools and frameworks influence the decisions senior leaders make about second language provision in their schools.

2.1 What is the extent to which the accountability measures imposed by central government affect decision-making regarding MFL provision in post-14 Education?

2.2 What is the extent to which operational contexts affect decision-making regarding MFL studies in their school?

3. RQ 3: To critically explore the extent to which the views of the wider school community about second language learning impacts on institutional level decision-making.

3.1 To what extent do the views of other stakeholders heavily influence senior leaders' decision-making?

3.2 What is the impact of political, historical and social landscapes on institutional level decision-making?

To address these questions, qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with head teachers and heads of MFL (section 4.3.6). This method was chosen to enable data to be collected from participants representing three different school contexts, in order to gain a picture of the impact of senior leaders' decision-making. Equally, this approach has enabled a detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and questions of the study (Ball,1990; Bryman,2012; Cohen *et al.*,2018), namely as to why and how decisions are made by both school leaders and heads of MFLs.

The semi-structured interviews took place during the Autumn term of 2020 and the Spring term of 2021. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, schools were operating with reduced staff and this had a limiting impact on the size of the sample as the availability of both senior leaders and heads of MFL taking part in the interviews was limited. Of the many school leaders and heads of MFL that were contacted only three were willing and available to take part in the interviews. These participants represented three different settings and attention was given to the impact that these

settings might have had on their decision-making regarding MFL. The limitations imposed by the pandemic, namely the 'lockdown' have also preclude me to seek directly the views of wider stakeholders (e.g. parents, pupils) in order to support further the drawing of conclusions about the RQ3 and RQ 3.1. The complete data set for the six participants, which encompassed six semi-structured interviews, was presented and analysed using thematic analysis (Dorton *et al.*, 2016:2007). In order to add further rigour to the study, I have also overlaid certain aspects with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Van Dijk, 1993; Wodack & Meyer, 2009). Both data analysis methods will be explored later in this chapter.

I have adopted a question-methods approach to the study (Punch, 2014:25), where my research questions preceded the methodological design. Through their identification, it became possible to consider the implications for adopting appropriate methods (Shulman, 1988) that capture or generate the data (Mason, 1996). It addresses the previously held tendency in the social sciences towards 'methodolatry' (Punch, 2014), which Janesick (1994:215) refers to as 'the slavish attachment and devotion to method'. Punch (2014:25) argues that the question-method approach is an aspect of conceptual clarity, which involves the precise and consistent use of terms, internal consistency within an argument and logical links between concepts. The semi-structured interviews are an example of how this approach can work in practice.

### **3.3.1 Research Participants & Sampling**

The purpose of this empirical study was to obtain and triangulate views from the three school leaders and heads of languages that were, not only representatives of their specific school context, but also held a certain degree of power, over the decision-making process. Sampling is important because it could have affected the usefulness of the data collected, the type of analysis possible, and the extent to which wider inferences might be drawn (Robinson, 2013). If a study does not define or makes claims beyond its own sample universe, this undermines its credibility and coherence [ibid]. A four-step approach to sampling was adopted in this study and it is depicted below:

<p><b>Stage 1</b> -The sample universe, also known as target population, was identified (Robinson, 2013), with a total number of individuals from which cases may legitimately be sampled in an interview study. For this sample universe, a set of inclusion criteria was specified for this study (Luborsky &amp; Rubinstein 1995; Patton 1990). Namely, the targeted population involved in the decision-making process entailed 3 senior leaders who have more power over strategic decisions about L2s (Johnson and Johnson, 2015) and 3 heads of languages whose decision-making 'power' relates more to pedagogic decisions (Parrish, 2018).</p>	<p><b>Stage 2</b>- How to select cases for inclusion in the sample. Samples in qualitative research tend to be small in order to support the depth of analysis that is fundamental to this mode of inquiry (Sandelowski,1995 [online]). I chose to collect data through interviews, as this method provides an open platform for eliciting participants' views and acquiring in-depth information from those who are in the position to give it (Ball, 1990).</p>
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Table 2 Sampling Stage 1 & 2

<p>The strategic options available at this point can be categorised into (a) random/convenience sampling strategies and (b) purposive sampling strategies (Robinson, 2014[online]). A purposive strategy was chosen based on the <i>a priori</i> theoretical understanding of the topics being studied; that certain categories of individuals may have a unique, different or important perspective on the phenomenon in question and their presence in the sample should be ensured (Mason, 2002[online]). Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, there were added difficulties in accessing the various sites and establishing contact. Selecting participants was challenging, and in order to decide which schools to select, it became necessary to use school websites<sup>1</sup>. For this, purposive sampling (Cohen <i>et al.</i>, 2018:218) was used to target both senior leaders and heads of MFL. This meant targeting samples that at the end of the process had gathered responses from sufficiently diverse areas that are somewhat representative of a wider population [ibid].</p>
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Table 3 Sampling Stage 3

The exploration of multiple perspectives of reality (Stake 1995) requires data to be collected from different players, seeking multiple viewpoints (Merriam, 2002:3), from multiple social actors and from multiple levels, such as the local and personal, institutional and social (Mohammed *et al.*, 2015). This was paramount to the inquiry, as each participant had their own perceptions and interpretations regarding second language studies. Crucially, the understanding of social structures and individual agency closely relates to the way that power operates in institutions (Giddens, 1984;

section 2.7): in the school context, for some senior leaders, greater affordance should be given to MFL. But the contrary can also occur. In both instances, the agency within their specific contexts may be constrained (Earley, 2013). Agency presumes a context of constraints and it is an elemental basis of power (Giddens, 1998:84-85). In secondary schools in England, head teachers hold the power over strategic decisions about L2 provision (Johnson and Johnson, 2015). Conversely, the heads of languages, due to their vested interest in the subjects, amongst other perceptions, are likely to have greater power over the micro pedagogic decisions in terms of implementing strategies (Parrish, 2009). Therefore, such power/knowledge relations had to be taken into consideration when selecting the participants for the inquiry. This rationale, which is in line with a post-structuralist lens (Mohammed *et al.*, 2015), was the driving force behind the size of the sample, with a specific focus on potential dissonance between sees' perceptions and heads of languages. It took into consideration the data that could be potentially collected in order to answer the research questions, and there was a need to strategically select who might be interviewed and what kind of data was to be collected (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

The last stage, known as sourcing sample, meant that as the researcher I had to source the participants (Robinson, 2014). Besides practical and organisational skills, this phase required ethical skills and sensitivity [ibid]. Participants were informed of: the study's aims, what participation entailed and its voluntary nature, how anonymity is protected and any other information that could help them reach an informed, consensual decision to participate.

*Table 4 Sampling Stage 4*

My data collection involved a group of participants that are representative of their specific setting, where MFLs are optional and with either an average or high percentage of free school meals students<sup>31</sup>. It was this precision of salient characteristics by which the selection was made, that gave the study its rigour (Bryman, 2012). The participants were selected according to purposive sampling because of their particular features, which then enabled a detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and questions of the study (Ball, 1990; Bryman, 2012; Cohen *et al.*, 2018).

The sampling strategy was an integral component of the research design (Robinson, 2013) because it could have affected the usefulness of the data collected, the type of analysis possible and the extent

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<sup>31</sup> . Within the state sector, only 20% of schools make a language compulsory for all pupils aged 14–16 (Tinsley & Board, 2016) with the uptake of MFLs strongly relating to the levels of social deprivation of a school's intake. Schools with high percentages of students entitled to free school meals (FSM) (an indicator of degree of social deprivation of a school's cohort) have low participation rates on MFL study beyond the compulsory phase [ibid].

to which wider inferences might be drawn (Ritchie *et al.*, 2014). Subsequently, the qualitative approach adopted is appropriate to the small sample covered in this study.

### 3.3.2 Research Settings

Data gathered on the characteristics of the schools allows a judgment to be made regarding the representativeness of the sample and a brief discussion is offered in this section. The research setting has unique characteristics of student demographics, community influences and entanglements of social class/place. This unique character of local context plays a major role in identity formation and consequently affects participants' beliefs in the value of learning a second language. This implies that what can be learnt from these social contexts becomes the focus, rather than whether they can be generalised across settings. Hence my study adopts Erlandson *et al.*, (1993) views that even conventional generalisability is never possible as all observations are defined by the specific contexts in which they occur. My data collection involved participants from three different settings: A Studio school<sup>32</sup> which is part of an Academy Trust; a non-denominational comprehensive school with a moderate percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM) and a joint Roman Catholic Anglican 11-18 comprehensive with a proportion of FSM students above the national average. Because there is a pertinent link between schools with high percentages of students entitled to FSM and low uptake of MFLs in post-14 education (Tinsley & Board, 2016), my choice of research settings was also informed by these considerations.

Situated in the south of England, the schools selected cater for students from the age of 11 to 18 & 13 to 19. Although it was hoped that a mixed sample could be selected, in the event it amounted to a process of selecting those who willingly accepted the invitation to participate (Ullmann-Margalit & Morgenbesser, 1977). The research adopted a homogenous approach to sampling (Patton, 2002; Robson, 2002; Holloway and Wheeler, 2010) because it provided a detailed picture of a particular phenomenon, namely which model was adopted regarding MFL curriculum provision, beyond post-14 education. The greater the inclusion and the exclusion criteria are in order to define a sample universe, and the more specific these criteria are, the more homogenous the sample universe becomes (Robinson, 2014). This can be achieved through various parameters, such as demographic, geographical, physical, psychological or life history homogeneity [ibid]. The sample universe, besides providing a boundary that aids the process of sampling, also provides a crucial theoretical role in the analysis and interpretation process by specifying what a sample is a sample of, hence defining who or what a study is about [ibid]. The more clearly and explicitly a sample universe is described, the more valid and transparent any generalisation can be achieved (Mason 2002). Equally, in this study,

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<sup>32</sup> Studio Schools offer a pioneering approach to learning which includes teaching through enterprise and real work experience.

it could be deemed to have adopted a typical case sampling (Patton, 2002; Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2013) because the schools were selected on the basis that they adopted a specific position, following the decision in 2004, where MFLs were made optional after Key Stage 3 (Department for Education and Skills, 2002), which means that 14-19 institutions are under no obligation to offer any language tuition at all, as well as the introduction of the EBacc in 2010 (section 2.1). Stake (1994) and Denscombe (1998) suggest that, although each case may be unique, it is nevertheless an example within a broader group and the prospect of generalisability should not be rejected. Nevertheless, such an approach can be pursued only with caution since, as Gomm *et al.*, (2000) recognise, it appears to demean the importance of the contextual factors which impinge on the case. Geertz (1973) identifies the value of such detailed data and rather than perceiving it as a negative factor, regards it as 'thick description', that is, rich accounts of the details of a culture. This is certainly the case in this inquiry. Furthermore, Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest that the dependability of the research can be ensured by utilising overlapping methods such as individual interviews, as in this research project. Shenton (2004) asserts that the research design may be viewed as a 'prototype model', whereby it is reported in sufficient detail to allow for a future researcher to repeat the process.

### 3.3.3 Interviewing as a method of data collection

To enable the understanding of the phenomenon from the participant's account (Merriam, 2016), interviews were the chosen method for data collection. Unlike a quantitative study, the researcher is the primary instrument in the data generation (Paisley & Reeves, 2001) and the interview questions are at the heart of the method. The outline, practical considerations, discussion and implications of my choice for interviews as a method of data collection is explored in light of the assumptions and principles that underpin my chosen methodology and methods, through the lens provided by Foucault (Foucault, 2007 and 2010) and critical theorists (Apple, 2013; Giroux, 2013; Freire, 2000).

The constructivist perspective sees the interview as a social conversation in which versions of 'reality or truth' are actively constructed (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995), and where both participant and researcher are continually shaping and influencing the meanings which are developed (Gordon, 1998). Arguably, this approach can be more accurately perceived as a process of data generation, not merely a data collection exercise (Kvale, 1996; Cohen *et al.*, 2008). This approach to interviewing strives for giving access to the meanings that people attribute to their experience of their social world (Crotty, 1998). Kvale's idea of the 'miner' and the 'traveller' (1996) clearly illustrates this

assumption<sup>33</sup>. For Gubrium and Holstein (2003) the interview, as an accepted mode of inquiry, relies on a societal model in which people understand themselves as individuals, with individual views and opinions carrying societal currency. The interview is historically and culturally situated (Gubrium and Holstein, 2001; Fontana and Frey 2005) and this is pertinent in this study, particularly at a time in the UK where L2 studies in post-14 education have been negatively affected, namely by the impact of English as a global language (2.4) and the decision to leave the EU in 2016 (section 2.6).

The purpose of the interview is to access and provide the researcher with a meaningful and unique insight into the person's 'inner world' (Morse 2002; Miller and Glassner 2004; Alvesson, 2010). This approach assumes that the participant is a 'knowing' subject – the originator of unique insights that could not have been obtained otherwise. However, Foucault argued that our experiences of selves and lives are discursive effects, they are the result of powerful discourses that structure our reality (Foucault, 1972). He rejects the idea that meaning emanates from a 'knowing' subject (e.g. an interview participant) [ibid]. Thus, a participant's account of themselves and their experiences cannot be seen as a point of origin for the construction of meaning, because the subject is constituted through discourse, and discourse provides the means of articulation and action (Foucault 2003). Discourse makes our current reality feasible and conversely to think, say or do anything outside of our current realm of discourse would appear as unreasonable, incomprehensible, insane or simply impossible (Foucault 1981; Hook, 2001). A research interview is a participation in discourse in the same way that other current social and material practices are. It is a social practice and both researcher and participants are taking part in the reproduction of discourse (Rodham & Gavin, 2006). Arguably, by privileging interviews, researchers continue to generate texts that reproduce precisely those discourses that captured their attention at the outset. Consequently, it could be said that the researcher is playing an unintended role in proliferation of the discourses [ibid]. Given the methodological and philosophical tensions highlighted, the use of interviews in this study could easily be questioned. However, by endorsing interviews as a means to generate text for analysis, I echoed Willig's view who claims that researchers can work with transcripts of semi-structured interviews (2001).

In order to comply with 'social distancing' policies during COVID-19 (Lobe *et al.*, 2020 [online]), the data collection method was adapted to enable interviews online using Zoom, an online video conferencing platform (Deakin and Wakefield 2013; Hanna, 2012). This has already been extensively

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<sup>33</sup> the 'miner' believes that the participant has the nuggets of precious metal, in other words, the information that needs to be extracted; the 'traveller', being the researcher, joins with the participant into unknown lands, and together co-construct knowledge (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:505-506).

used for research purposes (Archibald *et al.*, 2019; Daniels *et al.*, 2019).<sup>34</sup> However, I chose to use the digital recording facility only, to avoid a ‘sensory overload’<sup>35</sup>. A common limitation in video data is that it can lead to the collection of large amounts of rich data, which can be ‘overwhelming’ and lead to excessively descriptive and weak analysis (Jewitt, 2012 [online]). This ‘sensory overload’ of video data is perceived as a significant methodological issue in video-based research including data management, coding and sampling (Snell, 2011). One assertion frequently made in support of these interviews is that because both participant and researcher are in the same space, the latter has more access to verbal and non-verbal data (Hiller & DiLuzio, 2004). Moreover, they can build the rapport that may enable participants to freely disclose their experiences more effectively than might occur in other interviews (Shuy, 2003). This is a very pertinent limitation of using an online platform. However due to the Covid-19 pandemic it was not possible to conduct face-to-face interviews. Nevertheless, from an ethics point of view, there are no key differences between face-to-face and online (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:540). Both required already established ethical procedures, such as gaining informed consent and ensuring anonymity, privacy and confidentiality of the participants’ identity (Rodham and Gavin, 2006). Arguably, the influence of the researcher on what is said might be less as it is more challenging to pick up body language, which in a face to face interview, might influence what the participant says. Having access to nonverbal data (via an in-person interview) may actually introduce the potential for response bias, because participants may ‘read’ interviewers’ reactions to their responses and adjust their replies accordingly (Musselwhite, Cuff, McGregor, and King, 2006). Either way, the risk of bias remains (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:540). Such ethical issues are discussed in detail in section 4.4.

### 3.3.4 Piloting of the interview schedule

Piloting for interviews is crucial, as interview protocols can be strengthened in helping to identify if there are flaws or limitations within the interview design that allow necessary modifications to the major study (Kvale, 2007; Watson, Atkinson and Rose, 2007). In Castillo-Montoya’s pilot study (2016), she found that interview protocols could be strengthened through piloting the interviews. Harding (2013) also stated that the need for qualitative interviews to be piloted is not obvious because as interviews progress, the quality of the interview guide improves. However, he mentioned that it is advisable to pilot the interview questions and adjust them if necessary before embarking on a major study [ibid]. This is achieved by pre-testing the instrument on a small number of participants having the same characteristics as those in the main study. Sekaran (2003) also argues that

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<sup>34</sup> The platform supports real-time audio and full-motion video and it also enables audio/video recordings (Lobe, *et al.*, 2020). Importantly, control is limited to the meeting host, who can decide to share it with other participants [ibid]. Furthermore, access to the recordings is restricted to the host, as these are saved to their computer at the end of the session [ibid].



participants can bias data collected if they do not understand the questions put to them, so a pilot test of questions helps to identify unclear or ambiguous statements in the research protocol (Calitz, 2009).

At the outset I discussed the interview questions with my supervisors, which led to a better reframing of follow-up questions to draw out and clarify some details. This process has led to some reflections about the way I approached the questions, specifically how they were framed and how I responded to the answers (verbal and non-verbal) (Miller & Cannell, 1997). This was ensued with an interview with the Academic Deputy Head where I work<sup>36</sup> prior to the interviews with the participants. The Deputy Head was able to answer all aspects of the questions in the interview schedule and being part of the school leadership team, was very much aware of the implications that decision-making has on curriculum provision and enactment. The disadvantage was that some aspects of the questions such as the views on the Ebaac or Progress 8 do not apply to this setting, as it is part of the independent sector; she was therefore unable to provide the kind of answers that schools are able to put forward in response to some of the questions in these areas. However, her previous experience in another school still enabled her to formulate an informed view on those matters. Establishing whether replies can be properly interpreted, in relation to the information required (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001), is paramount and despite the differences already highlighted, I believe that this was achieved; my colleague was cognisant of such measures and their impact on students in post-14 education. Consequently, no changes were made to the interview schedules between the pilot phase and the main study.

Nevertheless, I had to ensure that both my non-verbal and verbal responses didn't in any way make her feel inadequate, by not knowing something and therefore showing herself in a poor light (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:275). This was then compounded by asymmetries of power that often exist between researcher and participants, which are discussed later in this chapter [Ibid]. This was particularly pertinent as my colleague may have felt the need not to disclose some information as the study focuses on decision-making by senior leaders and the role of power and agency in this process (Gaventa, 2003). Furthermore, I was aware of the 'pull' to agree with opinions being shared by a fellow teacher whose views I respect. It felt important to curb this natural tendency so that the interviewee was left free to express her views without interruption and to avoid the 'ethically questionable' possibility of bias that can arise in 'warm, empathic interviews' (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005:156).

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<sup>36</sup> It must be acknowledged at this point that Independent schools have not been included in this study and the institution where I work is an Independent Preparatory School that caters for children from Reception classes to Year 8.

Unquestionably, the piloting stage was indeed paramount as it enabled me to test the appropriateness of the questions and provide some early suggestions on the viability of the research. It also gave me the opportunity to obtain further experience in conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews. I learned that it is almost impossible to determine precisely how the participants are going to answer the questions. There were times where the answer to one question was expanded to the point where it also answered another, as yet unasked, question. Each interview incorporated unique ways to probe, which enabled me to improve my interviewing and probing skills. Finally, piloting the questions also enabled me to try and mitigate against researcher bias, by demonstrating that I had acted in good faith and not allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations (Bryman, 2012) to influence the conduct of the research.

### 3.3.5 Data Collection Schedule

Schedules were designed which included key questions and relevant prompts, but were intended to be used flexibly, as the more prompts and probes used, the greater the chance of bias (Fowler, 2009). Although participants are willing to provide information, they often require guidance about the amount of detail to provide. Probes or prompts can be used to encourage elaboration or explanation (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). For the researcher specifically, probes give the opportunity to clarify a participant's responses to questions using focused follow-up questions. However, in the attempt to address richness and depth of response through probing and prompting, the researcher may be perceived as looking for data that will affirm their own preconceptions (Galdas, 2017). When designing interview schedules, it is important to ask the questions in a way, which reduces bias and avoids communicating a preferred response to the interviewee (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:272-273). This was rather challenging due to my vested interests as an MFL practitioner. As a secondary teacher and Head of Languages, I had preconceived ideas and expectations of what data I might gather, which could then be applied to the scheduling of the questions and my interpretations of the data. In addition, my own philosophical beliefs have important implications for the structure of interviews, so researchers are encouraged to understand how their beliefs regarding the nature of research may influence their interview methods (Knox & Burkard, 2009). As a result, consideration must be given to the very questions that will be asked, because 'at the root of interviewing'... is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience' (Seidman, 1991:3). However, I maintain that the constructivist approach I applied to this study ameliorated the possibility. The study's aim was to explore the decision-making process of school leaders, rather than to prove whether their experiences and views were similar to, or different from, my own. Further measures were taken to mitigate bias and establish face validity of the questions, such as piloting of the questions and scrutiny by supervisors

(Smith *et al.*, 2009). The responses to the interview questions should provide the researcher with an opportunity to answer the research question [ibid]. All of these steps contributed to securing a higher degree of consistency.

Robson (2011) also warns against questions which are too long, leading to the interviewee losing track of what has been asked, meaning they may only respond to part of the question. Equally, as the interviews were being conducted in three different school settings, it was deemed necessary to ensure that questions were similar for comparability purposes (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). Because the settings and experience of the participants were different, it was important to ensure a structure that allowed for some differentiation in questioning if the relevant views of each individual were to be understood by the researcher as much as they can be, and as a result, represented as fully as is possible (Holloway and Wheeler, 2010; Patton, 1990). This was pertinent, specifically in relation to the data collection involving the heads of languages, as they are excluded of the ultimate decision-making regarding MFL studies (Parrish, 2018). The questioning had to reflect the position of the participants in relation to their setting (Holloway and Wheeler, 2010; Cohen *et al.*, 2018) and a blend of an interview guide and a more informal conversational interview was incorporated (Merriam, 1998). This also allows for observation as well as flexibility, so the interviewer can adapt the interview to the individual [ibid]. Consequently, I chose to adopt a 'semi-structured' approach for the interviews (Patton, 1990), and this will be explored in the next section.

### 3.3.6 Semi-structured interviews

The literature pertaining to semi-structured interviews is considerable and growing (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:508-509) and involves an interview script which is developed to collect similar types of data from all participants and create a sense of order (David and Sutton 2004, Bridges *et al.*, 2008; Holloway and Wheeler 2010). Predetermined questions are prepared by the researcher, who is free to seek clarification (Holloway and Wheeler, 2010; Robson, 2011), and are followed during the interview, whilst ensuring that they elicit open responses from the participants. This enables lines of conversation to be developed in situ, in ways that could not have been anticipated when the interview schedule was being planned (Irvine, *et al.*, 2013). The researcher is also free to vary the order and wording of the questions spontaneously depending on the direction of the interview (Bryman, 2012), as well as ask additional questions (Corbena, 2003) and develop a conversational style during the interview (Power *et al.*, 2010; Patton, 2002). The semi-structured interviews allow flexibility in the way they are organised, but they are not any less stringent in their design and interpretation. With open-ended questions the researcher has the opportunity to explore new paths which emerge during the interview and that may not have been considered initially (Gray, 2004; Berg 2009, Ryan *et al.*, 2009). Our actions as interviewers indicate that 'others' stories are important'

(Seidman, 2012:9). Therefore, by adopting a semi-structured approach to the interviews, I aimed to empower participants and give them a voice (Mertens, 2007), by listening to their stories.

Burgess (1984) refers to interviews as 'conversations with a purpose' (102), but there are others who contend that the interview is a 'specialised pattern of verbal interaction – initiated for a specific purpose and focused on specific content areas' (Kahn and Cannell, 1957, cited in Kerlinger, 1970 :16). Charmaz (2006) describes semi-structured interviews as a 'directed conversation' (p.27), where the researcher is in the driving seat of the discussion and therefore increases the chances of research bias as the questions formulated can serve the preconceived ideas of the researcher. She also highlights the 'contextual and negotiated' qualities of an interview and how the interviewer is a participant in the shaping of the conversation [Ibid]. Undoubtedly this raises concern regarding the role of the researcher and how it can lead to increasing the risk of research bias (Mehra, 2002) as the participants are only asked about things the researcher is already wanting to hear about. Moreover, in this study, the degree of affinity that the researcher has with the population under study, including researchers being a member of the group themselves can emphasise further the issues of bias [ibid]. Specifically, as a Head of MFL I can identify with some of the participants' views. Given this affinity as an 'insider' this could potentially limit the extent of the inquiry and not incorporate what participants did not know themselves (Chenail, 2011). As a result, the role of the researcher as a research instrument must also be acknowledged (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 368). Such considerations present some challenges in terms of rigour and research bias as well as a threat to the truth value of data and information obtained from data analyses (Chenail, 2011) and these are given further consideration in the next section. Nevertheless, the researcher remains the key person in obtaining data from participants. It is through the researcher's facilitative interaction that a context is created where the participants share rich data regarding their experiences and life world [ibid]. It is the researcher who enables the flow of communication, who identifies cues and sets participants at ease (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003:418). However, it is also the researcher who designs the questions, thus some scholars argue whether the questions measure what they claim to measure, hence their validity can be disputed (Cannell and Kahn, 1968 in Cohen *et al.*, 2018:271). Consequently, careful formulation of the questions with clear meaning must be achieved to ensure that they accurately measure what was intended (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:273) and bias is minimized.

### 3.3.7 Bias during data collection

The constructivist nature of this study also poses some difficulties both during the data collection and the analysis. Specifically, the role of the researcher raises concerns regarding bias (Mehra,

2002). Recognising and understanding research bias<sup>37</sup> is crucial for determining the utility of study results and an essential aspect of evidence-based decision-making (Galdas, 2017). Indeed, bias is commonly understood to be any influence that provides a distortion in the results of a study (Polit & Beck, 2014). In qualitative studies, researchers are an integral part of the process and final product, and separation from this is neither possible nor desirable (Galdas, 2017). In this regard, it must be made clear that the researcher has been transparent and self-reflective about their own assumptions, relationship dynamics and analytic focus (Polit & Beck, 2014) and about the processes by which data has been collected, analysed, and presented. Consequently, I acknowledge that my experience as an L2 teacher may be construed as influential during the collection of the data and its interpretation. Nonetheless, by acknowledging this possibility, I maintain that my views and opinions could be challenged and altered both in the process of data collection and as a result of the data analysis. In this sense, it mirrors Bryman's (2012) definition that social reality is an ongoing process. Moreover, it acknowledges the importance of stating one's ontological position, as a reluctance to recognise this, stems from 'vagueness, imprecision, or a failure to understand that there is more than one ontological position' (Mason, 2003). This issue of research bias and how I mitigated it during the process of data collection will now be discussed, and the influence on the analysis will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter. Bias exists in all study designs (Galdas, 2017) and although researchers should attempt to minimise it, outlining potential sources of bias enables greater critical evaluation of the research findings and conclusions. Researchers bring their experiences, ideas, prejudices and personal philosophies to each of the studies, which if accounted for in advance of the study, enhance the transparency of possible research bias. Clearly articulating the rationale for and choosing an appropriate research design to meet the study aims can reduce common pitfalls in relation to bias.

Semi-structured interviews produce rich data but they also concurrently construct individual and public opinion (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003:30). I was explicit about my role as both researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and L2 practitioner, as this can significantly increase the risk of research bias (Mehra, 2002). This is essential for affording validity to the study (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:271-273). In order to mitigate this risk a letter was sent to the participants including my personal and professional details plus information regarding the study, and specifically what it aimed to achieve. In addition, because some aspects of my positionality are culturally ascribed (Anthias, 2002) and this could have increased the risk of bias. I am a Portuguese, white European female and not being a native English speaker could influence the views that participants could be willing to share, namely affording low value status to L2 studies which in turn lead to the participants being cautious in what

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<sup>37</sup> Bias can occur at each stage of the research process and it impacts the validity and reliability of study findings. The misinterpretation of data can have important consequences for practice (Galdas, 2017).

is revealed (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). Sharing my position could also have increased the risk of being given answers that participants thought to be acceptable or desirable (Fowler, 2009). Dealing with fellow teachers poses further difficulties, as they invariably share a common belief, that they themselves are biased in relation to L2 teaching and learning (Thomas, 2009:106). In order to minimise such risk, I made it clear to the participants that it was important to expose their views as they perceive them, independently of my own position as a fellow practitioner. I discussed these issues openly, prior to the interviews, in an attempt to collect data that was a 'true' reflection of the participants' views. I further attempted to allay any concerns, by explaining that their comments and opinions were to assist me in my understanding of schools' decision-making, in relation to MFL studies in post-14 education. This was particularly prevalent with the heads of languages as it was important to collect their views free of constraints. Therefore, the formulation of the questions was of paramount importance in minimising the risk of bias (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:273).

### 3.3.8 Power Relations

Because interviews are not just simply about social and often political situations, power is of significant importance as it resides with both the researcher and the participants (Thapar-Bjorkert and Henry, 2004). Echoing Foucault, these scholars argue that power is fluid and is discursively constructed through the interview rather than being the province of either party (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:274). In this sense, the interview entails a type of power relation with a distinctive form of participation in the (re)production of discourse (Rodham & Gavin, 2006), where the emphasis is on subjectivity, equality, reciprocity, collaboration, emancipatory potential and non-hierarchical relations[*ibid*]. Conversely, Morrison (2013a) suggests that power resides with the interviewer who formulates the questions and the participant answers them; the participant is under scrutiny as opposed to the interviewer. Kvale (1996) also asserts that there are specific power asymmetries, as it is the interviewer who tends to define the situation, the topics to cover and the course of the interview (126). Nevertheless, the participant is also powerful as not only do they hold the data but also have the power to withhold it (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:274).

Indeed, there were important power issues at play in this study (Scott and Morrison, 2006). Semi-structured interviews were adopted because this type of data collection gives participants more power over their thoughts than in structured interviews. They also enable the participants' responses to dictate the direction of the interview (Clark, 2004), allowing questions to occur naturally (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:273, 535), with potential research bias minimised (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:272). This structure allows the interviewee greater control of topics resulting in breakdown of the immanent power relations between myself as the researcher, and the participants (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004). This is particularly relevant in terms of deciding what and how much to reveal

(Corbin and Morse, 2000). However, I had concerns regarding a possible conflict of interests that existed in the duality of my role as an MFL teacher and as a researcher (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009:33), and a potential power imbalance when interviewing fellow language teachers. Consequently, in an attempt to mitigate any potential power asymmetry (Patton, 2002), I discussed these concerns prior to the interviews. I also emphasised the importance of gathering rich data, despite potentially different professional views[ibid]. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) assert that in this situation a certain degree of reciprocity might take place with the participants offering views they think the researcher wants to hear. I had therefore to consider how much the questions might influence the participants to act in that manner by showing themselves in a good light, or becoming unduly helpful and consequently the data gathered would not be representative of the field of study (Edwards, 2001:24). It is critical to recognise the asymmetrical relationship that exists between researcher and participant and the potential this has to influence the data that is generated (BERA, 2011).

Finally, it could be argued that the authoritative position of the senior leaders could also have given rise to unequal power positions. Walford (2012) asserts that those in a position of power, resources and expertise might be anxious to maintain their reputation, hence they will be more careful with what they say through carefully chosen articulate phrases. Ball (1994b) contends that when those with power are interviewed, they see it as an opportunity to reinforce their position, maintain their reputation and importantly preserve their existing status quo. Therefore, they will be more guarded in what they say (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:274) and tend to control the interview as they have both a personal and professional investment in being interviewed (Walford, 2012). The implication then for this study is that the data gathered needs careful consideration in order to be able to establish a degree of confidence in the truth of the findings (Polit & Beck, 2014). For this study I have chosen settings different from my own, therefore such power issues were mitigated (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:136).

Nevertheless, this same authoritative position could impose some constraints on the Heads of Department if their views differed from those in leadership positions in the school. In order to safeguard the participants from any potential negative consequence of sharing their views, I reassured them that their views would be kept anonymous and confidential, and that the data gathered would only be used for research. Such issues of confidentiality and anonymity were raised and discussed with the participants prior to their participation in the study. In the ethics literature, confidentiality is commonly viewed as akin to the principle of privacy (Oliver, 2003; Gregory, 2003; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003: 67; Smyth & Williamson, 2004: 28). This principle is integral to societal beliefs

that individuals matter and that individuals have the right for their affairs to be private (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:128). To assure someone of confidentiality means that what has been discussed will not be repeated, or at least, not without permission [Ibid]. As result, and in order not to disclose identifiable information about participants and to try to protect their identity [Ibid], the participants have been anonymised and are referred to as letters, rather than names. It must be acknowledged that 'it is impossible to give absolute guarantees of anonymity' of the participants (Walford, 2005:88) as far as their schools are concerned and I made all participants aware of this prerogative.

Finally, all the information collected has been stored on password-protected files. Such ethical considerations are given further focus in the ethics section of this study. As discussed, researcher-participant power relations are not equal. This power imbalance is triggered by the different positions, agency and experience of both the participants and the researcher. Consequently, it poses a constant challenge in all stages of the research process (Einarsdóttir, 2007).

### 3.3.9 Reliability and Validity

Having explored and justified the methodological choice of qualitative research for this inquiry, issues of validity and reliability will now be considered.

Researchers have argued that the concept of reliability is misleading and has no relevance in qualitative research related to the notion of a 'measurement method,' if compared to quantitative methods (Winter, 2000). However, this is disputed by other researchers. Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2001) suggest that reliability in these situations is the degree to which the researcher's theoretical analysis and conclusions correspond to the data obtained. Cohen *et al.*, (2000) agree stating that 'reliability includes fidelity to real life, context and situation specificity, authenticity, comprehensiveness, detail, honesty, depth of response and meaningfulness to the respondent' (p.120). It could be suggested that the lack of impartiality, bias and subjectivity of the qualitative inquiry, may lead to a lack of reliability. However, the latter is based on consistency and care in the application of research practices, which are reflected in their visibility of research practice, analysis, and conclusions, as well as reflected in an open account that remains mindful of the partiality and limits of the research findings (Davies, 2002). Consequently, by considering the context in which the participants were interviewed, and by being open and honest about the aims of the research, I would contend that it is the same openness and honesty of the researcher, in acknowledging their standpoint and in their justification of their approach to analysis, which ultimately enables the research to be deemed 'valid'. I therefore believe that the analysis and conclusions I gathered were a 'true' reflection of the data collected, as it represented the participants' own views of the social world (Chenail, 2011[online]).



For reliability and validity to be attained, strategies for ensuring rigour must be built into the research process per se, not just to be proclaimed at the end of the inquiry, but rather all the way throughout the process (Morse *et al.*, 2002). The scientific aspect of reliability assumes that repeated measures of a phenomenon (with the same results) using objective methods establish the truth of the findings (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:270-271). Merriam (1995) stated that, 'the more times the findings of a study can be replicated, the more stable or reliable the phenomenon is thought to be'. In other words, it is the idea of replicability (Golafshani, 2003; Winter, 2000). One way to achieve reliability in this inquiry was through carefully piloting the interview schedules and by using open-ended-questions. This enables participants to show their own view of the world (Silverman; 1993) and is corroborated by Hand (2003) and Dearney (2005), who contend that the open nature of questions encourages, depth and vitality, helping new concepts to emerge. This increases the validity of the study, by assisting them in collecting rich data for analysis. However, within the discipline of qualitative research and given that multiple views of 'reality' exist, who is credible and 'correct', how do we know and how socially constructed knowledge is established, can be questioned (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:246). Arguably, establishing validity in this study could still be perceived as challenging; do the questions measure what they claim to measure (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:271), and crucially, is the meaning and interpretation of the gathered data sound [ibid].

Equally, the validity of the findings is related to the careful recording and continual verification of the data that the researcher undertakes during the investigative practice (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). If the validity or trustworthiness can be maximised or tested, then more credible and defensible results may lead to generalisability. Therefore, the quality of a research is related to generalisability of the result and thereby to the testing and increasing of the validity or trustworthiness of the research [ibid]. However, the question of the settings, people and situations, and how they might be generalisable is more relevant than generalisability in its widest sense (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:45). As researchers we are part of the world we research, hence complete objectivity is not attainable. Consequently, other people's views are equally as valid as our own [ibid]. In this sense, validity concerns the meanings given to the data by the participants and the inferences drawn from the data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Kvale (1996) suggests that in the field of qualitative research there may be many different interpretations of the same data or setting and yet these findings may be considered equally reliable because reality is multi-layered (Cohen, *et al.*, 2018). In this study, I was interested in how the participants constructed their experiences, rather than a verifiable list of those experiences (Bruner, 1986; Casey, 1995; Cohen *et al.*, 2018). Hence, rather than seeking objectivity and validity, the qualitative researcher should feasibly recognise and embrace the differing layers which exist within participants' accounts – the sometimes overlapping and sometimes conflicting

reasons and expectations which underpin their reveals, each of them as legitimate as the other (Bruner, 1986). We live in a socially construed multiple reality, where individuals construct their own meaning in different ways and together co-construct reality (Merriam 2002), even in relation to the same phenomenon. Social realities are socially constructed and they change each time the players change (Robson, 2002). I adopted Mishler's stance (1986) who contends that by empowering interviewees to lead discussions and present their 'stories' based on their own life experiences and interests, the data produced is therefore more trustworthy and accurate.

My position as the researcher, undoubtedly will, '*...affect the nature of the observations and the interpretations that are made*' and will ultimately affect the research outputs (Thomas, 2009:110) and both its validity and reliability. It was then paramount to mitigate such influences that tend to occur from selective observation and selective recording of information and from allowing one's personal views and perspectives to affect how data is interpreted, plus how the research is conducted [ibid]. For research to be considered both valid and reliable it should be open to external scrutiny so that the researcher (and those for whom the research is intended) can have confidence in the data and the conclusions drawn from it (Hammersley, 1992; Burton and Bartlett, 2009). As a result, the notion of inter-rater reliability became important to this study. Inter-rater reliability is defined as the extent to which another researcher, adopting the same theoretical framework, would have interpreted the data in the same manner (Cohen, *et al.*, (2018). An experienced researcher, who was completely detached from the data, but skilled in semi-structured interviews, acted as external peer-reviewer (Sandelowski, 1993; Miles and Huberman, 1994), selecting sections from each of the six transcripts to independently analyse them. Discussions ensued to compare findings, and where discrepancies were found, the data section(s) were re-examined and analysed to reach a resolution. The valuable discussions between myself and the seasoned researcher challenged my interpretation of the data and enabled me to further distance myself from my own preconceived ideas about the issues under investigation. Any differences in the interpretations of the data became infrequent through this process, ensuring consistency and transparency, which consequently strengthened the validity of this research (Ritchie *et al.*, 2014). As researcher, I am aware that my own perceptions and opinions may taint the research findings and conclusions; And despite bringing all my past experiences and knowledge to the inquiry, I listened carefully to the participants about their experiences and meanings; plus, I learned to set aside my own strongly held opinions, perceptions and preconceptions. In addition, the transcripts were shared with the participants and if deemed necessary, the opportunity for amendments, and additional information that did not come to mind during the interview would ensue. The establishment and maintenance of what Yin (2009) describes as 'a chain of evidence' or auditability is key in increasing construct validity (122). Equally,

by contemplating the weight and authority of the findings (MacNaughton and Hughes, 2009) and comparing them to other similar research studies, the validity of the study was further assured.

Participant validation is also paramount to increase validity, by ensuring that what is said in the interview accurately represents the participants' views (Long & Johnson, 2000). However, if we accept that there are 'objective, self-announcing facts of the world' (Griffin, 2012) and that the main focus of research is to identify them, then the complex relationship which exists between participants' views and 'truth' then the goal to seek a degree of formal validity 'becomes a matter of deep concern' (288). The question of whether the 'truth' of participants' 'stories' can be impartially verifiable or whether they are 'to some extent indifferent to truth (in the sense of historical facts) or falsehood' (Griffin, 2012:301) pervades the field of qualitative research. Guba and Lincoln (1989) define participant validation as 'the process of testing hypotheses, data, preliminary categories, and interpretations with members of stake-holding groups from whom the original constructions were collected' (238-239). They regard this as the single most crucial technique for establishing credibility, which focuses on establishing the link between the constructed realities of participants and those realities as represented by the researcher and attributed to various stakeholders. However, it is important to question the extent to which a researcher really knows whether what a participant is saying is what they believe in, because meaning-making is rooted in our social context and our views are subjective in nature (Osborne and Brady, 2001). Therefore, there are a number of factors which could influence this, not least the position, role and status of the researcher (Phillips, 1997). What participants offer as their 'story' can vary depending on the audience and the reasons underscoring their actions [ibid]. This poses obstacles for researchers seeking the notion of truth 'beyond reasonable doubt' of the information they study (Hammersley, 1995:78). However, it enables them to study what can be revealed about the participants and their stance within their worlds (Squire *et al.*, 2014). The position of this research concerns the '*truth*' of the individual accounts given by each participant in relation to the accurate representation of reality as they perceive it. Denzin (1989) advocates that this is judged on the extent to which participants' accounts are faithful to both events which have occurred, and the way in which they were experienced by the individuals. The 'evidence' becomes the product of that given moment in time and context – what is seen, felt and done by individuals as they interact with their world. Researchers and audiences make judgements based on the values they hold and their own experiences of the world, amalgamating what they know with what they hear in order to decide whether individual accounts can be believed, and whether they 'ring true' and can therefore be considered 'true' (Griffin, 2012). However, this notion of 'truth' is questionable, because it is linked to both society discourses and its influence on individuals (see section 3.2) offering therefore a multitude of 'truths' that represent the type of

discourse which society accepts and makes function as true, along with the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of that truth (Foucault, in Rabinow 1991: 75). As a result, I was keen to find out how the participants constructed their experiences (Bruner, 1986; Casey, 1995; Cohen *et al.*, 2018). The qualitative researcher should then feasibly recognise and embrace the differing layers which exist within participants' accounts – the sometimes overlapping and conflicting reasons and expectations which underpin their reveals; each of them as legitimate as the other (Bruner, 1986). By recognising and by being honest about the subjective nature of the qualitative enquiry we can begin to acknowledge that everything is subject to interpretation. As a result, it is the integrity of the researcher and the way in which claims are deeply embedded in a robust and 'truthful' methodology that supports the credibility of that research.

As qualitative researchers we 'need to respect the authenticity and integrity of the participants and perceive them as subjects creating their own histories' (Casey, 1995:231-232). It can be argued, therefore, that the notion of validity could be replaced by '*understanding*' in research of this kind (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). In this inquiry, I aimed to capture and uncover the views of both school leaders and heads of MFL for what they appeared to be, both at a given moment and as growth over time. I then used those views to stimulate reflection to move forward in our own *understandings*, leading possibly to a greater confidence in 'knowing'. Instead of a weakness, perhaps this could be perceived as a strength of qualitative research.

### 3.4 Ethical considerations

Merriam (2009) asserts that the ethics of the researcher are key to validity and reliability. The relationship between researcher and participant in the co-construction of new knowledge has been key to the discussion. The ethical practices set out by BERA (2018) were adhered to, such as establishing research contracts that included open and honest information about the study design and the nature of the participant involvement. However, I could not assume that this, in itself, would address the ethical implications pertinent to this research and the participants (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2005). Still remaining as a crucial issue for discussion is the potential impact the research process has on the participant and the ethical issues connected with this.

It is critical to the validity of research that there is a recognition of the asymmetrical relationship that exists between researcher and participant, and the potential this has to influence the data that is generated (Smythe and Murray, 2000; BERA, 2011). Such ethical considerations are crucial, as they also arise in the field and in the dissemination of findings. Credibility here depends much more on the values of the researcher, their awareness and sensitivity in seeing the issues and their sensitivity and integrity in responding to them. This was particularly pertinent in the study due to my role as researcher and L2 practitioner, which inevitably placed me in a position of authority and power, and

consequently the possible influence this has on the participants (Smythe and Murray, 2000). Through all phases of the research process I was concerned about the potential conflict of interests that existed in the duality of my role. Firstly, I was concerned about the influence this would have on the participants' views; that they were genuinely able to decline participation (Denscombe, 2010). I was also concerned about the influence my research could potentially have due to the vested interest of the heads of MFL and mine as practitioners, the openness of their responses and the implications of this on learning. This was also pertinent in relation to the senior leaders and their position of 'authority'. As Brooks *et al.*, assert, 'power relations are immanent in all research settings' (106) and researchers may occupy different social and power positions from participants. I wanted to ensure, as far as possible, that the participants' reflections were 'true' representations of what they wanted to share in relation to schools' decision-making in MFLs, as opposed to what they felt obliged to communicate. Furthermore, by seeking their views on what affects their beliefs in second language studies and how these may influence their decision-making, I aimed to promote dialogue and reflection (Freire, 2000) and crucially, to mitigate the unavoidable power asymmetries with regards to the participants (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:136), by giving them a platform and a voice (Mertens, 2007) to openly express their views.

My ethical stance was further informed by key scholars who contend that the complexity of ethical, respectful and meaningful relationships in semi-structured interviews, must be considered (Perryman 2011; Thomas, Tiplady, and Wall 2014). In this regard, semi-structured interviews are not without their difficulties and constraints (Newby, 2014), therefore the position of the researcher needs acknowledging at the start of the process, as a matter of ethical consideration (Clough and Corbett, 2000), as well as to maintain the ethical integrity of the research and secure credibility (Richardson, 1990; Andrews *et al.*, 2013). Semi-structured interviews invite the application of thoughtful reflexivity in relation to the broader ethical, methodological and theoretical elements of research (Galletta, 2013). It is ethically appropriate to acknowledge that I could not ignore my professional role, which carries a stake in the study and importantly, how my experiences and beliefs shaped its very design and execution. In this instance reflexivity can be understood as a recognition and awareness of the researcher as active in and acting on the research process (Squire *et al.*, 2014). Equally, I have acknowledged the influence I had on the data as I sought to interpret the participants' words and the meanings they ascribed to them. The potential for overshadowing the participant's authenticity by idiosyncratic biases, subject positions and disciplinary concerns of the researcher (Bastalich, 2009) may occur. This is an important ethical issue that also confronts the researcher when constructing the final representations that are distilled from the data collected [Ibid]. Therefore, it must be acknowledged in order to preserve the authenticity of the interview process.

In addition, issues related to consent, anonymity and confidentiality were addressed. The ethics procedures of the University of Winchester were followed in preparation for the study. The University of Winchester (2019) and BERA (2018) ethical guidelines were adhered to throughout this project, as ethical research respects participants, engages in responsible research and protects the researcher and participants (Le Compte and Schensul, 2010, Alderson and Morrow, 2011). Avoiding any harm to the participants and respect for the knowledge created is of great importance to my research. Informed consent is also paramount. (BERA) defines informed consent as ‘the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway’ and state unequivocally that the attainment of informed consent ‘is considered the norm for the conduct of research’ (BERA, 2018: 9). Consequently, participants were made aware that participation was voluntary and their consent was sought prior to the research. The right to withdraw at any time was also clearly explained and my contact details noted on the project information sheet (Bera, 2018:18; Thomas, 2009:150). To maintain confidentiality and anonymity a discussion with participants happened prior to data collection (Holloway and Wheeler 2010).

Confidentiality and the principle of privacy is perceived in a similar manner (Oliver, 2003; Gregory, 2003; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003: 67; Smyth & Williamson, 2004: 28). This principle is intrinsic to societal beliefs, that individuals matter and are entitled to the privacy of their affairs (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:128).

As a result, anonymity was preserved for all participants and their schools by using a system of letters. In addition, research instruments and letters were submitted to the Faculty of Education’s ethics committee for approval and an agreement by the head teacher of each school was then sought. The participants, head teachers and practitioners agreed to participate by signing a consent form on which it was made clear they were able to withdraw at any point. A project information sheet was also given when initially seeking participation as open and honest information about the study’s design and the nature of the participants’ involvement must be stated ensuring adherence to agreed protocols (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). The same care was taken during the interpretation of the findings, to ensure confidentiality, privacy and anonymity for the participants (Bera, 2018:21). This study took place in three different settings, unknown to me. Therefore, in the event of any issues arising would have needed to be treated sensitively (Kvale, 2007; Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). However, this was not the case. In exploring the need to honour privacy, Stake (2010:207) cautions against dependency on anonymity which he describes as ‘weak protection’. He concludes that the most effective means is ‘not to come to know the private matters’ [ibid]. As ethical issues arose during the research, they were resolved by means of reflection and, where appropriate, discussion

with a supervisor, with the objectives of maintaining respect for the participants and the schools, and the integrity of the research. Discussions held with the participants about maintaining confidentiality and anonymity have also helped to build trust, as participants' experiences and concerns were listened to, making them active partners in the interview (Holloway and Wheeler 2010); all important for building a sympathetic relationship and a sense of mutual trust in the research interview (Karnieli-Miller *et al.*, 2009).

Participants need to be comfortable answering questions honestly and a position of equality and mutual respect is central to the relationship between the researcher and participant (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). Smith *et al.*, (2009) suggested that if the interviewing style is clear and confident, participants will know that the researcher does not have a predetermined agenda and is interested in hearing about their experiences. Ethical dilemmas also arise in the field and in the dissemination of findings. Credibility here depends much more on the values of the researcher, their awareness and sensitivity in seeing the issues, as well as sensitivity and integrity in responding to them. The next section will also offer further ethical considerations when discussing the influence, I had on the data as I sought to interpret the participants' words and the meanings they ascribed to them (Richardson, 1990).

### 3.5 Thematic Analysis

Thorne (2000) characterised data analysis as the most complex phase of the qualitative research process, and conducted in a methodical manner it can be transparently communicated to others (Malterud, 2001). Consequently, researchers need to be clear about what they are doing, why they are doing it, and include a clear description of analysis methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Malterud, 2001). Thematic analysis (TA), which is a widely used qualitative approach to analysing interviews, was chosen, as it provides a highly flexible 'theoretical method' that can be altered for the needs of many studies. It provides a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2019:583; Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004) and resonates with my constructivist epistemology. TA is a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences and generating unforeseen insights (Braun and Clarke, 2006; King 2004). It is also useful for summarising main features of a large data set, as it forces the researcher to take a well-structured approach to handling data, helping to produce a clear and organised final report (King, 2004).

During the data collection process, coding, organising and analysis needs to be described in detail to help the reader determine whether the final outcome was rooted in the generated data (Ryan *et al.*, 2007). To explain the process of analysis within the context of institutional level decision-making in relation to second language studies, I have drawn on Braun and Clarke's (2006) conceptual

framework of TA. I chose this approach because a 'rigorous thematic approach can produce an insightful analysis that answers particular research questions' (Braun and Clarke, 2006:97). Equally, this approach complemented the research questions as it facilitated an exploration of the interview data from two perspectives: Firstly, from a data driven perspective based on coding in an inductive way. This meant that the analysis was grounded in the data which determined the themes, as opposed to a theoretically informed framework guiding the deductive analysis, where the researcher comes to the data with some preconceived themes that he or she expects to find reflected there, based on theory or existing knowledge (Patton, 2000). Secondly, from a research question perspective to ascertain if the data was consistent with the research questions and provided sufficient information. I was primarily concerned with eliciting and analysing the participants' views and opinions and what had emerged from their accounts (Boyatzis, 1998). This meant that coding the data took place without trying to fit it into pre-existing coding frames or any personal analytical preconceptions. In this regard, this form of TA is data-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as my concern was eliciting and analysing the participants' views and opinions and what had emerged from their accounts (Boyatzis, 1998). However, it must be pointed out that my own professional experiences, beliefs and values may also arguably influence the generated data and increase significantly the risk of research bias (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:368 & Mehra, 2002). Nevertheless, the wisdom that the researcher brings to the research needs also to be recognised, because behind a researcher's mind lies their life history that will influence the way they see and interpret the world (Ishak & Bakar, 2012).

Once the data was coded and collated, a list of the different codes identified across the data set was then developed. This involved sorting and collating all the potentially relevant coded data extracts into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006); extended phrases or sentences that summarise the explicit and interpretative meanings of data (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Boyatzis, 1998). A theme refers to a specific pattern found that captures some crucial information about the data in relation to the research questions and features patterned meanings across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It pertains to a shared topic with regard to an area of focus rather than summaries of data domains (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The terms 'pattern' and 'theme' are used interchangeably in the literature, and in this study, 'theme' will be consistently used.

Therefore, the next important consideration was to identify themes in the interview data I collected. Here the main requirement is to be consistent throughout the process of determining themes. These only gain full significance when linked to form a coordinated picture or an explanatory model. 'Describe, compare, relate' is a simple three-step formula when reporting the results (Bazeley,



2009:6). In this study significant data segments were first identified and then summarised in keywords or key phrases.

Additionally, in an iterative process those keywords or key phrases were then used to derive the underlying 'themes'. The visualisation for this process is depicted in the thematic map below:

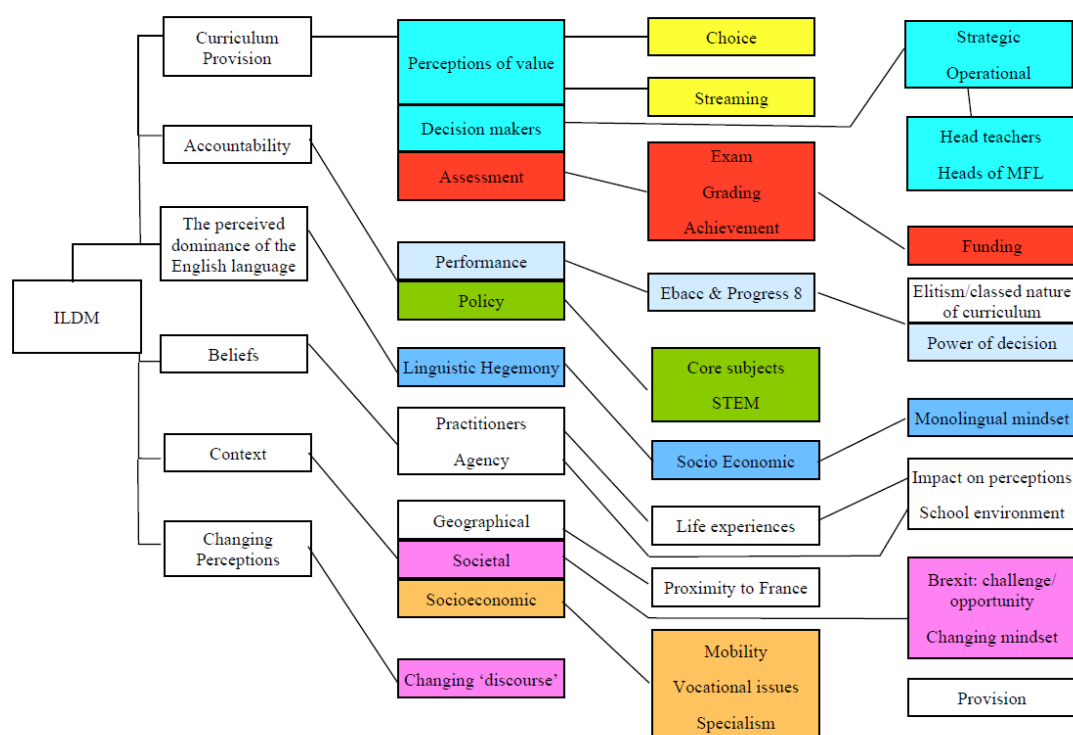


Figure 4 Thematic map

Braun and Clarke (2006) contend that themes or patterns within data can be identified either in an inductive 'bottom up' way <sup>38</sup>(citing Frith and Gleeson, 2004), or in a theoretical, deductive 'top down' way (citing Boyatzis, 1998 and Hayes, 1997). However, I acknowledge that top-down and bottom-up processes are interactive in some way, because the research keeps a specific interest in identifying themes influenced by the theoretical framework. TA is easily accessible and theoretically flexible, but it is this flexibility that can lead to inconsistency and a lack of coherence when developing themes derived from the research data (Holloway and Todres, 2003). There is an essential tension between flexibility on the one hand and consistency and coherence on the other [ibid]. Such tension

<sup>38</sup> According to Thomas (2003), the primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies (p.2). Thomas (2003) points out three main purposes for using an inductive approach: (1) to condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief summary format; (2) to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data; (3) to develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes which are evident in the raw data.

may encourage the qualitative researcher to consider the intentions and philosophical underpinnings of the different approaches in greater depth to arrive at an epistemological position that can coherently underpin its empirical claim [ibid]. As researchers, 'we are accountable about the epistemological status of our outcomes and what we are claiming for these outcomes' (Holloway & Todres, 2003 [online]).

With this in mind, my interpretations of the data must be considered in light of my assumptions, and the influence I had on the data whilst I attempted to interpret the participants' words and the meanings they attributed to them - whether their individual accounts can be believed and 'ring true', and can therefore be considered 'true' (Griffin, 2012). Consequently, my analysis involved triangulation of the results. This is a process of sharing the findings of the analysed data with other researchers and with the participants in the study, to remove the subjectivity that may occur, because the themes highlighted by the researcher may not be in congruence with the participants (Braun and Clark, 2006; Eynon *et al.*, 2016; Fereday, and Cochrane, 2006). Hence, I met with the participants and conducted a member check. I also held discussions with a senior researcher to discuss the findings and my interpretations of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Consistency and rigour were upheld, which is vital in research, as reviewers will scrutinise documents thoroughly and if a research project cannot be consistent and uphold rigour, it may be rejected by the academic literature.

### 3.5.1 Demonstrating rigour using TA

It is the individual researcher's responsibility to assure rigour and trustworthiness (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lincoln and Guba (1985) and the data collected through the interviews was analysed based on a three-stage procedure suggested in the literature (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1984): preparing the data for analysis by transcribing, reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and representing the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) point out that patterns are identified through a rigorous process of data familiarisation, data coding, and theme development and revision. I chose to analyse the interviews manually instead of using a software program, as the amount of interview data yielded was manageable.

A rigorous thematic analysis can produce trustworthy and insightful findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Trustworthiness enables researchers to persuade themselves and readers that their research findings are worthy of attention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) refined the concept of trustworthiness by introducing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to match the conventional quantitative assessment criteria of validity and reliability. Qualitative researchers speak of trustworthiness, which simply poses the question, 'Can

the findings be trusted'? [Ibid]. One of the strategies to ensure trustworthiness is credibility, which is concerned with the aspect of truth-value (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) discussed earlier in section 4.3.9.

Credibility addresses the 'fit' between participants' views and the researcher's representation of them (Tobin & Begley, 2004). It can also be established, as qualitative researchers demonstrate how data analysis has been conducted through recording, systematising and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Côté & Turgeon, 2005; Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested a number of techniques to address credibility including activities, such as, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, data collection triangulation, researcher triangulation and peer debriefing. The latter is recommended to provide an external check on the research process, which may therefore increase credibility, by way of checking preliminary findings and interpretations against the raw data. In this study, peer debriefing took place by discussing the initial findings with the participant, feeding back data, analytical categories, interpretations and conclusions to members of those groups from whom the data was originally obtained. This has strengthened the data, especially because researcher and participants looked at the data with different eyes [ibid]. The bottom line is that credibility and trustworthiness are matters of researchers' honesty and integrity (Saldana, 2016). In order to get an extra layer of trustworthiness the research process must be traceable, logical and clearly documented (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This is known as an audit trail; a strategy needed to ensure dependability and confirmability. Dependability adds another layer of trustworthiness because it establishes the research study's findings as consistent and repeatable. In addition, it provides evidence of the decisions and choices made in relation to theoretical and methodological issues throughout the study, which requires a clear rationale for such decisions (Koch, 1994). A study and its findings are auditable when another researcher can clearly follow the decision trail (Sandelowski, 1986). Consequently, it could be argued that another researcher with the same data, stance and situation could arrive at the same or comparable, but not contradictory, conclusions [ibid]. Another way for research study to demonstrate dependability is for its process to be audited (Koch, 1994). To achieve dependability, it is paramount to ensure that the research process is logical, traceable, and clearly documented (Tobin & Begley, 2004). When readers are able to examine the research process, they are more able to judge the dependability of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this instance, keeping records of the raw data (all the interview transcripts) can help researchers systemise, relate and cross reference all data, as well as ease the reporting of the research process, thus creating a clear audit trail (Halpren, 1983). As a result, I have kept a general log of the decisions taken during the research process of: the research team meetings, reflective thoughts, sampling, research materials adopted,

emergence of the findings and information about the data management. Therefore, other readers can examine the research process and consequently are better able to judge the dependability of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Once credibility, transferability, and dependability are all achieved, confirmability can then be established (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Confirmability is concerned with establishing that the researcher's interpretations and findings are clearly derived from the data and requires the researcher to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations have been reached (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Finally, by keeping a self-critical account of the research process [ibid], methodological decisions, rationales, logistics of the research and crucially the researcher's personal reflections of their values, interests, and insights information about self (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) I have added to the rigour of TA

### 3.5.2 Working with the data

Data collection is an iterative and reflective process that develops over time and involves a constant moving back and forward between phases (Braun & Clark, 2006). Therefore, and in order to gain a complete overview of the data set, I adopted Braun & Clark's (2006) six-stage process of data collection and analysis:

Phase	Process
Familiarization with the data	Verbatim transcription of the recordings Prolong engagement with the data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas (Cohen <i>et al.</i> , 2018; O'Toole and Beckett, 2013).
Generating Initial Codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a methodical manner across the entire data set & collating data relevant to each code. Qualitative coding is a process of reflection and a way of interacting with and thinking about data (Savage, 2000). Peer debriefing (Roberts <i>et al.</i> , 2019 [online]).
Searching for Themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme (Nowell <i>et al.</i> , 2017).
Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1/semantic) and the entire data set (Level 2/latent), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis
Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme
Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Table 5 Phases of Thematic Analysis (from Braun & Clarke, 2006)

#### 1- Familiarization Stage

The familiarisation with data was internalised through verbatim transcription of the recordings from the exploratory interviews (see appendix A). The process of transcription is a vital step in data analysis within a qualitative methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcription of both senior leaders and heads of MFLs' interviews occurred immediately after each interview and were double-checked with the participants informally. In this research study, the initial engagement with the data assisted in noting emerging preliminary themes throughout the data set, which led to more in-depth analytic work.

## **2- Generating Initial Codes**

According to Charmaz (2006), coding is the first step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic interpretations (p.43). It entails naming segments of data with a label that concurrently categorises, summarises, and accounts segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarises and accounts for each piece of data [ibid]. The code-generating step was imbued with iterative cycles of organising data into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005).

Manually created the analysis of data. This meant looking for different themes from the same data source (senior leaders' and practitioners' interviews) and an inductive coding was applied to interview transcripts. I employed a 'complete coding' process, coding all the data according to what was relevant and fascinating (Braun and Clarke, 2013:206). Following the transcription of the data, I conducted a preliminary analysis and read the relevant literature on emerging themes. I examined the literature to make sense of how my empirical research related to established literature and how it contributed to 'new knowledge' (O'Toole and Beckett, 2013). I then revisited the data, and analysed it in accordance with what the literature had presented as significant themes. The transcripts were re-read and ideas started emerging about what was in the data and what was interesting about them [Ibid:151]. It is pivotal to offer an explanation here regarding this idea of what is interesting.

Language plays a fundamental role in how and what we choose to code (Charmaz, 2006). As researchers, it is not possible to be neutral because language affords form and meaning on observed realities [Charmaz, 2006]. Thus, we define what we see as interesting in the data and describe what we think is happening. Unavoidably, due to my dual role as teacher and researcher, I came to the analysis with some prior knowledge of the data and some initial analytic interests or thoughts (Nowell, *et al.*, 2017). Hence, what has been classed as interesting stems from my own personal experience as a practitioner and acquired prior knowledge. Also, this idea emerges from the understanding of the participants' views and their actions from their perspectives, whilst I interacted

with them and subsequently continued to do so many times, through exploring their statements and observed actions and re-envisioning the scenes in which we know them (Charmaz, 2006).

Codes identify a feature of the data that appears interesting to the analyst, and refer to ‘the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data (semantic content and latent) or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon’ (Boyatzis, 1998: 63). Within a semantic approach, the initial ideas are identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data and the researcher is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said or what has been written [ibid]. The analytic process entails a progression from *description*, where the data has simply been organised to show patterns in semantic content and summarised, to *interpretation*, the so-called latent level, where there is an attempt to theorise the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications (Patton, 1990). The raw information was read line by line and was then reduced into smaller units (Saldana, 2016). Initial codes help to separate data into categories and enable matching with the data extracts that demonstrate that code. Through coding, the researcher is able to simplify and focus on specific characteristics of the data, by moving from unstructured data to the development of ideas about what is going on in the data (Morse & Richards, 2002).

Line-by-line coding frees the researcher from becoming so immersed in the participants' world views that accept them without question [ibid]. Boyatzis (1998) suggested that a ‘good code’ is one that captures the qualitative richness of the phenomenon (p.1). This process of coding is part of analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994), where the data is organised into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005).

The table below depicts an example of codes applied to a short segment of data:

Data extract	Coded for
‘They are given an options form which reflects their ability basically. So basically, those students who we feel are capable’ (Participant B)	1-Talked about choice in L2s 2-Talked about aptitude

Table 6 Data extract, with codes applied (from Clarke *et al.*, 2006).

The last step involved in developing data-driven codes was to determine their reliability. I asked an external peer-reviewer (Sandelowski, 1993; Miles and Huberman, 1994) to independently analyse some sections of the data. I then compared them with my own. Comparisons and discussion on codes were carried out to reach a unanimous agreement and to demonstrate rigour in the study (Roberts *et al.*, 2019), as well as to mitigate researcher bias due to the duality of my role, as both practitioner and researcher. Once all the data was initially coded and collated, and a list of the different codes identified across the data set had been developed and aligned with the research

questions and therefore fit for the purpose, the data-driven coding ensued with a focus on identifying patterns of meaning. Coded data is very different from the units of analysis (i.e. the themes/patterns) which are (often) broader. These are explored in the next phase where the interpretative analysis of the data occurs, and in relation to which arguments about the phenomenon being examined are made (Boyatzis, 1998).

### 3- Searching for Potential Themes

Themes are perceived as ‘abstract entities that afford meaning and identity to repeated experiences and their irregular manifestations’ (DeSantis and Ugarriza:362). This definition of themes is of critical importance as my construction of meaning is not free from contamination or interpretation (Elliott, 2005; Andrews *et al.*, 2013), and therefore needs to be acknowledged. The searching for themes stage involves considering how relevant codes could be sorted, collated and combined to form an overarching theme (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). They are dependent on whether they capture something important in relation to the overall research question, as opposed to quantifiable measures (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase the different codes were read and reread to identify significant broader patterns of meaning (potential themes). Table 4 below exemplifies this process:

Data extract	Code	Theme
‘the exam is penalising them [the students], for their background’ ...  ‘...a lot of kids in our school are not at the same level of literacy’.	Talked about poverty	Classed nature of curriculum/ elitism
	Talked about severe grading at GCSE	Assessment
	Talked about poor literacy levels	Knowledge
‘it is morally abysmal’	Talked about Progress 8	Accountability measures

Table 7 Data extract, with themes applied (from Clarke *et al.*, 2006).

Such an iterative comparing process was across subsamples (DeCuir-Gunby *et al.*, 2011) and I used descriptive codes to capture the participants’ views of MFLs in relation to institutional level decision-making beyond post-14 education. During this process, I identified crucial sections of text and created labels to index them as they related to a theme or issue in the data (King, 2004). Potential themes involve the researcher finding and identifying the theme as a definite one to develop, because it recurs more often than others. All of the data extracts that fitted into each theme were read again to ensure that all of the data formed a coherent pattern. It is necessary to verify that the

relationships between the themes reflect the meaning of the data as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once identified, themes appear to be significant concepts that link substantial portions of the data together (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000). A set of six potential themes stemmed from the analysis with their subcategories, such as: options, timetabling, assessments, specialism, Progress 8, Ebacc, policy, society, socio-economics and geographical. Part of the flexibility of thematic analysis is that it allows the themes and their prevalence to be determined in a number of ways (Braun Clarke, 2006). Although the stages used in the analysis of the data looked sequential, they were very repetitive while being built up on the previous stage.

#### **Stage 4 -Reviewing Themes**

Following on from this, considerations were made to determine what aspect of the data each theme captured and identified what was of interest about them and why (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For each individual theme, a detailed analysis followed to identify the 'story' that each theme told as well as how each one fitted into the overall story about the entire data set in relation to the research questions [ibid]. Initially, for those themes that didn't appear to belong anywhere, Braun & Clark (2006) suggest that these are placed under 'miscellaneous'. Although this may only be seen as marginally relevant, it may play a significant role in adding to the background detail of the study (King, 2004). It is recommended that a note on the importance of themes is kept to help establish confirmability (Halpren, 1983). The themes that emerged at this point were generated and are detailed as follows: Curriculum Provision; the perceived dominance of the English Language; Accountability; Beliefs; Context and Miscellaneous.

Once the set of themes was devised, it was then necessary to refine them and use the 'compare-and-contrast' method to ensure the developed themes were grounded in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boyatziz, 1998; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). During this fourth stage, the coded data extracts were reviewed for each theme, looking for coherent patterns. It is important that by the end of this phase, researchers can clearly define what the themes are and what they are not - i.e. if there is not enough data to support them, or the data is too diverse (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Other themes might also collapse into each other and might form one theme [ibid]. In addition, other themes might need to be broken down into separate themes [ibid]. This reviewing stage involves two levels: Level 1 refers to reading and ascertaining that the data extracts appear to form a coherent theme; Level 2 is concerned with considering whether the potential thematic map accurately represents the meanings in the data set as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Whilst carrying out Level 1 I recognised that some codes I had initially placed under the 'miscellaneous' theme were linked to the key themes and did capture something important in addressing the research question [ibid]. The table below exemplifies this process:



Data extract	Code	Miscellaneous theme	Reviewed theme
‘if the government is serious about everyone achieving the Ebaac, then MFL provision needs to start a lot lower down in school. It needs to be made part of the curriculum’, ...but it’s not strictly speaking, a taught subject’	Talked about achievement	Performance	Accountability
	Talked about L2s in primary schools	Policy	Curriculum

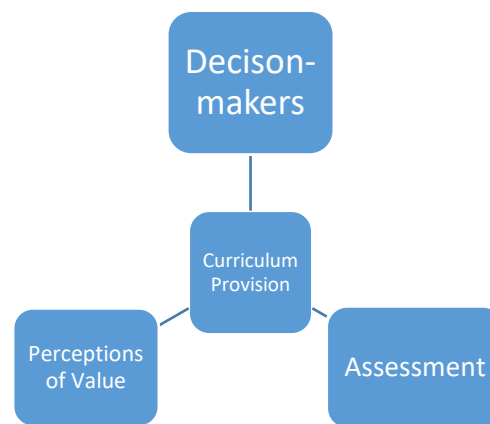
*Table 8 Data extract, with reviewed themes applied (From Clark et al.,2006)*

Following on from re-reading, re-contrasting, and re-thinking of the raw data, I understood the implications of the participants' views in advocating the need to start with an appropriately taught program of MFLs learning at primary level and implement it all the way through, to achieve greater results beyond primary. In this way, I moved from the surface meaning toward a richer description of the data; that is, one of the participants believed that MFL success in post-14 education must be nurtured from primary level. The reviewed theme seems to more appropriately reflect participants' voices and capture the contours of the coded data. Level 2 was concerned with a similar process but it considered the validity of themes in the entire data set. This level of reviewing themes may still involve reworking on codes and themes, to code additional data that was omitted in previous coding stages and to ascertain whether the themes fit into the data set. The validity of individual themes was considered to determine whether the themes accurately reflected the meanings evident in the data set as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Ultimately the data within themes must cohere meaningfully, with a clear and distinguishable distinction between themes [ibid].

### **Stage 5: Defining and Naming Themes**

At this stage, the final refinements of the themes take place [ibid]. By re-defining and potentially renaming them, stage 5 ensures a further clarification of the essence of each theme to produce a coherent and consistent account [ibid]. This process entails going back to the gathered data extracts for each theme and organising them into a coherent and internally consistent account, with accompanying ‘narrative,’ that identifies the story each theme tells (Braun & Clarke,2006). It is also crucial to ensure that each theme fits into a broader overall story about the data and overlap is

supposed to be avoided [ibid]. Finally, the names of all themes were revisited to ensure they were both concise and precise. By the end of this step, I was able to clearly name what the themes are and what they are not. Thomas (2003) asserts that ‘Most inductive studies report a model that has between 3 and 8 main categories in the findings.’ Of the six categories of the emerged themes, and as an illustration, I present below the model on the Curriculum Provision theme:



*Figure 5 Curriculum provision theme 1*

## **Stage 6- Producing the report**

The final stage begins once the researcher has fully established the themes and is ready to begin the final analysis and write-up of the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This will be explored fully in the next chapter.

Whilst I have made a case for the thematic analysis of the data generated in this research, I was mindful of the need to ensure that it was fundamental to uphold further rigour of my study (Alsaawi, 2014). Thus, I have overlaid some aspects of TA with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

### **3.5.3. Critical Discourse Analysis**

#### ***Introduction***

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a qualitative analytical approach for critically describing, interpreting and explaining the ways in which discourse constructs, maintains and legitimises social inequalities (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). CDA recognizes ‘the role of language in structuring power relations in society’ (Wodak, 2001:5). The concept of power is a central notion in CDA, because discourse is socially consequential thus entwined in social power (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). Power is *signalled* not only by grammatical forms within text, but also by a person or a group of people’s controls of a social occasion. As result, discursive practices can produce and reproduce

unequal power relations between races, classes, genders and other majorities and minorities.’ It is CDA’s objective to point out the hidden power relations behind the discursive practices and challenge unequal power relations in making conventionalized and stable discursive practices.

This study therefore uses CDA to question further the discursive construction of schools’ decision-making in relation to second language provision and enactment beyond post-14 education, by exposing a web of discourses used as a form of control over practitioners’ decision-making. The analysis of discourse relates to the concept of power and its relationship with knowledge, as well as the construction of identity and societal knowledge, offering the means to describe or narrate ‘reality’ in a particular way. Power and knowledge are interrelated and uncovering the source of knowledge production about reality will reveal the source of societal power (Foucault, 1991). Because my methodological objective is to deconstruct discourses, or rather their contextual meanings, I argue that to fully uncover the meaning contained in the discourses and enact social change, an understanding of the context at its fullest is pivotal, namely to uncover the sources of production of meaning. Discourse analysis in the discursive tradition, places emphasis on the concept of power which is ‘prior to language’ (Hastings, 1999:10), so that power relations are reflected in language, and can also be a consequence of language. Therefore, this study is broadly informed by critical theories, but more specifically it focuses on the discursive tradition of discourse analysis inspired by Foucault’s concepts of knowledge and power (Foucault, 1990). Consequently, I aim to critically analyse discourses in relation to schools’ decision-making regarding MFL, according to the power relations they uncover, aiming to provide valuable insights into this area of education beyond KS3 (Richardson, 2000).

Methodologically and thematically, this study is in alignment with ideology critiques of discourses on L2 language learning and policy (Jong, 2013), looking specifically at the ‘Foucauldean’ lens, which has been used to explore the ways in which development discourses are imbued with power and how language colonizes everyday life, throughout institutional discourse (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). One of the strengths of CDA is that, through exposing the rationality of policy making, researchers become aware of the contingent nature of the policy process (Rose, 1996). They are aware of the knowledge production and rationalisation of policy options within the discourse, and of the boundaries and limits of the discourse. This means they are able to distil the discourse rules and are able to observe the power relations of policy making, as well as highlight gaps between the rhetoric and practice of policy.

CDA examines the ways in which language produces and moderates social and psychological phenomena and crucially emphasises the role of language as a power resource (Willig, 2014). Its

framework entails characteristics and processes shared and described by scholars such as Foucault (1970), Fairclough (2001), Van Dijk (1993), and Wodak (2001 & 2009). Those characteristics are problem-oriented focus, regardless of any theoretical or methodological approach. The emphasis is on language; the view that power relations are discursive; the belief that discourses are situated in contexts; the idea that expressions of language are never neutral; an analysis process that is systematic, interpretive, descriptive, explanatory (Fairclough, 2001; Van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 2001) and have an ideological stance; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Within the diverse landscape of approaches to the study of language, CDA has been frequently used with regards to issues related to power, inequality, ideology, and 'the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups, that result in social inequality' (van Dijk, 2001: 249). In relation to schools in England, the lack of a wider provision of MFLs and its curriculum enactment is closely associated with socio-economic deprivation (Lanvers, 2016; Tinsley & Board, 2016) and that leads to social inequality, where schools in more affluent areas have a greater exposure to language studies.

Power is usually institutionalised and organised hierarchically; small groups of power elites have special roles in the enactment of power (Van Dijk, 1993). Dominance or the abuse of power, involves control of one group by another [ibid] which may include control of action (e.g. limiting the freedom of others) or cognition (e.g. influencing others' ideological stance (Wodack & Meyer, 2009). Regarding MFLs, such 'abuse of power' is manifested through the decision-making process where, in the name of policy, or in response to 'accountability measures', affordances are given to other subject areas to the detriment of MFL. As a result, in this study it was pivotal to analyse some aspects of the *discourse* on MFLs in post-14 education in England, with a focus on engagement and interaction. Through examining questions of how actors form and implement policy (Foucault, 1982) CDA offers the analytical framework to discuss how school leaders 'decision-making affects L2 studies. However, van Dijk (2001) argued that CDA is 'primarily interested and motivated by pressing social issues, which it hopes to better understand through discourse analysis' (p. 252). Importantly, CDA focuses on the ways that power manifests itself through language, thus identifying and demystifying the reciprocal power/knowledge relations that produce, and concurrently, are inscribed within the discursive construction of reality. CDA analyses 'power' as central condition in social life that is manifested and challenged in discourse. As Wodak argues (2001:11), 'language indexes power, expresses power, is involved where there is a contention over and a challenge to power. Power does not derive from language, but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and long term.' Power can be exercised indirectly through the control of discourse, or by controlling context (Mullet, 2018[online]). For example, head teachers exert control over heads of MFL, when appointments are scheduled to 'discuss' departmental provision in light of predetermined school development plans. Therefore,

CDA can potentially provide an important insight into the opaque ways in which unequal power relations lead to the diminution of L2 practitioners' 'subject positions' and consequent lack of agency. The dominance of the discourse of 'normalisation' and 'the rule of homogeneity' along with the construction of 'hierarchies [and] hyponymic relations' (Foucault 1977:183, cited in Luke 1996:36) can lead to the 'ostracization', of MFL practitioners' 'subject positions'.

In this study, CDA is used in order to make the power/knowledge nexus clear, and its subjugating effects, when analysing the themes that emerged from the interviews. Namely, CDA is essential to open the way to expose the subjugating effects of power and its negative effect on the pursuit of an inclusive discourse where MFLs are afforded high value and greater prominence beyond KS3. CDA is directed to the ways that the intense 'discursive agonism' (Foucault, cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982) underpinning institutional level decision-making in relation to L2 provision in post-14 education is mirrored within certain official legislative documents and the impact that it might have on social processes. The removal of the Statutory Provision of MFL beyond KS3 (Coleman, 2009) is one of those documents. In particular, the analysis should mainly emphasise the social problem which might be rooted either 'in the activities of a social practice, in the social practice *per se*, or in the representation of social practice' (Fairclough 2001a:236). An example would be to expose the ways that specific accountability measures and institutionalised practices may lead to the marginalisation of L2 studies, or similarly, to address the problem of representation, thereby exposing the ways that the importance of L2 studies may be misrepresented in policy documents. Representation is indeed a key concept in the constitution of discourse and, by implication, in the conceptualisation, formation and provision of MFL policy. In this respect, CDA goes beyond the linguistic analysis of the text and extends to the questioning and dismantling of the subjectivities construed within the text. As a result, in this study I aim to apply this approach to the themes which emerged through the earlier analysis, namely to expose discourses in relation to MFLs according to the power relations they uncover [ibid]. These are particularly prevalent, as the perceptions amongst the different groups regarding the value of MFLs, 'wanting' to afford them with more or less visibility in post-14 education, is in constant play. The relationship between these groups is particularly pertinent when it comes to decision-making in schools in relation to L2 studies beyond KS3.

Fairclough (2003) proposes two approaches of CDA: one where the focus is on the linguistic micro-structures of the text and another that is mainly concerned with the historical and social context of the text and the ways in which social relations and identities are discursively constituted. In this study, I have adopted the latter, which draws on Foucault, who is particularly pertinent for an exploration of the issues of representation through his theorisations for the discursive constitution

of subjectivities (Foucault 1982). In this regard, CDA extends to the questioning and dismantling of the subjectivities construed within the text. Many of policymaking and, by extension, social conflicts are, according to Luke (1996:6), about representation and subjectivity. He asserts that:

‘In terms of representation, they involve the production and consumption of texts, access to and legal control over texts, and the rights to name, to construe, to depict and to describe. In terms of subjectivity, they involve how one is being named, positioned, desired, and described and in which languages, texts and terms of reference’ (Luke,1996:6).

The concept of identity politics and the constitution of subjectivities is also pivotal to any analysis of school decision-making in relation to MFL studies. ‘Hall (cited in Giroux, 1993) affords prominence to the power of ‘identity’:

‘The concept of identity politics should be re-problematized as part of a broader attempt to analyse how the dynamics of cultural power work within the classical economy of language, representation, and institutional structures to position ‘a subject or a set of people as the other of a dominant discourse’ (Hall 1990, 226, cited in Giroux 1993:68).

This notion of cultural politics is inevitably connected to the triad of language, power and discourse and its role is pervasive in L2 education policymaking and subsequent institutional level decision-making. The latter is produced by the scientific discourses that saturate policy agendas, which through the linguistically positioned panoptic technologies of power, construe MFL studies as ‘secondary’ but susceptible to the normalising technologies of power (Foucault, 1977), such as examination procedures. It must be acknowledged that Foucault, besides being concerned with the ‘knowledge’ conveyed through the linguistic utterances and the nomenclature inscribed in it, he also seeks to expose the origin or the genealogy of this knowledge: namely he seeks to break down the power/knowledge web where such statements stem from and become legitimised as ‘knowledge’. As Foucault (1998:208) asserts, ‘*My objective has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture human beings are made subjects*’ (cited in Kendall and Wickham, 1999: 51). In order to achieve this, however, it is crucial to move beyond the structure of the discourse and to expose its interactional aspect; that is to achieve interdiscursive analysis through the reciprocal relation between micro-events and macro-structures. In other words, the analysis should reflect an interplay of both social as well as a linguistic approach of the text through interpretation and explanation (Fairclough ,2001b).

Nevertheless, in this study, the focus regarding MFLs is on the socio, political and economic contexts of educational policy in which decision-making occurs. Consequently, the analysis of the linguistic features of the text is therefore meaningless unless it is located within the discursively constituted

social context, something that can be only achieved by the higher stages of analysis: interpretation and explanation [ibid]. For instance, as far as L2 studies is concerned, the aim is to identify the extent to which either affordance or visibility can be revealed within the official legislative documents or the excerpts of interviews, as it is the case in this study. But at the same time, it is also necessary to expose the social processes inherent in such documents, as they are constituted by the intense discursive 'agonism' (Foucault, cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982) over L2 practitioners' subject positions. Lastly, it is useful to expose the ways that the less dominant discourses are affected by the imposition of the new dominant ones. As an example, the focus on core subjects at KS4 has led to a devaluing of others, such as MFLs. CDA aims to expose the ways that these constructive effects become a legitimized and naturalised means of accepting inequality (Fairclough 1985, cited in Van Dijk 2001), whereby power is covertly imposed, whilst its processes become natural, dogmatic and institutionally sanctioned. Thus, echoing Fairclough (1999):

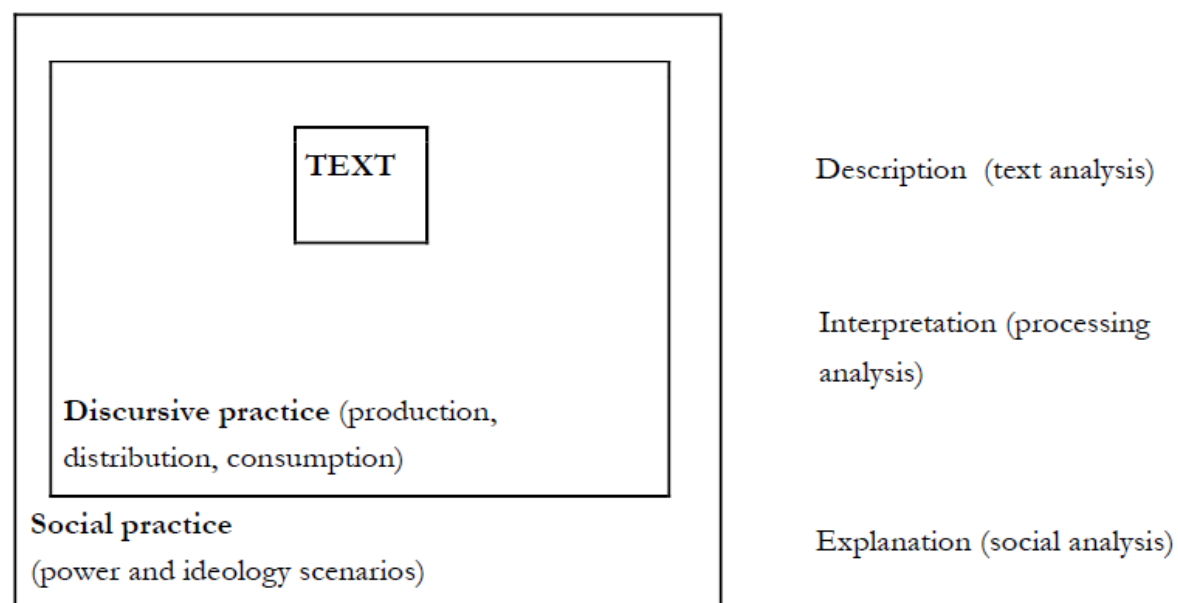
*'... CDA sets out to make visible through analysis, and to criticize, connections between properties of texts and social processes and relations (ideologies, power relations) which are generally not obvious to people who produce and interpret those texts, and whose effectiveness depends upon this opacity' (p.97).*

At the outset, a three- step process was contemplated, based on Fairclough's (1992, 2003) three-level CDA framework as the method of analysis. CDA sets a conception of discourse distinguishing texts (written or spoken), discourse practice, and social practice. Fairclough proposes three levels of analysis: (i) discourse as text, (ii) discourse as discursive practice, and (iii) discourse as social practice. The table below illustrates these levels:

First level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The structural-grammatical features of the text.</li> </ul>
Second level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discourse as discursive practice, involved analysing text production, interpretation, and transformation into a web of discourses, enabling the promotion of ideas and values about ILDM in L2s.</li> <li>Linked to intertextuality, interdiscursivity refers to how particular discourses, styles, and genres are articulated altogether in a text (Fairclough, 2003:218). It enables the questioning of coexistent discourses reinforcing a particular construction of L2s in the analysed samples.</li> <li>I aimed to uncover the contextual meaning of the words rather than the words themselves. It must be emphasised that the selection and further contextualisation of the words was guided, by using the knowledge gained over the years as a practitioner and more recently as an interviewer and researcher. As a result, the themes that had emerged from the TA interlinked with the second level of Fairclough's analysis.</li> </ul>
Third level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysing power and ideology scenarios external to the text but simultaneously reflected in it and reinforced by it. This third level is crucial to bring to bear my theoretical model, which is to deconstruct contextual meanings by focusing on the discursive tradition of discourse analysis underpinned by the nexus power/knowledge (Foucault, 1990).</li> </ul>

*Table Fairclough's three levels of analysis*

For Fairclough, CDA encompasses an oscillating interaction among these three analytical levels, equivalent to the text description, interpretation and explanation (Figure 6).



*Figure 6 Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis (Dai, 2015)*



Fairclough's textually orientated discourse analysis provides a framework in which characteristics of texts can be related to wider social practices, via an investigation of the mediating effects of discourse practices (the social practices which relate to language production and use specifically, such as text production and consumption). The three dimensions are interrelated: discourse practice is the link between text and sociocultural practices. In other words, the discourse practice (how a text is produced or interpreted) depends on the sociocultural practice in which the language text is a part of; the discourse practice shapes the text and leaves 'traces' in surface features of the text. Considering the discussion on discourse in section 3.1, discourse is both constituted and constitutive. It both shapes and is shaped by society: it is socially conditioned by the contexts in which it occurs (discourse practice) and it, at the same time, affects the social relationships and identities of people who are participated in these social events (sociocultural practices). An example of the three-dimension model applied to language policy is offered below:

Level 1. The written *text* in terms of its linguistic features, such as syntax, modal words and argumentation.

Level 2. The process of interpretation and production of the document, the *discourse practices*, among people or groups of people, e.g. a practitioner's handbook that explains the language policy document; a staff training meeting held by senior leaders that interprets the document.

Level 3. The *sociocultural practice* or the situational, institutional or social context surrounds the discourse practices, e.g. the language environment or the education system of the country. CDA exposes the complicity of language use in macro and micro processes of power and inequality and, crucially, in examining how this complicity is actually accomplished (Hastings, 2012). CDA points out the hidden power relations behind the discursive practices and challenge unequal power relations in making conventionalized and stable discursive practices.

### 3.5.4 Summary

This chapter entailed three main parts - one being a justification for the methods selected; two a description of how the research was undertaken and three the types of analysis chosen in line with the theoretical lens discussed in the previous chapter. Data collected from interviews was transcribed and then coded to enable it to be subjected to processes of inductive analysis. In order to afford further rigour to the study, the themes that emerged from the TA were overlaid with CDA. The next chapter presents the findings of the study in response to the research questions.

## Chapter 4: Findings & Analysis

### Introduction

This chapter is divided in three main parts. Part 1 presents the findings of data collected, with the results from the three selected schools duly reported. It starts with a brief summary of the key policies changes that affected MFL provision in the last two decades in England, in order to provide a reminder of the contextual factors underpinning this study. This is then ensued by a contextual description of the participants' schools before moving on to presenting the findings. Here the themes that emerged from the data were integrated under each research question. I have also indicated where the findings are both consistent and inconsistent with the ideas, concepts and theories discussed in Chapter 2. I have taken Wolcott's advice on the need to 'winnow' data to a manageable length and to communicate 'only the essence' (Wolcott, 1990:18). Part 2 offers the analysis of the gathered data with a focused discussion in light of the research questions. Part 3 considers the data in relation to the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power and how it affects schools' decision-making practices in MFL, and how this exercises authority in discourse within institutions, such as secondary schools, in England (Olsson and Heizmann, 2015).

As discussed in chapter two, the position of second language studies in post-14 education is concerning and the various measures taken to abate the decline have had little or no positive impact on increasing take up (Parrish, 2018). The table below depicts the key policy changes that took place in England during the last two decades in an attempt to abate the crisis in L2 studies, beyond post-14 education in secondary schools in England.

Date	Change	Impact
2004	Statutory Provision of L2s removed beyond KS3 (Coleman, 2009).	L2s became optional at Post-14 education L2s perceived as dispensable for some students (Swarbrick, 2011).
2010	Specialist schools including language colleges are abolished	Cessation of MFL support to neighbouring schools and the local communities (Bartram, 2010).
2010-2011	Ebacc Implementation (Dfe, 2010[online])- To increase progression to higher education and decrease the inequity in language learning across the school divide	Temporary improvement (Tinsley & Board, 2013). Initial 8 % jump between 2011 and 2013 Numbers of GCSE students has since plateaued. Very little impact on the numbers taking languages post-16 (Tinsley and Board, 2016:111).
2011	Closure of NCL	Funding and support for MFL development was dramatically reduced since the closure of NCL.
2013	Reform of GCSE, AS and A level qualifications	Added rigour in GCSEs, in preparation for further academic or vocational study, or for work (Adams, 2013[online]).
2013	Progress 8	Grades shifted from letters (A* to G) to numbers (9 to 1). Schools receive a progress score that measures every pupil's final results against their ability on entry.
2014	Compulsory primary languages	Operational issues limit the impact: Staff shortages; timetabling; severe grading. Lack of continuity as secondary schools cannot assure that students are able to learn that same language from Year 7 onwards as they did in primary school.
2015	L2s at GCSE, whilst not exactly compulsory <u>are</u> expected to be the norm, part of the Ebacc.	A target 90% of KS3 students was set for those who took their GCSEs in 2020. This has resulted in a slightly increased take-up at GCSE, but not beyond that and through into further education (Ofqual, 2016 [online]).

Table 9 Key policies changes in the last 2 decades affecting L2s in post-14 education in England.

Together with low level motivation (Coleman; Galaczi and Astruc, 2007; Tinsley, 2018; chapter 2.1), this study directly investigated the views of both senior leaders and heads of MFL regarding MFL provision in post-14 education, in England. Specifically, it looked at the role of the head teachers, as the decentralized nature of MFL policy brings to the forefront the impact of their decision-making in second language studies in England. The data collection took place within three different school settings and the research questions addressed were:

- To critically understand institutional level decision- making regarding language learning in secondary schools and the role of power and agency
- To critically examine the way in which policy tools and frameworks influence the decisions senior leaders make about second language provision in their schools.
- To critically explore the extent to which the views of the wider school community about second language learning impacts on institutional- level decision making.

Within each main question, there are associated sub-questions which are depicted under each main question, with findings presented accordingly.

In order to answer the research questions, data was collected anonymously by means of semi-structured interviews (section 4.6.4) and over a period of five months.

<b>School A</b>	School A is an over-subscribed non-denominational comprehensive school in the south of England. There are just over 1880 students on the roll. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The numbers of students in receipt of pupil premium funding is average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs/or disabilities is above average.
<b>School B</b>	School B is an 11-18 comprehensive school. There are 1050 students on roll. The numbers of students in receipt of pupil premium is above the national average as are the numbers of students with special educational needs. Most students are of white British heritage but there are growing numbers of students from other ethnic backgrounds and of students with English as an additional language.
<b>School C</b>	School C is a comprehensive Studio school, part of an academy trust in the south of England. It provides education for 13–19-year-olds, combining core curriculum with vocational studies. There are just over 439 students on roll. The vast majority of students are from White British backgrounds and there are very few pupils for whom English is an additional language. A relatively low proportion of pupils are known to be entitled to free school meals.

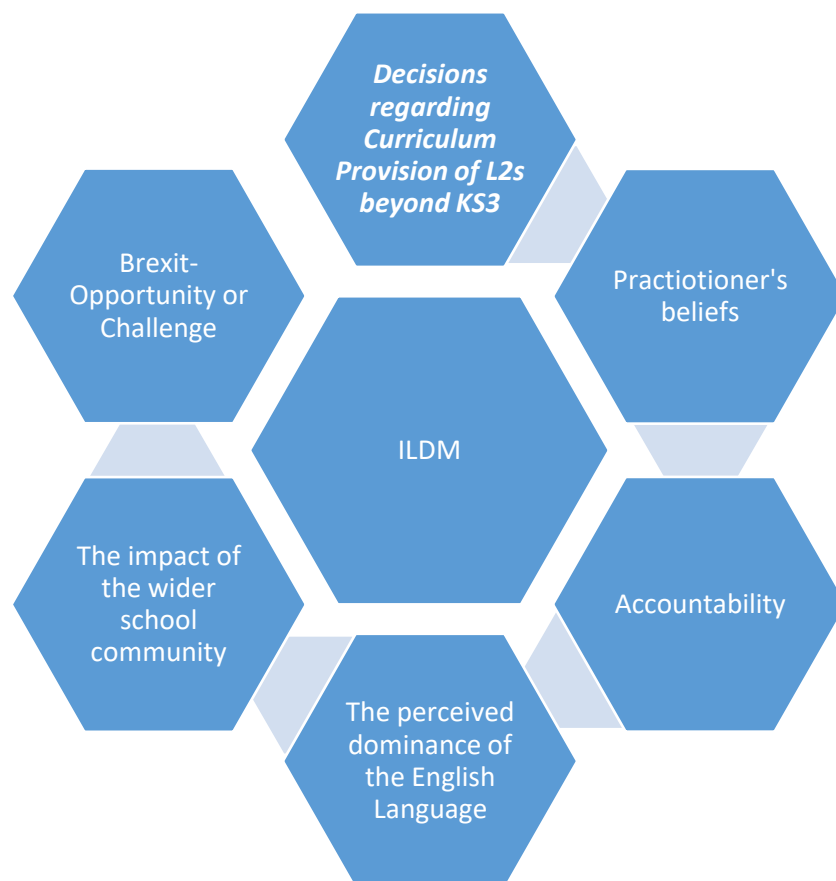
*Table 10 Details of participating schools*

## 4.1 Presentation of the findings

Six semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to validate and investigate the findings.

Themes emerging from the data and prior research were analysed and discussed, juxtaposing against relevant literature. It is important to acknowledge that, the data gathered emerged from three different settings. Therefore, initially I established common themes on each individual setting; I then considered all the common themes from the three settings and suggested the most representative themes that mirrored the participants' views (Dorton *et al.*, 2016). In addition, some extracts of the transcripts were used to illustrate findings and strengthen the analysis. These extracts were copied exactly as they were entered or written, which means that there are spelling or

grammar errors or 'quirks. The report revolved around my analysis and selected examples capturing the essence of the data with quotes directly from participants (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). These were chosen because they were prevalent throughout the transcripts and particularly representative of the participants' voices, and because of their uniqueness in pointing out a fresh new point of view that informed institutional level decision-making in MFLs, in post-14 education. Literature was used to underpin and corroborate as well as compare examined evidence in reporting the data. As a result, the report incorporated my account, quotes from the interviews, and literature (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2018) to tell the rich story of data and make a compelling argument in relation to the research question (Clarke & Braun, 2014). This section therefore considers how the findings support the theoretical framework of the research and the discussion will be advancing evidence to support the research questions. The figure below illustrates the overall themes that stem from the data analysis relating to schools' decision-making in relation to MFL in secondary schools in England:



*Figure 7 Themes emerging from analysis of the data in relation to the research questions.*

As a result, in the next sections, I will identify the themes which emerged under each research question and discuss the findings accordingly.

## 4.2 RQ 1 To critically understand institutional -level decision- making regarding language learning in secondary schools and the role of power and agency.

### 4.2.1 RQ1.1: How do senior leaders make decisions regarding MFL provision in schools?

This section presents the findings that emerged from the data analysis in relation to the first research question and sub questions: In this regard, two main themes emerged from the interview data: decisions regarding curriculum provision and the extent to which beliefs influence the decision-making process.

#### *Decisions regarding Curriculum Provision of MFL beyond KS3*

Regarding MFL curriculum provision, the findings are consistent with existing studies which suggest that there are four influential factors, namely, assessment, perceptions of value, beliefs and decision- makers, specifically who holds the ultimate responsibility of which languages to offer. And this is true of this study, as decisions regarding provision lie with the school leaders as indicated by the findings. The senior leader in school C in particularly emphasized this, stating: ‘because I designed the curriculum, I timetable still so well, whilst I'm in that role’. Indeed, School C offers both Spanish and French. During 2020/21 French was the only language running as there wasn't enough take up. However, for 21/22 the prediction is for both languages. Because it is a Studio school, their specialism is in Performing Arts and Sport and do not have to offer a language at all. Nevertheless, the curriculum provision in this school, includes MFLs as participant C believes that it is necessary for the students. It could be argued that the decisions made by this SL about language provision stem from her own beliefs in the importance of L2 learning for the context of her school and its' pupils. The Y12 students in this vocational setting are likely to ‘*travel the world*’. As a result, the provision of MFLs is a crucial part of the curriculum, as shown below:

‘So, I don't have to offer languages, for example. But obviously performing arts and sport and we have GBE level students and Westend level students and they get to travel the world. So, we do offer our languages at key stage, four, years nine to 11...’ **Data Extract 4.1**

The literature gives credence to such findings where it is argued that the context, is able to steer the formation of the pedagogical beliefs and practices of both teachers and school leaders (Johnson, 1996; Borg, 2003 and Lee, 2008), inevitably affecting their decision-making, and in the case of this senior leader, afford greater prominence to MFL studies.

Despite encouraging the study of MFLs, participant C is aware of low take up and consequently, the decision on provision must consider staff expertise, with a practitioner able to deliver both languages. It was stated that: ‘I purposely went and advertised for somebody who was able to deliver by French Spanish because I knew each year it may change and I didn't feel I would have enough work for a French and a Spanish teacher’. The data in this setting suggests that the decision

regarding MFL provision is based on the school leader's belief rather than just offering what is prescribed by the NC, as in this setting the senior leader does not have to offer MFLs.

Unquestionably, the school leader has the power of decision over MFL curriculum provision. Thus, these findings give strength to the argument in the literature in that MFL provision is ultimately in the hands of head teachers (Johnson and Johnson, 2015).

In school A, French and Spanish is offered to all students in KS3. Beyond this compulsory phase, students can choose accordingly with most wanting to continue the language started earlier. The view of the SL is illustrated below:

'We do only French and Spanish and we now do ask the children to identify, when they come in to school which of the 2 routes that they potentially may go down. So, in Key stage 3 they do either French or Spanish. We basically identify which of the languages they do, and so we do offer for the those who go down say the Spanish route and they decide they want to do French we give them the options to do that but in reality, obviously most only want to build on what they did previously'. **Data Extract 4.2**

However, this element of 'choice' is not quite clear cut as this same participant added that: '*We basically only put them in for subjects which we know they are going to be successfully taught*'. This is also corroborated by the Head of Languages, participant AA:

'... Generally, what happens is, yes, they have a choice, but they are put there strongly advice that they're given a pathway depending on their ability, depending on their setting...'  
'They are given an options form which reflects their ability basically. So basically, those students who we feel are capable. So those academic students will be pretty much told that they are doing a language that will be on their option form.' **Data Extract 4.3**

The data in school A seems to suggest that the curriculum provision of MFL beyond KS3 is based on accountability, thus is linked with ability and consequent success rates in examinations (Harris and Haydn, 2012; Ryrie *et al.*, 1979; Stables, 1996). Consequently, it could be argued that the SL believes that the over-riding purpose of education is about attainment and grades and therefore this decision would align with those beliefs. In addition, Woods (1979) describes the choice available as an 'illusion' (p. 60) given that students have generally been put into ability groupings and have been affected by the schools' or teachers' perceptions of them as more or less able. In school A, the decision on provision appears to be taken by the headteacher. This position is corroborated by the head of MFL in the same school, when questioned if her views were taken into consideration by the SL: 'I don't I don't have the final say, though. I don't you know, I'm not in charge. You know, I just have to go with what decisions are made by the school'. This is consistent with the literature where the provision of MFL is a key responsibility of the leadership, although the views of the heads of department can be taken into consideration (Earley & Weindling, 2004; chapter 2.2).

The reply of participant AA demonstrates that curriculum decisions regarding MFL provision are based on practicalities of staffing and timetabling. It was claimed: 'I'm not sure they [head teachers] truly get it no!']. And this was clearly reflected by the perception held by the same participant regarding the provision of Spanish:

'I think that's maybe where the kind of the disappearance of Spanish comes in, because the Spanish side of the department has always been a bit wobblier than the French, staffing wise. And I think that as well as the fact that two languages makes timetabling just a little bit more complicated and the fact that because of our demographics, they [school leaders] don't feel that two languages is a real pull for the school'. **Data Extract 4.4**

Also, this same head of MFL seems to suggest that the leadership doesn't see any value in some pupils benefiting from learning an L2. This is particularly pertinent as it raises the question on beliefs in the importance (or otherwise) of languages for all students. Furthermore, the head of MFL stated: '...like any subject we are, kind of at the mercy of people above and their opinions and their wishes and their passions'. Such statement also indicates a lack of agency by the head of MFL where it is felt that they do not have a voice in the decision-making process. Certainly, this is congruent with the literature where the role of the head of MFL is merely to implement strategies, defined by the school leaders (Parrish, 2018), therefore, their decision-making is constrained by that of the senior leaders.

School B offers French and German with their students sampling both. Senior leader B stated a very strong affiliation with languages, specifically French and Spanish. German remains on the curriculum as the language department is very successful in ensuring MFLs are valued, even though this doesn't always translate into greater uptake at A Level. This is illustrated below:

'Well, we offer a mixture of French or German, and students get to sample both. Of course, many of them come with mixed experience of French from their primary school, some pretty good, some very little, but they come with virtually no German whatsoever.... So French and German, the decision to do that was that of my predecessor. I think he felt that the German was really the business language for the future and that may or may not be the case... I'm not, I don't have a personal affinity with German, but I have a great love of France. So, I'm happy insofar as the department is very successful in terms of just as a team, in terms of practitioners, in terms of their pedagogy, they have been able to make sure that languages are valued, even if that doesn't always translate into numbers taking it at A level.' **Data Extract 4.5**

This response of the head teacher in school B demonstrates how beliefs impact on decision making (in this case the belief that German is the language of business and therefore could be useful for the pupils in later life), despite this provision not always 'translating' into data (numbers of pupils selecting it for an A level). This is a particularly striking finding, as the greatest influence on the agency of this school leader appears to be his 'great love for France' that has shaped his values and



informed his decision-making. Moreover, this participant would like to offer Spanish, as he has a 'personal love of Spanish', despite being wary of the unique position of his school setting of being one of the very few that still offer German. In this regard, participant B pointed to the duty of his school to justify German, and at the same time being aware of what is going on other schools, where Spanish is more prominent, thus indicating the potential for change or an addition to the curriculum: 'there's a greater onus on us to justify German in our curriculum. And German can't be justified just because we've got German teachers doing it. You know, that's not good enough...'. Moreover, this statement indicates a tension between beliefs versus practicalities: the data indicates that the SL believes that decision-making be based on something deeper than merely organisational issues such as staffing and timetabling.

Unquestionably, this SL presented himself as 'a passionate advocate for language'. And this is reflected in his decision-making regarding curriculum provision. In this regard, the head of MFL in School B, Participant BB pointed to the need to assign core value status to MFLs, in order to raise the profile further of L2 studies, as illustrated below:

'I would wish for languages to be a core subject of such that I would wish for more curriculum time...'... If you want languages to be an important part of the curriculum, find talk about them in the same breath you talk about in Maths and Science'. **Data Extract 4.6**

Undoubtedly, the data suggests that MFL provision in School B is based on perceptions of value of learning assigned to languages, as well as responding to parental views regarding the education of their children, namely which languages to take to enhance their future prospects.

Thus far, the data suggests that MFL curriculum provision in all the three settings is in dissonance with the national picture, where the decline in uptake of language studies continues to increase despite various government measures intended to deter such downward trend (Board and Tinsley 2014; Lo Bianco, 2014; Long and Boulton, 2016; Staufenberg 2017; Thomson 2016a). The head teachers in this study appear to be supportive of L2 provision beyond KS3, irrespective of declining data and low uptake at A' Level. But more than the willingness and the believe in the value of MFLs for all, senior leaders need also to ensure high quality staffing to successfully enact the provision of MFLs, as they perceived this to be a determinant factor in student's choices and a more reputable view of language studies in their setting. This is clearly illustrated in the extract below, where the SL in school B felt it is a matter of high expectations. He stated:

‘... a significant contributory factor is that all of the modern foreign languages, teachers are strong and they are passionate. So, the facility to not want to do a language because you can't stand the teacher is removed because they're all highly regarded, much loved teachers. They make a great team. The modern foreign languages area is welcoming, is attractive, is indicating the applications of language.’ **Data Extract 4.7**

In school A, the headteacher also felt that it was a matter of quality in his staff body as well as having high expectations and wanting a high-quality learning experience for the pupils:

‘I think it's all to do with the quality of the experience. I don't think we've had, I think there's only one member of the department who was here, no there was two members of department who were here five years ago and so we've raised standards, pushed those standards, people who don't like it have left, people who we didn't need enough were asked to go and now that we've got a quality team’. **Data extract 4.8**

Arguably, the data suggests that such support is linked to the quality of the staff which then raises the question as to the extent of such support if quality could not be assured. Equally, the data demonstrate the challenges faced by the leadership, in that with weak teachers, the students will not engage or do well and this is detrimental to their learning and views about the subject.

In the current study, the findings outline above suggest that schools have flexibility over curriculum arrangements and the ways in which provision is organized and head teachers emerge as the key decision-makers. Moreover, the data has also demonstrated that personal beliefs and values play a far greater role in affecting senior leaders' decision-making, and in turn influence the level of MFL curriculum provision, beyond post 14 education.

4.2. RQ1.2: Is there congruence or dissonance between senior leaders' decision making and beliefs?

In this section, exploratory findings relating to practitioners' beliefs are presented. The beliefs held by school leaders will be considered in terms of their impact on the decision-making process.

Namely the discussion that ensues addresses how senior leader' beliefs are influenced by their own life experiences and the extent to which both the heads of MFL and the senior leaders feel empowered to enact their beliefs. The intention is to explore any potential links, which have not previously been researched.

#### *The Impact of Practitioner's Beliefs on institutional level decision-making*

In order to investigate the links between practitioners' beliefs and decision-making outcomes, the participants were asked if their decision-making in relation to MFL provision was consistent with their beliefs. It is clear from the data that all participants saw a correlation between beliefs and the value attributed to MFLs, although this is not necessarily reflected in their ability to make decisions. Namely the head teacher of school B, despite not having been 'brought up in a household where

culture was celebrated at all”, his life experiences were pivotal in developing a love for languages. In his words:

‘... some of my most magical life experiences have been because I've been able to talk to people and therefore they've opened their doors to me’. And therefore I've had you know, I've been guest of honour in a pueblo and sat next to the mayor on their paternal feast, sitting out under the stars in a village. And I'd never have had that experience. My children have seen me be able to navigate Barcelona because I can talk the language or when my daughter lost a contact lenses to go and get her contact lenses. So, I think to answer you the latter part of your question, I think that I'm certainly biased because of my own conviction and I can't help that. But my own conviction is what I can see it do for people...’ **Data Extract 4.9**

This same senior leader believed that MFLs are important and this had emerged from his personal beliefs that in turn had stemmed from his life experiences, as depicted below:

‘The seminal experiences as a young teenager going on a boat trip to Dieppe, in France and thinking how beautiful it was and drinking a fizzy mint drink ‘diabolo’ ... I remember my first, I can remember my first French lesson and it being introduced as though we had a feeling that we were now speaking a secret code. And I rather liked that...’ **Data Extract 4.10**

This data suggests a participant empowered to give voice to his beliefs. The SL in school A believed that his background had also played a prominent part in the manner in which he viewed MFLs. He asserted that:

‘I don’t think it is simply about valuing languages. It’s about my subject back ground [which] is Theology and Philosophy and I think if you’re sufficiently self-aware, you’re aware of one’s own biases and so on. But also, if you’ve got a particular perception of anthropological perspective on what it means to be fully human then that’s going to influence what one regards as the purpose of education. And I think languages are a manifestation of that breadth and proof of humanity and therefore we would want to continue that.’ **Data Extract 4.11.**

Regarding the head of school C, it appears that in this setting there is greater autonomy in relation to external measures, as this institution is a Studio School. Such schools were established to provide education targeted at specific employment sectors (Parrish, 2018). The NC is taught, and as MFLs are currently not compulsory, having been made optional in Key Stage 4 in 2004 (Department for Education and Skills, 2002), the decision as to whether or not to do so and which language(s) rests entirely with the individual school, and not all offer a language. Thus, in this particular school, the senior leader is able to steer the curriculum according to the beliefs held, but also in response to the type of school which is focused on vocational paths. This view is illustrated in the following extract:

‘...because of our specialism, that strengthens my belief in it ...So, I've kept both [ French & Spanish] going ... I make that decision... So, you know, I think that's definitely my school to support my belief in developed it more so, because of the type of school is.’ **Data Extract 4.12**

The head of MFL in the same school believed that her beliefs were influenced by childhood experiences and values of her family, as illustrated below:

‘My personal beliefs and in in thinking that, well, finding language is important and useful, and I I mean, I suppose I had the opportunity when I was a youngster to learn French at quite an early age. My mum spoke French and she was very enthusiastic about the language. So, I think it's my upbringing. And I do I do still find actually that those students that are more engaged with learning a foreign language have a deeper understanding of it. And I think that is, you know, that's from home as well as at school.’ **Data Extract 4.13**

The head of MFL in school A has also corroborated this idea that beliefs stem from life experiences. She asserted:

They come from, your, your experience, don't they? And whether you were told that you can and if opportunities are open to you, and I think that's where your beliefs come from is actually probably. You know, my parents always said to me, you better work hard and you do everything with a positive attitude, you pick whether you do it positively, whether you're washing up or whether you are preparing a presentation to the queen... I don't think our beliefs would stop us. No, I don't I don't think. I don't think they would’. **Data Extract 4.14**

The view of participant BB adds further strength to the impact of beliefs on MFLs as denoted by his response:

‘Languages have the ability to open doors to young people that might otherwise be closed ... and beyond that, it opens doors to them from the point of view, not of employment opportunities, but in terms of in terms of outlook, and languages, have the ability to make our young people think more about the world outside their town, their county, their country. And I think for them as individuals and for the wider benefit of our country and our society, that is entirely a good thing.’ **Data extract 4.15**

The data presented thus far is unequivocally pointing to beliefs emerging from life experiences and this is congruent with the research, where importantly teachers bring their ...’background, to their classes or their institutions ‘(Kaplan and Owings,2011:5). Consequently, it became pertinent to explore the link between beliefs and decision-making.

#### *Challenges of enacting beliefs*

In this regard, participant A stated that it was important to continue trying to implement what he believed in, as he indicated: ‘... it’s a case of trying to drive what one believes to be the right education for young people. So yes, absolutely - I couldn’t do the job as an automaton, as a robot’. *This participant* has also highlighted the influence of political, social and economic landscapes and how these affect beliefs and in turn any decision-making. He claimed that individuals continue to

review and reflect on their own values and as a result any decision making is affected by such processes:

‘It’s a direct correlated relationship isn’t it, because one’s always continuing to shape, inform, review, reflect upon one’s own value system and part of that is by doing that through your own socio-political cultural context and it’s a way of continuously refining and improving, one hopes, one’s own value system, so absolutely.’ **Data Extract 4.16**

However, the SL in School B emphasised that his ability to make decisions is limited by external constraints beyond his control, as per his response: ‘*Well, I guess I guess as much ... as I can...*’. He commented further: ‘as a teacher, I have an external accountability, so, you know, I can’t, I can’t say, well, this is how I think it should be. Off we go. Follow me!’. However, the relationship between beliefs and decision-making in MFLs is not straightforward. This participant alluded to accountability measures imposed by central government to be a determinant factor in decisions taken by school leaders. The findings from the interview with the headteacher of school A also suggest that despite his beliefs, his agency is also curbed (Johnson, 1996): ‘I’m in the job to get outstanding results in order to achieve a performance table.’ Conversely, and as suggested prior the Data Extract 4.12, the SL in school C is able to implement her beliefs. However, this is also due to the particularity of her vocational setting.

When questioned if his power of decision was somehow in dissonance with his beliefs, Participant BB felt his was not the case. He said: ‘I don’t think I would say that because I’m fortunate in that I work in a school where there is there is a general support for languages. Indeed, this participant felt that his convictions were reflected in the decision-making process. He felt empowered as per his response: ‘I’ve been at this school for a long time. I think that helps. I feel, I feel respected. I think they do listen... They know how passionate I am about what I do. And I think my views are taken into account’. Moreover, he added that despite some external and contextual factors, he believed that the leadership team respects his views, as shown below:

‘It doesn’t mean I get what I want, not by a long way, because, of course...I genuinely feel that my school leadership team, they do respect languages, they respect the team ... And we are supported in that. Of course, when it comes down to it, if you are a teacher and you’re looking at financial reality, of course it’s financially more viable to run an A- level class of twenty-five than it is one of six, but was of course it. So I have absolutely no grounds for complaint whatsoever... But I don’t feel that there is a reluctance at all from the leadership team to respect my views’. **Data Extract 4.17**

The same participant claimed that such level of support is due to the collegiate ethos of the leadership which is supportive of their staff: a ‘... the school’s leadership has a general policy of consulting anyway that they do consult. And yes, I definitely feel that I am listened to’. The data

suggests that in school B, the SL is supportive of the MFL department. What is also very clear is that the beliefs held by the SL are also acting as enablers to L2 provision. Namely the reference by the head of MFL of a 'teacher' who speaks an L2, in other words, the head teacher. The extract below

'I'm not I don't think I would say that because I'm fortunate in that I work in a school where there is there is a general support for languages. There is a general belief in languages. I work for a teacher who speaks languages himself. That maybe helps. And I think there is there is that wider understanding and support for what we do. And therefore, I don't feel every day like I'm limited in my ability to open students' eyes. I feel there is, there are there are, of course, limitations. There are societal limitations. There are curriculum limitations.... And of course, I don't have the ability to decide myself that languages should form a bigger part of our curriculum. I don't have the ability to go off into our society and transform the national view of languages... But at the same time, I don't feel powerless. I don't feel like I'm doing all I can and it's up to other people. I do feel that on a daily basis I have the ability and sometimes I exploit it and sometimes I've got work to do to make a difference to students I teach. And that's why I do this job'. **Data Extract 4.18**

illustrates this view:

Curiously, when asked to comment on the relationship between beliefs and power of decision, the response from AA is very different, as it can be seen below:

When questioned, the heads of department responses pointed to the fact that their ability to enact their beliefs are constrained by decisions taken by the senior leader. Moreover, it was felt that the school environment and its culture is able to steer the formation of the pedagogical beliefs and practices of both teachers and senior leaders (Johnson, 1996; Borg, 2003; Lee, 2008), inevitably affecting their decision-making. Participant AA stated that: 'I would always tend to listen to those around me and listen to the institution that I'm on in. So, no, I don't think so. And so, I don't think my personal experience stops me or hinders or has a ceiling'. The data here also suggests that the impact of life experiences on beliefs can be eroded in favor of socially constructed and contextually

'... you adapt to your situation and the needs of your, your cohort and the environment around you. So now I think I'm very capable of adapting and I would always be enthusiastic about selling, opening up your mind, and so I don't believe that my personal beliefs, which I would always tend to listen to those around me and listen to the institution that I'm on in. So, no, I don't think so.'

**Data Extract 4.19**

situated beliefs (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2011; Mercer, 2011).

However, participant CC stated that such beliefs are not exactly reflected in any final decision-making, as her views appear not to be taken into consideration: She stated: '...I don't have the final say, though. I don't you know, I'm not in charge ... You know, I just have to go with what decisions are made by the school'. And this is in dissonance with the literature where the achievement of

agency is informed by the role of beliefs, past experience, including personal and professional biographies (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

#### *The Impact of Students' Beliefs*

In the course of the interview, I also asked the participants if they felt that the student's beliefs on the value of MFLs weighs heavily when they are faced with choices at GCSE level. Specifically, I asked what were the primary reasons for students to take up or not an L2. For the SL in school C it was a matter of 'confidence on their primary experience' and 'their background experience of what you know, before they choose.' Conversely, participant CC put the choices of students down to likes and dislikes associated with difficulties. It was stated that:

'in general, it will be because, um...those that don't want to do the language, because they don't like them or they find them difficult and those that do want to do with language, some of them, because they truly have an ability in the language and they enjoy the subject, one or two of them, because they don't know what else to choose' (Laughter). No. I don't know, really, I can't say that I've heard any of the students I teach talking about any hopes or aspirations to do with languages!' **Data Extract 4.20**

Therefore, it could be argued that the students' views on MFL take up in school C, is also informed by their beliefs regarding the value of MFLs. The head of MFL in school B corroborated this view stating that 'they [the students] find it a bit too hard... and thirdly, there's a group of students who do not see the value, who you absolutely do not see the point in learning French, everyone who speaks English. I don't I don't like that'. In addition, the same participant felt the organization of provision is also a determinant factor when choosing to take an L2, beyond post-14 education, as per his statement: '.... I think for some of them it is I'd like to do it. I would be happy to do it. But there's not enough choices...'. This same question was put to participant BB and his response, depicted below, was trifold: Not enough choice in the curriculum, too difficult for some and finally some do not see the point of it, as everybody speaks English.

' I think probably three main things. I think for some of them it is I'd like to do it. I would be happy to do it. But there's not enough choices... but they only have two or three options and they want to do these other the things on the curriculum as one reason. I think a second reason is they find it a bit too hard. And I think, thirdly, there's a group of students who do not see the value, who absolutely do not see the point in learning French, everyone who speaks English'. **Data Extract 4.21**

The response to this line of questioning by the head teacher in school A revolved around the students' background as a determinant factor in affecting student perception of MFLs and potential take up. He stated that: 'I think it's to do with the cultural background of the children and so many of our children whose parents don't go to university, many of our children will be the first generation in

their family to go to university and therefore parents may have a fairly skewed view as to the value of other languages' For the head of MFL in School A what might impact upon student's beliefs and influence their choices, also relates to their background, their prior experience and the influence of their parents. This participant commented:

'We do struggle with when the students come in to secondary school, they don't always see why they're doing it. I think it's a lot to do with home life sometimes, isn't it, and experience and do they are taken? I mean, it's not happening at the moment, obviously, but school trips, we do a day trip to Cherbourg, which is only kind of 40 pounds. And we've taken students on that day trip to Cherbourg. didn't even know there was a ferry down the road and didn't even know and never left the country. So that has a bearing, I think... occasionally you do get parents who are very negative and say, you know, Billy finds it really difficult, I hate that. I don't see why doing it, blablabla! And I think that sometimes has a bearing.' **Data Extract 4.22**

When considered as a whole, the findings suggest that students' beliefs regarding MFLs are linked with their background, their prior experience of language learning in the primary education, a lack of choice in terms of general curriculum provision beyond post-14 education, as well as the views of their parents relating to issues of low value attributed to second language studies.

### *Conclusion*

The link between staff beliefs and their decision-making suggests that any move to change language provision at school level would not be hindered by the values or mindset of the staff. Indeed, all participants, particularly the head teachers were supportive of MFL provision. Moreover, the data in this study suggests that despite external constraints, head teachers' institutional level decision-making is influence by their beliefs (see chapter 2.3.3), with a positive outcome for L2 provision in post-14 education. However, the same cannot be said of the relationship between beliefs and decision-making in relation to the heads of MFL. With the exception of school B, the findings suggest an element of tension between beliefs and the agency to enact those same beliefs (see chapter 2.2.2) due to the difficulty imposed by harsh grading at GCSE levels, which constricts even further the provision of MFL (Tinsley and Board, 2017a). As a consequence, the heads of MFL can be constrained, and in some cases, completely limited in enacting their own beliefs: Participant AA alluded to a complete adherence to the school's decision-making, outside her beliefs and participant CC felt dominated by the leadership. Regarding Participant BB, where the senior leader is particularly biased towards MFL, there was a clear sense that the views were heard and it was recognised that the SL listened to the views of the MFL department, where possible. The data has shown that the beliefs of the teachers are primarily influenced by their personal experiences (family, childhood, travel etc), and this is consistent with the literature that supports the notion that practitioners are influenced by their beliefs, which in turn are closely linked to their values, their views of the world



and to their understanding of their place within it (Pajares, 1992). Consequently, the understanding of teachers' beliefs leads to the understanding of their actions and impacts on their decision-making processes in schools (Barcelos, 2013; Borg, 2003; Johnson, 1999; Pajares, 1992; Woods, 1996).

Importantly, the data in this study indicates that the power to determine who learns languages, and to what level, still pertains to senior leaders and their unique interpretation and adoption in their educational setting (Johnson & Johnson, 2015; Chapter 2.3). Thus, it could be argued that any move to enhance MFL provision can be hindered by head teachers' beliefs and values, as the findings have established a clear link between beliefs and second language provision in post-14 education.

However, and despite personal convictions, senior leaders have also to contend with performance measures imposed by central government. Hence, this became the focus for discussion under the next RQ2 and its sub questions.

## 4.2 RQ2: To critically examine the way in which policy tools and frameworks influence the decisions senior leaders make about second language provision in their schools.

4.2.1 RQ 2.1 What is the extent to which the accountability measures imposed by central government affect decision-making regarding MFL provision in post-14 Education?

### *The impact of the Ebacc and Progress 8 measures*

Existing research has established that schools in England have the freedom to make both curriculum and syllabus decisions. Importantly, such autonomy (Earley, 2013; Glatter, 2012) comes at a price. Schools remain accountable to central government. One of such measures is the Ebacc. In this regard, the participants were asked their view regarding the government's ambition of 75% of year 10 pupils in state-funded mainstream schools should be starting to study EBacc GCSE courses nationally by 2022 (taking their exams in 2024), rising to 90% by 2025 (taking their exams in 2027).

Both the SL and the head of MFL in school A were quite adamant that the government's ambition is unrealistic, as put by participant A:

'No, it is utterly unrealistic ... There are some schools that have been graded as outstanding who like our selves have got between 40 and 50% doing EBacc so no its a nonsense, a nudge in a particular direction, it is a strategic nudge rather than a realistic aspiration'. His head of MFL simply said: 'I just don't think that. I don't think they can do'. **Data Extract 4.23**

Moreover, this participant added that the government target wasn't achievable and pointed to the difficulty of the exams with a level of vocabulary to which the students could not respond due to poor literacy levels, as well as a lack of life experience to enable them to access the papers. Her view is illustrated below:

'I don't think so... It's the reading and the listening exams, particularly the reading exam. It's when you look at the language that's being used. And actually, they rely heavily on cognates, like advanced cognates. And so, students with a better use of English, better levels of literacy are the ones who succeed now ... A lot of the questions kind of rely on them having, you know, experience of going on a plane every year or, you know, I can't think of any other examples of my head .... and actually, quite a lot of the kids in our school are not at the same level of literacy'

**Data Extract 4.24**

This same participant AA has also suggested that such poor literacy levels not only hinders students' achievement but crucially 'the exam is penalising them[students] for their background'. In school A there is a high percentage of PP, 24-25% and that is linked to low participating rates on MFL studies beyond 14 (see chapter 2.1; Tinsley and Board, 2016;). This is congruent with the literature that indicates a correlation between the impact of the EBacc measure and low take up of MFLs in deprived contexts ( Lanvers, 2016; Swarbrick, 2011). Consequently, only some students in school A are 'strongly' advised to take up an L2, as stated by the same participant: 'So, basically those students who we feel are capable... will be pretty much told that they are doing a language that will be on their option form.' The implication of such finding gives credence to the notion that the EBacc has led to an elitist approach of the curriculum (Coleman, 2009), where second language studies become the preserve of social and intellectual elite [ibid].

In school C the percentage of Pupil Premium is low. Nevertheless, the head's position, participant C, regarding the government ambition for 90% of pupils taking the EBacc by 2025 is also negative: '... 95% actually completing it, I don't think that's possible.' It must be acknowledged that School C is not accountable in relation to the EBacc, due to its status as a Studio School. The head of MFL view this same measure in a negative light, as she recalled her prior experience in a different state school. She stated: '... I've had a really poor experience of the EBacc'. She added:

'Going back, it's probably 8 to 10 years ago now when it was first becoming a thing, the school I was working at the time were putting students in year eight and nine to do GCSE. If they were unsuccessful at the end of year nine and at GCSE, then they had to repeat the whole course again in years 10 and 11, all to achieve the EBacc qualification. It was horrendous. It was absolutely horrendous'. **Data Extract 4.25**

The SL in school B, despite seeing that the Ebacc could provide a degree of 'academic *grit*', nevertheless he perceived it with a negative stance as he added: 'No, and beyond that, I don't think it's even desirable'. Indeed, in his view, this measure led to a narrowing of the curriculum due to greater onus on core subjects and performance. He stated:

‘No, I really don't. I'm not convinced, you know, taking the conversation a bit more broadly... Firstly, with my own children, I've seen what happens when the school is so concerned with performance measures that it concentrates on those who are going to make a difference to its statistics and abandons those who've already yielded the product. So, where we live, we have a middle school system. I saw my children or the all of the arts and all of those other subjects went by the by. What the school desperately wants to get is English and Maths up. So that that's just wrong is plain wrong’. **Data Extract 4.26**

These findings from the participants suggest that the Ebacc measure concentrates on those who are going to make a difference to the statistics, with a detrimental effect to the others. Interestingly, the head of MFL, participant B viewed the Ebacc in a positive manner, despite stating that it can lead to a hierarchy of subjects. This is depicted below:

‘The way I view the back is the Ebacc is an attempt to go back to that core academic curriculum with options on top of it, because there is a belief that in changing away from that, in 2004, we lost students, moved away from languages in particular and into other things that perhaps now some people are viewing as perhaps being not as high value to them.’ there is the wider conversation about the Ebacc, which is because it effectively categorizes subjects by kind of poor English, Maths, Science, Ebacc and other...You do create a hierarchy for better or worse, you create a hierarchy of subjects. And that's an issue because you're then saying things are more important than others and maybe that's a problem’. **Data Extract 4.27**

Having recognized that the Ebacc may create a hierarchy of subjects, this participant believed that the issue is the emphasis on core subjects, with a consequent reduction of curriculum time to all the other subjects, including MFLs. He stated:

‘I'm very pleased the government has put in some concrete targets, because if you don't do that, it just won't happen. We've had 20 years of languages being in the position that it's in. We've had 20 years of people saying, yes, we think it is important to do a language. And actually, the Ebacc is the first attempt to do something proper about it, to actually change things. I know it's a bit of a bad name, but the problem with Ebacc is not Ebacc itself, because it's not the Ebacc that narrows the curriculum. It's the emphasis on English, Maths and Science, the number of hours given to those subjects that narrows the curriculum’. **Data Extract 4.28**

The position of this head of MFL differs from the other participants. Despite acknowledging a narrowing of the curriculum, at the same time, by having MFLs as part of the Ebacc could lead to raising the profile of language studies. This is clearly stated by the participant: ‘What I've been saying through this conversation is that I think it's necessary to elevate the status of languages... to make it part of the core curriculum where we say these are the skills that young people need’.

In addition to the Ebacc, participants were asked to comment on ‘Progress 8’ measure (Department for Education, 2014c) imposed by central government. This measure does not have to include a language, but has been developed as a performance measure together with the Ebacc (in which a

language is compulsory). The SL from school A viewed this measure as elitist, ‘morally abysmal... a third of children end up with grade U’s is disenfranchising the most disadvantaged which is immoral’. Participant AA pointed to the difficulty of the exams and the pressure on students to perform. A matter of statistics as it is shown below:

‘There is a need for them [SLT] to prove that the exams are hard... And actually, they're just trying to catch them [students] out all the time... But I think it's because, you know, they [SLT] need to prove that that the grade nine is an amazing, you know, grade to achieve...’ **Data Extract 4.29**

The nature of the assessment in L2 studies points to exam-oriented success, with well documented severe grading (Tinsley and Board, 2017a) Specifically, the difficulty posed by GCSE exams in MFLs is a determinant factor when deciding provision as it has a huge impact on student levels of motivation and consequent take up. Studies on L2 motivation in the UK show low levels of motivation (Coleman, Galaczi & Astruc, 2007; Lanvers, 2017a; Williams, Burden & Lanvers, 2002). This is present in this study as illustrated by participant AA: ‘... we tell them it is going to be hard work... there’s that feeling of taking lambs to the slaughter.

Participant BB has also felt that the difficulty of the exams and in particular the severe grading poses a hindrance to take up. When questioned on such issues, he replied by saying: ‘*Well, yes. And we know there's been research that has shown that the language is abraded, a whole grade harsher... So, yes, absolutely.*’ The head of MFL of school C also agreed with the responses of the other participants and when asked if the documented difficulty of the MFL exams was in any way considered by the senior leadership when deciding on provision, she vehemently said: ‘No (strong laughter) ...’. For the senior leader of the same school, it was also about the needs of the individual students, despite concurring with the overall idea of difficulty of exams and severe grading. This is illustrated in the extract below:

‘From the trust point of view, that's why they stopped offering French. They found the Spanish was an easier GCSE. So that that was definitely from a trust point of view. They are clearly hard. And that's why the kids aren't going for it, because it's not that they don't necessarily like the language, but the minute they see exam material. You know, they just can't access it properly, but [it] is about the students, the individual student. Yeah, without a doubt.’ **Data Extract 4.30**

The data is conclusive and consistent with the findings reported both by research and nationally. The perception of disproportionate difficulty of MFL GCSEs being harder than other subjects has also been acknowledged in the annual report provided by the DfE (2019), as well as being discussed in Ofsted’s 2021 curriculum review [ibid]. Davies *et al.*, (2014) have shown that students’ perceptions of a subject are fundamental in the GCSE choices they make. And this has led to a decline in numbers

of students taking language GCSEs, as discussed in chapter 2. Consequently, head teachers become disincentivised to enter students for GCSE MFL (Education Datalab 2015; Harris and Burn 2011; Lanvers, 2017b). In an attempt to abate this situation, MFLs were made optional subjects at KS4 (see Chapter 2). This has also led to placing a significant onus on heads of MFL in an attempt to increase motivation of students regarding L2 beyond KS3. Participant AA claimed that they have ‘...to work quite hard with quite a lot of the students to prove to them that they can do it. And, it's worth it ... They don't have that natural I don't know, lust and love and motivation’. For school C the students’ choice to take up an L2 is informed by prior experience at primary level. Therefore, if the experience was negative, that ultimately would determine the student’s choice and his perception of the subject. This SL added:

‘...because, um...those that don't want to do the language, because they don't like them or they find them difficult and those that do want to do with language, some of them, because they truly have an ability in the language and they enjoy the subject, one or two of them, because they don't know what else to choose (Laughter)...’ **Data Extract 4.31**

It must be acknowledged that the SL in school C is not constrained by centrally imposed accountability measures and this may influence her stance towards such measures, as illustrated below:

‘Well, again, we're not measured as a studio school, but we do actually measure. So, all our students, they are very competitive...We've always published that to year 11s on a board and we always drive it and we've raised us massively. I think it is a good thing. I think it works a lot better. So, yeah, but you can fill those eight buckets without a language and that's the difference.’ **Data Extract 4.32**

The SL in this school is against the Ebacc, as indicated by the data. However, she offered a positive stance towards Progress 8. Arguably it could be said that if the school had to comply, potentially the head’s position could have been different. Indeed, the head of MFL in the same school, pointed to a constant struggle against targets: she commented:

‘Yeah, I don't know, it's I mean, again, going back to target grades because it's based on targets and these targets are created from tests that aren't necessarily, well, they're not specific to foreign linguistic abilities. So, again, I'm not sure if we can see these things as being highly accurate for, for the cause of MFL. But I don't know. I always find that I'm battling against targets because the teachers know their students best. They know the students’ capabilities. But then we're being told, well, no, but your students target is this this is what they should be achieving. And, um, you know, for some of them, it will be achievable, but others, it won't be achievable.’ **Data Extract 4.33**

In school B, participant BB perceived Progress 8 as ‘a double- edged sword’. Firstly, and like in the Ebacc, he felt that this measure helps in raising the profile of MFL, because ‘part of progress 8 is to

insist on students doing three of the wider subjects beyond English and Maths'. Simultaneously, he felt that this measure led to a 'reduction on curriculum choices', as illustrated below:

' Because it [Progress 8] is focused on eight subjects, they actually had the impact on schools of narrowing the curriculum'. The end result has been a reduction on curriculum choices in order to 'increase the amount of time given to English, Maths and Science because of their heavy weights in the Ebaac.' **Data Extract 4.34**

His views are in line with the literature in that it is claimed that by diminishing student's choices and establishing a hierarchy of subjects, there is a negative consequence for L2 entries (Wiggins, 2016 ). The data presented gives credence to the notion that the government's ambition for 90% of pupils to study the Ebacc by 2025 is not achievable. Moreover, it shows that the implementation of the Progress 8 measure has narrowed the curriculum (Wiggins, 2016). In addition, the findings are in line with prevalent ideas and theories which claim that in particular Progress 8 has led to lower-attaining students being disappplied from MFL and humanities subjects in order to maximise their potential results in subjects deemed easier (Education Datalab, 2015). This corroborates the views in the literature that languages are unpopular and difficult (Blenkinsop *et al.*, and their learning not deemed essential for some pupils (Swarbrick, 2011). Nevertheless, the introduction of the EBacc and development of Progress 8, has indeed led to an increase in uptake of MFLs (Tinsley, and Dolezal, 2018). But this is predominantly attributable to students of above-average attainment (See Chapter 2.1). As result, and as suggested by the data in this study there is evidence that schools steer students towards or away from subjects based on their ability or the predicted outcome for that student (Harris & Haydn, 2012). Crucially, the findings suggest that the EBacc and Progress 8 measures are misaligned with the more fundamental beliefs and philosophies about inclusive practices and opportunities for all. By way of 'streaming' students (Gaskell, 1970), in areas of lower socioeconomic backgrounds students encounters with foreign languages is scarcer (Coffey,2018; Lanvers,2017a). Thus, it could be argued that such measures act as social markers (Tinsley & Board, 2016). In this regard, senior leaders are placed in a position where they need to consider the extent to which operational contexts affect their decision-making regarding MFL studies in their schools. In particular, the nature of the assessment in L2 studies which points to exam-oriented success, with well documented 'harsh grading'

4.2.2 RQ2.2 What is the extent to which operational context affect decision-making regarding MFL studies in your school?

### *The impact of assessment on L2s take up*

The link between accountability measures and student performance combined with the one-size fits all approach to assessment in languages has emerged with a negative impact beyond KS4.

In school B, and as pointed out earlier, the difficulty of the exams, can have a negative impact on student take up. Participant BB asserted that: 'Yeah! And I'm sure this affects their experience. 'Well, yes! So, at KS4, yes. And we know there's been research that has shown that the language is abraded, a whole grade harsher than the job situation. So, yes, absolutely'. The participant also acknowledged the impact that the grading system has on uptake beyond KS4. He added:

'At A level it's catastrophic because at A level, language is by reputation really hard and they are much harder than other subjects. I know that, as I teach other subjects, at KS5 as well. And the simple fact is reputation that becomes a problem, because students are concerned that they won't get their three As to do a language or they won't get whatever it is they need to do a language.' It is the reality of the situation'. **Data Extract 4.35**

For the SL of this same school, participant B, the difficulty of the exams has to be considered when making decisions. However, he felt that it was important to 'remove' or 'reduce' as much as possible, any negative outcomes:

'I've got to try an approach that in a way removes as far as possible or reduces as far as possible the negative fallout...So an example of that, and would be that we don't tell children their target grade. And we don't give them that target grade because what is the point of being told age 11 or 12, you never amount to more than a three [Grade values]. So, we find ways of managing it that limits the damage or potential'. **Data Extract 4.36**

The headteacher in school C, when asked how the difficulty of the exams impacted upon her decision-making, replied that this was reflected in the decision made by the Trust to withdraw French and offer Spanish instead. She stated:

'From the trust point of view, that's why they stopped offering French. They found the Spanish was an easier GCSE. So that that was definitely from a trust point of view. They are clearly hard. And that's why the kids aren't going for it...It is about the individual student. Yeah, without a doubt!' **Data Extract 4.37**

Nevertheless, French continues to be on the curriculum, as the students travel every year to France 'to get their work experience completed', as stated by participant C. Hence, more than autonomy, this participant's agency is limited in response to the needs of her specific setting. And this is in line with the literature that claims a limiting of school leaders' agency due to contextual local factors (Biesta & Teddlar, 2007). The head of MFL in the same school, participant CC felt strongly about the

lack of continuity, as in the setting in question, students only join in Y9, hence teachers have no prior knowledge of the students' linguistic abilities in any other language:

'...The school doesn't know your [the students'] particular strengths and weaknesses, and you're [they are] almost starting all over again in year 9, which is really, quite a crucial year for bridging KS3 over to KS4. So, I think just that whole set up, that school system set up, I, I don't think helps! And I've got to the point this year where I'm actually saying, look, you know, we can't be offering these options just to anybody. Students have got to have been studying the language that they want to study at GCSE for at least the last two years.' **Data Extract 4.38**

The data indicates that the difficulty posed by the exams can affect head teachers' decision-making regarding provision of MFLs beyond KS3. Namely the options made available to students in terms of L2 studies are linked with exam success rates. This was particularly pertinent in both school A and C. Equally, the quality of the staff body is taken into consideration, as well as their expertise, in order to be able to deliver the curriculum effectively. The data also suggests that specific local factors can also affect the decisions taken by school leaders. This again was particularly pertinent in school C due to its status as a vocational school with specific links to France. The findings in school B seem to suggest that the reputation of language studies for being a difficult subject is also an issue to contend with. Moreover, the options in terms of language choices available for students beyond KS3 might be under review as other schools in the area are offering Spanish as opposed to German, in response to the demands of the parental body and the students. It is clear from the data collected that operational contexts affect schools' decision-making, namely the perceptions held by other stakeholders appear to play a part in the decision-making process. And this has led to the third research question and sub question that discuss the impact of perceptions held by the wider school community might have on schools' decision-making in relation to MFL studies.

## 4.2. RQ 3: To critically explore the extent to which the views of the wider school community about second language learning impacts on institutional- level decision making.

### 4.2.1 RQ 3.1 To what extent do the views of other stakeholders' influence heavily on senior leaders' decision- making?

#### *Parental views*

The data collected during the interviews indicates that schools decision-making in relation to MFLs is also affected by the perceptions of the wider school community. In this regard, the participants were asked whether the views of the parent body in the three settings has any impact on their decision-making. The SL in school A when asked gave an example of responding to parental views in a



*'previous headship'*. He added that this had been possible because 'They had the expertise in the staff and I knew they were quality teachers, thus we did offer language like Mandarin and various other languages'. However, he stated that any changes to provision can only occur providing the school has the *'expertise'* and *'quality'* in the staff body with the respective department being able to realistically meet the new demands. Moreover, he added that it is essential to have a good rapport with parents so that the latter can see how the school values the individual student and the choices

if the relationship with the parents is right and they see that we are genuinely invested in trying to do the right thing for their children that the side issues of the politics around Brexit, the unconscious bias that goes on in society, the bigotry and all the rest of it, also becomes almost as I say a side issue to the issue of the child's actual choice of subjects'. **Data Extract 4.39**

s/he might make. As a result, any other issues become secondary. This is illustrated as follows:

Regarding the views of the students, participant A of the same school believes that the students are being listened to and this is reflected during the option process, although he stated that this is based on an informed conversation, as per the extract below:

'one of the benefits of being a large school is that we can offer quite a broad curriculum and so if students wanted to take Spanish and French ...we've got the means for them to do that'. In his view, in a school with 325 students in a year 9, 'the fact the number of requests to change options was single digits out of 300 means that the provision was right for them and students felt that they have a say in the progression route that they took.' **Data Extract 4.40**

In relation to School C, the data seems to point to a senior leader that also listens to the stakeholders in order to inform the decision-making process:

'Yeah, when they are in year 11, I will... for me as the head is about what the students need. So, you may have a really, really intelligent young student, but because of what's going on at home, they can't cope with the eight or nine GCSE. So, you do what's right for them'. **Data Extract 4.41**

Regarding parental views, these seem to be taken into consideration, unless the school feels it is not appropriate. The same SL stated that: 'Yeah, yeah. Everything's going to come from the parents and in discussion. And if we don't think is right, then we don't allow it. But we will look at the whole picture. So outside pressures, et cetera'. Nevertheless, this SL added that ultimately it is the specialism of the school that takes priority in terms of provision. She commented: 'I'm sure they would if parents had things to say. I mean, it would depend, again, how many parents. But as I've said before, because of the certain specialism at high school, it's the specialism that takes priority.

And that is the most important thing to the parents and the students. Arguably, it could be said that the parental body only has a partial influence on the decision-making process.

In school B the views of both the parental body and the students appears to be taken into consideration, but within the constraints imposed by central government. The SL, participant B when asked on this issue responded vehemently, 'Yes'. However, he also alluded to constraints that may limit his agency in response to the views of both students and parents. Specifically, he added that: 'I have an external accountability, so, you know, I can't I can't say, well, this is how I think it should be. Off we go'. The findings reveal that the views of other stakeholders appear to be taken into consideration by senior leaders. The data has revealed that senior leaders' decision-making is affected by the views of the parental body which in turn, cannot escape the influence of the global community. Therefore, the ensuing sub question was put to the participants:

#### 4.2.2 RQ 3.2 What is the impact of political, historical and social landscapes on institutional-level decision making?

In this respect, two overarching themes arose from the interview data: the perceived dominance of the English language, specifically the link between levels of motivation and this rationale and the impact of the UK socio-political climate, in particular the discourses on Brexit and the extent to which it could offer an opportunity or a problem for language learning in the UK.

##### *The Perceived Dominance of the English Language*

In response to the link between the perceived dominance of the English language and low level of motivation, in school A, the head teacher did not see the choices students make in MFLs as a direct consequence. Rather he pointed to a wide range of other subjects on offer, 'a varied diet', the high quality of his staff body in other subjects, as well as languages being 'possibly the victims of having so much competition [in other subjects] in the school' as the reason to a lower take up in relation to other subject areas. This was not case with his head of languages, participant AA that saw a direct link between this rationale and low take up, as illustrated in the excerpt below:

'... Absolutely. It's kind of, there's a there's two things, isn't there? There's I think there's a massive lack of confidence as well in the nation. And we don't need to. Therefore, there's a perception that we don't need to. Therefore, you know, you don't bother, type thing, things. Yeah, I do think that has an impact'. **Data Extract 4.42**

This view is also shared by the SL in school C, who perceived the lack of motivation in language studies, linked with 'the English is enough' mantra, which is still quite visible in schools. In his own words: 'there really is a stigma there that while I'm never going to need it, so why study it? Everyone else speaks English'.

Similarly, participant CC referred to a lack of ‘appreciation of learning a foreign language and having the foresight to see how important it can be, I think those people are in the minority’. Her perception was that the ‘majority would be in the camp of, well, you know, why do we actually need to learn a foreign language?’. The response of the head teacher of school B in relation to the same question points to a degree of arrogance and superiority held by some. He added:

‘Yeah, yeah, yeah... And yet they won't think twice when they're forming an English colony on the Costa Brava and it won't cross their mind when they're going for their kebab and their curry and their pizza and their take their Chinese takeaway that perhaps actually there is something to be gained by engaging with cultures that are other than ours. And there is an arrogance.’ **Data Extract 4.43**

This view from participant B advocates that student motivation is indeed affected by these perceptions. This gives credence to the literature, where not only student motivation in post-14 education is negatively affected, but also feeds a notion of superiority and the idea that other languages are unnecessary (Anderson (2000)).

The perspective of the head of MFL from school B also concurs with the commonly held beliefs that English is the lingua franca and therefore there is less of a need to learn a L2, as reflected in the extract below:

‘Absolutely... I think a large part, it's true and honest English is the world language. And I do think that whereas it is almost essential for a young person sitting in a classroom in France or Belgium or Spain or Italy or wherever, almost essential for them to learn English because it is main global language, it is less important for us native English speakers to speak international languages. I get that and I'm happy to accept that’. **Data Extract 4.44**

Nevertheless, he saw the learning of MFLs being rooted in a more utilitarian perspective, e.g. the usefulness in terms of economy rather than recognising the more intrinsic value. He stated:

‘But I think if we if we stop there, if we just say most of the people are English, therefore we don't need foreign languages, we miss the whole point. And of course, we know this and there's House of Lords data that shows how much money we lose through our economy each year because of a lack of languages, because we then miss the whole point that actually as native English speakers, we have massive advantage internationally as long as we can also speak other people's languages.’ **Data Extract 4.45**

The SL in school A highlighted that the perceived low value of MFLs is linked to the students' 'cultural background', whose parents have not gained access to higher education and consequently '... may have a fairly skewed view as to the value of other languages'. This view is also corroborated by the SL in school C, as seen below:

'Yeah, I think you're looking at the families and the and the families in the area that go to school, you know... But I think there really is a stigma there that while I'm never going to need it, so why study it? Everyone else speaks English'... **Data extract 4.46**

These findings are in alignment with the literature in claiming that students fail to see the values of language learning beyond practical needs (e.g. jobs or travelling), hence, they find themselves in a monolingual mind-set or habitus (Lanvers, Doughty, and Thompson, 2018; section 2.2 & 2.4). Equally, such findings concur with perceptions held and documented nationally regarding the global spread of English and its impact on perceptions of value of L2 studies, (section 2.4) that can lead to a lack of motivation within society arising from the acknowledgement of the international status of English and its hegemonic and global dominance (Guo and Becket, 2007; Lukes, 2005; Phillipson, 2003; Wodack, 2009). Consequently, it could be argued that political, historical and social landscapes, outside the school gate (Coleman, 2009) can affect individual's perceptions and in turn, might influence the decision-making process.

#### *The Impact of Brexit*

Having established that it is not possible to isolate individual views from contextual landscapes, it became necessary to understand the impact of Brexit on individual's perceptions, and how these might influence schools' decision-making. In this regard I asked the participants their views on Brexit and whether the latter presents a challenge or an opportunity for L2 studies, particularly in post-14 education. In response to my questioning, the head of school A believed that Brexit had impacted negatively on individuals' perceptions, as denoted by his response: 'Absolutely'. Furthermore, he added:

'...No, Brexit is a car crash for the economy and for the future of this country, and therefore those people who have thought they were making an informed decision I think will come to regret it and therefore the breadth of curriculum which we want children to experience, including languages and their opportunities to work, to have opportunities to work globally, that I think some of those perceptions that have been highlighted in the Brexit debate have been I think uninformed and as an education provider that I think we've got a responsibility – my own view is that we've got a responsibility to educate our society and part of the way that we do that is through our contact with the parents. So, we do it indirectly, in order to give them a more informed view of the value of what can be offered for their children'. **Data Extract 4.47**

For the head of Languages in the same school, participant AA, the impact of Brexit is translated in a potential lack of opportunities for students in the future, as indicated below:

‘Well, it depends on what happens to programs like Erasmus, doesn’t it? I mean, I can’t see that my children are going to have the same opportunities that I had to study abroad. And so, it all depends on the knock-on effect of that, really, you know’. She commented further: ‘I can’t see how it’s going to be easier. When I was a student, I could go and work in a bar. I could work in Luxembourg without really that much hassle and without really thinking about it. Whereas there is going to be harder...’ I mean, I think I think that the whole the whole idea of breaking away is just not conducive to (Laugh) opening up minds and hearts...’. **Data Extract 4.48**

These negative views are also corroborated by the SL in school B, who saw the potential impact of Brexit as ‘a disaster’. He added that the rhetoric in the media is rather negative and as such leaves little space for ‘building bridges with Europe’, and that might be the beginning of an ‘triumphalist isolationism’. The extract below illustrates his view:

‘... It isn’t featuring you know, we’re not talking about Brexit as such unless it’s too early. But if you listen at the moment and you listen to the way in which Europe is being discussed in our media in these early days, post Brexit, the Europeans can’t get their act together with regards to vaccination. The Europeans are wanting our vaccination. The Europeans are stopping AstraZeneca nation from coming to us so that at the moment there is no sense out there that we need to be building bridges and finding new ways in. I think we’re at the beginning if we’re not careful of an ever a triumphalist isolationism.’ **Data Extract 4.49**

Furthermore, this SL alluded to a subconscious process, as he put it: ‘*so much goes in subliminally that it’d be really hard to isolate particular, but I’m sure it’s in the mix.*’ In this way, he conveyed the idea that it is difficult not to be affected by any landscape and Brexit is no exception. The head of MFL, participant BB, in the same setting reinforced this view as illustrated below:

‘I think the simple answer to your question, in my opinion, is yes. And actually, more than that, of course, I think all of us are affected by the wider environment in which we grow up, in which we live, the people around the media landscape, the political landscape, of course, and perhaps in the UK, certainly as much as anywhere else. And I mean that because we are an island with a very long history, because we have much to be proud of in our history, because we, because we have much to be sorry for our history as well. And I think all those things define us, as a people.’ **Data Extract 4.50**

In addition, this head of MFL concurred with the SL in the extent to which the relationship with Europe might be hindered, both emotionally and pragmatically. He stated:

‘if it is true that Brexit has just made relationships with other European countries, our closest partners, who will remain our closest partners because geography matters in trade, if it is just made that a bit more difficult, and it's made it a bit more difficult economically, it's a bit more difficult in terms of bureaucracy, but also has made it more difficult emotionally...’ **Data Extract 4.51**

Crucially he stated that in his school setting, the conversation on Brexit has led to students questioning the relevance of learning an L2 and this is congruent with the literature where learning an L2 is seen as unnecessary (Bartram, 2005). In his own words:

‘Within the context of our school, it certainly has made students ask the question more about the relevance it hasn't done. That's my own view in terms of for us as a country and for our young people is I think [that's what] Brexit has done.’ **Data Extract 4.52**

In school C, the impact of Brexit on the curriculum was devastating as pointed out by the SL. Specifically, it has led to a loss of a major site for working experience and for a great deal of her students, that was the springboard for employment in several French ski resorts, as well as other job loss, which is essential in a vocational school. It was said that:

‘So, I didn't, I don't agree with Brexit. I do agree with some. But realistically, like one of my six partners is Rockley, so my students in year 12 every summer would go across for the whole summer to Rockley, in France and get their work experience completed. They can't do that now. Then they're not allowed to do that. ... Our students were quite often probably a good 50, 60 percent were then employed the following year after the year 13 in that sector and went on to ski resorts or and that that really impacted our sector at the sports outdoor sports side of it, without a doubt.’ **Data Extract 4.53**

Hence, a change in strategy had to be enacted with a detrimental effect for the students and for language acquisition. The same SL stated:

‘Obviously I deal with for the education of the whole company, they're only out in Rockley Park in France able to now employ those that are over in France or within Europe, you know, so they've had to change the whole business strategy.’ **Data Extract 4.54**

The participants concurred with the idea that the decision to leave the EU has been detrimental to the uptake of language studies. Comments such as, ‘a car crash for the economy’ by the SL in school A or ‘a triumphalist isolationism’ or ‘a disaster as per the SL in school B were expressed.

The head of MFL in school C also agreed that different landscapes impact on individual perceptions, as illustrated below:

Education reaches people in a different way... Changing the way people think about things, you know, but in such an impactful way that it really does, because, you know, we're still all affected by external things, you know, what's going on in our own lives, our own families, our family's views and choices on things that has a massive impact on people. School can only influence, you know, in certain ways.' **Data Extract 4.55**

However, regarding Brexit in particular, she stated that it could also offer an opportunity for all, as illustrated below:

'Both really, I mean, I think it is the fallout of Brexit over the next few years is going to be interesting. But it wouldn't surprise me if companies find that they do need more employees with language skills if they still want to have that exporting and importing opportunities' **Data Extract 4.56**

Acknowledging the impact of other landscapes on perceptions, participant BB felt that it was also important to extract the best out of individuals' convictions and use that to create a more internationally minded country. The extract below depicts his view:

'And I think it's always that when you when you're looking at history and you're looking at society, there's always that combined thing where you look to how do we take the best of who we are and carry that forward and how do we adjust the things that we're not so proud of about ourselves to make ourselves better and to try and bring it back to the micro of learning languages? I think I wish definitely I wish that the Britain as a country and I'm talking about 67 million people, I definitely wish that we were more international in that sense. I definitely wish that we embraced the learning of other people'. **Data Extract 4.57**

Whilst understanding the negative impact of Brexit, this same participant BB saw the exit from the EU as an opportunity to develop a global outlook. He went on to emphasize that the position of the UK in Europe and its proximity to France should be taken as an advantage. He stated:

'I think it makes it even more important that we have an international mindset, that we look externally. Yeah, to give a positive stance on it, because it is something that we can go on. But it is also important to sort of catch it kept out as an opportunity to put forward.' And I think we have to, absolutely. You know, it's a reality, isn't it? You know, it's happened for better or worse. It's happened the UK is determined, I think, to be internationally look to look outwards, as I say. And my personal view, those relations with our closest partners in Europe are going to remain every bit as important. But there's no question that the Brexit make puts a bit of friction in there'. **Data Extract 4.58**

Participant A has also alluded to a somehow positive impact, as she explained: 'I mean, it might increase the need to speak languages. Therefore, businesses might say that we absolutely need to because that business is going to have to work a bit harder'. The head of MFL in school C also

acknowledge the need to ‘embrace’ second language learning: ‘The country needs to see the importance of embracing foreign languages...’

In exploring the extent to which political, historical and social landscapes, outside the school gate (Coleman, 2009) affect individual’s perceptions and how in turn this might influence the decision-making process, The data suggests that institutional level decision-making regarding MFL provision has not been negatively affected, as the schools in this study, despite acknowledging the impact of landscapes, such as Brexit, they have nevertheless continued to offer languages to the students regardless of practical constraints, and some of the negative feelings fuelled by the press. However, the data sustains that Brexit has led to more negative attitudes in schools (Data Extract 4.52) specifically in schools with a high percentage of PP, above national average and a lower intake of EAL pupils (section 2.1 and 4.5; Tinsley, 2019; Tinsley and Dolezal, 2018). School A is one of such schools and the emotive words used by the SL regarding the impact of Brexit is illustrative of the struggle to encourage further take up beyond KS3. (Data Extract 4.47). In addition, the data also points to a leadership that believes in the value of second language acquisition for their students and continues to drive its provision. Crucially all the participants seem to agree that it is pivotal to change the way conversations on Brexit and other landscapes are held and, in this way, make the study of languages more appealing, in order to abate the current decline beyond KS3.

#### *Changing the way we talk about languages*

The findings have demonstrated how important it is to market language acquisition and create a greater sense of success as opposed to failure. Participant BB commented on the need to ‘change the conversation’ on MFLs. He asserted that ‘If you want languages to be an important part of the curriculum, find talk about them in the same breath you talk about in Maths and Science’. Similarly, the head teacher of school B also believed that it is essential to change the way conversations on language studies occur, as illustrated below:

‘...I don't think, you know that it helps that when people out there nationally are talking about languages and they use the word difficult. Because right at the beginning of this conversation, I said that the way language is introduced to me was the language of code and game. And so, the way in which we sell the importance of language is probably where we need to look, because if I tell people that it's hard, it's harder than physics and all that sort of stuff, then who's going to want to do that? If we talk about opening doors and opportunity and adventure, our students are going to warm to that, as will their parents, I think.’ **Data Extract 4.59**

In school A the head teacher also felt that the stigma and the challenging perspective that students hold of foreign language learning needs to be addressed. He viewed this as ‘cultural poverty’. Moreover, he claimed that the school has a responsibility to ‘educate’ society’, and this is done



‘through our contact with the parents’, ‘in order to give them a more informed view of the value of what can be offered for their children’. At the same time, the head of languages in the same school advocated the need to ensure that provision of MFL is engaging as ‘they [the students] don't have that natural, I don't know, lust and love and motivation!’. She added that building confidence is the key for changing perspectives and increase up take, as illustrated below:

‘...So, the kids that we struggle more is with year 7. We have to convince them to start up. And, once we convince them and we build up that confidence, we're fine. We don't have a lot of negativity. The kids are generally positive about their language’. **Data Extract 4.60**

In school C, its head also felt that the classroom experience is essential and there is enough curriculum time allocated in order to explore MFLs in an ‘exciting’ way. Her view is depicted below:

‘...it's the student experience in the classroom and the belief that the exam level for teachers to not feel the need to just push, push through and to allow them time to get that understanding because you be better off. Yeah, to me, that's what's missing... Forget about the GCSE. It's about experience, it's about it and really being able to use it and even in the classroom together ...I'm lucky with studio school. You know, when you if I just to give out to a mainstream now, I would think all the time you need to do this, you know, just to get all the subject GCSE, but actually for language to really be loved, you've got to have make it fun and that curriculum time has to allow you to make it fun.’ **Data Extract 4.61**

The head of MFL in the same setting has acknowledged the importance of changing individuals’ mindsets: ‘changing the way people think about things, you know ’, as it was explained. This participant also felt that it is important for parents to acknowledge the relevance of MFLs, as she added: ‘I think actually it's the, the kids and the parents’ realization how useful a second language is. And the kids change now.’ Moreover, she acknowledged that good teaching and high- quality learning experience will only get you so far. Hence, she emphasised that to make a meaningful change, bigger conversations have to be had beyond the school gates, at a societal level. Her views are illustrated below:

‘School can only influence, you know, in certain ways. But I don't know, sometimes I just think we're going around in circles and we're not really you know, we're not really getting anywhere with this whole, you know... The country needs to see the importance of embracing foreign languages...’ **Data Extract 4.62**

Any attempt to change individuals’ negative perceptions of MFL could be perceived as an ambitious undertaking, especially in the UK where monolingual mindsets are prominent, as particularly students fail to see the values of language acquisition beyond practical needs (Lanvers, Doughty, and Thompson, 2018; see section 2.2 & 2.4). However, the data suggests that besides high quality

teaching it is imperative to engage the whole of society in order to drastically change perceptions of L2 studies.

#### *Concluding Thoughts*

The analysis so far has indicated an interplay of complex causes behind the low uptake in second language studies in secondary schools in England. Specifically, the senior leaders' discourse seems to suggest empowered school leaders with agency to bring change to the landscape of MFL in post 14 education, in light of their school's aims, as well as student outcomes. However, their agency can also be constrained and challenged by explicit policy contexts that privilege conformity and standardization over change (Ball, 2006) and importantly, segregation where 'Languages become the preserve of social and intellectual elite' (Coleman, 2009). All participants believed in inclusion and opportunity for all, however the data indicates that the accountability measures imposed on secondary schools only serve to deepen the gap on participation and attainment and lead to further inequity in L2 education (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In this regard, head teachers tend to make policy decisions in line with dominant discourses that withstand and normalize linguistic, economic, and ethnic/social hierarchies (Ball, 2006). Such practices are well established and are accepted within relations of power and authority. But crucially they downplay issues of power, control and inequity. As a result, and in response to my paradigmatic assumption, which is also congruent with critical theorists, I will now critically examine the findings in relation to the notion of power by way of adding further rigour to the study and apply some elements of critical discourse analysis to the data that has emerged from the TA.

#### **4.3 CDA - Method and Themes**

This analysis seeks to bring further rigour and criticality to the study, by way of investigating the role of power and agency in L2 studies and how it affects schools' decision-making. This decision was prompted by my drive to critically explore the relationship between discourse and power, as well as revealing the broad representation which underpins schools' decision-making in the constitution of discourse, with its impact on conceptualization, formation and implementation of MFL policy in secondary schools in England. The objective is threefold: Firstly, I aim to establish whether there is an alignment or dissonance between senior leaders' decision making and central policy tools and frameworks. Secondly, I also intend expose the ways that specific accountability measures and institutionalized practices lead to the marginalization of L2 studies. I hoped to establish whether discursive representations explaining discourses of an inclusive education in second language studies are truly reflected in the decision-making process of school leaders. In this regard, I discuss the extent to which the individual context of the participating schools facilitates closing the gap of social inequality and how this might be translated into decisions made by the schools. At the same time, I

address the problem of representation, thereby exposing the ways that the importance of L2 studies are misrepresented in secondary schools in England. As a result, and in congruence with the research questions and supported by the literature on the nexus power/knowledge (Foucault, 1990), I chose a specific area, on which to base the analysis: namely discourses in relation to schools' decision-making in MFLs according to the power relations they uncover (Richardson, 2000). Methodologically, I aimed to deconstruct discourses, or rather their contextual meanings, disseminated by government official documents, school policies and informal 'discourses' held by the school leaders. I argue that institutional level decision-making is produced by the scientific discourses which construe MFLs as 'secondary' subjects and regardless of this 'low' status, they are nevertheless susceptible to the normalizing panoptic technologies of power (Foucault, 1977). By means of using CDA, I endeavour to expose the ways that these constructive effects become a legitimized and naturalized means of accepting inequality (Fairclough 1985, cited in Van Dijk 2001), whereby power is covertly imposed, whilst its processes become natural, dogmatic and institutionally sanctioned.

#### 4.3.1 Sample

In this study, I consulted an 'ensemble' (Ball, 1993) of policy and accreditation documents released by government bodies between 2010 and 2021, when secondary schools and their programmes became less subject to regulation and power shifted from the state to the senior leaders, who became the key actors in shaping their schools to fit their own individual context (Lanvers, 2016). Policy statements and guidelines are the types of documents selected. I identified the policy documents by scanning publications on government agencies' websites. I have also obtained information regarding policies on individual settings through the interviews I conducted. The documents selected are described below:

Document Title	Publication Year	Description
The National Curriculum in England Framework document	2014	Framework for the NC curriculum
Curriculum research review series: languages	2021	Principles behind Ofsted's research reviews and subject reports
Language Policies in the 4 Countries of the UK	2017	UK policies on Languages

*Table 11 Documents selected for CDA*

It must be acknowledged that the main body of analysis has already been conducted (Section 5.1& 5.2). Therefore, this section is more limited in contents as its focus is on overlaying TA with an element of CDA, where a discussion takes place regarding the influence of macro and micro levels of policy actors and the extent to which it might influence schools' decision-making in post-14 education. As a result, below, I draw on Fairclough's three-dimension model (section 4.5.3) as it is well suited with the multiple layers of language policy agents in policy creation, interpretation and appropriation. Recognizing the multiple layers of policy agents is recognizing that policy texts can be created (as *text*), interpreted (*discourse practice*) and appropriated (explained in *sociocultural practice*). Consequently, I framed the analysis within these three analytical levels: Text Analysis, Analysis of Discourse Practices and Socio-political Analysis. In the text analysis, I focus on the linguistic features of the policy documents, to find out the power relations embedded in the text. In the discourse practice analysis, I draw on the analysis of some relevant texts and the interviews, to find out the production and interpretation of the policy texts by people or groups of people (e.g. school leaders and heads of MFL). In the socio - political practice analysis, I focus on the national and regional contexts and the generated social norms, language ideologies and attitudes.

#### **4.3.2.1 Text Analysis**

Before interpretation can take place, the researcher must uncover the economic, political and social forces in which the discourses are produced (Caballero Mengibar, 2015). To this end I read the document 'Language Policies in the 4 countries of the UK' (The Languages Company, 2021) where it is noted that '*there is currently no specific policy on languages in England*'. The actual policy statements are confined to the frameworks set out in the NC. Consequently, I consulted 'The National Curriculum in England Framework document' (DfE, 2014) which opens with the following statement: '*Learning a foreign language is a liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures. A high-quality languages education should foster pupils' curiosity and deepen their understanding of the world.*' The same document states that MFLs must be taught to all pupils in KS2 and KS3, but crucially these are not compulsory NC subjects in KS4. Finally, it is also clearly stated that inclusion is paramount: 'all teachers should set high expectations for every pupil' and they have an even greater obligation to plan lessons for pupils who have low levels of prior attainment or come from disadvantaged backgrounds...'. In addition, I read the Curriculum research review series: languages (Ofsted, 2021), where the issue of L2 provision for all is highlighted as a challenge to education. The reading of these documents points to individual schools to develop their own policy on second language studies, rather than centrally imposed. And this implies that head teachers hold the ultimate decision-making 'power regarding provision.

Secondly, and specifically the NC framework document emphasizes that 'A *high-quality languages education should foster pupils' curiosity and deepen their understanding of the world.*' Arguably, this 'lighter tone' feature of the text can refer more to the cultural aspect of the MFL curriculum, rather than their statutory nature. However, the use of the verb 'should' as oppose to a modal verb, such as 'must' appears to place L2 education as a recommendation, thus opening the way to subjective interpretations to the kind of provision to be offered in schools and specifically places a great deal of responsibility on both head teachers and MFL practitioners. Whilst these official texts claim the need for inclusivity, at the same time they also specify the optionality of MFLs beyond KS3. This seems to suggest a discrepancy between what should or should not be done. Indeed, by advocating a policy of choice, this discursive construction is in direct dissonance with the principle of an inclusive education. This notion is also clearly defined, where regardless of socioeconomics, the emphasis on these documents is on teachers to deliver language studies to all pupils. In both documents, the use of verbs in the simple present indicative form express need, obligation, and desirable qualities.

However, I would argue that this specific use of language leads to greater exclusion, as it removes any imperative sense of education for all. Otherwise the imperative form of the verb would have been used. In other words, because the language used in policy documents is not strong enough to mandate languages for all, it then opens the way for schools to make decisions which exclude some students of being afforded the opportunity to study a language, if those schools choose not to offer it. Given the removal of the policy of languages for all and the extent to which decision-making is currently devolved to schools, it can then be inferred that government commitment to positive outcomes of language learning is not strong. And this is supported by the use of a mild tone of language employed in official publications, such as The NC framework.

Text analysis identified how linguistic forms and meaning can convey different messages regarding MFL provision beyond KS3 across the sample documents. This critical interrogation of the context relating to the provision of languages in post-14 education has revealed that it could lead to an array of interpretations at local levels and this is reflected in the structural and grammatical feature of the text. Specifically, in both School A and B (Data extracts 4.2 & 4.3, respectively), languages are compulsory up to KS3, but beyond KS4 they become optional. The use of the adjective 'optional' entails that it is up to the individual student to decide whether to take a language or not. However, this is not the case, as stated by participant AA where this 'choice' is only given 'for those students who we feel are capable'...and they will be pretty much told that will be on their option form'. The result is that for some students there is no 'choice' at all, as they are not afforded the opportunity to learn a second language beyond KS3. MFL provision, specifically in school A, which is set in an area of greater socioeconomic deprivation reflects a tendency to offer this subject only to high attainment

students (Data extract 4.27). The head of MFL in this same school believes that the GCSE exam ‘is penalising them[students] for their background’ (Data Extract 4.24). Therefore, it could be argued that the principle of an inclusive education is not always necessarily reflected in the decision-making process at the local level and the linguistic structures used, at local level, in documents such as the option form, are ambiguous as they can be manipulated to suit the context of the school. My contextualization of the language use after interpretation yielded themes that expressed the knowledge contained and reproduced in official discourses about MFLs. And these are essential in exploring further social relations and meanings, but they do not explicate solely social inequality in this area of the curriculum. Furthermore, findings can be used to investigate the type of power relations present in second language education as implied in the texts. In this way, further clarification was then sought to the extent to which the recommendations as set out by the NC Framework are pursued in practical terms and how such decisions might then facilitate closing the inequality gap or perpetuate it. With this in mind, I then re-read all transcripts of the semi-structured interviews I had conducted. My attention then turned to the overarching themes that had stemmed from the TA that would guide the finding of the discourses to be critically analysed. And these were: Alignment or dissonance between senior leaders and policy tools and frameworks; Accountability measures and institutionalized practices; Discursive representations of an inclusive education in MFL and the extent to which the individual context of the participating schools facilitates closing the gap of social inequality and how this might be translated into institutional level decision-making.

#### **4.3.2.2 Analysis of Discourse Practices: Impact of Accountability Measures**

The second level, analysis of discourse practices involved analysing text production, interpretation, and transformation into a network of discourses, enabling the promotion of ideas and values about L2 studies beyond KS3. Thus, the documents referred to above, such as the NC framework and The Curriculum research review series ‘guide’ the implementation of MFLs, and together contribute to the possibility of actions which transcends differences in space and time (Fairclough, 2003:31). In this respect, government, policy makers and schools across the system share the discourse of MFL provision to align the accreditation to a common national regulatory scheme. This discourse affords a clear orientation towards accountability and performance, whilst safeguarding institutional autonomy. Thus, the guidelines set a ‘minimal common framework’ for curriculum implementation, following the quality requirements by current regulations and the needs of the school system’ (MoE, 2016: 7). It also asserts to ‘respect school autonomy and value the diversity of curricular structures [ibid: 9]. They are a case of intertextuality where particular discourses, styles, and genres are articulated altogether in a text (Fairclough, 2003:218). This process enables the questioning of coexistent discourses reinforcing a particular construction of MFL in the analysed sample. The data

has suggested that all participants position themselves in line with policy tools and frameworks imposed centrally. But the decisive factor in determining either affordance or invisibility to MFL is 'the agency side of policy work' (Ball, 1993: 102). Hence, policy-making processes and the discourses developing around them also influence senior leaders' scope for agency. Specifically, both head teachers and heads of MFL are obliged to fulfil the requirements of the measures imposed by central government, such as the Ebaac and Progress 8, despite their own perceptions and the so-called 'autonomy' (Data Extracts 4.23-4.28; 4.32- 4.34). Framed by the power relations between the subject and the state, the regulatory discourse of devolved policy articulates compliance. In this regard, head teachers' decision-making is to respond to the performance measures, where the focus is on core subjects. The SL in school B pointed to the negative impact of such measures, as experienced by his own children (Data Extract 4.26). He viewed this as 'just wrong is plain wrong'.

It could then be argued that the discourse on MFL offers a clear orientation towards accountability, which underpins a common national regulatory scheme that seems to be focused on the values of core subjects (Olsson and Heizmann, 2015). And this leads to language studies becoming marginalised through schools' decision-making practices which exercise authority through discourse within institutions, such as schools [ibid]. The data suggests that despite being 'autonomous', school leaders are nonetheless accountable to measures imposed centrally. The SL in school B stated that his school would be 'in hot water' if he chose not to comply. Statements such as these, undoubtedly question the value of 'devolution', as according to the data, external accountability is just another 'accepted' form of control. Indeed, in light of Foucault's governmentality (2007), as discussed in chapter 5, the 'devolution' of MFL policy can be defined as a disciplinary mechanism, through which legitimacy and control of autonomous subjects is paramount in the interplay between schools and state. Its aim being to govern practitioners' subjectivity by exercising the appropriate conduct, using self-discipline, ethics, and regulations, to permit 'the reconciliation of control and consent' that constitutes the practitioners as 'the instrument and the subject of government, the governor and the governed' (Fournier, 1999:285).

#### **4.3.2.3 Socio-political Discourse Analysis**

The last level of CDA is both an 'explanation' and a 'critique' (Fairclough, 1989, p. 113), moving beyond text structures and discursive interpretations to unpack the ideological significance of discourse. A network of discourses constructs schools' decision-making in MFL, where agency and agentic power is driven by professional knowledge, beliefs, and values (Foucault, 1980;1990). Knowledge in particular is therefore understood as discourse and a set of practices that, define the impact of schools' decision-making and MFL studies in post- 14 education in secondary schools in

England (Chapter 5.2). These discourses express and reproduce the ideologies of school leaders and their teams, all tied together by the state under the ideology of neoliberalism. As a result, the hegemonic power moves from the state to the senior leaders whilst permeating all school practices and discourses in MFL. Therefore, policy, local or central, becomes the legislative set of rules for decision-making, as well as a process to achieve specific goals (Ball, 1994). During the interviews it became clear that head teachers, despite having to contend with imposed accountability measures, were nevertheless able to offer MFL provision (Data Extracts 4.1-4.6). However, they were faced with some specific challenges that appears to stop them in their ability to close the gap of social inequality. Both, The National Curriculum in England Framework document (DfE,2014) and The Language Policies in the 4 Countries of the UK (The Languages Company, 2021) advocate education for all. However, the Ofsted curriculum research review (Ofsted, 2021) emphasizes that students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as those with SEND (special educational needs and/or disabilities) are being excluded from language studies. The findings from the interviews also corroborate the social exclusion based on socio-economics (Data Extract 4.24). The performativity concerns seem to be distant from the commitment to ensuring that *'more pupils continue to study languages after they become optional'* (Ofsted, 2021), as stated in both the Ofsted Curriculum review and the NC Framework (DfE,2014) These sample texts include notions of equality in education. However, the findings from the interviews, in particular with school A, render this invisible to those in deprived areas.

Having established that social inequality pervades L2 education, it is also necessary to consider what other challenges are seen in the documents used and that also account for the low uptake beyond KS3. One of such challenges noted in the Ofsted curriculum review is to encourage *'the study of other languages in the face of the dominance of the English as a second language'* (Ofsted, 2021). The perceived value of English superseding the need to learn other languages reflects such discourses. This is congruent with the literature that advocates that the spread and use of English (Phillipson 1992) have created an ideology that renders other languages as not essential. As a result, practitioners and society in general internalise the norms and ideology of the dominant group or class, even though this is not necessarily in their interests (Althusser,1969). These hegemonic struggles constitute the various discourses as they are represented and materialised by powerful social actors (Phillipson,1992). The data from the interviews also gives credence to this assumption (Data extracts 4.42 to 4.46), where the participants have acknowledged the impact of the international status of English in both their settings and society as a whole. However, the data suggests that in these settings the idea that English is the only gateway to education (Pennycook, 1995) is not sustainable. The contrary seems to prevail and this is reflected on the curriculum



provision in the three settings, where MFLs appear to have been given some prominence, despite constraints such as funding and timetabling (Data extracts 4.1; 4.2; 4.3). Moreover, and in relation to the impact of other societal landscapes, such as Brexit, the participants saw the latter as another obstacle leading to further abatement of the landscape of MFL (Data Extracts: 4.47; 4.49; 5.51 ;4.52).

The Ofsted curriculum review document claims a lack of access to MFLs by students in deprived socioeconomic areas (Ofsted,2021). Conversely, the NC Framework document (DfE,2014) suggests on the surface, an inclusive education for all. At the same time, the data from the interviews reflects an inclusive approach to education, despite performative measures and the impact of societal landscapes. This raises the question as to the extent to which school contexts can ultimately facilitate closing the gap of social inequality. Undoubtedly, MFL education is a fertile ground for governmentality as it can prompt, at the micro-level of individuals, adaption to ubiquitous regimes of compliance (Foucault,1991). This translates into adapting imposed constraints and apply them, despite being 'autonomous'. The case of school C clearly illustrates this as due to their vocational status the SL does not have to comply with Progress 8. Yet, this is used with the Year 11 students (Data Extract 4.29). Nevertheless, this is not to say that the hegemonic approach to MFLs imposed by accountability measures erases the agency of school leaders. The data suggests that institutional level decision-making lies primarily at the individual's micro-level and is not exclusively defined by policy or frameworks. With agency, head teachers can make reflexive choices about negotiating, resisting, and even contesting policy implementation and as a result fulfil their commitments to an inclusive education. The senior leader in school B enables MFL provision, beyond KS4, regardless of take up (Data Extract 4.5).

Importantly senior leaders must be aware of the extent to which the discourses circulating in schools influence individual and collective agency, in affording visibility to L2 studies, as the provision and enactment of foreign languages as part of social life, are troubled with hegemonic struggles that drench their philosophical tenets and practices (Liasidou,2008). Such hegemonic struggles establish a plethora of discourses and truths, where subjects become united under such truths, thus compliant to those that direct them (Foucault, 2007). In schools, this is achieved by way of creating a hierarchy of subjects (Wiggins, 2016) which is reflected on everyday practices. The influence of historical macro-structures is clear on discourses and as such, head teachers' practices may reproduce socio cultural beliefs and attitudes in which they are embedded. In the case of this study, it seems that the agency of school leaders regarding MFL provision, beyond KS3 is informed by the impact of different landscapes, which relate to their personal histories (Data Extracts 4.9- 5.13) and which can affect their capacity to shape policy within their own settings. Hence, this analysis extends the current literature on L2 education in posts-14 by identifying the strength

that senior leaders' own beliefs and values might have in determining greater affordance in second language provision.

#### 4.3.4 Conclusion

The attributes of power and their numerous representations within social processes can only be identified once revealed and critically exposed through the 'textual work of representing, relating, identifying and valuing' (Fairclough 2001a:241). Concurrently, this undertaking must be complemented by identifying the hidden forces and the 'epistemological and political possibilities and alternatives' (Luke 1995:7) that have the potential to change the situation for the future. The aim being to realise an inclusive discourse, which places L2 studies with equal parity as core subjects through the linguistic and conceptual 'reinstatement' [my emphasis] of L2 studies where its value is recognized by all social actors. In other words, official policies clearly implement such values, hence stakeholders follow through. In this study CDA was used to uncover how the language used in the discourses relating to the provision and enactment of MFL, reproduces beliefs and values hinged in traditional ideas anchored in neoliberal policies that serve to perpetuate the status quo and deepen the already wide gap of social inequality in L2 studies in Post-14 education. Through the analysis of the impact of broader social contexts that covertly obscure the decision-making process in schools and which are only visible after their critical interpretation, I was able to identify the type of knowledge which is produced, reproduced and legitimised through discourse. Drawing from this analysis I argue that to enact change in MFL provision requires delegitimizing certain thoughts and choices in society; yet, finding the roots of the problems causing such invisibility in language studies beyond 14 is also imperative, for it helps legitimizing the production of competing alternative discourses aiming to afford greater prominence in L2 and further inclusivity in education. As a result, the use of CDA is therefore necessary toward identifying inequality and social injustice. In this context, critical language use can reveal the existence of misrecognition, and inequality and/or discrimination.

As discussed, the findings of this study make a clear connection between the role of power and agency in institutional level-decision making regarding Second Language Studies in post-14 education. Consequently, with these findings and analysis as a springboard, a detailed explanation regarding Foucault's concept of power/knowledge ensues in order to offer a critical lens to this study, by analysing Foucault's theoretical tools.

## CHAPTER 5 Power/Knowledge- A theoretical Analysis of the findings

### Introduction

This chapter proposes the theoretical framework, based upon the Foucauldian principles of power/knowledge, designed to help contextualise institution level decision-making regarding second language studies in post-14 education. In addition to outlining the theoretical framework, empirical evidence is provided in support of this framework that raises underlying issues of power/knowledge, in determining the decision-making process of senior leaders in secondary schools in England. Thus, a discussion of the main findings ensues in light of the theoretical framework, by way of seeking to explore the operation of power and agency in shaping institutional level decision-making in relation to second language learning. Namely, the specific focus on the entanglement of power/knowledge is discussed, as this nexus can both constrain and support the agency of school leaders in the decision-making process, and how such concept shares some affinities with critical theory (Wandel, 2001). Specifically, it considers the extent to which the Foucauldian rationale opens up the field of debate to consider what constitutes knowledge within L2 learning. Also, a discussion is held on whether L2 learning practices define a discourse of power. Finally, some considerations are offered regarding what might be the entanglement of the role of power in producing individual subjectivity (Foucault, 2000b) in the exercise of these discourses and their associated disciplinary mechanisms. Such 'discourse of power' colonizes everyday life, throughout institutional discourse (Cohen *et al.*, 2018), as it circulates throughout societies, constructing social institutions as well as individual subjectivities (Foucault, 1980). It is through discourse that we are created; and that discourse joins power and knowledge, and its power emerges from our casual acceptance of the 'reality with which we are presented' (Foucault, 1977).

The relevance of this study lies in that it provides evidence of how issues of power, who holds and how it is operated, is inextricably linked with knowledge, and underpins school leaders' decision-making regarding provision of MFL studies beyond post-14 education. In contrast with other studies in the literature (Parrish, 2018; Agasisti, Catalano and Sibiano, 2013) that indeed point to a lack of autonomy of the leadership, as a crucial contributor to the existent decline in MFL studies beyond KS3, I argue that consistent with the theoretical framework the findings are indicative of school leaders having successfully taken decisions regarding provision, which are mirrored in the take up of languages in their schools. The findings illustrate how Foucault's ideas raise pertinent questions about the practices of school leaders and how MFL policy is formed, shaped, reshaped and enacted; specifically, Foucault (1970) challenges the notion that policy making is a 'rational' process based on indisputable evidence or 'truth'.

Underpinned by such assumptions, in the subsequent sections, Foucault's thinking provides a valuable approach to understanding how senior leaders are constituted as subjects through a range of practices and discourses associated with schools' decision-making. In this context, Foucault's concept of power/knowledge will be specifically drawn upon, in relation to L2 studies beyond KS3 that thus far has not been considered. In light of the findings, a more in-depth understanding of how institutional level decision-making practices in MFL exercise authority through discourse within institutions, such as secondary schools, in England (Olsson and Heizmann, 2015) will be provided. In Foucault's conception, discourse is seen as a complex network of relationships between individuals, texts, ideas, and institutions, with each node impacting to varying degrees on other nodes and on the dynamics of the discourse as a whole.

Although the truism, knowledge is power is universally acknowledged, for some scholars, the issues of power relations remain largely unaddressed (Olsson, 2009, 2005a, 1999; Dervin, 1999; Frohman, 1992). Therefore, this lens can enrich institutional level-decision-making research in second language studies, as it affords a deeper understanding of the relationship between knowledge and power and how it underpins school leaders' curriculum practices (Olsson and Heizmann, 2015) as power only becomes apparent when it is exercised (Townley, 1993). Against this backdrop and informed by the findings, Foucault's thoughts offer an account of the effects of discourse, knowledge, and power on society. Namely, the focus is on how power is shown by its effects, particularly in the way that it forms and transforms individual subjects (Foucault, 1998) and also when applied to the regulation of populations, through all the far-reaching effects of its activity, by ways of monitoring and regulating collective bodies such as populations or specific social groups (Kehily, 2001). Crucially, Foucault asserts that political order is kept through the production of 'docile bodies' passive, subjugated, and productive individuals (Foucault, 1980a:139; Gaventa, 2003), where social control occurs through individual self-discipline; what Foucault (1997, 1998) called 'biopower'.

## 5.1 Biopower

In this study, the findings suggest that senior leaders have flexibility over curriculum arrangements and the ways in which provision is organised, they emerge as the key decision makers. But importantly rather than just considering the decision-making in itself, it is what drives it that is of paramount importance, as illustrated by the statement of senior leader A: 'So, some [other heads] say 'I'm in the job to get outstanding results in order to achieve a performance table'. These individuals appear to see themselves solely at the mercy of centrally imposed performance targets (Board and Tinsley 2014; Lo Bianco, 2014; Long and Boulton, 2016; Staufenberg 2017; Thomson 2016a) as evidenced by participant A. The head teacher in school B also alluded to his school to be in '*hot water*' if he was to pursue solely his own agenda. Strikingly, in school C, the senior leader commented that as a vocational

school, they do not need to comply with the Ebacc or Progress 8 measure. However, the choice was made to use this measure. In the words of this participant: 'I think it is a good thing'. Conversely, the head of MFL in this same school had a far more skeptical view of such measure. However, she felt unable to oppose it as the leadership would not take heed of her views, as reflected in the following extract: 'I always find that I'm battling against targets because the teachers know their students best. They know the students' capabilities. But then we're being told, well, no...but your students target is this this is what they should be achieving. And, um, you know, for some of them, it will be achievable, but others, it won't be achievable'. Unsurprisingly, the heads of MFL, due to their position within the hierarchies of a school management have different levels of autonomy. The implication being that their role is to implement strategies within the department (Earley and Weindling, 2004; Parrish, 2018). Consequently, they are constrained by both the school leaders' decisions and the government requirements (Glatter, 2012). In this regard, the head of department in school A also saw herself as a vector of compliance, as stated: 'I just have to go with what decisions are made by the school'. The data clearly points to the participants feeling obliged to comply with performative measures, which through the eyes of Foucault, works as techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, (Foucault, 1990). And this is seen through Foucault's lens as biopower (Foucault, 1990:139), who perceives power as both being centred on the body, such as the individualising power of disciplining and the organisation of power over whole populations, in this case, the school population or at the level of the social body (Rogers *et al.*, 2013). Foucault posited that 'biopower' operates on our bodies, regulating them through self-disciplinary practices which we each adopt, thereby subjugating ourselves. This plays out in the findings as illustrated by the response of the head of MFL in school B: 'I don't feel every day like I'm limited in my ability to open students' eyes. I feel there is, there are of course, limitations. There are societal limitations. There are curriculum limitations'. The institutional disciplining, surveillance, and punishment of the body creates bodies that are habituated to external regulation, working 'to discipline the body, optimize its capabilities, extort its forces, increase its usefulness and docility, integrate it into systems of efficient and economic controls' (Foucault 1980a:139), and thus produce the types of bodies that society requires. Its force derives from its ability to function through 'knowledge and desire'-the production of scientific knowledge which results in a discourse of norms and normality, to which individuals voluntarily desire to conform and control themselves by self-imposing conformity to cultural norms through self-surveillance and self-disciplinary practices (Foucault, 1977). These in turn create more detailed knowledge of the individuals within the system, which allows for more efficient disciplinary practices producing more knowledge, and so on. This plays out in the data, as senior leaders are perceived by their heads of languages as the ultimate decision-makers, as referred by the heads of MFL in both

school A and C. Consequently, any directives are followed through, and not objected. In school A, the head of MFL raised her concerns regarding the provision of Spanish. It was stated: 'I am concerned about the future of Spanish'. At the same time, a justification was immediately offered which implies an almost supportive stance by this participant in relation to the leadership, as illustrated in the reply: 'I think that's maybe where the kind of the disappearance of Spanish comes in, because the Spanish side of the department has always been a bit more wobbly than the French staffing wise. And I think that as well as the fact that two languages makes timetabling just a little bit more complicated and the fact that because of our demographics, they don't feel that two languages is a real pull for the school'. Such internalization of behaviour is openly displayed in this statement, where the decision taken by the headteacher is perceived to be legitimate, thus accepted and even understood by others. Undoubtedly, such findings certainly corroborate that the discourse of education and the disciplinary technologies that are linked to it reflect the hierarchical power where one group is legitimised over the other. In contrast to school leaders, teachers are construed as those without knowledge, and with very limited power of decision, or none (Cannella, 2000). However, in the Foucauldian view that power operates but cannot be owned, the focus is on the ways in which power operates within institutions, such as schools, namely the way power is spoken about in everyday discourses, and ultimately how is reproduced and exercised by the subjects over others and themselves (Foucault, 1982). In this regard and in a vicious cycle, official discourses, such as curriculum frameworks and government policies inform formal discourses at the level of the institution and in turn they establish the basis for the informal discourses that permeate among staff and students (Ball & Goodson, 2007:177). Foucault uses the notions of discourses, and the regimes of power/knowledge to demonstrate that power is a network which includes everyone (Foucault, 1991, 1980, 1972; Feldman, 1999). Consequently, and in light of the findings, the focus in the following section is on how some discourses have been shaped, legitimised and dominate how we define and organize both ourselves and our social world (Foucault, 1970:56).

## 5.2 Discourse - A site of power and resistance

Foucault famously stated, 'discourses are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 2002a: 54). Such claim suggests discourse as practices and not just a form of specific language. Their importance seems to be on what they do, besides what they are. Foucault observes through this process the problem of 'knowing whether the unity of a discourse is based not so much on the permanence and uniqueness of an object as on the space on which various objects emerge and are continuously transformed' [Ibid: 36]. Therefore, the unity of a discourse demands, not the existence of the object 'institutional level decision-making', but how the rules of discourse

and relations between statements manifest during a specific time slot and in relation to that object. This is evident in this study. Whilst participant A states that his school supports the provision of MFL for all beyond KS3, the reality is that Languages beyond KS3 are only offered to those that are going to be successful. He stated: 'In terms of the curriculum provision, we basically only put them in for subjects which we know they are going to be successful. Largely students will do a single language ...given obviously the pressures upon schools to be successful in progress 8, they [students]are doing either French or Spanish'. Crucially, discourses trigger specific claims to truth that draw on types of language, to statements that frame what can be said and thought in respect to certain phenomena. Discourse is a complex set of arrangement, mechanisms and practices that engage some statements while ignoring or excluding others [ibid]. Whilst language is important, Foucault focus is on the use of such language to produce meaning and power effects. Therefore, discourse underlines the connections between subject position and subjectivity constructed in various discourses, and how people occupy such positions (Lacan, 2006; Gilbert & Low, 1994). Subject and subjectivity are formed only through power; they are produced historically through certain discourses and certain desires (Dreyfus 1999; Cooper and Burrell 1988, Foucault 2000b). The initial connection is between language and social relations, and the role of power in producing individual subjectivity. Here language becomes the common denominator in the analysis of social institutions, social meanings, power and individual consciousness. Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested [ibid]. It is also the place where subjectivity is constructed and produced in a whole range of discursive practices — economic, social and political — the meanings of which are a constant site of struggle over power [ibid]. Foucault explained the meaning of the word subject and its relation to power:

'This form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects' (Foucault, 1983: 212).

It is these mechanisms that make people 'subjects' that is important to explore in relation to the findings. Senior leaders are made into subjects through various sets of complex power relations and also discourses of leadership. The subject is constituted by various discourses and it is here that head teachers come into being, but not through a set of traits or hierarchical modes of authority. In this regard it could be said that if the discourse of the leadership was to change into a discourse that affords greater value and visibility to second language studies, this would have a positive impact on MFL take up, beyond KS3. This plays out in the data, particularly in school B where there is a greater emphasis on language studies, as illustrated in this extract: 'I'm a passionate advocate for language...

So I'm happy insofar as the department is very successful in terms of just as a team, in terms of practitioners, in terms of their pedagogy, they have been able to make sure that languages are valued, even if that doesn't always translate into numbers taking it at A level'. The head of MFL added further:

'Increasingly, if you speak to our young people in year 10, year 11 who are doing GCSE in languages, I think increasingly if you ask them what is the main reason you're here, the reason would be because I know it's important. And from that point of view, the message is getting through... They recognise that languages are important. And I think that would probably be the number one reason that we give beyond that. Those who do it, they really enjoy it. They like learning languages. We do student voices in school and languages is a subject that students constantly report high level of challenge, but which students like'.

Foucault's notion of the subject, that he examined through historical analyses, shows how individuals are transformed into subjects and as a result, he believes there is no 'fixed' subject that exists prior to history and truth. The subject is both dissolved and recreated in a range of ways and settings through the production of knowledge and truth. The subject is constructed through and by social, cultural, economic and political structures, discourses and practices. Hence, it could be argued that the autonomy granted to schools in 2010 would certainly position school leaders as 'the subjects' with the ability to afford greater visibility to MFL. However, the erosion of the framework of support for MFL studies led to a centralisation of funding into the general school budget (Bowler, 2020/21). The impact on MFL was profound with school leaders in England no longer able to prioritise second language studies (Bowler, 2020/21). Therefore the 'subject' that in tune with his personal convictions, and prior to 2010 was able to enact provision in MFL studies beyond KS3, became the 'subject' whose agency was curtailed by the withdrawal of support structures and the imperative need to respond to performative measures. The latter in particular, is played out in the findings relating to school B, where its head teacher states that the school would be in 'hot water' if he was to follow only his own views, on the importance of language studies. Foucault's thoughts illustrate this concept of 'subjects': 'There are two meanings for the word 'subject': subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self- knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to' (Foucault, 1983: 212). This was further corroborated by the head of MFL when asked about school provision. He replied that his head teacher values languages: 'I work in a school where there is a general support for languages'. However, he has also acknowledged that generally in schools there are 'societal and curriculum limitations... and a greater emphasis on English, Maths and Science and the number of hours given to those subjects that narrows the curriculum.



Such discourses become entrenched in society because they are associated with the status of those who claim it. In this case, the status of the school leaders, which stems from criteria of competence and knowledge with institutional, systemic, legal and pedagogic norms attached to give them the right to speak about and make educational statements (Niesche, & Gowlett, 2019). Hence discourse is both nondiscursive and discursive (Olsson and Heizmann, 2015). It is a system for the formation of a group of statements that is not delimited to what is being said [ibid].

Within this study, the problematization of discourse is conceptualized with the belief that a Foucauldian lens can unpack how situated power dynamics shape the way head teachers convey, seek and use information to inform practice (Olsson and Heizmann, 2015). In relation to decisions made by school leaders, regarding Second Language Studies, beyond post 14-education, discourses are constituted through statements of 'value' that emerge at a given time and setting (Olsen *et al.*, 2015[online]) which are considered as entities that allow signs to assign specific and repeatable relations to objects, subjects and other statements [ibid]. And this is seen through the shifts in policy, as documented in section 2.1.1 that have occurred in the last two decades, where the exclusion of some ideas and practices have by default belittle the intrinsic value of studying a second language and its consequent reduction of timetable in favour of other subject areas. Thus, the system functions within the assumptions that have grounded educational discourse, namely that particular knowledge is considered more important, more legitimate and the inferiority of particular people or subjects within education. This is prevalent in second language studies that, despite being considered a 'foundation' subject, are in reality relegated (see sections 2.1 & 2.2).

The acceptance of the scientific discourse of education has led to the rise of forms of knowledge and 'experts' in that knowledge who are, by definition, given exclusive rights to speak and act (Cannella, 2000). This rings true to this study, as reflected by the response of the head of MFL in school A, that when asked if her views were taken into consideration by the leadership, she replied: 'So they've always been supportive... I'm not sure they truly get it no!'. This was also the case in school C, where the head of MFL was adamant and simply replied 'no' when faced with the same question. Clearly the head teachers of these two settings appear to hold exclusivity, particularly whilst decision-making in relation to L2 curriculum provision, where the knowledge of particular groups, such as L2 practitioners, are often undervalued or at its worst, dismissed [ibid]. Although the latter are identified as stakeholders in educational discourse, they are not given equal partnership in the decision-making process. Therefore, discourse is a social practice containing and constraining ways of acting and behaving (Cannella, 2002; Dick & Cassell 2002; Bergstrom & Knights 2006; Ezzamel and Willmott 2008; Jack & Lorbiecki 2007; Välikangas & Seeck, 2011). Using Foucault (2002) and his analogy with doctors and their [sic] status to utter statements and contribute to discourse, educational statements cannot

come from anybody; their value and generally speaking, their existence cannot be separated 'from the statutorily defined person who has the right to make them, and to claim for them the power to overcome suffering and death [Ibid:56]. Undoubtedly my findings indicate that regarding provision of second language studies beyond post-14, it is the senior leaders that have the power to overcome the current provision in schools and change it. And this is supported by Foucault's lens (1977), where discourse reflects and generates power, serving as a mirror of particular ideologies and socially constructed norms (Foucault, 1980; Lather, 1991). This may be liberating or oppressive, but most likely a combination of both (Canella, 1999). As a social construct, discourse is created and perpetuated by those who have the power and means of communication (Foucault, 1977; Pitsoe & Letseka, 2012), such as head teachers who will subsequently determine what is discussed and in the case of this study, the level of provision for MFL, particularly in school A, as shown by the comment from the head of languages when asked about the level of provision beyond KS3: 'I'm not sure they truly get it no... and I think that's may be where the kind of the disappearance of Spanish comes in ... And I think that as well as the fact that two languages makes timetabling just a little bit more complicated and the fact that because of our demographic, they don't feel that two languages is a real pull for the school'. Their discourses govern by rules and principles of exclusion that include the privileged right to speak, the appeal to reason, and the will to truth (Foucault ,1972). Different institutional discourses illustrate the prevalent truth about different issues, such as MFL curriculum provision beyond post-14 education. Consequently, it could be argued that senior leader's discourses are crucially in determining the status of second language studies, as due to their status, their perceptions are given legitimacy (Ball, 1990). Therefore, and as added by the head of MFL in school B: 'If you want languages to be an important part of the curriculum, find talk about them in the same breath you talk about in Maths and Science'. Hence, rather than affording visibility to core subjects and performative measures, the findings suggest the importance of the normalization of such discourses surrounding MFL studies and this is corroborated through Foucault's rationale. Indeed, Foucault(2000b) argued that with the passing of time, the ways of organizing and perceiving the working subject will become established and viewed as normal, and consequently rendered invisible to alternative views of organizing and perceiving the working subject (p.281-301). The discourse community will have a set of conventions or discursive rules, either formal or implicit but widely recognized within the community, by which a truth statement can be evaluated and validated or repudiated (Foucault ,1978). The mantra amongst school leaders of the importance of core subjects in detriment of MFLs, is being constantly validated, specifically beyond post-14 education (section 2.1 & 2.2). The findings in this study revealed that despite affording importance to second language studies, school leaders are continuously underscoring the values of core subjects. And although it could be argued that their reasons relate to

the need to comply with accountability measures, such discourse becomes validated further by the wider community. Indeed, the head teacher in school B argued against the government target for 90% of students to achieve the Ebacc by 2025. His response was clear: 'no, no. And beyond that, I don't think it's even desirable'. For school A, the response was identical: 'No, it is utterly unrealistic'. These discursive rules impose what can be said in the context of that discourse, and shape the form that a valid truth statement can take in that discourse (Foucault, 1978 in Olsson and Heizmann, 2015). Hence, statements or claims of truth must comply with the recognised discursive rules, otherwise they will be literally worthless [ibid]. Discourse is independent of individuals or institutions, but is shaped by systems or regulatory processes described as discursive formations. One is 'in the true' only by obeying the rules of a discursive 'policing' (Foucault, 1970 :61). Undoubtedly, the policy tools and frameworks, such as the performative measures imposed in schools, are a reflexion of such discursive formations. The findings substantiate this claim, as illustrated by the head teacher of school B, and this, despite believing in the value of MFL: 'as a teacher, I have an external accountability, so, you know, I can't say, well, this is how I think it should be. Off we go. Follow me. You know '. Hence Senior leaders can justify the lack of affordance given to MFLs by focusing on the 'importance' of core subjects. These practices become normalised and accepted by all (Foucault, 1991). Crucially, it could then be argued that what constitutes knowledge in MFLs is the result of specific discursive formations that inform curriculum provision and enactment in post-14 education. Foucault (1991) argues that discourse is a linguistic unity which constitutes and defines a specific area of concern, governed by its own rules of formation with its own modes of separating truth from falsity and of defining the scientific from the non-scientific (Olsson, and Heizmann, 2015; Foucault, 1991). The regularities which characterise this process and in which these rules are embodied are then defined as discursive practices. They can be described as practices of knowledge formation by focusing on how specific knowledges (discourses) operate and the work they do [ibid]; they are routinized in ways 'in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood' (Reckwitz, 2002: 250). All knowledge is then relative to the discursive formation that constitutes it. The discursive formation is a socio-historic phenomenon that constitutes areas of knowledge of objects and social subjects (Fairclough 1992:39). Foucault (1991) posits that 'discursive formations' provide the foundation that governs all knowledge of objects and social beings meaning that the individual is totally located and shaped within discourse. This version of discourse appears to be constitutive of social reality and social subjects [ibid].

In this study, the discourse encompasses information from senior leaders, heads of MFL, parents, central government, researchers, pupils and policy makers. From this body of created knowledge come beliefs about what MFL provision beyond post-14 education should be like and this defines what

we know and think about MFLs in secondary schools beyond KS3. Discourse shapes power/knowledge. Statements such as 'experts say' or 'it's policy', afford power to those who hold the knowledge and decide how it should be acted upon. It is not surprising that school leaders' decision-making is likely not to be contested. Foucault claims that:

'The judges of normality are everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the social worker-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviours, his aptitudes, his achievements' (Foucault,1977b:304).

The relevance of discourse in this study stems from the discourse of accountability that shapes responses taken by schools and consequently informs the decision-making regarding L2 provision in post-14 education. In this regard, this discourse is linked with performance and 'it can become the means by which power relations within a school and between the school and external agencies can be established and maintained' (Lowe,1998:97). The discourse regarding the value of learning a foreign language appears to reflect very clearly such an assumption, thus gaining status and dominating society (Weedon, 1987). The findings in this study give force to the argument that if a 'new' normalisation of discourse was to occur, the impact on uptake could potentially be greater, as evidenced in the excerpt below from the headteacher in school B:

'I don't think, you know that it helps that when people out there nationally are talking about languages, they use the word difficult, because right at the beginning of this conversation, I said that the way language is introduced to me was the language of code and game. And so, the way in which we sell the importance of language is probably where we need to look, because if I tell people it's hard, it's harder than physics and all that sort of stuff. Then who's going to want to do that? However, if we talk about opening doors and opportunity and adventure, students are going to warm to that, as will their parents, I think'

Alternative discourses, such as these, are marginalised and subjugated [ibid], although they offer the potential for action and resistance 'with scope to 'evade, subvert or contest strategies of power' (Gaventa 2003:3). Consequently, school leaders have a crucial role to play in enacting change by way of challenging the dominant views. Therefore, discourse constitutes the 'nature of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern' (Gaventa, 2003). It circulates in the social field and can attach to strategies of domination as well as resistance

[ibid]. They emerge at the nexus of 'doings' and 'sayings' (Rasche and Chia, 2009) as power is embodied in certain ways of thinking, speaking, and behaving (McKinlay and Pezeta, 2010; Townley, 1993). Nealon (original emphasis, 2008:20) thus notes: *'power is something practiced . . . speaking the truth is the ...stake and outcome of a series of practices and statements, rather than the secret to be revealed (or not) by them'*. Accordingly, a focus on practices alerts us to *'what it is that is done, how it is done, and how it is possible that it be done'* (Messner et al., 2008:70). Hardy and Thomas (2014), in their study of strategy marking in a telecommunications company showed how the power effects of a discourse had to be 'intensified' through the enactment of discursive practices, where multiple actors engaged in practices that helped to normalize and diffuse it to the extent that a well-defined strategy object was produced (Hardy & Thomas, 2015). Consequently, discursive practices are the practices of discourse, where what is said relates to its specific context (Bacchi and Bonham, 2014). Language constructs the individual's subjectivity in ways which are socially specific (Weedon, 1989: 21). These subjectivities are constituted by drawing on existing discourses or sets of meaning. Interestingly, school C does not have to report on the performance of the students regarding the Ebaac. However, they comply with the Progress 8 procedure, as evidenced in this extract: 'We are not measured as a studio school, but we do actually measure'. Not all meanings about MFLs will have the same salience for all individuals and in all contexts. Part of the empirical task in this case is to identify which discourses have most salience for senior leaders and with what consequences (Wright, 2003) for MFLs beyond post-14 education. The head of MFL in school A asserted that: 'They [students] are given an options form which reflects their ability basically. So basically, those students who we feel are capable. So those academic students will be pretty much told that they are doing a language that will be on their option form'. Conversely, in school B, all students are 'offered a mixture of French or German, and students get to sample both', as claimed by the headteacher. He added further that as a Spanish speaker, he was 'very keen to sort of think, well, when can we get Spanish onto the curriculum'. In school C, the SL stated that both French & Spanish are offered. But due to the specialist status of the school as a Studio School, French take up is stronger. It was stated: 'we go through the options choices also. I'm lucky my teacher D. is two language, so she does Spanish and French. So, we'll put out the offer each year... so my students in year 12 every summer would go across for the whole summer to Rockley, in France, and get their work experience completed'. Therefore, choosing to define MFLs as 'optional subjects', points to discourses being drawn upon by policy-makers and or head teachers and to the ways in which they position themselves and others regarding the value that they attribute to MFL studies (Wright, 2003) beyond post-14 education. This works ubiquitously across institutions and practices.

In social institutions, modes of thought and individual subjectivity are offered within specific, historical analysis to explain the working of power. And this is done on behalf of specific interests and to analyse the opportunities for resistance to it [Ibid]. Thus, subjectivity and consciousness are perceived as socially produced in language, as a site of struggle and potential change.

Discourses embody political interests and consequently are constantly competing for status and power [ibid]. The subjectivity of the individual is the site of this battle for power, and it is a battle in which the individual is an active but not sovereign protagonist (p.41). The curriculum within schools is also social and therefore ideologically constructed within discourse at the level of policy: thus, language studies have an ideological construction which may not be shared by different individuals occupying other discourses. Arguably, the focus with performance in core subjects suggest that the study of English supersedes the need to learn other languages (section 2.4). The head teacher in school B felt that this to be an issue amongst the wider community. He acknowledged that the decision - making process of many other school leaders is based on the 'English is enough' mantra. He added that some of the personal choices made by many, outside the school environment, reinforces this further: 'they [other heads] won't think twice when they're forming an English colony on the Costa Brava and it won't cross their mind when they're going for their kebab and their curry and their pizza and their Chinese takeaway that perhaps actually there is something to be gained by engaging with cultures that are other than ours. And there is an arrogance'. In Foucault's view, the formation of identities and practices are inextricably tied to their particular socio-historical context and cannot be studied or understood if divorced from this context; there is '... no universal understanding that is beyond history and society' (Rabinow, 1984:4). Therefore, it is impossible for human beings to detach themselves from their historical background (Foucault, 2002). The decision-making in some schools appears to not only perpetuate an 'inferiority' of second language studies, but crucially only to be given access to a small minority of students. The findings relating to the optionality of MFL in school A strongly indicate this position, as reported by the head of MFL: 'So those academic students will be pretty much told that they are doing a language that will be on their option form'. Such statement implies that the other students are not able to take a second language beyond KS3. As Fairclough (1989) puts it, 'Discourse can never be 'neutral' or value-free; discourse always reflects ideologies, systems of values, beliefs, and social practices' (p. 21). Of significance to critical educators is the manner in which these discourses operate in the public realm (Orlowski, 2012). Thus, senior leaders when determining which languages to offer, to which students, perpetuate the notion that MFLs are only granted access to a small minority, thus contributing to neo-colonialism and racism through linguicism (Becket and MacPherson, 2005). As a result, second language studies become marginalised (Pennycook, 1995). Consequently, it is paramount to discuss the extent to which school leaders'

discourse might conform or challenge stances towards the importance of L2 studies. Are such discourses aligned with those that are disadvantaged or are they in line with prevailing narratives hinged on traditional ideas for their legitimacy and acceptance? By taking a critical approach, it is necessary to consider discourse and look beyond such 'structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control' (Wodak, 1995:204).

As well as educational discourse reflecting and reproducing beliefs, attitudes and social practices of education, for Foucault (1972) discourses also determine 'truths' about who can speak, when, and with what authority. This is pertinent to both school A and C, namely the latter, where the views of the head of MFL are only considered in terms of daily classroom practices. It was stated: 'the views that I do have issues that come up or things that that come up, you know, the day to day of the job, yes, I am listened to. But with regards to the bigger picture of offering different languages, no!'. School A and the head of languages stated a total dependence from the leadership, as per the following extract: 'we are kind of at the mercy of people above and their opinions and their wishes and their passions'. Conversely, in school B, the head of MFL claimed to be listened to. He stated: 'Yes, in a word, yes, I'm for a number of reasons, I've been at this school for a long time. I think that helps. I feel respected. I think they do listen ... the school's leadership has a general policy of consulting anyway that they do consult. And yes, I definitely feel that I am listened to'.

Discourse in social structures creates the new truths, the specialist knowledge which gives power to those who hold it. In most societies, the education system is controlled by the state, but it works to maintain relations of power throughout the society as a whole; Individuals become elements or instruments of power (Foucault, 1982a). Therefore, the importance afforded to second language learning, depends upon the beliefs held by the so called 'authoritative' voices. This is certainly the case in school B where the headteacher's personal history and beliefs on foreign languages impact on his decision-making: 'I think that I'm certainly biased because of my own conviction and I can't help that. But my own conviction is also what I can see it do for people'. In this way, the decision-making of headteachers in relation to MFL provision becomes also a matter of 'authoritative allocation of values' and cannot float free of the social context (Ball, 1990:3). However, such views are not shared by all. Indeed, in school A, and as already discussed, the provision of MFL is uneven and aiming at responding mainly to the pressures exerted by accountability measures. Hence, the dominant view becomes embedded in the individual, as the latter is not 'given', but produced historically through elements of power/ knowledge (Foucault, 1982a). Thus, it could be argued that head teachers are inadvertently stifled by the social order, as they are 'carefully fabricated in it' (Foucault, 1977). This appears to resonate with many language practitioners, as they often feel oppressed, being denied access to certain knowledge, and crucially by the demands of the dominant group within the school setting that

the 'other' shed their differences (in essence, their being, their voices, their cultures) to become 'one of us'. The replies from both heads of MFL in school C and A, when asked whether their senior leaders took into consideration their views are indicative of their agency being curtailed: the use of 'we are at the mercy of people above', shows the extent to which head teachers' decision-making, specifically in the field of MFL practices, are considered authoritative in institutions (Olsson and Heizmann, 2015). Undoubtedly, such findings suggest that discourse is interwoven with power and knowledge to constitute the oppression of those 'others' in our society, serving to marginalise, silence and oppress them. Control of knowledge can be perceived as a form of oppression—only certain groups have access to certain knowledge. Those in positions of power of decision are responsible for the assumptions that underlie the selection and organisation of knowledge in society. In this regard, it could be argued that through discourse, the nexus power/knowledge might constrain or support agency in the decision-making process and afford either prominence or invisibility to L2 studies. These power/knowledge relations have implications for the way school leaders' position themselves and present information within and across communities of practice [ibid]. Differences in the discursive rules that govern such institutions may cause clashes in their interactions and hinder information seeking and sharing (Heizmann, 2012). As a result, head teachers and practitioners are required to adopt legitimisation strategies that augment the authority of their knowledge and/or foster alignment (Olsson, and Heizmann, 2015). Consequently, it becomes apparent not just how (de-)legitimation strategies are an important aspect of schools' decision-making, but also how these practices help to replicate power/knowledge relations. In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is 'to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality' [ibid]. When senior leaders draw on the existing discourses relating to MFL, practitioners, in turn, draw on their own discursive engagements to make sense of and evaluate the credibility of what is being said. This is the nature of intersubjectivity: that individual statements and evaluations, whilst they may be uniquely in their own right, are nonetheless constructed from social components ([ibid]; Deacon & Parker, 1995).

The findings, specifically in school A and C, as discussed earlier, also suggest that the heads of MFL implicitly comply with the decisions taken by their heads of school. As Hutcheon (1991) asserted, discourse is more than a tool of domination, it is both an instrument and an effect of power and ideological control. It is a tool for the social construction of reality (Foucault, 1978; Pitsoe and Letseka, 2012). Indeed, the discourse perpetuated by most head teachers in relation to provision of MFL in post-14 education, inadvertently informs, influences, and shapes all practitioners' identity to the point where the latter act out and behave according to what has been labelled as acceptable and true about



second language provision. Discourses, in turn, are shaped and informed by practices, which then enter into power relations (Pitsoe and Letseka, 2012). One does not have more or less power than the other but each equally shapes the other (Foucault, 1977). The gathered data also suggests that the education system, whilst controlled by the state, works to maintain relations of power throughout the society as a whole. Hence, the official discourses of the state relating to educational policies (e.g. curriculum provision and systems of assessment or school management) are obvious instances in which discourse becomes the instrument and the object of power (Ball & Goodson, 2007:177). And this achieved not only through the imposition of performative measures, but also through examinations. In school A exams are perceived as a means to exclude many from taking language qualifications, as illustrated by the head of MFL: 'I do think that in a lot of ways the exams are written in an elitist way, and some students will just experience such a feeling of failure, GCSE exams are so much harder, it's seen as they will get half to a whole grade less in their GCSE languages'. Equally, in school C, when questioned, on the difficulty of the exams and the impact this might have in terms of what to offer to their students, the reply from the head of MFL was striking: 'No, the school will offer different subjects. But it doesn't know your [the students] particular strengths and weaknesses, and you're almost starting all over again in year nine, which is really quite a crucial year for bridging KS3 over to KS4. So, I think just that whole set up, the school system set up, I, I don't think helps'. These extracts suggest that MFL learning practices define a discourse of power which is an effective instrument for the formation and accumulation of knowledge, through assessment and reporting procedures, such as examinations and compliance with centrally imposed accountability measures (Foucault, 1994). Foucault (1991a) perceives examination as a 'normalising gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, classify and punish' (p.184) and there are various formalised and ritualised examinations in MFL, but it is also important to note other forms that examination occur. Foucault refers to the school as an apparatus on uninterrupted examination, which is woven in to the very fabric of schools and education. Undeniably, the concept of subject and power is strongly connected with the idea of discourses. Foucault asserts that this notion of technologies of power, such as implementation of methods of teaching and management, determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivising of the subject' (Foucault 1997: 225). It could be said that examination and other policy tools work explicitly as a means to control the individual, through normalising procedures. Normalising refers to a corrective mechanism of power that serves to alter behaviour through means of minor punishments (Niesche & Gowlett, 2019). These may work on different elements such as time, activity, behaviour, speech and on the body itself. Procedures are then set up to monitor indiscretions according to these rules and structures [ibid]. As an example, and relevant to this study is the requirement by OFSTED to include the Ebacc in its draft

inspection Framework of 2018 and the government's ambition for 75% of year 10 pupils in state-funded mainstream schools to start studying EBacc GCSE courses nationally by 2022 (taking their exams in 2024), rising to 90% by 2025 (taking their exams in 2027). The findings from this study, as indicated in the previous chapter, demonstrated that all the three participating schools comply with the requirement, and despite not agreeing, as noted by the head teacher in school B, compliance was *sine qua non*, otherwise the school would be in 'hot water'. Unquestionably, the views of the participants clearly show them as dominated by a technique of power, such as the examination process. In Foucault's words:

'The examination is the technique by which power, instead of imposing its mark on its subjects, holds them in a mechanism of objectification. In this space of domination, disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially by arranging objects. The examination is, as it were, the ceremony of this objectification' (Foucault, 1991a:187).

In this regard, the framework, or the examination works as a means to normalising judgement on both students, teachers and senior leaders. Students are expected to perform against such set of criteria clearly defined and in turn, schools implement policies round expected adherence to these very same policies. In turn, practitioners are then expected to enforce such policies or set of rules and head teachers discipline and draft up the relevant policies. The aim is to correct or reduce certain behaviours with associated punishments. The analysis of these techniques of disciplinary power led Foucault to conclude that power is not primarily located in structures or in an all-powerful state apparatus (Wright, 2003). Rather institutions act as specific sites where particular techniques of power are channelled and brought to bear on individuals in systematic ways. Through its architecture, its organisation, its curriculum and daily practices, schools become a disciplinary site which draw on 'discourse' to legitimate its existence and to define what it does [ibid].

As stated earlier on, the data from school A demonstrates that language studies are only offered to those in the high ability range (head of MFL). Thus, specific pedagogical practices in MFLs, such as these, and which are associated with assessment and the organization of classes based on ability, can be seen through the lens of Foucault, as a means to produce 'normalising', 'regulating', 'classifying', and 'surveillance' effects [ibid]. In other words, the curriculum leads to compliance and importantly without appearing to be coercive. Therefore, this framework assumes that bodies are socially constructed and controlled and managed through regulatory policies and discursive practices (Olsson and Heizmann, 2015; Foucault, 1979). Discourses are not only realized in 'the textuality of representation and knowledge, (Hook,2007: 179), but also they become a technique of power in regulating principles and actions of institutions, in forms of everyday practice and in actual material

arrangements' [ibid]. At the same time, some ideas and practices have been excluded. Hence certain assumptions have been grounded in educational discourse, to name a few: particular knowledge as more important, more sophisticated, more legitimate; and the inferiority of particular people within education. This is the case of the importance afforded to core subjects with a devaluing of second language studies reflected in fewer options and reduced curriculum time, as pointed out by the head of MFL in school B:

'State schools for a long time have learnt to follow government performance measures in shaping their curriculum. So when we have the main performance measures being five A stars -to Cs at GCSE, a lot of schools shape their curriculum to ensure that as many students possible get five A stars at GCSE... When Progress 8 came along, we reduced the number of students. So, the number of GCSEs our students do by one. So, we reduced the number of choices, increased the amount of time given to English, Maths and Science because of their heavy weights in the back. And therefore, what you ended up with was a situation where if students are pushed into an Ebaac curriculum, they have fewer optional subjects. The result, which of course squeezes out or makes life more difficult and makes fewer students study some of those additional areas of the curriculum, such as languages, which are really important.'

These exclusions function as rules for reinforcing and complimenting each other in the perpetuation of the dominant form of educational discourse. Institutions, such as schools reinforce our present-day acceptance of learning, thinking, education, advancement, privileged knowledge, and human inferiority (Cannella, 2000). Furthermore, disciplinary technologies of education<sup>39</sup> reinforce this discourse by creating human bodies that in the educational context attempt to improve themselves to become objects to be shaped and controlled[ibid]. And this is the case in this study, in particular the heads of department in schools A and C, as they saw themselves as vectors of compliance, at the whim of their school leaders or central government. Foucault acknowledges a body that is constituted by the workings of disciplinary power on the physiological body, which create a sense of an inferiority that in turn operates as an instrument for the exercise of power on the body. Thus, for Foucault, the body is both corporeal and social (Dale, 2005). The relationship between the body and power in a disciplinary regime, is one in which the body is isolated, has its freedoms constrained when it is placed in a whole network of normalizing disciplinary techniques with the end goal of conforming to the established norms turning it into a productive cog in the social apparatus (Foucault, 1975). Thus, the reasons in which these disciplinary techniques work so efficiently is that 'punishment' acts in depth

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<sup>39</sup> Foucault's work *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison* (1979) recognized the application of this notion of disciplinary technology to education. These can be described as objectifying practices in a culture that would produce docile bodies, the formal techniques and operations that create human bodies as objects to be moulded (Cannella, 2000).

on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations' (Foucault, 1975: 16). Through 'disciplinary architecture' (Foucault, 2007), a study conducted by Godfrey *et al.*, (2012) illustrated clearly how the range of practices that render the body governable, create a 'docile, uniform, military body' disciplined, standardized, and substitutable military unit of labour, where bodies are divided and partitioned into visible, standardized units (p. 552).

Equally, the educational machine carefully crafts 'docile bodies' through discourses that work to normalize the low status associated with MFLs in relation to other subjects[*ibid*]; senior leaders' actions are enacted according to accountability measures imposed by central government, and in turn L2 practitioners become restricted in their own action due to the impact of these same measures (see chapter 2.2). Undoubtedly, the findings are suggesting that the conformity of both school leaders and practitioners is a direct result of the 'docility' of their bodies. Moreover, and specifically regarding language studies, the practices in place within institutions, such as examination procedures, curriculum frameworks and performative measures, could be perceived as disciplinary technologies imposed on the bodies of both practitioners and school leaders. These technologies, such as the conceptualization and practice of curriculum development, the implementation of methods of teaching and management, and the proliferation of evaluation as educational practice, construct an invisible power, creating individuals as bodies to be controlled (Cannella, 2000). At the height of their efficiency for control, these technologies require standards that are used to determine the 'normality' of bodies that are observed and, from these standards, expectations for judgments and for the construction of what is 'normal and acceptable' emerge [*ibid*]. Arguably, school leaders were given more autonomy. However, the findings in this study suggest that through technologies of control, and through its many institutions the state continues to bring all aspects of life under its controlling gaze (Foucault, 1980a). Through disciplinary techniques, power becomes a source of social discipline and conformity that together creates a 'discursive practice' or a body of knowledge and behaviour that defines what is normal and acceptable and is always in constant flux (Gaventa, 2003; (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983). These techniques are institutionalized everywhere, particularly in schools, but more importantly, they are internalized in individuals through self-regulating behaviours (Foucault, 1980). The appraisal process clearly mirrors this regulation of behaviours and the constant need to conform.

Foucault's analysis of discipline (the power) is oriented towards knowing, mastering, and using disciplinary technologies; the system of knowledge that facilitates the successful implementation of disciplinary power, shows how technology is involved in a process of subjection (Foucault, 1975:143). Such conformity is achieved by constructing conceptions of normality and deviance; power makes the norms appear moral or 'right' and creates the desire to conform to these norms. This plays out in this study, as the accountability measures placed on head teachers facilitate compliance, thus the lack of

affordance given to MFLs become 'normalized' and institutionalized. Such desire to conform leads individuals to sustain their own oppression voluntarily, through self-disciplining and self-surveillance. Self-monitoring is therefore achieved through practice and crucially through discourse. Individuals feel compelled to regulate their bodies to conform to norms, but also to talk about what they 'should' and 'should not' do and to 'confess' any deviation from these norms (Foucault, 1977,1978; Gaventa,2003). Foucault's notion of the societal disciplining of bodies (Eick, 2004: 86-93) can therefore generate further insight into how processes of affordance or invisibility of MFLs are negotiated by bodies. This is mirrored further in this study, by way of considering the differences of 'discourse' between those with an invested value in MFL, such as heads of department and the discourse of head teachers that appear to reproduce prevailing socio-cultural beliefs and attitudes (Goldstein, 2004). The 'English is enough' mantra (section 2.4) also mirrors such an assumption.

Conversely, the head teacher in school B commented on the benefits of learning a second language: 'The breadth of formation that language confers culturally... my own conviction is what I can see it [languages] do for people.' He added further: 'this lunchtime, I was talking to a lad who came up to me. He's in year 11 now. ... He's doing A level, he wants to do business studies, French and geography. And I said, why is that? He said, well, I want to go and study in Canada. And I thought, that's it. There's a fifteen or sixteen-year-old boy, who says, I want to go to university in Canada. And he can do that because he's going to learn French. And I think that's amazing'. In this regard, discourse, as perceived by Foucault is an instrument of power that can both oppress and liberate and create a space of conflict that sets out rules as a means of excluding inappropriate speech and speakers (Eick, 2004:85). Therefore, discourse is a site of power and resistance and affords the opportunity to avoid, disrupt or challenge power strategies (Gaventa, 2003). Foucault advocates that acts of resistance 'can only exist in the strategic field of power relations' (Foucault, 1978:96). This does not imply that actions are always passive or bound to defeat. In fact, there are many forms of resistance that are adequate for everyday political relations. As an example, heads of languages can design cross curriculum events, where by the profile of language studies is raised. Each relationship is accompanied by an opportunity to resist through the implementation of different strategies. It is therefore important for MFL departments to take every opportunity to promote language learning, through exposure and original pedagogic practices that might encourage students to take up languages beyond post-14 education. Foucault underscores the role of resistance as a constituent of relations of power, whilst stressing the complexities of power's strategies (Foucault 1998).

Power/knowledge can explain that discourses are constructed in a number of possible ways (Ball, 1999b): discourses are neither about objects, nor they identify them: rather 'they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention' (Foucault, 1972:49). Ball (1990) explains that

this is because 'discourses constrain the possibilities of thought. They order and combine words in particular ways and exclude or displace other conditions' (p.2). This is also corroborated by Gold and Evans (1998) who assert that in education 'dominant discourses are often so powerful that the dissenter finds it hard to voice dissent articulately or objectively' (p.9). Discourses also stand 'in antagonistic relationship to other discourses, other possibilities of meaning, other claims, rights and positions' (p. 18). In MFL, dominant discourses prevail and regimes of truth are constructed through the effects of true/false distinctions, through which people govern themselves and others (Ball, 2006a:49). Despite research in the field of MFL pointing to their importance within the NC, the current trend nationally (sections 2.1 & 2.2) seems to suggest a relegation whereby languages are often carefully placed under specific blocks, so that students only choose the subjects that will lead to greater school performance. And this is done under the direction of such 'voices'. This was corroborated by the senior leader in school C, when referring to the Progress 8 measure: 'I think it is a good thing. I think it works a lot better..., but you can fill those eight buckets<sup>40</sup> [subject areas] without a language and that's the difference'. Discourse, unquestionably, is interwoven with power and knowledge to constitute the oppression of those 'others' in our society (Foucault 1978). They serve to marginalise, silence and oppress those 'others', and this suggests that subjects that follow the norms of society can be made to live and be invested in [ibid]. Conversely, those categorised as 'abnormal' will be 'let to die' through disinvestment and simultaneously through juridical power can be made to die [Ibid\; 144]. The task for the educator is to discover the patterns and distributions of power that influence the way in which a society selects, classifies, transmits, and evaluates the knowledge it considers to be public (Pitsoe and Letseka, 2013). Thus, discourse ultimately is used to control not just what but how subjects are constructed.

The potential to explore the reasons behind the downward trend in language studies, in post- 14 education in England must take into consideration this idea of discourse, as an institutionalized way of speaking or writing about reality that defines what can be intelligibly thought and said about the world and what cannot (Foucault, 1998). Equally, and whilst every context of practice typically manifests a variety of discourses, there is also an 'order of discourse' (Fairclough,2003:2) that reflects the authority relations of these discourses and their relative importance in specific contexts. In Heizmann's study (2010, 2011,2012) of human resources, professionals uncovered the predominance of one discourse in a way that privileged particular information practices and relationships over

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<sup>40</sup> The Progress 8 measure is designed to encourage schools to offer a broad and balanced curriculum at KS4, and reward schools for the teaching of all their pupils. The measure is based on students' progress measured across eight subjects: English; mathematics; three other English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects (sciences, computer science, geography, history and languages); and three further subjects, which can be from the range of EBacc subjects, or can be any other approved, high-value arts, academic, or vocational qualification.

others. This is mirrored in the school environment, as the latter is also governed by discourses at government level that in turn inform most if not all school settings, in conjunction with school leaders' own discursive stances. The findings in this study are no exception to this, despite a strong belief by all the participant in the value of MFLs. Consequently, head teachers' discourses take a normal and foreseeable authority in their own setting. This emphasizes how 'power is exercised through a set of interpretive frames' that practitioners come to accept and incorporate 'as part of their organizational identity' (Mumby & Clair, 1997:184). Equally important is to recognise that individuals may engage with multiple discourses, sometimes even apparently contradictory ones<sup>41</sup>. This is also illustrated in the findings, namely in relation to the head teacher in school A where in one hand, he claimed to be 'fully committed to the whole Ebacc curriculum, we found that by specialising they[students] will be more successful that way', and in the other hand and in terms of curriculum provision, he added that students are only included in MFL studies, when 'we know they are going to be successful ...'. This multitude of discourses is unquestionably present in secondary education, specifically in relation to decision-making in second language studies, where there are many examples, such as these, of school leaders and practitioners with conflictual and contradictory views.

In considering the textual representation of actions and interactions 'we ought to be concerned with the processes of producing and interpreting texts, and with how these cognitive processes are socially shaped and relative to social conventions' (Fairclough, 1989:19). Therefore, in order to see the way power operates, it is paramount to understand language as discourse, as the latter shape the power relations that characterise a particular domain of practice. Through the understanding of the 'order of discourse' (Fairclough, 2003) and the discursive rules that help constitute it, it is then possible to see why particular truths may reach a taken-for-granted status in relation to decision-making in the field of MFL, thus potentially refuting and or ostracising other voices and 'truth' claims (Olsson, & Heizmann, 2015 [online]). In this context, researchers can look for different meanings in the discursive negotiations of individual speakers, such as senior leaders and heads of MFL [ibid]. Differences in discursive rules can create clashes in the interactions between different communities of practice leading to challenge each other's legitimacy and the resulting tensions that emerge (Heizmann, 2010; 2012). This can occur between heads of languages and their school leaders. The latter position their heads of languages as: 'vectors' of compliance with the accountability measures imposed by central government. In school A, the support given by the headteacher to his head of MFL is conditional : 'If K. wasn't of the quality she is, I would have an issue with that, but because she is so good I would

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<sup>41</sup> In Olsson's (2010b) study of theatre professionals' sense-making of Shakespeare, every participant at some point in their interview emphasised the importance of a performance being faithful to the true meaning of Shakespeare. The views of the participants were conflictual and highlighted the dynamic and political nature of discourse. Balancing the contradictory demands of these two discourses clearly served an important social function within the theatre companies [ibid].

always listen to the head of MFL and if they feel they had both a specialism and there was a need – it was meeting agenda needs – then I would respect that’. And this can be a cause for tensions between both stakeholders. Therefore, the concept of discourse is then defined as a way of thinking about the dynamics of power within school decision-making regarding L2 studies in post-14 education. And power is insidious and its relations of power do not openly emanate from a sovereign source, but rather they masked as forms of truth and knowledge (Foucault, 1990). In this regard, the discussion ensues with considerations of the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays and how inevitably it affects institutional level decision-making.

### 5.3 The status of truth

Foucault claimed that power circulates through institutional practices and games of truth and across regimes of truth (e.g. neoliberalism, science, religion, etc.) to give the appearance of reality. Fejes and Dahlsted (2013) referred to a regime of truth as the ‘organized and routinized way in which we learn how to do things... [that] can be identified through discursive and non-discursive elements that can be part of, but can also be linked to and through, the practices of an institution’ (p. 21). The findings suggest that the senior leaders in this study, despite their personal convictions on the values of second language studies, their practices are constrained by such ‘regimes of truth’ with negative consequences for the provision of MFL in post-14 education. Both school leaders in school B and A respectively believed this to be the case as seen by the ensuing extract: ‘Well, I guess I guess as much as I can... as a teacher, I have an external accountability, so, you know, I can't say, well, this is how I think it should be; ‘... it's a case of trying to drive what one believes to be the right education for young people’. The use of the word trying is indicative of his predicament. Since MFL studies becoming optional in post-14 education (Parrish, 2018), it could be argued that the discourse on the value of languages has shifted to give greater visibility to core subjects. This has affected curriculum provision in all secondary schools. But more than that, it has led to a legitimisation of a new ‘truth’ that is embodied in the fabric of the institutions and society, on the whole. The data in this study suggest this shift, particularly when linked with performative measures, despite personal beliefs or values, held by the senior leaders. These institutional practices are defined by recognizable sets of relationships or ways of being between subjects and objects. Schools have institutional structures, where power/ knowledge is bound together to form an institution reflective of a regime or ‘regimes of truth’, with individuals subjected to specific truths and practices that make them recognizable subjects. In turn, subject positions or who individuals present themselves to be, give legitimacy to particular knowledge so that individuals understand who they are as premised on certain ‘truths’ and revealed in specific institutional practices. This is particularly manifested, in the effectivity of measures such as league tables (Ball, 2016) and it plays out in the findings, as all the head teachers comply with



measures imposed, otherwise and as stated by participant B, the school would be in 'hot water. Foucault's early work claims that truth is 'centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it' (Foucault 1980: 131), and that it is 'subject to constant economic and political incitement' [ibid], implying there is a demand for truth (Ball,2016[online]). He asserts that 'Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalises, professionalises and rewards its pursuit' (Foucault, 1980:131). To critically understand power in light of institutional level decision-making is not only to seek some 'absolute truth', but rather a means of extricating the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the given time' (Foucault, in Rabinow 1991: 75). Foucault maintains that truth, morality, and meaning are created through discourse (Foucault, 1977). The latter set in motion particular truth claims that draw on types of language, to statements that frame what can be said and thought in relation to certain phenomena. It is, as discussed, a complex set of arrangement, mechanisms and practices that involve some statements whilst disregarding or excluding others. Foucault states:

'Discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to the language and to speech. It is this 'more' that we must reveal and describe' (Foucault, 2002: 54).

What Foucault is suggesting is that while language is important, it is the use of such language to produce meaning and power effects that is rather crucial. Hence Foucault challenges the notion that policy and decision-making process is based on irrefutable evidence or truth, because these are used and created within the limits of the discursive formations, so that the 'truth' conforms to the rules and norms of the discourse. In his words, 'the will to truth', the effect of which is to mask the discursive formations (Foucault, 1970:56). Foucault does not provide a definition of truth; rather, he offers a multi-faceted characterisation (Prado, 2006:81). In the representation of judgement and the practices of evaluation and comparison, truth articulates our 'discursive currency (Ibid:80), ways of thinking and talking about ourselves, to ourselves and to others – 'a regime of truth offers the terms that make self-recognition possible' (Butler, 2005:22).

Truth<sup>42</sup> is the means by which, each is sanctioned and transcends politics, and thus it perceives power as an everyday, socialised and embodied phenomena (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1991:75). My findings demonstrate that 'Truth<sup>43</sup> is the means by which, each is sanctioned and transcends politics, and thus it perceives power as an everyday, socialised and embodied phenomena (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1991:75). The ensuing comment of the headteacher in school A regarding Progress 8 measure, who believed that it was 'morally abysmal' because it has led to '30% of students nationally leaving school with no qualification. That is outrageous... as I say a third of children end up with grade U's, [and that] is disenfranchising the most disadvantaged which is immoral.' Nevertheless, the school continues to be measured, but the students are guided as to what to choose or not, as I discussed earlier. In this context, in post-14 education, preference is given to other subjects, rather than languages, where exam performance is higher (see chapter 2.2). The head teacher of school C has also corroborated this stance, as illustrated here: 'I think it is a good thing. I think it works a lot better. So, yeah, but you can fill those eight buckets [reference to the structure of Progress 8] without a language and that's the difference'. In a Foucauldian sense, truth is both a 'system of exclusion' and constraint (Foucault, 2013: 2) which is exercised in other discourses and on a whole series of other practices' [ibid]. In MFLs, and as evidenced by the gathered data, the 'truth' claimed by leadership teams regarding their value works as a constraint, as it leads to the invisibility of this area of the curriculum. Truth refers to the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault in Rabinow, 1991). Decision-making in schools does not escape such assumptions. When considerations are given regarding which languages to offer beyond KS3, school leaders' discourses claim a 'truth' that appears to serve the interests of their schools, in terms of funding, which in itself is related to the performance of their students. Such 'regimes of truth' evolve from scientific discourse and institutions and are continuously secured and redefined throughout the education system, the media, and the fluidity of political and economic ideologies [ibid]. Thus, the quest is not for absolute truth but rather about 'the rules according to which the true and false are separated and specific effects of power are attached to the true' (Foucault in Rabinow, 1991; Välikangas & Seeck, 2011 [online]). It is a quest for the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays [ibid]. Hence, the creation of social and educational institutions is part of the power struggle to establish, expand, and sustain specific notions of truth through control over the power of legitimacy. Foucault (1972) notes that truth should be understood

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<sup>42</sup> 'Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. ... power produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth; the individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production' (Foucault 1991: 194).

<sup>43</sup> 'Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. ... power produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth; the individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production' (Foucault 1991: 194).

as a 'system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements'. Every education system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it (Foucault, 1972).

In this study the search for truth relates to raising school leaders' awareness of the value and usefulness of MFL studies in post-14 education against legitimized dominant 'truths' that continue to inform policy and decision-making. These legitimised truths or 'will to truth' (Foucault, 1972: 218) emphasize that true discourse denies any ties to power because it is 'true, as it gains a taken-for-granted status in a given domain of practice, thus potentially negating and/or marginalising other voices and truth claims. The basic assumptions underlying educational discourse have imposed themselves on us, thus they are not recognized as masking forms of power [ibid]. Indeed, the perception of some of the student body regarding the importance of core subjects in detriment of language studies is reflected on their views of MFL studies, as illustrated by the comment of the head of languages in school B: 'everyone speaks English.'. Equally in school A the general students' views of MFL can be negative, as shown in this extract: 'we don't need to [learn another language]. Therefore, there's a perception that we don't need to. Therefore, you know, you don't bother, type thing'. What must be emphasized is that whilst senior leaders might value language studies, their policies and subsequent discourses do not reflect such values, but rather they reinforce the values placed on core subjects. And although this may not be intentional, it is perpetuated and legitimized, hence accepted as a 'truth'.

Although challenges to regimes of truth are offered, society continues to function as if these assumptions represent a true discourse (Cannella, 1991)<sup>44</sup>. By seeking head teachers' views on what informs their decision-making, the aim is to challenge these so-called 'truths' and promote dialogue, collaboration, reflection and ultimately action (Freire, 2000). And this can be achieved by affording senior leaders with an opportunity for reflection on the working of their institutions (Ball, 2006). Specifically, the opportunity is afforded to think about the ways in which current structures construct and may constrain possible modes of action and being; school leaders and heads of MFL become deeply engaged in a critical process that entails 'analysing and reflecting' on what informs and limits their decision-making and its impact on the lives of their students (Foucault, 1974: 45). Such reflective action is in alignment with Foucault's notion of critique, 'the art of voluntary insubordination, and a practice of reflective intractability' [ibid:3]. Namely, the essence of this process is on 'the critique of what we are' and 'the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with

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<sup>44</sup> Foucault offered an explanation as to how such influences work, by referring to pastoral power<sup>44</sup> (Foucault 2007: 175, 130). According to Foucault, the techniques used in pastoral power are present in various institutions and practices (p. 199). In the present context, this links with the beliefs on the values of L2 studies and how such beliefs impact upon ILDM by legitimizing knowledge with 'truths' accredited by experts and authorities in their pre-eminent institutional sites and subject positions (Välikangas and Seeck, 2011 [online]).

the possibility of going beyond them' (Foucault, 1997c:306). Therefore, both school leaders and Heads of languages can reflect on the social and political realities that affect their lives and how they impact upon their decision-making (Freire, 2000) and potentially contemplate the possibility for change. Dialogue<sup>45</sup> becomes the vector for a change in discourse conveying a positive message about MFLs beyond KS3. Moreover, by pulling out side-lined discourses and feeding them back to the participants can facilitate beneficial changes to their decision-making practices that would otherwise not have been considered (Olsson and Heizmann, 2015). Hence, in the next section, a discussion on the concept of power and specifically, its entanglement with knowledge will ensue as well as an examination of how such concept might constraint or support agency in the decision-making process regarding L2 studies (Gaventa, 2003).

#### 5.4 Reflections on power/knowledge and its impact on agency

Foucault (1980) understands power as a relational force that permeates the entire social body, connecting all social groups in a web of mutual influence. Power/knowledge is used as a form of social control through societal institutions (Gaventa, 2003). It is therefore not surprising that the decision-making process with regards to MFLs is not just a matter of individual choice, but rather a process to which the individual appears to be oblivious to the conception of its own self. Power constructs social organization and hierarchy by producing discourses and truths, where subjects become united under such truths, thus compliant to those that direct them (Foucault, 2007). Certainly, the data in this study rings true to this assumption, where heads of MFLs are constrained not just by government policy, or lack of it, but by imposed decisions taken by their leaders, in their specific context. Indeed, the heads of MFL in both school C and school A were very clear regarding their scope of action. The former stated: 'I don't have the final say, though. I don't, you know, I'm not in charge. I have to go with what decisions are made by the school'. And the latter, when asked to comment on the difficulty of the exams replied: 'I don't really have anything to do with the decision making and we would absolutely encourage anybody to take it. But at the same time, there is that feeling of taking lambs to the slaughter sometimes'. In contrast, in school B, the head of MFL alluded to the fact that his views were considered, but he acknowledged that there was more to the decision-making process, as illustrated by his response: 'What I mean is there is that decision making at school leadership level is informed by more than the requirements of languages and the views of your head of languages. Of course. And I genuinely feel this is a feeling. I genuinely feel that they must my teacher and my school leadership team, that they do respect languages, they respect the team'. Undoubtedly the views of the heads of MFL, in the three settings, they underscore a link between institutional level decision-making and

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<sup>45</sup> For both Freire and Foucault education envisages a society with individuals in constant dialogue with one another and where different critiques have openly been played out, have come into collision with each other and have already gone through problems and conflicts which are then reflected upon in the spirit of dialogue (Po Tao, 2010 [online]).

performative measures imposed in schools. This is seen by Foucault (1991a) as the way power operates through particular technologies and regimes to create different types of individuals. As Foucault says, 'Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is a specific technique of power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise (p.170). Contrasting with mainstream theories of power which focus on what power is, who exercises it, how it is distributed and who gains and lose from its use, Foucault sees power as 'ubiquitous' and beyond agency or structure; he perceives it as a nominal construct: *'power is not a thing, an institution, an aptitude or an object'* (Foucault, 1979: 93); it is a productive social force. It is political in that it is used to govern or structure the lives of individuals, and it determines the nature of our societies; it appears to be fundamentally disparate and diffuse; it is everywhere because it appears to be everywhere (Foucault, 1994: 202). It 'circulates' or flows through the entire 'social body' by a multiplicity of mechanisms and archipelagos of localized power relations, each of which exercises its own relational forms of power (Foucault, 1988: 38). Both managers and managed, in this instance, both senior leaders and heads of MFL, are implicated in power relations, where 'the manager's autonomy becomes the teacher's constraint' (Ball, 1993:118). These constraints do not work coercively down from the state, but through 'a bottom up, capillary process of local and unstable relations' [ibid]. Power refers to sets of relations that exist between individuals, or that are strategically deployed by groups of individuals. Institutions, such as schools are simply the crystallization of rather complex sets of power relations, which exist at every level of the social body (Foucault, 2010). These power relations are self-reproducing and immanent, and they are exercised within the sphere of education in a particularly meticulous way, proliferating through the system [ibid]. The educational management becomes the new Panopticon in contemporary society, and under its influence power is exercised efficiently, just as teachers, specifically in MFL, lose their freedom (Ball, 1990a). In the findings relating to this study, and previously discussed, the continuous response to the various accountability measures, assessment procedures and league tables (Niesche, 2011) ensures a form of control exerted by the state on both senior leaders and heads of languages. In this regard, in school A, whilst complying fully with the measures imposed, the options form for students are devised in such way that low ability students can avoid selecting languages in post compulsory education, despite the Ebacc, which requires at least one language to be taken. As stated by the head of languages: 'Generally, what happens is, yes, they have a choice, but they are put there strongly advice that they're given a pathway depending on their ability, depending on their setting. They are given an options form which reflects their ability basically. So basically, only those students who we feel are capable'. Equally, to comply with the Progress 8, the structure of this measure is such that also enables students to avoid MFL studies, whilst both teachers and senior leaders are still following the imposed regulations. Undoubtedly the pressures of the 'surveillance are reflected in the

way the practical application of these measures occurs. The ‘panopticism’<sup>46</sup> describes the architectural phenomenon of Jeremy Bentham’s *Panopticon* as an instrument of power. The effect of this structure was to ensure that the prisoner is always under surveillance and never knowing when they are being observed by the guard. It only requires one guard to maintain this operation of power for sometimes hundreds of prisoners. In light of the findings it could be argued that accountability measures ensure surveillance in schools. This permanent visibility is seen by Foucault as the automatic functioning of power, that is independent of the person exercising it for it does not matter who the person is. It is here that power is visible and yet also unverifiable and extremely efficient (Foucault, 1991a: 201). I argue that, like prisoners in Bentham’s (1787) *Panopticon*, schools and their school leaders adapt or ultimately change their systems and behaviours so that they can perform in accordance to the imposed measures. The findings illustrated this ‘docile’ behaviour, even in school B, where the leadership is openly supportive of MFL provision in post 14 education. I referred earlier on to senior leader B stating that his school would be in ‘hot water’ if to follow only his own personal values and beliefs. Indeed, the *Panopticon* offers an effective and efficient tool for organizing bodies and maximizing their powers since it produces an environment where surveillance leads to acceptance of regulations resulting in a docile and disciplined mindset. It is thus a type of power, a strategy and a kind of technology. The actions of the observer are based upon this monitoring and the behaviours he sees exhibited; the more one observes, the more powerful one becomes (Foucault, 1977). The subjected individual is coerced into governing him or herself, which reduces the amount of external physical force needed to govern their behaviour. Comparably, school leaders and their teachers become subject to supervision, and they are also coerced into assuming the ‘proper’ behaviour. The monitoring machine, where individuals overtly spied, is replaced by a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole [ibid:207]. Therefore, this study is conceptualised within this ‘Foucauldian’ concept of power which is more nuanced and deeply inserted in the institution and its individuals (Clemishaw, 2013). The challenged nature of school leader’s decision-making emphasises the influence of social micro and macro settings, historical forces, and the impact of power on decision-making processes (Kwon, Clarke and Wodak, 2009).

## 5.5 Knowledge an exercise of power

A consistent theme through Foucault’s work is the idea that belief systems gather momentum and therefore power through their normalization, such that they become ‘common knowledge’ and that certain contradictory thoughts or acts can become ‘abnormal’ or ‘impossible’. Because this form of

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<sup>46</sup> ‘Panopticism’, ‘a type of power that is applied to individuals in the form of continuous individual supervision, in the form of control, punishment, and compensation, and in the form of correction, that is, the modelling and transforming of individuals in terms of certain norms’ (Foucault, 2002: 70) where ‘panoptic’ refers to ‘seeing everything, everyone, all the time’ (Foucault, 2006: 52)

power covertly works through individuals and has no particular locus, resistance to this power essentially serves to define it and in itself is only possible through knowledge (Foucault, 1979; Foucault and Rabinow, 1984). In relation to this study, knowledge is not detached and independent: it is integral to the operation of power (Townley, 1993). Through discourse, senior leaders' knowledge has gained status (Foucault, 1970). It has been legitimised and given authority (Ball, 1993), within their institutional practices. Thus, knowledge become a form of power and can be gained from power (Townley, 1993). By critically examining and questioning the social construction of knowledge and curricula, and expose who defines worthwhile knowledge and why, it is then possible to expose how power is produced and reproduced through education (Knights & Willmott, 1985).

Knowledge, in a Foucauldian sense is something constructed by humans, in the service of power. Therefore, what is understood by society as knowledge is really just an exercise of power. It is power/knowledge. This nexus is both constructed and perpetuated by discourses. Something becomes legitimised as knowledge from the way it is spoken about and this is applicable across all levels of society, and specifically relevant in this study, in the field of MFL, in post-14 education. Crucially, these claims to knowledge advance further the interests and power of dominant groups whilst eroding the agency of others. In practice, this legitimises knowledge and the behaviour of individuals is constantly sculpted to ensure they fully internalise the dominant beliefs and values (Foucault, 1998). In this regard, when considering the role of power and agency in shaping school's decision-making in relation to second language studies, I argue that the decision-making process is underpinned by the normalization of beliefs which can lead to acceptance of normalised discourse and a set of practices that in turn can either constrain or support agency in the decision-making process. This is played out in my data, as decisions taken, namely by the head of school A and school C, such as which languages to offer, or which students to include or exclude from the curriculum provision in MFL is taken as a final decision and is granted legitimacy through existent educational policies/demands that place headteachers as the 'holders' [my emphasis] of knowledge. Moreover, the exam regime also constitutes the 'norm' despite being seen by the three participating heads of languages and their students as challenging. In the words of the head of school A, 'it is like taking lambs to the slaughter'. Additionally, in school B, the head of MFL alluded to the negative impact of the exams in both post 14 and post 16 education. He stated: '...so at KS4, yes! And at a level it's catastrophic because at A level language is by reputation are really hard and they are much harder than other subjects. I know that I teach at each other subjects, at KS5 as well. And the simple fact is reputation that becomes a problem, because students are concerned that they won't get their three' As' to do a language or they won't get whatever it is they need to do a language'. Because head teachers do not openly object to such practices, their discourse reinforces them further, and

establishes them as absolute 'truths', thereby placing senior leaders with the power to speak and act (Ball, 1993:108) and consequently reduce the voices of other stakeholders, such as, the practitioners. Therefore, the power comes from the knowledge the observer has accumulated from his observations of actions in a circular fashion, with knowledge and power reinforcing each other (Foucault, 1997). Thus, knowledge may be understood as discourse and a set of practices that afford autonomy to senior leaders in relation to decision-making regarding second language learning and at the same time quash teacher's voice (Ball, 1993).

Hence, it could then be argued that school leaders' power to influence policies or curriculum provision, although not coercive, can shape and normalize behaviours within schools, and this is achieved by panoptic discipline (Schofield, 2009; Foucault, 2006, 2002, 1975) that in turn leads to conformity by the internalization of this reality (Townley, 1993). Such power relates not just to control which is achievable through imposition or restrictions and prohibitions, but rather ubiquitous management. Rather than imposing restrictions, compliant behaviours are achieved through a plethora of new concepts and explicit policy contexts (Ibid; Ball, 2006). This has implications, namely for practitioners as their agentic power is eroded from any crucial decision-making that could change the landscape of MFL in England (Parrish, 2018). What is particularly striking is that such behaviour is accepted and normalized amongst the body of teachers, where often claims are made that languages are not as important as English or Maths (Ball, 2006). Thus, Foucault's thinking plays out in the relationship between senior leaders and heads of MFL, and how elements of power and agency may express themselves on these same groups of participants are crucial. It is also possible that there is an interplay between these two groups.

Despite normalisation of behaviours (Ball, 2006), there are nevertheless some elements of tension between school leaders and heads of MFL. The latter have a vested interest in MFLs. However, this will not be the primary motivation for heads of schools as they are likely not to put such emphasis on MFLs as they have other issues to contend with around data (Education Datalab 2015; Glatter, 2012:564; Harris and Burn 2011; Lanvers, 2017b). Consequently, these two groups potentially perceive the importance that might be laid on language teaching differently. In addition, this perception of MFLs, correctly or not, together with a well-documented level of difficulty (Parrish, 2018; Taylor & Marsden, 2014; Thompson, 2016b) will impact upon school leaders' decision-making and will determine how much emphasis to place on language studies and consider that there are subjects less difficult, hence improved exam performance leading to better positioning within league tables (Parrish, 2018). It is clear that this notion of power is most important. Who holds the power of decision-making, the heads of MFL or the head teachers? When such conflict arises, the power that heads of MFL might potentially have in decision-making for their subject is rather questionable and



often highly limited. However, more than considering where power resides, Foucault points to the 'how' of power; the practices, techniques and procedures that give it effect (Foucault, 1982:154). Power is relational; it becomes apparent when it is exercised (Foucault, 1981:94). And because of this relational aspect, Foucault argues that power can be explored through an analysis of institutions, such as schools, which embody power relations, or in which power relations are reflected (Foucault, 1982:791). Power permeates all levels of institutional level decision-making (Foucault, 2010). In L2 studies, this power/knowledge nexus implies that state driven hegemonic power shifts from the state to senior leaders and management teams and permeates institutional level practices and discourses and consequent curriculum conceptions (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 2010). This apparent shift of power is theorized by what Foucault refers to in the theory of governmentality (Johnson, 2013b; Pennycook 2002; Foucault, 1991).

Foucault's understanding of power as a relational network is perhaps manifested most clearly in this concept. The emphasis on core subjects within policy and curriculum, in detriment to foreign languages and other subjects, suggests an increasing governmentalisation of the state (Foucault, 2007). However, more than governing through policy decisions, institutional curriculum practices and law-making, 'government' takes place in and through discourses and practices that inform actions and are drawn on in our relations to ourselves (Fejes and Nicoll, 2008). In developing the term 'governmentality' Foucault combined the words government and rationality to understand this specific domain of analysis. Thus Foucault (2007) uses the term government to refer to the concept of the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault, 1991b :341). This notion implies that government is acting on the conduct of people, that is, how one governs the self. Governing, then, is the guidance of conduct, where behaviour attempts to shape the field of possible action in relation to these repetitions. Besides practices of government, it also entails practices of the self (Dean, 1999:12). Therefore, an analysis of government is an analysis of those practices that 'try to shape, sculpt, mobilise and work through the choices, desires, aspirations, needs, wants and lifestyles of individuals and groups' [ibid]. In a 'Foucauldian' sense, governing the forms of self-government presupposes the notion of a subject that can actively govern his or her own self and his or her own subjectivity by means of structuring and shaping the field of possible action of the subjects and affecting their conduct [ibid].

Governmentality then is about analysing how power operates through regimes of practices and through the guiding of conduct throughout society and via a range of structures and institutions. The applicability of analysing how power operates through various education policies and reforms has been evident though exploring the changes in governing and governance of schools and education, in section 2.1.1. The findings in this study illustrate clearly this theory. Namely they point to the way in which the relationship between the school and the state have changed in recent years, as discussed

in section 2.1.1, with respect to governmentality and surveillance: the relative loss of teacher's professionalism as evidenced in 2010, with the withdraw of policies on support and intervention was terminated (Dobson, 2018), and the new framework for OFSTED led to greater focus on performative measures, which translates into greater control of the state, with headteachers continuously monitored and their decision-making subjected to the will of the state (Niesche, 2011). Senior leaders hold the 'power' of decision and are 'free' to enact their own policies within their contexts (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). However, I argue that they have become merely instruments of the state, through an architecture of compliance, where the state unquestionably governs and monitors their 'subjects' (Niesche, 2011) and ultimately imposes its own will through shaping the behaviour of the individuals. This is certainly the case in school C, that despite not having to comply with Progress 8 measure, due to their vocational status, the SL nevertheless implemented such measure as it thought to increase competition amongst the students, as evidenced by the following extract: '...we're not measured as a studio school, but we do actually measure. So, all our students, they are very competitive. So, they have a Progress 8 board, because actually quite often you find our higher achievers at the bottom of the progress and our lower achievers, so quite often they're higher and that changes the mindset, especially when you're competitive'.

Undoubtedly these findings give strength to the notion of education as an important part of governmentality (Peters, Besley, & Olssen, 2009; Simons & Masschelein, 2006), and as a result had to be considered, as there exist elements of disciplinary practice, as well as elements of sovereignty and government in a triangular fashion (Niesche, 2015). School leaders are 'caught up' in this as they are subjected to disciplinary practices, such as accountability measures and yet, they also subject others to these disciplinary practices too [ibid]. Certainly, this is mirrored in this study where head teachers appear to subject heads of MFL to these same disciplinary practices and constrain their agentic practices. Equally, as a part of government at a distance, and through school development plans and performance tables, head teachers are working with and through apparatuses of government forming practices of the self for the improvement of their schools [ibid]. This implies that their schools are closely monitored and school leaders are also supervised and subject to normalisation and hierarchical observation (Niesche, 2011). And this is visible through an array of accountability measures, such as policies on publishing league tables on schools, that place senior leaders under constant scrutiny, as they are constituted not only as heads of their schools but crucially their bodies are implicitly 'caught up' in the production of knowledge and truth about schools and their educational practices and outcomes [ibid]. Head teachers are constituted as subjects through various leadership and educational discourses, government tactics and practices of the self. Such regimes of truth play out in leadership discourses, standards and competency frameworks that are constantly emerging [ibid].

Unequivocally, the notion of governmentality reflects the view of power twinned with knowledge where government is dependent upon particular ways of knowing, requiring vocabularies, ways to represent that to be governed, and on ways of ordering populations/mechanisms to supervise or administer individuals or groups (Townley, 1993). Regarding post-14 education, the impact of such predicaments on MFL can be seen as devastating. Forms of accountability which are exercised through league tables, Progress 8 and other measures (see sections 2.1 & 2.2), create tensions for head teachers and heads of MFL. The data in my study shows that the pressures exerted by the EBacc and Progress 8 measures were considered, by both school A and School B. But what is interesting is that, school C does not have to comply, due their vocational status. However, the senior leader saw value in implementing this measure as it was believed to increase competition amongst the students, as evidenced by the following extract: ‘...we’re not measured as a studio school, but we do actually measure. So, all our students, they are very competitive. So, they have a Progress 8 board, because actually quite often you find our higher achievers at the bottom of the progress and our lower achievers, so quite often they’re higher and that changes the mindset, especially when you’re competitive’.

Nevertheless, claims are made that schools are now becoming ‘corporations’ in which continuous forms of control are in place at all levels of schooling with increasing intrusions from ‘outside’ (Suspitsyna, 2010). Accordingly, these intrusions appear to allow governments to ‘govern at a distance’, as well as a range of other techniques of accountability in terms of locally managed budgets, managerial accountabilities amongst others. Schools and their leaders are now a part of a ‘continually assessable set of arrangements that is in constant crisis’ (Niesche, 2011[online]). The various constraining measures appear to be designed to publicly list all schools’ performance data; and these data become benchmarked against national averages and against a number of similar schools throughout the country. The impact of these measures on MFL means that due to their well-documented difficulty beyond KS3 and their harsh grading, as documented by the findings and referred to earlier on, school leaders appear to be forced to limit their provision (see section 2.1 & 2.2). Thus, the negative effects on pedagogy and curriculum is unquestionable. It could be argued that the packaging of government for public perception and consumption and a focus on rhetoric and spin are symptomatic of governmentality in action (Gillies, 2008). In addition, it appears that these measures function as a ‘neoliberal ‘rationality that produces new subjectivities heavily informed by business ethics, new managerialism and a type of bio-power that forms and stimulates the individual’s desire for choice as a consumer (Niesche, 2011 [online]).

Rose, (1999) argues that through quantifiable data, political power is exercised. Firstly, numbers determine who holds power, and whose claim to power is justified; secondly, numbers operate as

diagnostic instruments within liberal political reason; thirdly, numbers make modes of government both possible and accountable; and lastly, numbers are crucial techniques for modern government (Rose, 1999: 197–198). Rose suggests further that there is a constitutive relationship between quantification and democratic government and this can be seen to be playing out through techniques such as league tables. If government is to exercise power over and through specific domains and practices then it needs to ‘know’ these conditions (Foucault, 1991c). The form of accountability that is exercised through measures such as, Progress 8 and the Ebacc, function as a neoliberal rationality (Suspitsyna, 2010). The practices and institutions of government, such as schools, are always enabled, regulated, and justified by a specific form of reasoning or rationality that defines their ends and the suitable means of achieving them (Foucault, 1978 and 1979). How such relations are rationalised means to understand power as a set of relations. It means examining how forms of rationality inscribe themselves in practices and systems of practices, and the role they play within them [Ibid]. In this sense, individuals or objects become agreeable to intervention or regulation via formulation in a particular conceptual way [ibid]. Governmentality emphasises regulatory systems, processes, and particular methods of thinking about/perceiving a certain domain [Ibid]. Consequently, head teachers’ decision-making is aligned with that of a perpetually assessable subject through the school performance data (Niesche, 2011). Their subjectivity equals to that of their schools, due to the continuous dependence from performance accountability frameworks with significant consequences for the school and themselves, if targets are not met. Such processes appear to then curtail significantly the study of MFL in post 14- education, in England as senior leaders’ decision-making will prioritise other areas of the curriculum (Parrish, 2018).

Foucault’s concept of power arises from the fact that individuals deeply believe in what it tells them, for it gives a sense of belonging, as knowledge is integral to the operation of power and can be gained from power (Townley, 1993). This structure of power is less oppressive on the surface, but rather more internally embodied, integrated and constructive (Knights & Willmott, 1985). Foucault’s ideas and those of critical theorists share a political and ethical commitment by way of challenging what Marx called ‘traditional ideas’ of dominance, viewing them as historically complicit with the exercise of power (Wandel, 2009). At the start of this chapter, I brought to the discussion the link between discourses and everyday practices in secondary schools. The key importance is that discourses endow those with ‘specialist’ knowledge, in this case senior leaders, with power. Therefore, discourses are essential components of power.

## 5.6 Summary

Having raised issues involved in the construction of knowledge and the power structures that stem from this, it is clear to see how discourse has been developed and how it influences the individual who

becomes an object of knowledge (Foucault, 2007). In light of the findings in this study, the understanding that power operates and reveals itself at the level of knowledge has provided the framework for a reading of the role of power and agency in institutional level decision-making regarding MFL learning in secondary schools in England. Here I argued that social, economic and political landscapes cannot be dissociated from the role of power and agency in institutional level decision-making (De Silva e Lopes, 2017; Lanvers, Doughty and Thompson, 2018; Shahomy, 2006; Ball, 2006), as these landscapes inadvertently affect the individual. Therefore, the recognition of the impact of such factors on the construction of knowledge is central to my epistemological assumption.

## 5.7 Philosophical dimension

The theoretical journey of this study makes a general claim for knowledge which is within the context of a culturally constructed social world, where perceptions of value of second language learning are linked to established discursive practices framed by ideological, socio, historical and economic values.

A post-structuralist view of the position of the researcher would be one of an active -maker of meaning negotiating meaning within an active social environment. They are operating and creating meaning within an academic discourse and, in the case of this study, researching school leaders and teachers' discourse which is also active in the creation of meaning. In both cases active subjects, researchers and participants, are creating meaning, which is continually being generated in each social situation and does not transcend or pre-exist context. Edwards (1998) posits that meanings are created by signs and words, not on their own, but within social situations which, when specifically located, are known as discourses. Thus, in a post-structural ontology, personal identity constitutes subjectivities actively being constructed in each social situation. Equally, the process of decision-making regarding teaching and learning 'entails judgements about what knowledge counts, legitimates specific social relations, defines agency in particular ways, and always presupposes a particular notion of the future' (Giroux, 2013:6). Therefore, it is also important to consider a critical approach to the research process. Firstly, to understand senior leaders' experiences of social relations; secondly to consider their knowledge, and to encourage them to be agents of social change projecting their visions of the future of the MFL landscape in England in post-14 education; and ultimately to challenge the dominant ideologies that serve to exclude some students from successfully studying a foreign language.

Although contested by some critical theorists such as Habermas (1987) who reject any affinity between critical theory and the view of a multitude of meanings, it could be argued that by giving prominence to individual and subjective accounts, this study is in line with critical theory. In addition, the study also seeks to question the interests at work in specific situations and interrogate the

legitimacy of such interests in their service of equality. Althusser (1969) argues that what seem to us to be natural ways of understanding our experiences are actually internalized dimensions of ideology... 'Ideologies are manifest in language, social habits, and cultural forms' (Brookfield, 2009:38; Cohen *et al.*, 2018:52). Importantly, the focus of this study is on the discussion regarding the impact of the nexus power/knowledge in shaping the decision-making process in schools in relation to MFLs, and specifically, how power is produced and reproduced, through education [ibid]. The latter is particularly relevant as schools have historically embraced theories and practices that serve to unite knowledge and power in ways that sustain asymmetrical relationships of power between school leaders and heads of subjects and maintain the status quo (Coglan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). The issue within MFL studies and institutional level decision-making is that institutions such as schools operate on the basis of interests' which are linked to ideologies and values, which in turn are ascribed to society [ibid]. Ball (1990b) argues that the relationship between education and ideology, in particular, policy changes in education, can be traced to ideological shifts and can lead to disputes over the meaning of education, and thus struggles for control within it. This is particularly true of language studies in post14 education where for instance, prior to 2004, there was significantly greater emphasis on the EU and the study of languages was encouraged (see section 2.1). With the labour government in 2010, languages became optional [ibid]. In addition, and following the 2016 referendum and an apparent refusal by some to ascribe to European values, the well-documented decline in MFL was exacerbated, despite measures to attempt its revival in England [ibid]. Thus, it could be argued that this 'discourse' became dominant and was taken as authoritative (Ball, 2006a).

Broadly speaking, my own beliefs about the nature of reality and truth are informed by my understanding and thinking of those who align themselves within the critical paradigm. Despite having taken a more discursive approach to underpin this study, due to my position as an L2 practitioner, hence a cog in the prevalent educational system, I am also the researcher with a critical view that emanates from my ontological and epistemological position. Therefore, it is also important to acknowledge that a critical approach is also advocated and can sit alongside with this Foucauldian lens. The critical approach refers to the linking of the social and political engagement with sociologically informed construction of society, with the recognition that the interconnectedness of things and the cause and effect chain are distorted amongst other things, discursively (Wodack, 2001:2). And ultimately the task of the critique is to make this interconnectedness visible [ibid]. Moreover, in the critical paradigm, knowledge is viewed as both socially constructed and influenced by power relations from within society (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, my ideas regarding power and agency in this research share a fundamental kinship

with critical theory, (Wandel, 2001), where institutions of power that are hinged on traditional ideas for their legitimacy and acceptance are questioned [Ibid].

In order to counteract such views, Foucault (1977;2003) proposes a process known as 'eventalization', where through this process, 'regimes of truth', or rather discourses claiming truths shape learning and, ultimately, the individual. The perceived belief that proficiency in MFLs is not deemed necessary due to the role of English as a lingua franca (Phillipson, 2003) provides the opportunity to question such 'evident' category, by way of opposing such views. By seeking to achieve the appearance of one's own present as a strange, historical moment (2000), Foucault reconstructed the necessary ethical and political condition of critical theory that had been the standard procedure since the ideology critique of the Manifesto (Wandel,2001). One of the challenges in this study is to consider the extent to which schools' decision-making in relation to MFLs might contribute to reinforcing or closing the gap of social inequalities, by way of validating specific values linked with the dominant discourses (Ball, 1990b). This allocation of values reveals power and control; hence it must be questioned. The critical research paradigm addresses this issue by enabling the researcher to practice 'deep democracy' (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000) which involves identifying and transforming socially unjust social structures, policies, beliefs and practices [ibid]. One of the criticisms of this approach is that it has a deliberate political agenda and the task of the researcher is to be dispassionate and objective (Morrison, 1995a). However, it could be argued that such a call for researchers to be ideologically neutral is in itself saturated ideologically by '... laissez faire values which allow the status quo to be reproduced' (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:55). The adoption of a system's view of society where individual behaviour is determined by structural features of society; for example, social class, position and role in society can be questioned (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:25). Consequently, rather than just placing the individual as a puppet of a given system, Foucault argues that individuals are not just holders of given roles. Individual agency has prominence [ibid]. This is undoubtedly the case in this research as the agency of the participants is explored in light of senior leaders' decision-making regarding MFL studies in post-14 education. Throughout my theoretical journey I argued that within the context of a culturally constructed social world, perceptions of value regarding MFL learning are intrinsically linked to dominant discursive practice (Fairclough, 2003; Olsson and Heizmann, 2015). Therefore, my ontological and epistemological assumptions have informed my chosen methodology and methods, and in turn, these assumptions have also informed and permeated the findings and the outcome of my inquiry (Thomas, 2009:110).

## 5.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the theoretical framework that underpinned this study and I have argued that the chosen lens is aligned with my own theoretical position as a researcher. The latter is

elaborated on the tenets of the 'Foucauldian' concept of power/knowledge and the extent to which it shares some affinities with critical theory (Wandel,2001). Framed by the very same lens, and in light of the findings, a discussion on the operation of power and agency in shaping institutional level decision-making regarding second language studies in post-14 education took place. Specifically, the focus on the entanglement of power/knowledge and how this can both constrain and support the agency of school leaders in the decision- making process.

The final chapter which follows draws together the key findings from across the three school settings presented here and conclusions and broader implications resulting from these findings are considered to guide discussion about future practice and research directions in second language studies beyond post-14 education. The chapter then concludes with an account of the significance and contribution of the findings in relation to institutional level decision-making in second language studies in post 14-education. Potential implications for teacher educators in the field of second language studies arising from this study are identified and discussed.



## Chapter 6 - Conclusion

This final chapter summarises the research and presents an account of the significance and contribution of the findings in relation to schools' decision-making regarding MFL in secondary schools in England, in light of the role of power and agency. Potential implications for deterring the continuous abatement of MFL education and provision in post-14 education arising from this study are identified and discussed.

### 6.1 Significance and contribution to schools' decision-making in the field of MFL in post-14 education

The current educational landscape in England is characterised by a continuous decline in numbers of students taking languages, beyond post 14-education. Despite a wide range of government measures focusing on standards and accountability to address this situation (Board & Tinsley, 2015; Department for Education, 2014c) the impact has been minimal. Indeed, such measures are particularly aimed at core subjects, and in themselves they are unlikely to achieve a paradigm shift in culture, unless supported by coherent and consistent national language policies (Evans, 2007& Macaro, 2008). An important aspect of such measures has been the decentralization of policy to schools, which has brought to the forefront the role of head teachers and the impact that their decision-making has in deterring or perpetuating the decline in MFL beyond post-14 education. There is a growing body of interest in this field of study (Parrish and Lanvers, 2018: Parrish, 2019); and research is on the rise which provides a view on the role of school leaders' decision making with regards to enactment of policy and practice and which reveals the reality of MFL provision in post-14 education in England. What is less evident is research which seeks to develop a deeper understanding of what drives the unique interpretation and adoption of MFL provision by head teachers within their educational settings (Johnson and Johnson, 2015).

The primary aim of this study was to critically understand institutional level decision-making regarding MFLs in secondary schools and to examine this in light of the role of power and agency in influencing how individuals feel and act as 'subjects' of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1982). Thus, consideration was given to how this nexus can afford both prominence or invisibility in MFL provision, beyond KS3. Because power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge and 'truths' [Ibid], such entanglement can both constraint or support schools' decision-making. In this regard it was imperative to explore the extent to which senior leaders felt that their agency could enact their beliefs and which factors could then support or inhibit their agentic power (Oolbekkink-Marchand *et al.*, 2017). Integral to this research was also a desire to examine the extent to which schools' decision-making reflected a sense of congruence or dissonance with senior leader's beliefs

and as a result reinforced or precluded the decision-making process and its eventual application and practice in this curriculum area. Thus, this study explored the extent to which school leaders are able to reflect on how their judgements and values ultimately affect their decision-making and in turn give greater affordance to the provision of MFLs beyond KS3. By establishing a link between the role of power and agency, as well as senior leaders' beliefs and their decision-making, this study provides timely and valuable insights, helping to bridge the gap between this under-represented area of research. There is a scarcity of research which links the role of power and agency with institutional level decision-making in relation to second language studies provision beyond the compulsory phase. The following research aims (RA) therefore drove this research:

To critically understand institutional -level decision making regarding language learning in secondary schools and the role of power and agency.

To examine the way in which policy tools and frameworks influence the decisions senior leaders make about second language provision in their schools.

To critically explore the extent to which the views of the wider school community about second language learning impacts on institutional- level decision making.

An exploration of the findings from both school leaders and heads of MFL (as presented and analysed in Chapter 4) have generated some significant findings, which are the focus for this concluding chapter. It is recognised that the small group of participants can limit the extent to which generalised claims can be made. I argue, however, that the conclusions which are drawn from this study have important implications for those with an interest in MFL provision in secondary schools in England and who seek to understand the reasons behind the continuous abatement of L2 studies in post-14 education and most importantly that seek to reverse the landscape of MFL in England. The findings that emerged make a valuable contribution to our understanding of how senior leaders might contribute successfully to the determent of the decline in L2 studies in secondary schools. It is therefore essential to delegitimise discourses associated with 'historically grown macro-structures' (Becket and MacPherson, 2005) and bring to the forefront of education new discourses fit for the global world we live. This in turn will lead the way to novel ways of acting and ultimately contribute to the curtailment of the existing decline in MFLs, in post 14- education.

## 6.2 Key conclusions from data

### 6.2.1 To critically understand institutional -level decision- making regarding language learning in secondary schools and the role of power and agency (Research aim 1)

Following from the analysis in chapter 4, decisions relating to second language provision beyond KS3 are devolved mainly to headteachers (Johnson and Johnson, 2015) thus, the latter have a paramount role in contributing, if not almost stopping the abatement in the 'language learning crisis' (Lanvers & Coleman, 2013). As a result, it can be argued that school leaders are discursively positioned as agentic and empowered, (Parrish, 2018). Thus, they hold the ultimate decision-making, as their discourses have shaped and created meaning systems that have gained the status and currency of 'truth' (Foucault, 1970:56; Fejes & Dahlsted, 2013). Hence legitimacy is granted to their particular knowledge within their institutional practices. Therefore, it could be argued that head teachers' decision-making also holds the answer to the decline of MFL beyond KS3. The findings in this study reveal that despite an architecture of compliance (Foucault, 1975, 2007), where many head teachers perceive their role as a means to define and meet performance targets (Board and Tinsley 2014; Lo Bianco, 2014; Long and Boulton, 2016; Staufenberg 2017; Thomson 2016a) as pointed out by participant A when referring to other school leaders, *who' are in the job to get outstanding results in order to achieve a performance table'*, it was clear from the data that the senior leaders believe in the relevance of MFL and consequently are able to drive this agenda, as their authoritative position enables them to act as elements or instruments of power (Foucault, 1982a). Thus, their decision-making is given legitimacy as it becomes a matter of an 'authoritative allocation of values' (Ball, 1990:3). It was clear from the findings that school leaders were responsible for decision-making regarding curriculum provision beyond KS3. The views held by the heads of languages were also considered. However, their agency is constrained not only by centrally imposed accountability measures, but also by the decision-making of the school leaders (Parrish, 2018)

Whilst the authoritative position of school leaders has also played a part in the decision-making process of the participants in this study, the findings have also demonstrated that senior leaders' perceptions of the value of MFLs and what affects their decision-making is underpinned by their own values that in turn drive their practice. Considering all aspects of the findings, it has been found that senior leaders' decision-making with regards to MFLs is dependent on their beliefs about the importance of L2 learning (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2007). And given this link between beliefs and decision-making, they are willing and able to allow their own visions and values to inform their strategic overview to planning, and consequently afford greater provision of second language studies. This suggests that change must be attitudinal as opposed to structural, and enacted both at government and local level. The head teachers in both school A and B have clearly indicated this to

be the case. For SL A it was *'a case of trying to drive what one believes to be the right education for young people'*. Moreover, he argued that individuals have a *'particular perception of anthropological perspective on what it means to be fully human then that's going to influence what one regards as the purpose of education. And I think languages are a manifestation of that breadth and proof of humanity and therefore we would want to continue that.'* In school B it was conveyed that the affordance given to MFLs was also informed by the beliefs and values held by the school leaders (Data Extracts 4.9 - 4.11), despite any other constraints. The head teacher indicated being *'biased because of my own conviction and I can't help that. But my own conviction is what I can see it [L2s] do for people...'* The findings strongly suggest that school leaders' decision-making process regarding MFL provision is underpinned by the values and beliefs of the headteachers (Devlin & Warnock, 1977; Hammersley-Fletcher, 2007).

6.2.2 RQ2: To critically examine the way in which policy tools and frameworks influence the decisions senior leaders make about second language provision in their schools (Research aim 2)

The data has revealed that the senior leaders involved in this study considered MFL studies an important element in the education of their students. Actually, it is argued that the pressures exerted by external accountability measures are to be blamed for the national 'low' profile of MFLs, where the latter are regularly and easily put aside to make way for learning which is judged by policy makers to be of greater importance (Powell *et al.*, 2000; Jones and Coffey, 2013; Driscoll, 2014). Importantly, the findings demonstrated that the EBacc and Progress 8 measures, although considered, they were not the main drivers in the decision-making process, but importantly act as social markers (Tinsley and Board, 2016), thus they are misaligned with the more fundamental beliefs and philosophies about inclusive practices and opportunities for all. The data has shown the importance of providing an inclusive education, regardless of background. It is the head teachers' prerogative to bring about the much needed change in language education, regardless of its link with socio-political contexts (Pachler, 2007), which are embedded in ubiquitous hegemonic traditions that contribute to social inequality in education and further linguistic and cultural marginalisation. Namely, senior leaders must oppose the validation of policies and curriculum decisions that restrict educational access and privilege dominant groups (Shohamy, 2006) and in that way stand against normalized linguistic, economic, and ethnic/social hierarchies (Ball 2006). Crucially, head teachers' decision-making regarding L2 provision in post-14 education must reflect a clear drive to improve social equity in education closing gaps in both participation and attainment irrespective of socioeconomics. Arguably this is an enormous task, as school leaders might be reluctant to follow their own beliefs as they have to contend with Ofsted ratings, the reputation of the school, the stands or falls on attainment grades, amongst other constraints. But ultimately, as leaders in their

different settings they can be the enablers to the start of a new discourse on second language education in post-14 education.

6.2.3 RQ 3: To critically explore the extent to which the views of the wider school community about second language learning impacts on institutional- level decision making (Research aim 3)

The data in this study has revealed that senior leaders' decision-making is affected by the views of the students and the parents which in turn, cannot escape the influence of the global community. In this regard the findings showed that the perceived dominance of the English Language and its link with motivation (Guo and Becket, 2007; Philipson, 2003) together with the exit of the UK from the EU, has affected societal perceptions (Coleman, 2009) which led to a degree of reluctance by students to take up MFLs (Lanvers, Doughty and Thompson, 2018). Nevertheless, the head teachers in the schools in question continued to pursue their agenda and offer language studies to the students regardless of the negative feelings imposed by these landscapes[ibid]. Consequently, and underpinned by the findings of this study, it is now possible to make clear recommendations for policy and practice.

### 6.3 Implications for practice

This section brings together the key findings of the three research questions and puts forward some recommendations for future language policy. Data was collected relating to MFL take up in secondary schools, beyond the compulsory phase. This was then followed by examining the factors that can affect school decision-making practices in MFLs, and how the latter exercise authority in discourse within institutions, such as secondary schools, in England (Olsson and Heizmann, 2015). This was a prominent focus due to the perceived ability of school leaders to act autonomously and with intent, and as a result to influence or not wider school policies and practices (Oolbekkink-Marchand *et al.*, 2017), namely by way of affording greater visibility to MFL studies beyond KS3. In addition, school leaders' decision-making regarding L2 provision must be underpinned by the principle of a rounded education for all, where MFL provision is seen as an important part of the curriculum. Equally and believing that education is for all, this must be translated into specific measures that will lead to closing the gap in participation and attainment irrespective of background. Namely it is important to ensure that all students are exposed to L2 studies particularly in areas of lower socioeconomic backgrounds, where students' encounters with foreign languages are scarce (Coffey, 2018; Lanvers, 2017a; section 2.5). Consequently, policy tools and frameworks, which include examination criteria and content must be underpinned by an inclusive approach to MFL education and driven by senior leaders who truly believe in the values of second language education.

In highlighting the discursive construction of the decision-making process in schools, this study points to senior leaders' responsibility to undertake active, critical, and sceptical interrogation of policy that fails to stop the continuous decline in MFL. Consequently, the essence of this study focused on affording the opportunity for senior leaders to reflect on how their judgements and values on the usefulness and importance of languages, ultimately inform their decision-making regarding language policies beyond KS3, as these factors in turn affect individuals' perceptions regarding the value of L2 studies (Barcelos, 2013). As a result, I contend that for a change to occur in the landscape of MFL beyond post-14 education, school leaders must understand and accept the value of MFLs in post-14 education and their decision-making must translate clearly such values. Hence, there is an absolute necessity for greater awareness on the value of L2 studies, and how these also hold the door for economic success (Tinsley, 2013; CBI, 2016).

Thus, this study has opened the way to understand the extent to which own beliefs and values underpin institutional level decision-making as the data gathered indicates a clear correlation between head teachers' life experiences, values and beliefs impacting on the decision-making process in relation to curriculum provision in MFL, in post-14 education. By investigating the link between the impact of beliefs and the role of power and agency in the decision-making process, it is very clear that changes to the landscape of second language studies can be advised based on research evidence.

#### **6.4 Limitations of the study and directions for future research**

Although adequate for most aspects of the current study, sample size could be seen as representing a limitation. A larger sample size would allow comparison between school types and regions. However, I argue that although the sample size is limited, I was nevertheless able to ensure richness and depth of analysis. Moreover, the typicality of the situation - the participants and the settings - enables group comparisons to occur and indicate how data might translate into different settings and cultures (Eisenhart and Howe ,1992; Lincoln and Guba,1985).

The current study has signposted new avenues of research. Future studies might benefit from a deeper investigation into senior leaders' conceptions of usefulness and importance of languages, given the findings which revealed these to be particularly important factors in their decision-making. And this can be achieved by ways of creating at national level, working groups that can engage in a meaningful, and dialectical reflexive processes aiming to recognise and shape current perceptions in order to give greater affordance to L2 studies in post-14 education.

Although school leaders recognise that L2 studies are relevant in the curriculum beyond KS3, this study raises questions about whether school leaders could do more to encourage take-up. This

thesis highlights, therefore, the need for an increased focus and attention in the way that discourses on MFLs take place. In this regard, senior leaders must stand against existing discourses, which are hinged in traditional ideas, that only serve to perpetuate the status quo (Coglan & Brydon-Miller, 2014; Jessop, 2014; Fairclough, 2001) and continue to afford invisibility to L2 studies in post-14 education.

## 6.5 Personal reflections

The findings from the study contrast with the general, gloomy picture of Modern Foreign Languages in schools in England. The data reveals that when there is a strong belief in the value of second language learning, the provision beyond KS3 is not only assured but importantly, it is instigated regardless of socioeconomics. And this translates into a greater take up. Therefore, it is important for school leaders to oppose the validation of policies and curriculum decisions that restrict educational access and privilege dominant groups (Shohamy, 2006) and in that way stand against normalized linguistic, economic, and ethnic/social hierarchies (Ball 2006). Crucially, senior leaders' decision-making regarding L2 provision in post-14 education must reflect a clear commitment to improve social equity in education closing gaps in both participation and attainment irrespective of socioeconomics.

## 6.6 Concluding Thoughts

The essence of this study focused on exploring what influences school leaders' decision-making regarding language policies provision and enactment in post-14 education, as individual perceptions regarding the value of MFLs play a pivotal role in the decision-making process (Borg, 2003). In this regard, senior leaders have a crucial role in extricating what influences their own beliefs in order to make informed choices for the benefit of their students and create policies that place L2 studies at the forefront of education. In so doing the research provides opportunities for all practitioners, particularly school leaders to reflect on their own beliefs and importantly on the power that such beliefs hold. By sharing the outcome of the present research at both regional and national level and invite head teachers to be part of leading discussions groups based on the present findings, can create the conditions to start a new 'discourse' on the values afforded to MFL studies. In turn this critical reflection will set the ground for actions within their school contexts, creating at national level, working groups that can engage in a meaningful, and dialectical reflexive processes aiming to recognise and shape current perceptions in order to give greater affordance to L2 studies in post-14 education.

As discussed in this study, senior leaders' decision-making in MFLs is a new area of research, but a critical one if the landscape of MFL is to be understood and consequently changed. On the basis of this new area of study, recommendations for practice are made: namely the findings strongly

suggest that school leaders, policy makers and all those working in Education must critically reflect on their own views on the values and usefulness of second languages studies, as well as the benefits (both intrinsic and extrinsic) that L2 studies offer and in turn design their curriculum with greater affordance given to L2 studies. In addition, it is paramount that senior leaders critique and reflect on their own personal life stories, biases and beliefs in a more meaningful and informed way. A change in mindsets will unquestionably lead to positive perceptions of MFLs, and head teachers, due to their authoritative position within their institutions have the ultimate 'will to truth' (Foucault, 1972), hence they will be able to initialise, legitimise and reproduce 'new' discourses that can work to normalise and regulate a 'new' normal. This, I believe, can only serve to reverse the current decline in MFLs beyond compulsory education. Engaging in discourse requires the capacity to be critically reflective and the ability to engage in 'critical dialectical discourse involving the assessment of assumptions and expectations supporting beliefs, values and feelings' (Mezirow, 2003 :60). I believe the discussion of discourse adds further conceptual ideas with which to approach Institutional level decision-making in second language studies, to understand the relations across a variety of levels of discourse and to recognise schools' decision-making not as a single solitary unit of discourse but as an indefinitely describable field of relationships (Foucault, 1991: 55). This importance of openly discussing and reflecting on what informs school leaders' decision-making will create the conditions for schools to engage with a new 'discourse' that emphasises the value of learning a foreign language beyond KS3 and consequently place the latter with the same level of affordance as core subjects, thus leading to change on the landscape of MFLs in England. In exploring such issues with school leaders and bringing to the forefront the 'power' that institutions hold in terms of strategic, operational and pedagogical decision-making, pressure can be placed at school level to bring about much needed change. And this starts in every classroom and in every subject, but crucially starts at the strategic level where MFLs must be timetabled with enough hours in the curriculum to enable high quality teaching which in turn will enthuse students. In this way, the future of MFLs in secondary education beyond KS3 will not be in peril. Finally, I conclude by suggesting that there is much work yet to be done. Change does not occur in one sweep. However senior leaders are the ones that must take the lead in championing and influencing educational change in second language studies in England.

Finally, it is important to highlight the originality of this study, when compared to others. Namely, there are various studies on policies, power relations and leadership (Ball, 1990,1993 &2006; Earley and Weindling, 2004; Foucault, 1977,1980,1983). However, their focus has not been solely on Second Language studies. The exception to this, is a study conducted by Parrish and Lanvers in 2018 (Parrish & Lanvers, 2018). The latter focused on the relationship between the decisions made by



school leaders in England concerning their school policy for teaching modern foreign languages (MFL) post-14, but linked with student motivation for MFL. Equally in 2011, Earley & Weindling, (2004), discussed school leadership in schools and found that the opaque nature of the position of heads of MFL, can yield high degrees of professional autonomy. The way senior staff work with their middle managers is crucial in relation to such matters as role clarity[ibid]. And in 2014, Rayner in his critical study explored through discussion with head teachers the interplay between structure (the policy context) and their ability to shape the school culture and to exert authority and autonomy (2014). Equally, Ball (1993,1990) has also been at the forefront of the field of educational policy analysis in the UK, namely discussing issues relating to education reform, such as the 1988 Education Reform Act. And a particular feature of his approach has been the way in which he treats educational policy as discourses and how he examines them, in light of Foucault's concept of power knowledge. Whilst Foucault did not write about education, per se, the usage of his approach to power has been extensive within a range of areas within education<sup>47</sup>. And although the notions of power have been explored extensively in other fields, I felt that there were still avenues for further exploration of these ideas in educational leadership and policy to unpack how power is seen (and not seen) to operate through particular discourses and education reforms.

Issues of power and decline in second language studies have been well documented, as well as the impact of policies on the provision and enactment of the MFL curriculum, particularly how school leadership teams manage their implementation, the impact of policy provision and consequent decision-making process is yet to be understood in its full extent. The aim of this study was to critically understand what influences institutional-level decision-making when determining the provision of second language studies in post-14 education, with an examination of the impact of institutional level decision-making practices in second language studies, and the extent to which they exercise authority in discourse within institutions, such as secondary schools. Indeed, my study has clear similarities to the many studies already discussed, namely those which focus on discussing the decline of MFL in secondary schools as well as the role of senior leaders in their different settings in attempting to remain autonomous despite the performatives measures centrally imposed. I have also discussed the impact of beliefs on practitioners (Borg, 2003; Johnson, 1999; Pajares, 1992; Woods, 1996) (section 2.3) in order to understand the relationship between beliefs and the decision-

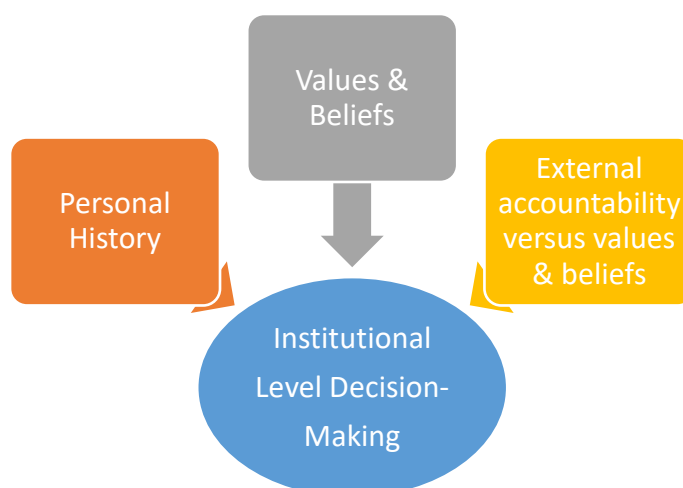
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<sup>47</sup> Besides the selective bibliography, these are a few texts that provide elements of Foucault's notion of power: *The History of Sexuality* Volume 1, pp 92-98 (Foucault 1990a); *Discipline & Punish*, pp. 170-194 (Foucault, 1991a); *Power/Knowledge*, pp. 78-108 (Foucault, 1980). These are a few selected texts that provide these elements of Foucault's notion of power and also in education specifically. Regarding education and educational leadership such as Niesche (2015)' work on Governmentality and schools.

making process (Barcelos, 2013), and more specifically, how beliefs affect senior leaders' decision-making. Finally, I have also explored is the relationship between language and power (Fairclough, 1995; Pennycook, 1998), where some of the discourses are granted the legitimacy of the state and potentially prevent many of accessing second language studies (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; section 2.7). Framed by this background of research, my study aims to joins together all these different elements, in light of Foucault's concept of power/knowledge and how this nexus can both constrain and support the agency of school leaders in the decision- making process, and consequently offer new insights into research in the field of Second Language Policy implementation in Secondary schools in England, with the relevant policy changes needed to alter the landscape of MFL studies beyond post-14 education, as indicated by the findings.

## 6.7 Significance and Contribution to Knowledge

The significance of the contribution of this thesis lies in the exploration, through the nexus power/knowledge, of the pivotal role that values held by school leaders can lead to greater prominence of MFLs, beyond post-14 education. Specifically, their individual values underpinning practice can safeguard MFL provision regardless of policy directives or any other drivers. For all the opportunities and limitations of educational policy, the greatest influence on the agency of school leaders is their personal history that shapes their values and in turn informs their decision-making. The figure below illustrates this idea:



*Figure 8 Drive behind institutional level decision-making in Second Language Studies*

This study throws fresh light on the ways that schools' decision-making in relation to second language studies can lead to some students continuing to be permanently disadvantaged in secondary schools, as findings give insights into the mechanisms by which inequality

constructs closure for some, in relation to MFL learning in post-14 education. In this regard, head teachers are faced with a choice: comply with external accountability measures, or give a voice to their own beliefs and values and the very principles of equality in education, with language provision for all. Critically, the former occurs and this leads to further ostracization of students from deprived socioeconomic backgrounds, who are often advised not to take language studies further. And this stands in stark contrast with the principles of an inclusive education. As a result, these students move through life feeling detached from the value and benefits of learning a second language. This process continues to be perpetuated in a cyclical manner, impacting negatively upon societal perceptions, namely on the intrinsic value of teaching and learning a second language. Although senior leaders recognise that L2 studies are relevant in the curriculum beyond KS3, this study raises questions about whether they could do more to encourage take-up. Therefore, I contend that school leaders have the greatest responsibility and duty in deterring the decline in MFL beyond KS3. And this ultimately translates into senior leaders' ability and willingness to shape their school culture and values, where the study of foreign languages is not only afforded greater visibility, but crucially is encouraged, regardless of socioeconomics. Hence, it is paramount for senior leaders to enact a discourse that opposes entrenched societal views and truly values the linguistic variety of the global community, as this is critical in 'fostering students' curiosity and deepen their understanding of the world' (DfE, 2013), where MFLs are recognised as a fundamental part of the curriculum.

The findings that emerged in this study, undoubtedly have made a valuable contribution to our understanding of how senior leaders might contribute successfully to the determent of the decline in Second Language Studies in secondary schools in England, beyond post 14 education. Specifically, it is fundamental for senior leaders to convey a clear message of support in MFL provision and follow it through as a fundamental part of the curriculum in all key stages, being valued in pair with core subjects. And this can only be achieved when every student and every parent can see unequivocally that the body of the school, led by the senior leaders, completely embrace such beliefs and as result they are then able to drive this agenda through, as their authoritative position enables them to act as elements or instruments of power (Foucault, 1982a). Thus, their decision-making is given legitimacy as it becomes a matter of an 'authoritative allocation of values' (Ball,1990:3). This study has demonstrated unquestionably the need to delegitimise ubiquitous discourses associated with the domination of the English language, which underwrites a neo-colonialist approach (Becket and MacPherson, 2005) and only contributes to reinforcing further the prevailing disengagement of students regarding second language studies (Dobson, 2018). Therefore, and as evidenced by its findings, it is paramount for senior leaders to bring to the forefront of education new discourses fit for the global world we live in and where the status of second language studies is considerably

improved and this ultimately will contribute to the curtailment of the existing decline in second language studies in post 14- education.

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## Glossary of Acronyms

ILDM – Institutional Level decision making

GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education

KS1 – Key Stage 1

KS2 – Key Stage 2

KS3 - Key Stage 3

KS4 – Key Stage 4

L2s - Second Language Studies

MFL – Modern Foreign Languages

NC – National Curriculum

SLs- Senior Leaders

## Appendix 1 – Decline in second language studies prior to 2002

Claims were made that the decline in MFLs begun via a policy of disapplication (DfEE 2000:19-21), where secondary schools started withdrawing pupils from Design and Technology and MFL for work-related and curriculum emphasis and consolidation of learning across the curriculum.<sup>48</sup> In all three cases, schools are able to disapply up to two NC subjects. The withdrawal of some pupils from language lessons continued to permeate L2 studies in KS3, despite being a pillar of the Ebacc (Language Trends, 2021). This disapplication led to a number of schools beginning to withdraw students from MFLs in KS4. From September 2004, languages became an entitlement at KS4 and

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<sup>48</sup> GREAT BRITAIN. PARLIAMENT. HOUSE OF COMMONS. EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE (1998). Disaffected Children. Volume 1: Report and Proceedings of the Committee. London: The Stationery Office.

ceased to be mandatory, consequently the dramatic decline in GCSE entries during 2004-2006 slowed. Nevertheless, 2008 saw yet again, an annual decrease of 3-4% (CILT *et al.*, 2010) until the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc) in 2011, which showed an increase from 31% in 2010 to 49% in 2011 (Tinsley & Han, 2011[online]).

This increase however, represented more able pupils (Filmer-Sankey *et al.*, 2010; Tinsley, 2013a). As many as 50% of state schools reported an increase from 2011 to 2014 in the numbers of pupils taking at least one language at Key Stage 4, and in 33% of schools this increase was by 10% or more (Board & Tinsley, 2013[online]). About 1 in five schools take-up for languages remained persistently low (below 25%) [ibid]; in 49% of sponsored academies<sup>49</sup> fewer than 25% of pupils were studying a language beyond KS3. Conversely, only 10% of converter academies<sup>50</sup> had such a low level of pupil take-up for languages in Key Stage 4 [ibid].

## Appendix 2: Language Trends Data on Participant Schools

In 2018, 785 secondary schools (651 state funded and 134 independent) participated in the survey. The 2019 survey gathered evidence from 845 secondary schools, of which 715 were state funded and 130 independent – slightly more than 2018. Unfortunately, the data collection phase in 2020 coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic when all schools in England closed on 20th March 2020. This resulted in fewer responses to the survey than in previous years: 320 secondary schools (a significant drop from 845 in 2019), of which 271 were state funded and 49 independents. Despite a low participation rate from state secondary schools in the North East, with just 10 responses, all other regions of England were represented. By 2021, the number of participant schools increased, with 138 Independent schools and 617 state secondary schools (Language Trends, 2021).

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<sup>49</sup> Sponsored **academies** are mostly underperforming **schools** who have been encouraged to **convert** to an **academy** run by sponsors, who are responsible for improving performance

<sup>50</sup> **Converters academies** are **schools** which previously had 'good' or 'outstanding' Ofsted grades and have opted to **convert** to **academy** status.





### Appendix 3: Objectivism versus constructivism

Objectivism explains that social entities exist in reality, external to social factors. Reality exists independent of human thoughts and beliefs and knowledge can be acquired through observable objects and events (Saunders *et al.*, 2003; Bryman and Bell, 2007; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008; Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Only through objective interpretation can information be fully processed and understood (Livesey, 2006 [online]). The epistemological stance within this paradigm is therefore positivist in nature and this means that the researcher maintains a distance in order to avoid bias (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). This methodology requires a quantitative mode of inquiry (Saunders *et al.*, 2003), where numerical data is used to quantify or measure phenomena and produce findings (Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Conversely, in constructivism or constructionism, it is argued that those involved are continually creating and revising meaning [ibid]. For Guba and Lincoln (1989), '... realities are social constructions of the mind, and that there exist as many such constructions as there are individuals' (p.43). There are multiple constructs of realities (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012) and they are influenced by experiences and social interactions (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Each person has their different view of reality that is considered right (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, the notion of an objective reality is rejected, as social interaction is based on consciousness, action and unpredictability (Ponterotto, 2005; Livesey, 2006). This means that it is only through interaction and dialogue between the researcher and participants or object that a clearer understanding and answers are achieved [ibid]. The epistemology is therefore constructivist in nature and a consensus is sought within the findings (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; 1998).

## Appendix 4: Project Information Sheet and Consent Form

### Project Information Sheet

**Who are you, and what is the research?**

My name is Ana De Silva e Lopes and I am head of Modern Foreign Languages at Stroud School in Romsey

I am currently undertaking an Education Doctorate (Ed.D) at the University of Winchester. This study is seeking the views that may provide insights into the decline in post-14 education in second language studies and explore the factors, which influence the institution-level decision making about the teaching of MFL in secondary schools.

**What is the Research about?**

This study seeks to understand the factors which influence the decisions school leaders make about the foreign language provision and curriculum enactment in their secondary schools in England.

**Why am I being asked to participate?**

You have been asked to participate because as a member of the senior leadership team in your setting you are in a particular place that enables you to share light on the reasons behind the provision and curriculum endorsement regarding second language studies in post-14 education.

Secondly as a head of MFL in your settings, you have first-hand experience of the engagement or disengagement of your students in second language studies. In addition, your position as language teacher will also enable you to give informed opinions regarding the position of language studies and its relation to any decisions that might be made at local level regarding curriculum provision in second language studies.

**Why is this research important?**

It is important to gain an understanding of the role of senior leaders and the impact of their decision-making regarding second language studies in secondary schools in England.

Your feedback will bring new insights that can help explain further the decrease in second language studies in post-14 education in secondary schools in England

**How can I participate in the research project?**

To participate in the research project, you will be interviewed. You will be asked to talk about your experiences as part of the leadership team and heads of department and how your personal and professional journeys might affect your own decision-making process regarding curriculum provision in second language studies.

You will receive an email inviting you to attend an interview. This will take place in the forthcoming Autumn term in your school setting.

**What happens if I do not take part?**

There will be no consequences if you choose not to take part.

**What will happen to the information I give?**

The interviews will be recorded on a password-protected device and then transcribed.

All information will be held securely on a password protected site. The data will be analysed and used as part of a mixed methods study with information previously collected via a questionnaire being administered through an anonymous online survey.

No individuals will be identified.

The data collected will be written up for the doctoral thesis and may be published in academic papers or presentations.

**Can I see the results?**

I will provide you with the opportunity to see the transcripts of the interviews should you wish to do so. In addition, if you would like to see and/or discuss the research findings once completed, please do not hesitate to email me on the email address below.

**Additional Information**

My Study has been approved by the Faculty of Education Ethics representative at the University of Winchester.

If you would like any further information, would like to discuss this study or have any concerns, please contact me on [A.desilvaelopes.13@unimail.winchester.ac.uk](mailto:A.desilvaelopes.13@unimail.winchester.ac.uk)

If you have any concerns at any point in the research, please contact my Director of Studies Dr Marnie Seymour at: [Marnie.Seymour@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:Marnie.Seymour@winchester.ac.uk)

or the University Data Protection Officer: Stephen Dowell at: [Stephen.Dowell@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:Stephen.Dowell@winchester.ac.uk)

## **Consent form**

Dear Mr /Mrs

My name is Ana De Silva e Lopes and I am Head of Modern Foreign Languages at Stroud School in Romsey.

I am currently undertaking an Education Doctorate (EdD) at the University of Winchester, which is seeking the views that may account for the well documented decline in post-14 education in second language studies and explore the factors, which may influence institution-level decision making when determining the provision of second language teaching and learning in secondary schools in England.

The project information sheet contains the details regarding my research. Therefore, I would like to ask if you are willing for take part in this study, virtually or in person (Covid-dependent).

In order to develop my understanding, I hope to conduct some interviews with three head teachers and three heads of MFL from different school settings. Thus, I would be very grateful if you agree to take part in this project to let me have some possible dates so that I can explain fully the whole process and in turn conduct the interview.

My time scale is somehow limited, but if possible, by the end of the current month, beginning of April would be a good time for me. Due to my work commitments I am only able to conduct interviews On Mondays and Wednesdays from 14:00 onwards, and afterschool hours for the remainder of the working week. However, during the week beginning the 29 of March, I am available all throughout the week.

I must reassure you that all references to participants will be anonymous and will be referred to as letters, to treat data confidentially and anonymously (BERA, 2018). You will have the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview if you choose to do so. All transcripts will be kept in a password- protected file. No personal data will be used to refer to participants. All traceable personal data will remain confidential.

To fully comply with data protection laws (GDPR) all data collected will be securely stored on a password- controlled file. All reference to your identity or the identity of other participants will be removed, so that it will not be possible to connect any individual person with particular statements. No real names or reference to this school by name will be included in the report that I eventually write.

For the Winchester Research Ethics Committee approval process, I need to show that I have your permission and support to undertake this research. Thus, I would be grateful if you would be able to email me a response to indicate that you are happy for me to carry out this research. I will then attach this to my Research Ethics Approval Application. We can then discuss in more detail the best date, time and venue for the interviews.

If you have any questions about my research, I am very happy to discuss this further with you.

Thank you very much for your help.

Kind regards

Ana Lopes