

Language programs in Coventry schools: information from school websites

Anthony J. Liddicoat, Department for Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick

This paper presents some information about the distribution and other features of programs for language study in schools in Coventry. The main focus is on Modern Languages, but Classical Languages such as Latin and Ancient Greek have also been included where they are offered.

Methodology

This study from the websites of schools in the Coventry local authority in order to examine what schools communicate about their language offerings to the community. The data was collected from the websites of all schools in the local authority area and from both primary and secondary schools from December 2019 – May 2020. Data was rechecked in 2021 in case of changes since the initial round of data collection. Websites, as documents created by schools, offer a way of understanding the schools’ local language policies (Maguire, Hoskins, Ball, & Braun, 2011) and in particular the values that inform their decision-making about languages.

The problem with using websites is that such sites do not always accurately reflect what schools provide and this should be taken into consideration when interpreting the data that has been collected. The data should not be seen as a factual presentation of information but rather as indicating something about how schools represent language study and what information is communicated about it. For example, if a school does not mention a language program on its website, this does not automatically mean that they do not teach a language. It may mean that they do not think the language program is of sufficient important or relevance to communicate about it to the public.

Additional data about schools was taken from government information from the ‘Get information about schools’ website: <https://www.get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/>. This site helped to identify schools in the local area, and general information about each school, including location and statistics relating to eligibility for free school meals.

Primary Schools

Overall profile of language programs in primary school

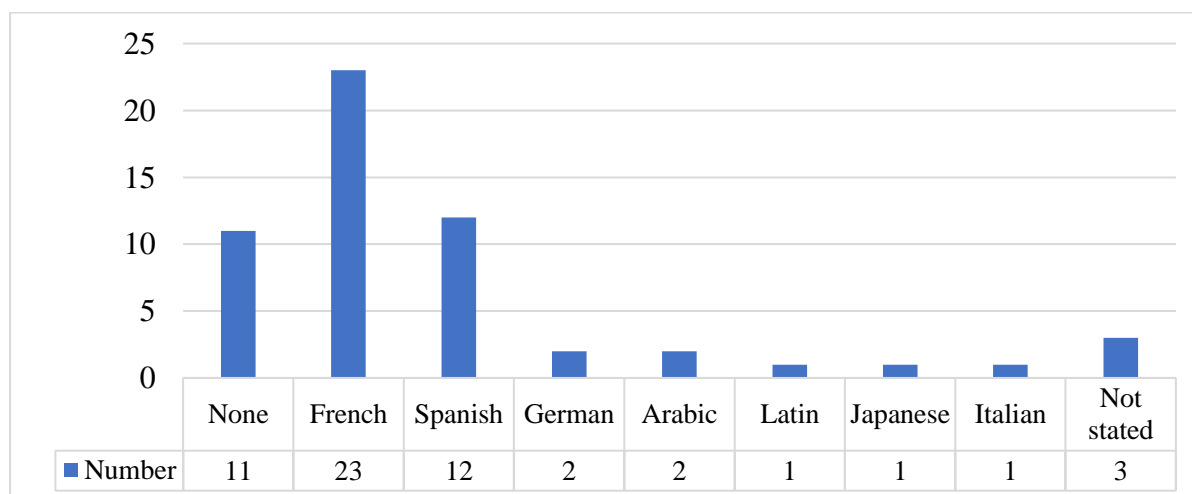


Figure 1: Languages offered by number of schools – Primary

A number of primary schools do not list a language as part of their curriculum offerings on their webpages. This may indicate that they do not offer a language at all or it may mean that they do not feel as if ML is an important enough part of the curriculum to warrant attention on their websites. Most school websites appear to list all other curriculum areas so the absence in most cases could be interpreted as a lack of a language program in the school. However, two of these schools give very little curriculum information and in this case, the lack of information about a language is not interpretable.

In those schools offering languages French and Spanish are widely taught with little teaching of other languages. At one school Arabic and Italian are as a second ML in rotation.

It appears that primary schools make little space available to support the development of community languages. One of the schools teaching Arabic may be an exception as it is an Islamic independent school but there is no data available about the program or the language background of students. The focus may be on Qur’anic recitation rather than communicative language development. The other Arabic program, which is also offered at an independent school is unlikely to be oriented towards a community language cohort as it is offered as an elective second ML and the teaching of Arabic and Italian as electives alternate.

Of the schools that advertise a language, all schools offer language study only in Key Stage 2, although 3 schools give no information about when an ML is introduced in their program. One school appears to offer an ML only in Years 3 to 5. Three schools mention language awareness activities in Key Stage 1 classes. In two schools, the websites state that they have an ML program, but do not state which language is taught or give other information about the program.

The offerings of primary schools have little connection to the languages spoken in Coventry according to UK census data for 2011. Punjabi, Polish, Gujurati, Urdu, Chinese (other than Mandarin), Arabic, Tamil and Bengali are the eight most widely spoken community languages spoken in Coventry according to the 2011 census, but of these only Arabic is taught at primary school/

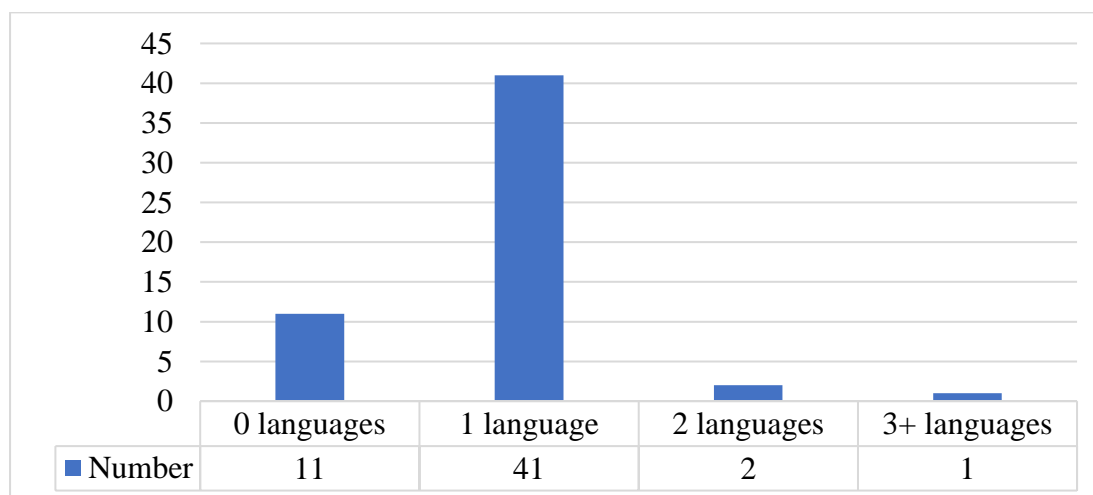


Figure 2: Number of languages offered by schools – Primary

Most schools offer one language with a small number of schools offering more than one. Of the schools offering more than one language, two do not offer continuous programs in the same language but rather change languages at a mid-point in their offerings. One school offers

Spanish in Years 3 and 4 and then switches to French for Year 6.¹ Another school offers French in Years 3 and 4 and Japanese in years 5 and 6. In the remaining school, which is an independent school, all students study French from Year 3 and can elect to take an additional language in Year 6.

Spatial distribution of primary school programs

Post code area	Number of schools	Languages taught (number of schools)
CV1	8	French (2), Spanish (4), German (1), Arabic (1), Italian (1), Latin(1), None (2)
CV2	9	French (6), Spanish (1), Not stated (1), None (1)
CV3	11	French (7), Spanish (2), Japanese (1), None (1)
CV4	6	French (4), Spanish (1), None (1)
CV5	9	French (2), Spanish (5), Not stated (1) None (3)
CV6	13	French (2), Spanish (2), German (1), Arabic (1), Not stated (1), None (3)

Table 1: Languages taught in Coventry by postcode – Primary

Languages are not evenly distributed across Coventry. French and Spanish are taught in most postcode areas. Schools reporting no language programs are spread across the city.

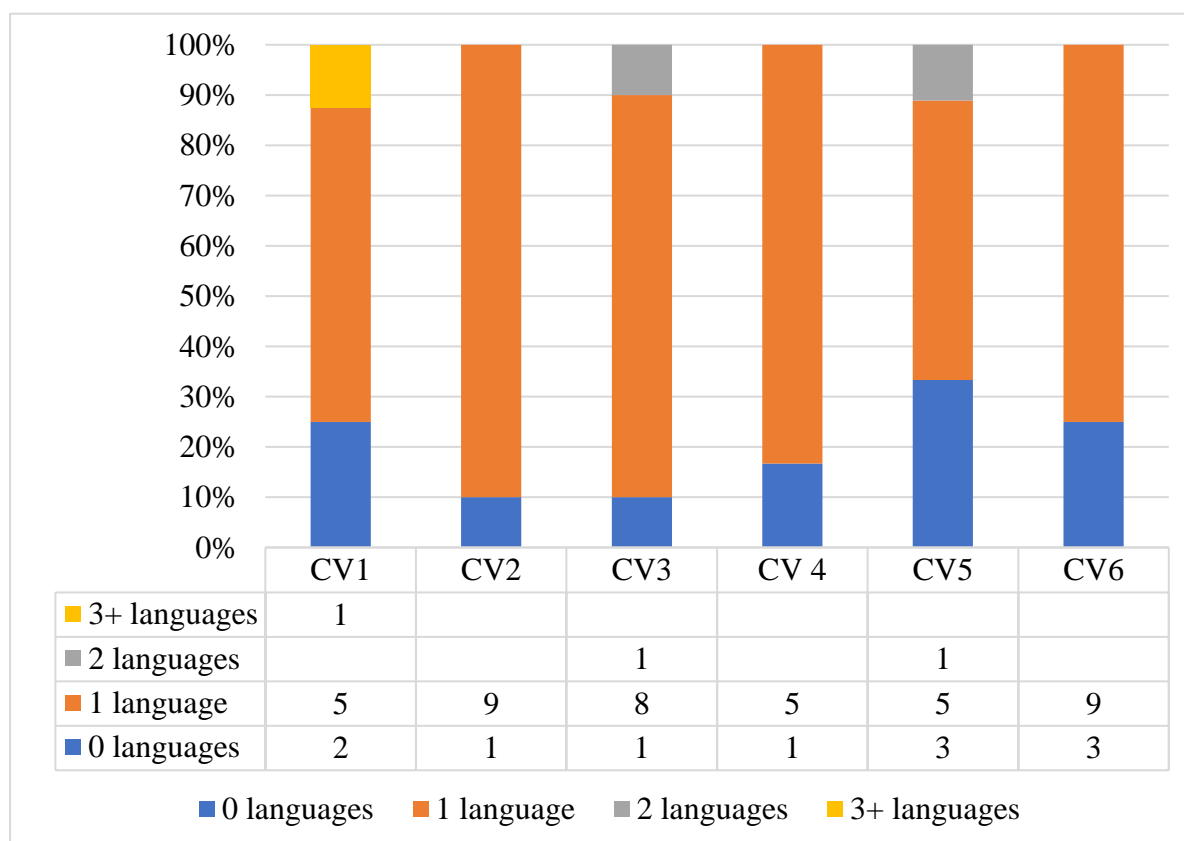


Figure 3: Number of languages taught by schools by postcode – Primary

Schools not advertising languages are spread across all of the postcodes. Schools in CV2, CV4 and CV6 offer at most one language, and this is true of the majority of schools across Coventry.

¹ In Year 5, the language is listed as TBC.

Social distribution of language programs

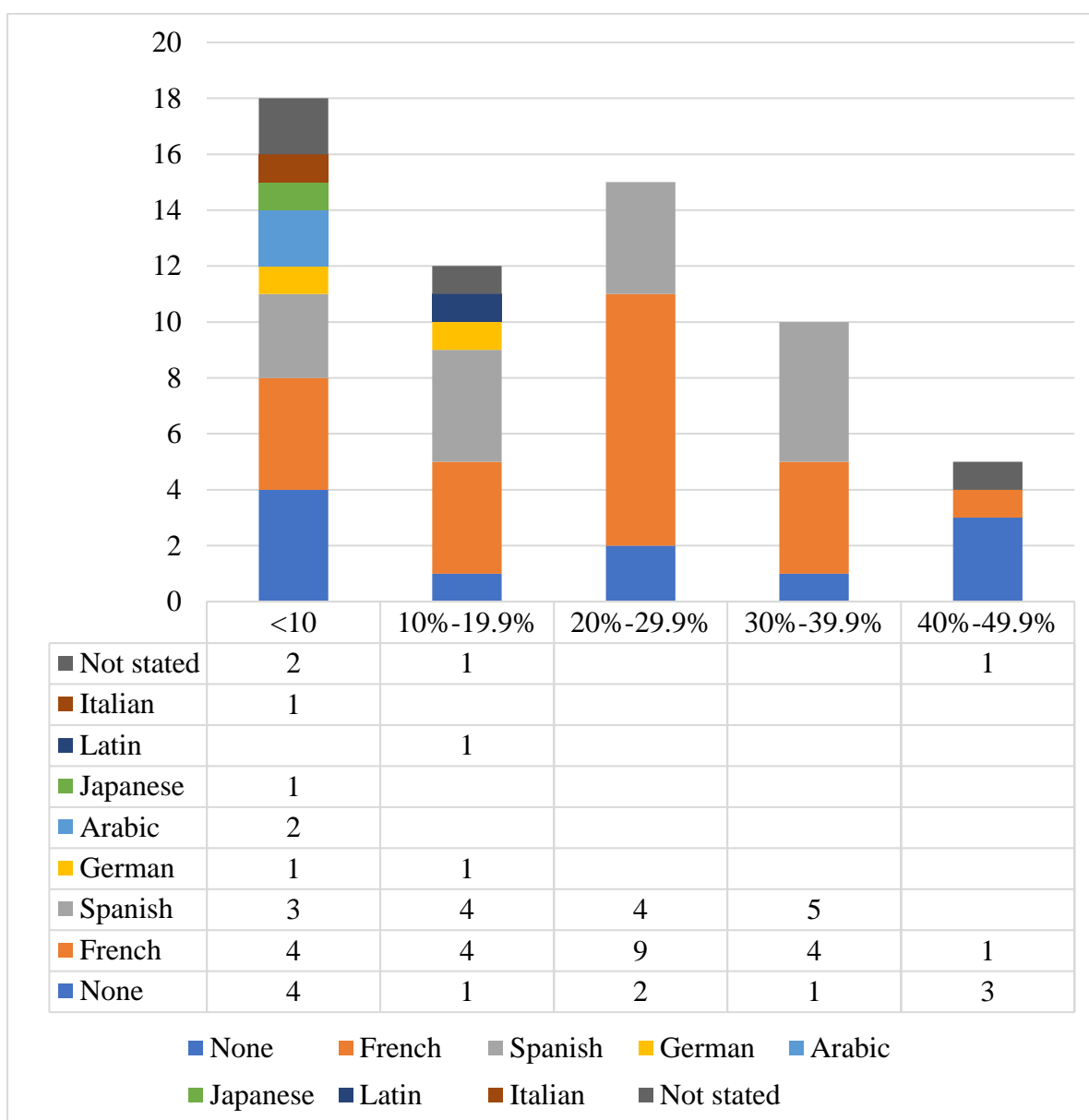


Figure 4: Schools offering languages by eligibility for free school meals – Primary²

Whether or not a school offers a language program does not seem to correlate well with socioeconomic status as measured by eligibility for free school meals, although schools in the lowest SES group are less likely to advertise a language. The range of languages available in schools with high SES is greater than those in lower SES areas. The presence of Arabic in the <10% group may however be overstated as it is taught in an Islamic independent school and all independent schools have 0% eligibility for free school meals and this eligibility does not reflect actual family financial situations.

² All private schools have 0% eligibility of free school meals.

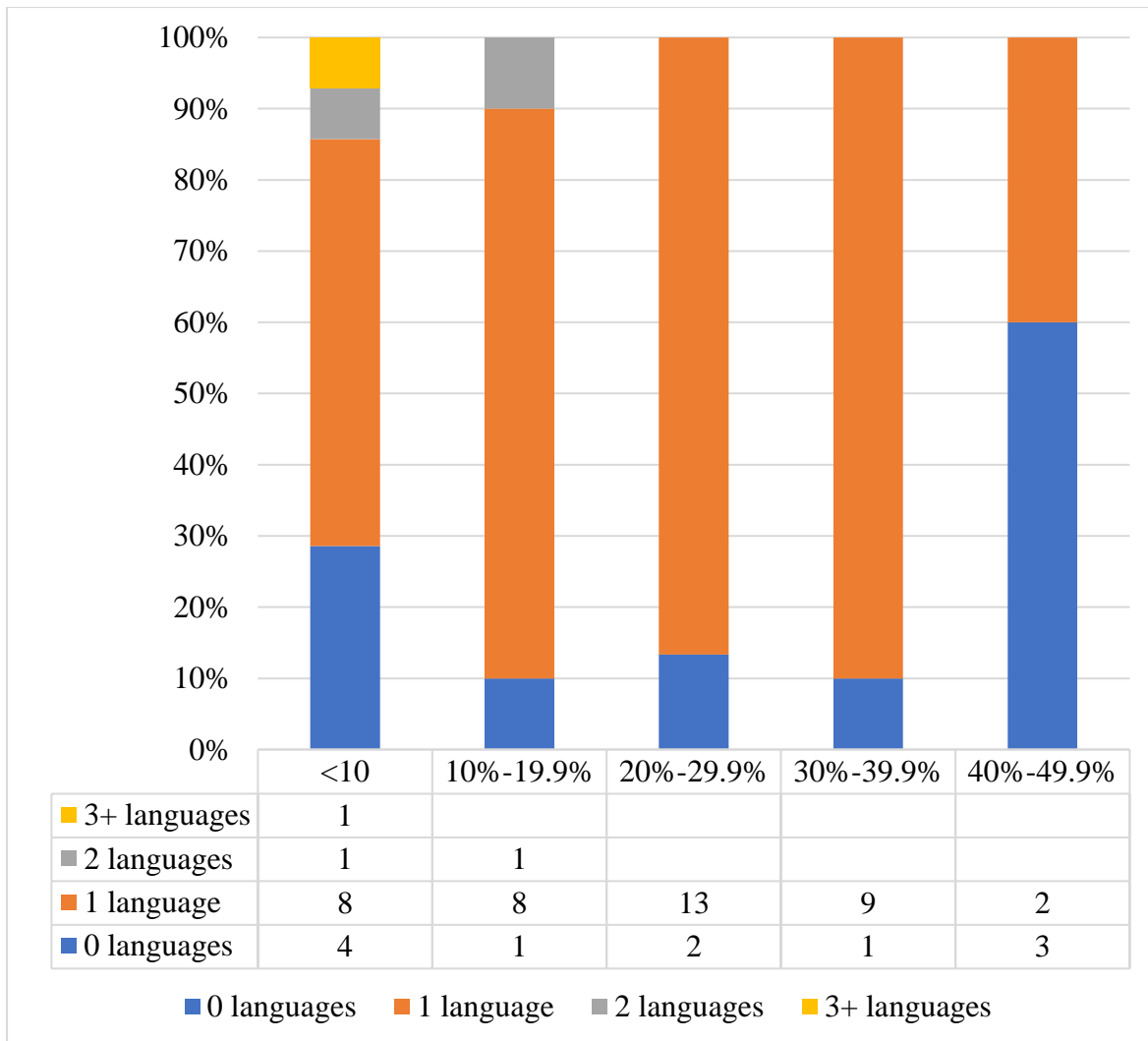


Figure 5: Number of languages offered by schools by percentage of students eligible for free school meals – Primary

The distribution of the number of schools offering more than one language shows a stronger relationship to SES with all schools offering more than one language being found in schools with lower eligibility for free school meals. This largely reflects a concentration of language learning in elite independents schools. Although schools that do not advertise MLs feature across the spectrum of SES groups, it is notable that schools in the lowest SES grouping are least likely to offer languages and only one school names a language on its website. There is therefore some evidence of a class bias in language learning in primary schools.

Secondary schools

Overall profile of language programs in secondary schools

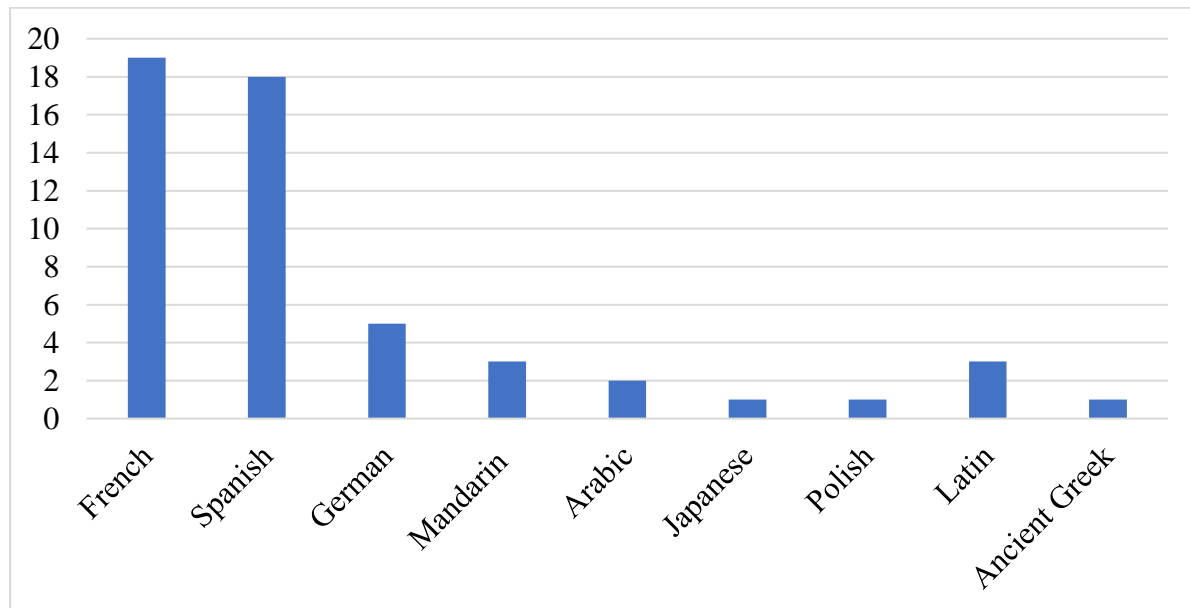


Figure 6: Languages offered by number of schools – Secondary

French and Spanish remain the most widely taught languages in secondary schools, but the range of languages is expanded. Polish appears at one school a community language but is studied from beginner level.

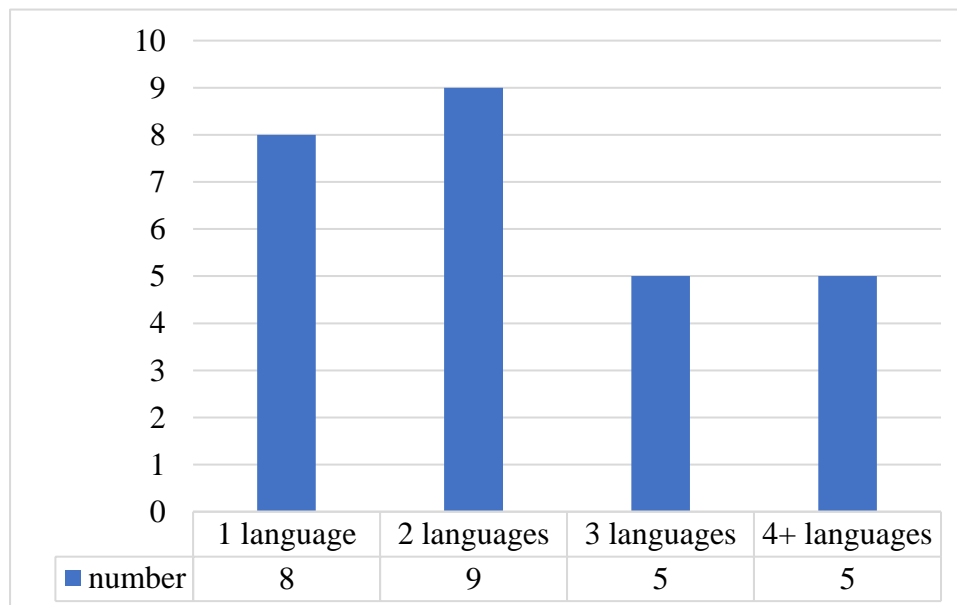


Figure 7: Number of languages offered by schools – Secondary

All secondary schools offer a language, and the majority of schools offer more than one language although, most schools offer either one or two.

Spatial distribution of programs

Post code area	Number of schools	Languages taught (number of schools)
CV1	5	French (5), Spanish (2), German (2), Arabic (1), Latin (2), Ancient Greek (1)
CV2	5	French (4), Spanish (4), Latin (1), Polish (1).
CV3	5	French (3), Spanish (5), German (1), Italian (1)
CV4	4	French (4), Spanish (4), German (2), Mandarin (4), Japanese (1), Arabic (1)
CV5	0	
CV6	4	French (3), Spanish (4)

Table 2: Languages taught in Coventry by postcode – Secondary

French and Spanish are taught across Coventry, German is more widely taught than in primary schools. Most community languages teaching happens in CV4.

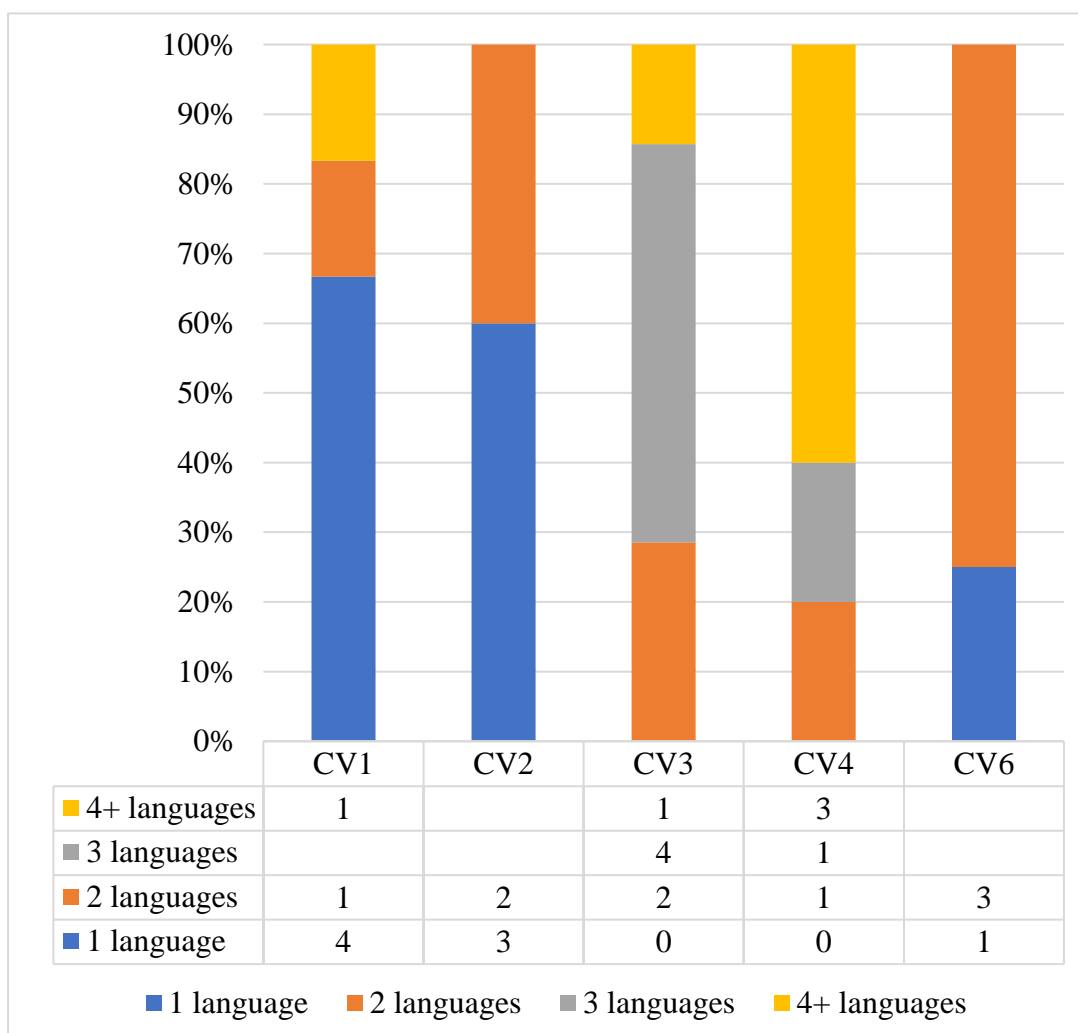


Figure 8: Number of languages taught by schools by postcode – Secondary

CV1 has the highest proportion of schools teaching only a single language and no schools in CV4 teach a single language. The most multilingual schools are located mainly in CV4.

Social distribution of language programs

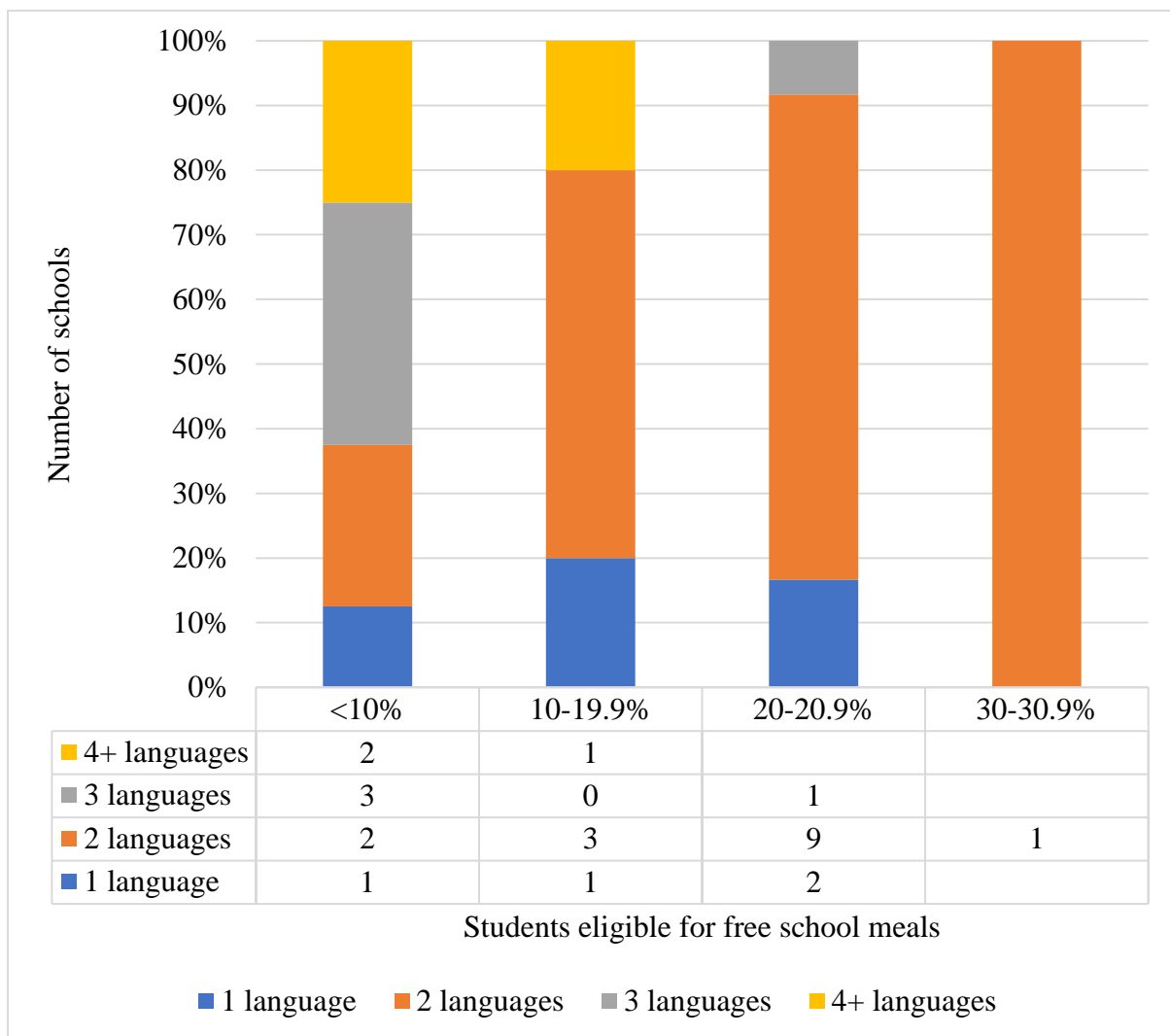


Figure 9: Schools offering languages by eligibility for free school meals –Secondary³

Schools in higher SES brackets are more likely to teach multiple languages although the single school in the lowest SES group does not fit this pattern.

³ All private schools have 0% eligibility of free school meals.

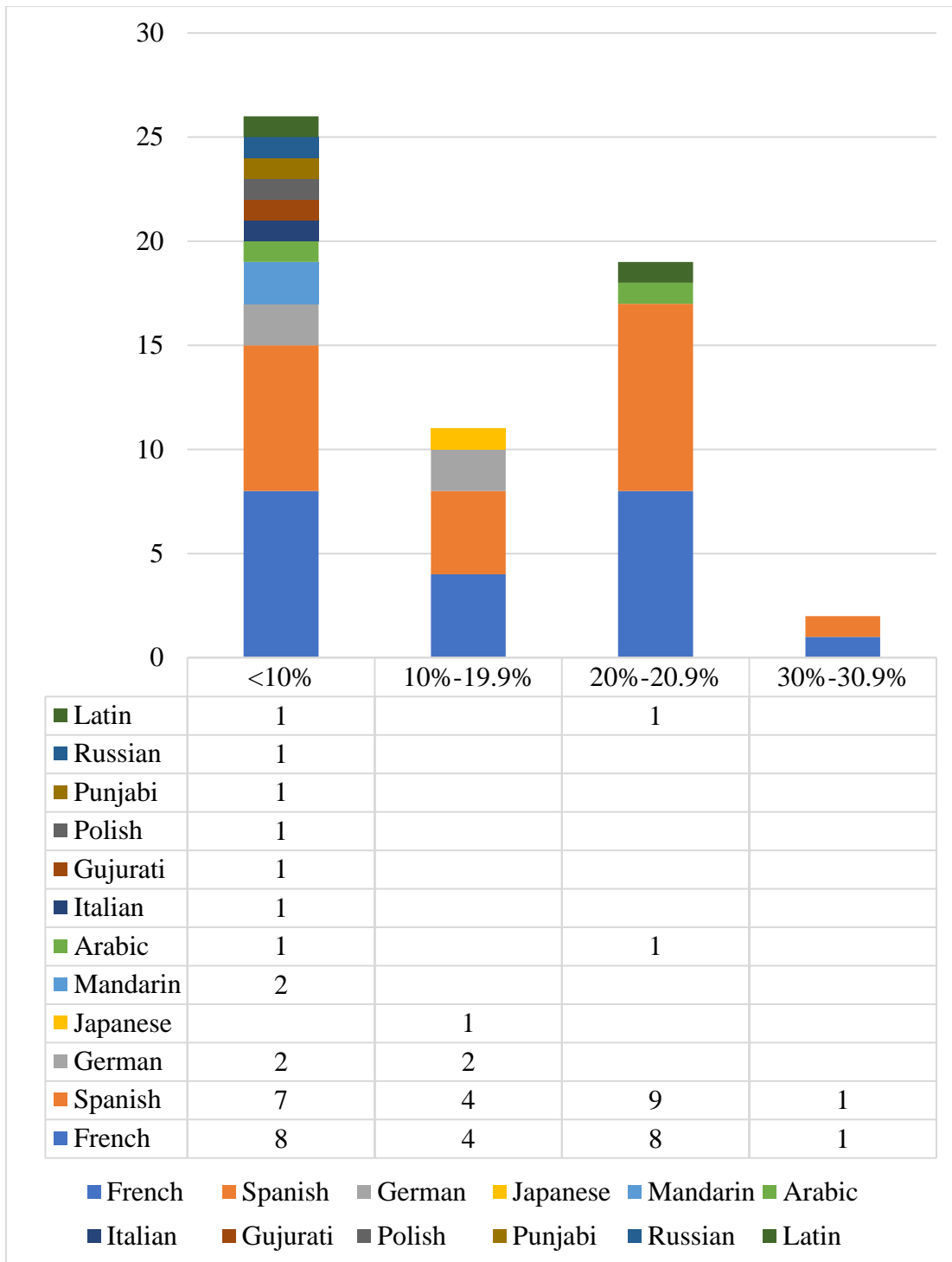


Figure 10: Number of languages offered by schools by percentage of students eligible for free school meals – Secondary

A wider range of languages is offered in schools in high SES areas than in those with lower SES. Community languages are offered almost exclusively by schools in the highest SES bracket.

Duration of compulsory language study

Year language study becomes optional	Number of schools	Languages concerned
Year 9	11	French, Spanish, Arabic, German, Mandarin, Latin
Year 10	6	French, Spanish, German, Polish, Latin
GCSE	6	French, Spanish, German, Mandarin, Japanese

Table 3: Year at which language study becomes optional by number of schools –Secondary⁴

In almost half of schools, language study becomes optional from Year 9 and only a minority of schools requires language study for GCSE.

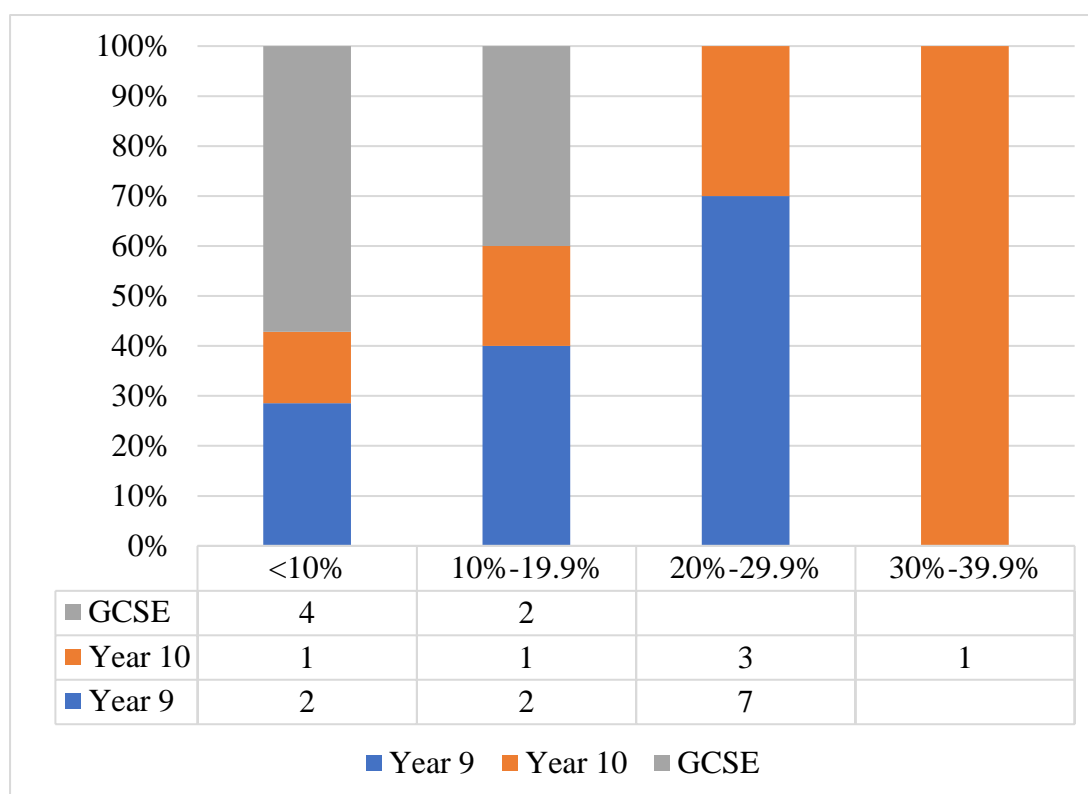


Figure 11: Year at which language study becomes optional by eligibility for free school meals – Secondary

Language study is more likely to be required for GCSE in higher SES schools than in lower SES schools, although earlier discontinuation of compulsory language study is found across all levels.

Almost all schools allow students to choose one language for study from year 7. In one school students take both a modern language and a classical language, with the classical language start from Year 8 and in a further school requires an additional language from Year 8. Both these schools are independent schools.

⁴ One school that requires language study at GCSE also offers Latin and Ancient Greek, but Latin becomes optional at after Year 9 and Ancient Greek starts as an option from Year 8.

Funding

This project was funded by the University of Warwick's Faculty of Social Sciences Research Development Fund.

References

Maguire, M., Hoskins, K., Ball, S., & Braun, A. (2011). Policy discourses in school texts. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32(4), 597-609. doi:10.1080/01596306.2011.601556

Version date: 19 April 2021