The Modern Languages competences and choices of PGCE students

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The 2014 HEFCE report on trends in Higher Education confirms that the number of undergraduates enrolling for modern foreign language university courses is at the lowest point in a decade, in a year where the proportion of UK 18-year-olds applying to university has reached its highest-ever level. Entries for Modern Languages at GCSE and GCE A-level have shown a similar decline. While the lack of foreign language competences in the population is frequently bemoaned by commentators, the study of languages in many schools would no longer appear to be considered a priority, particularly since Modern Languages ceased to be compulsory at Key Stage 4. This paper examines how current curriculum policy and student choices are reflected in the uptake of languages in our education system. The full 2014-15 PGCE cohort across subject specialisms in the author’s university were audited on their language competences. They were asked what languages they had studied at each stage of education, from pre-school through to university and self-study. They self-assessed their competences and were also encouraged to make further comments regarding their experiences of learning languages. The analysis of these data is also compared with a similar audit from 2002-03, reflecting changes in language study options. Changes and developments in language education policies, curriculum choice patterns, and lifestyle options over the period are discussed.

Reference
