Language Skills and Capabilities in the UK Research Base

Understanding the use, role and recognition of languages in academic research

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The British Academy

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About the Centre for Language Acts and Worldmaking

Language Acts and Worldmaking, based at King's College London, is a flagship project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council Open World Research Initiative, which aims to regenerate and transform modern language learning by foregrounding language's power to show how we live and make our worlds. Through six interlinking research strands, we examine language as a material and historical force which acts as they means by which individuals construct their personal, local, transnational and spiritual identities – 'worldmaking'.

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Executive summary

This report presents the findings from the British Academy commissioned project *Language Skills and Capabilities in the UK Research Base*, which set out to examine and evidence the recognition, role and use of multilingualism in UK academic research fields outside Modern Languages.

The project sits within the Academy's flagship languages programme which is dedicated to monitoring trends in language provision, supply and demand, and mobilising this expertise to inform debate on the importance and value of language uptake in the UK.[1] At its core, the programme raises the profile of languages and language learning by illustrating their strategic vitality for the future of the UK.

This present investigation focuses on multilingual capabilities in academic research in the UK by assessing the recognition of language skills and their demand and importance across disciplines. The result is an evidence base which uncovers the ways in which languages are relevant to academic researchers in their professional lives, researchers' perceptions of the value of and need for language learning for research, as well as about the language training which they have already undertaken, and whether there are any discipline-specific trends or differences.

Key Findings

- Multilingual capabilities are integral to research excellence, impact and integrity, not least in a globalised and connected research environment. Diverse language skills enrich and expand research across all academic disciplines.

- Academic researchers see the direct and indirect value of multilingualism, though demand for languages can vary across different disciplines and research stages.

- There is rich multilingual potential among UK academic researchers, but this potential may be underutilised and undervalued, and language use can sometimes remain 'hidden' within the research process.

- Barriers to language acquisition and application risk undermining the importance of language capabilities in the research base. These include a lack of time and funding, a lack of discipline-specific demand, a lack of training opportunities at institutions, and researchers' own self-perception.

- There are ways to better capture, incentivise and capitalise on multilingualism in academic research. This includes ensuring the visibility of languages in assessment criteria as part of the Research Excellence Framework, grant applications, and the provision of institution or department training.

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[1]   See The British Academy's Languages Programme for further details on current and previous work.

1   Introduction

Multilingual skills are strategically important to the UK's economic, social, cultural and research success.[2] Languages constitute a vital source of soft power to influence, connect and engage with others, brokering trust between communities and increasing our responsiveness to emerging or acute issues, from the local to the global.

In 2020, the Academy co-authored *Towards a National Languages Strategy*, setting out a framework for promoting a pipeline for language learning in the UK from early years education to the workplace.[3] The recommendations from the report emphasise the value of language proficiency not only for individual development but as a cornerstone of the future of the UK's society and economy, a message reinforced in subsequent research into the economic value of languages.[4] As such, widening our capacity for language learning and usage is not only a priority for those who work, teach or study in areas visibly linked to languages and cultures; rather, it is imperative that we acknowledge our existing linguistic resources and strengthen our language capabilities in sectors and disciplines outside of these areas.

In academic research, diverse language and cultural competencies can support researchers to meet the highest levels of originality, integrity and rigour in their outputs and engagement. The UK is celebrated internationally for its research excellence, with our universities and researchers operating at the cutting edge of world-leading scholarship. Yet, amid a national deficit in language provision and learning,[5] declining multilingualism among UK researchers may undermine the agility and competitiveness of our research capabilities. The work underpinning the Strategy revealed an anecdotal perception that some disciplines risk becoming uncompetitive because of their relative lack of language skills – a perception which this present report will test.[6]

This is not a new challenge: in 2009, the Academy commissioned RAND Europe to investigate the supply and demand of language skills among UK-trained academics in the social sciences and humanities. This followed concerns that limiting the pool of researchers with relevant skills to meet the demands of a globalised research environment may have detrimental consequences to the health of academic research fields. Noting that without adequate language skills, "scholars are unable to understand and significantly influence the research in their fields",[7] the report identified a lack of sufficiently diverse linguistic ability among UK-trained academics.

Language deficits among researchers are brought into focus during significant domestic or global events, particularly since our capacity to respond to and navigate complex challenges relies on dynamic intracultural and intercultural communication. Indeed, more than a decade after the publication of the RAND report, challenges associated with a range of global events and political developments present a timely opportunity to revisit and build on work from the previous report. The COVID-19 pandemic and the UK's departure from the European Union, for example, have raised concerns about the national language skills shortage across all sectors, not least in higher education.[8]

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[2]   The British Academy (2020) *Languages in the UK: A call to Action* [accessed November 2024].

[3]   The British Academy et al (2020) *Towards a National Languages Strategy* [accessed November 2024].

[4]   For example, see: Wendy Ayres-Bennett et al (2022) *The economic value to the UK of speaking other languages.* [accessed November 2024].

[5]   British Academy (2013) *Lost for Words: Languages in UK Diplomacy and Security.* [accessed November 2024].

[6]   The British Academy et al (2020) *Towards a National Languages Strategy* [accessed November 2024].

[7]   RAND Europe (2009) *Language matters: The supply and demand for UK born and education academic researchers with skills in languages other than English*, p.50 [accessed November 2024].

[8]   Wolfestone (2021) *'An unspeakable disaster? The UK's foreign language skills shortage'*, *Wolfestone* [accessed November 2024].

Language Skills and Capabilities in the UK Research Base presents a renewed focus on the role and recognition of languages among UK academic researchers. It makes two key departures from the earlier RAND Europe report in this current iteration: first, this investigation looks at all academic research fields across UK higher education institutions to better understand language use, demands and deficits with respect to disciplinary trends. Secondly, it addresses a wider range of quantitative and qualitative sources to identify where or how in academic research languages may be in use or limited.

In 2023, the Academy commissioned the Centre for Language Acts and Worldmaking, based at King's College London, to lead a series of evidence gathering exercises to build a profile of language skills, provision and use among academic researchers in their work. The team carried out a focus group with academic staff from different disciplines, launched an online survey distributed UK-wide to higher education and research institutions, and followed this by conducting interviews with some of the survey participants. A roundtable to discuss preliminary findings was also hosted at the British Academy in May 2024, bringing together Academy Fellows as well as researchers from across different disciplines, institutions, and career levels.

To nuance the survey and interviews, the Academy sought further qualitative evidence to build a comprehensive profile of the state and perception of languages in UK academia. This included a literature review and an analysis of five impact case studies submitted to the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF), including structured interviews with the submitting research teams.

This report explores whether there is evidence of 'hidden' multilingual use in research processes or outputs that are currently obscured or under-recognised. By building a profile of different types of language use and capability in the research base, this evidence is intended to support better recognition of languages as a strategic priority for all academic disciplines. In doing so, the aim is to promote the visibility of languages in research policy.

As such, what is presented in this report is not an audit of language skills among researchers but an appraisal of researchers' perceptions of the role of languages in their own work, disciplines and institutions. It examines whether there is current (unmet) demand for certain languages in different disciplines and whether there is an opportunity cost involved in failing to harness existing multilingual resources.

Chapter two presents a literature review that examines current attitudes and trends in multilingualism in the UK. This links to the under-recognition of languages within the UK's (global) research and innovation agenda and our strategic priorities. This chapter also turns to the current evidence on the state of language use among UK researchers and approaches to language learning in higher education.

In chapter three, readers will find the results and a comprehensive analysis of the survey as sent to different institutions in the UK. This chapter highlights the range of languages spoken and languages used (currently or previously) in participants' professional research activities. The survey also uncovers perceptions on language training or educational opportunities open to academics from different disciplines, the challenges with improving language proficiency, and whether researchers perceive there to be any need to diversify their language capacity for their research.

This is followed by the interview findings in chapter four. This section provides a thematic analysis of in-depth qualitative interview data collected. The themes that run through the interviews complement the findings from the survey, providing richer insight into researchers' use of languages, perception of the value and usefulness of languages, as well as incentives and barriers to language acquisition and use for research purposes.

Finally, in chapter five, the Impact Case Study database from the 2021 Research Excellence Framework exercise is used to identify five case studies from a variety of disciplines where language skills were implemented in the research and dissemination process. We expand on these case studies through structured interviews with the research teams, to illustrate through concrete examples how language skills can play a pivotal role in research and impact.

2 Methods and data

2.1   Rationale and scope

The project set out to investigate the primary research question: *What is the evidence base for the use, role and recognition of language skills in academic research disciplines outside Modern Languages and cognate fields in UK universities?*

Distilling this, Modern Languages subjects had to be distinguished from other academic disciplines. In doing so, this approach could better identify non-languages disciplines to assess their multilingual capabilities. To define 'Modern Languages', the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) subject code list for languages and area studies is a useful guide.[9] Translation Studies was included in this list given its direct link to languages (Table 1). For Linguistics and related disciplines (Applied Linguistics or Sociolinguistics, for example), these were accepted as research disciplines outside Modern Languages only if no other indication was given (e.g., French Linguistics, in which case this would be seen as a sub-set of French language studies).

Further, as language studies can encompass broad fields of research such as literature, culture, history or politics that are not related to linguistic scholarship in the strictest sense, these were still included as examples of Modern Languages. For example, a scholar of Spanish history would still fall under Modern Languages even if they identified more as a historian than a linguist. For further detail, see section 1.4.2 on how non-Modern Languages disciplines were interpreted in order to analyse the survey results.

Table 1: Modern Languages disciplines and cognate fields in UK universities, repurposed from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH)

Celtic Studies (including Gaelic, Welsh and others in Celtic Studies)
French Studies
German Studies
Scandinavian Studies (including Norwegian, Swedish, Icelandic, Danish and Finnish Studies)
Italian Studies
Iberian Studies (including Spanish, Catalan and Portuguese Studies)
Latin American Studies (including indigenous languages)
Slavic Studies (including Russian and Eastern European languages
Other European languages
Chinese Studies (including Mandarin and Cantonese)
Japanese Studies
Korean Studies
Other Asian languages
African Studies
Middle Eastern Studies
Translation Studies

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[9]   See: Higher Education Statistics Agency, *'The Common Aggregation Hierarchy'* [accessed November 2024].

Additionally, 'research base', as it is used in the research question and throughout the report, signifies academic researchers across all disciplines in the sciences, arts, social sciences and humanities. What has not been captured are contractual conditions such as full-time equivalent status, nor has the analysis excluded those whose primary or predominant employment function is teaching. Respondents to the survey and interviews, for example, could anecdotally observe whether employment terms impacted language learning or uptake for their research.

To respond to the main research question, three main objectives were identified. First, to address the role of languages in research, the study needed to capture the supply and range of multilingual skills among UK academic researchers. Language skills refer to reading, writing, speaking and listening abilities, not defined against any specific level of proficiency. This allowed for the widest possible profile of diverse language capabilities in the research base, encompassing both first languages and competency in any other languages, from basic reading comprehension to 'native' proficiency.

Secondly, the study needed to examine if, where, how, and when multilingual skills are applied in academic research. Academic research can cover any process or activity relating to the design, delivery, co-production, publication or engagement of research and research outputs. Through this, an appraisal can be made of the role and use of languages in research, whether there was a demand for language skills, and if demand was greater in certain subject areas. In doing so, the study set out to also investigate whether there is a mismatch between the supply and demand of multilingual skills.

Finally, the study was designed to explore whether there is a recognition and appreciation of languages in academic research. This could encompass individual researcher perceptions, departmental or institutional opportunities, discipline- or subject-specific trends, and, more broadly, attitudes in the research sector and research policy to languages and language learning.

Through these objectives it was identified that a mixed-methods approach would serve the project best, since the research aims pertained to both measurable data (e.g., capturing the range and supply of language skills) and subjective insights or behaviours across a breadth of disciplines and research profiles. To support the extensive evidence-gathering and analysis that would be needed to address the primary research question, in 2023 the British Academy commissioned the Centre for Language Acts and Worldmaking, based at King's College London, to lead a focus group, design and disseminate a survey, and conduct follow-up interviews.

2.2   Literature review

Chapter three presents a literature review. Adopting a selective approach, the literature review sought out primary and secondary sources consisting of academic work, policy reports and documents, legislation, and official communication (such as press releases). The Centre for Language Acts and the project Steering Group made recommendations on appropriate academic literature and similar studies that had been conducted.

2.3   Survey methodology

2.3.1   Focus group

Led by the Centre for Language Acts team, an initial focus group was held in February 2024 and involved seven researchers from the disciplines of Anthropology, Ancient History, War Studies, Clinical Communication, Geography, and International Development. In compliance with ethics procedures, no quotations from the focus group are used in this report.

The aim of the group was to scope potential areas of enquiry for the survey, to identify points of relevance and concern for participants and to find out more about the ways in which language proficiency is relevant to researchers in their professional lives. These initial insights provided the starting point to design the survey questions.

2.3.2   Design and dissemination

Following engagement with the initial focus group to scope potential questions, the Centre for Language Acts designed an online survey using the JISC Survey tool. Having gained approval as a Minimal Risk project through King's College London Research Ethics Office, the survey was distributed via subscription-based mailing lists (JISC, The British Academy) as well as through internal institutional and departmental mailing lists.

The survey consisted of 26 questions, which were divided into three sections. The first section (Q1-Q3) collected institutional and disciplinary data; the second section (Q4-Q19, Q25) asked the participants about their linguistic competency, types of language usage, and the type and location of their training. A final, qualitative, section (Q20-Q24, Q26), focused on the perceived benefits of language skills, the participants' perceived deficiencies, and obstacles to learning and maintaining language skills.

The survey had a runtime of six weeks (from 27 March until 10 May 2024), during which it collected responses from 340 participants from 73 different institutions. Most of these institutions were universities, though 5% were independent research institutions. Targeted efforts were made to reach Science, Technology Engineering (STEM) participants, who were expected to be more difficult to include in a language-focused survey; 30 STEM departments were therefore contacted directly through the King's College London-internal mailing lists.

2.3.3   Analysis

Out of the 340 responses collected by the Centre for Language Acts, 64 respondents were identified as working in Modern Languages or a cognate field or in non-UK universities. These entries were removed, allowing analysis of trends and insights from non-Languages disciplines and giving a total sample size of 276. While every effort was made to distinguish between subjects falling under Modern Languages and other subject areas, this was not always a straightforward task. For example, where a respondent indicated they belonged to French Studies, this clearly fell within the Modern Languages category.

However, one challenge was that some researchers, particularly those who identified as academics in Linguistics, Area Studies or European Politics or other SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy) fields with a more international dimension, actually worked within a Modern Languages department, but they provided their subject specialism as their disciplinary home. Consequently, as some respondents identified as historians or geographers more so than languages scholars, this raised the question as to whether the findings into subject-specific trends and demands would be limited or affected. Where possible, these disciplines were cross-checked against respondents' other answers to ascertain a clearer picture.

Many respondents had knowledge of pre-modern and ancient languages such as Latin, Ancient Amharic and Old Norse. These have been included in the overall survey analysis to demonstrate the full range of multilingual capabilities among the respondents and to therefore advocate for languages education in its widest sense.

Despite efforts to target a wide range of researchers across different disciplines and stages of their careers, we cannot claim representativeness of the sample as such, because it is likely that those with a pre-existing interest in languages were more likely to fill out the questionnaire. As such, the language capabilities of the survey respondents are likely not representative of those of the UK's research base as a whole, given participation appeared skewed towards those with an active interest or skillset in multilingualism.

2.4   Interviews

2.4.1   Design and delivery

From the 340 active survey participants, 180 replied positively to question 27 indicating that we could contact them for a follow up interview. 40 of the 180 were contacted by three members of the the Centre for Language Acts team to request an online meeting so that an in-depth interview could be undertaken. The 40 were chosen to provide a varied sample of respondents from different career stages, a variety of disciplines and institutions as well as linguistic backgrounds. Of these 40, 20 responded positively to the invitation to interview, and 16 interviews went ahead.

A semi-structured interview format was selected. This approach ensured that the same questions were posed by the three project interviewers to all interviewees in order to ensure parity and consistency while not precluding appropriate wider-ranging topics of discussion as they occurred in the course of the interview. The interviews were used to add depth to the findings of the qualitative data obtained in the large-scale survey format by exploring further reasons underlying survey responses.

A total of 16 interviews lasting an average of 45 minutes each (12 hours in total) were carried out by three members of the the Centre for Language Acts team in May-June 2024 via Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Each interview was recorded and transcribed with the prior consent of each interviewee.   These were subsequently synthesised across the set of interviews obtained and analysed individually in detail to identify recurrent themes. A good general level of comparability with the survey data was observed and the interviews provided nuancing of some of the survey responses.

2.4.2   Analysis and transcribing

While the in-depth interviews, like the survey, do not claim to be representative of the whole UK researcher base, interviewees ranged in age, gender, discipline, career stage and type of institution. The participants are, therefore, as representative as practicable for the scale of the research conducted. The discourse and close reading analyses indicate that the number provides an evidence base informed by the standard data saturation principle, in recognition of the multiple perspectives that can be validly applied to a single point. That is to say, the responses and organically derived themes begin to repeat themselves. When seeking "thick", qualitative data and personal reactions to the topics explored, it is the depth of the data which is key, especially when this is complemented by survey evidence to substantiate and validate the findings.

The approximately 12 hours of recorded discussions and 100,000 words of transcribed interview data allowed key themes to emerge organically. The principal form of analysis undertaken drew on a combination of discourse analysis and close reading techniques to allow these themes, and any commentary on them, to emerge from the interviewee's words, thus prioritising their responses and preoccupations. No fixed hypotheses were established before the empirical research. The research process was therefore also generated during the interviews, rather than anticipated, reducing researcher bias. The themes and findings presented can, therefore, be tested through the data collected.

2.5   Research Excellence Framework: Impact Case Studies and interviews

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is a national peer-review assessment of the quality of research undertaken by UK HEIs. During REF2021, HEIs were evaluated across three areas: research output, impact, and environment. The publication of Impact Case Studies is considered a resource to demonstrate the impact of research: the REF2021 impact Case Study database includes 6,681 case studies across all disciplines. These present an opportunity to

recognise the achievements of research coming out of UK HEIs, and to articulate the value of this research and its impact both in the UK and globally. Understanding therefore that the Impact Case Studies can provide a useful evidence base, we wanted to utilise the database to show how language skills and use can be beneficial or even crucial to research impact in disciplines beyond Modern Languages. In order to do this, we conducted an analysis of a sample of case studies within the Impact Case Study database to identify examples where language skills played a significant role in the research.

Necessity and use of language skills within research are not regularly explicit in the impact case studies, and therefore a methodological approach to identifying language use proves difficult. Using keyword searchers as well as the filters for impact location, we manually selected from each main panel two to three impact case studies where the use of multiple languages was either mentioned or suggested. Case studies from sub-panel 26 Modern Languages and Linguistics were deliberately excluded, as the aim is to stress the applicability of languages beyond these disciplines. We contacted the research teams of our selected case studies and asked whether they would be willing to answer a short series of questions relating to the use of languages in their research. Five teams agreed, and we held short, structured interviews, where we presented the principal investigators (PIs) of each case study with a set of questions about the use of languages in their research (see Annex A). The analysis of our findings can be found in Section 6.

3 Multilingualism in the UK research base

This chapter presents a selective literature review to explore the use, role and recognition of multilingualism in UK academic research. It aims to contextualise this study in wider discussions on the relationship between languages and research. In addition to framing the rest of the report, it serves as a rationale for building an evidence base of language capabilities among academic researchers.

The chapter opens with a brief comparison of different understandings of 'multilingualism' and the implications for how we might capture language use and abilities. We argue that languages are the connecting tissue for fulfilling social, political, economic and cultural aims, and that stronger language capabilities among researchers can, in turn, enrich our research capabilities. Departing from the premise that diverse languages can better leverage the reach, influence and rigour of academic research, the chapter turns to some of the evidence and studies on the state of multilingual skills and use among academics and university departments outside Modern Languages.

3.1   Understanding multilingualism in the UK

Multilingualism, in its most rudimentary sense, refers to the ability of individuals, institutions or groups to communicate in and across multiple languages. However, there is no single definition, and while there are shared understandings of what the term constitutes, there are divergences over some of its most fundamental aspects. This report is not prescriptive in its definition, leaving this open to the interpretation of survey and interview participants; understanding these distinctions in meaning nevertheless serves as a useful insight into how language capabilities are conceived and their implications for developing language policies and frameworks.

For example, UNESCO defines multilingualism as "the use of more than one language in daily life",[10] while the European Council considers it "the ability to use different languages appropriately and effectively for communication".[11] These two definitions are not necessarily contradictory, since they both pertain to multiple language use. Yet the former adopts a broader understanding, with multilingualism encompassing all levels of competency. Meanwhile, the latter indicates a perceived threshold between basic competency and more sophisticated proficiency in multiple languages.

The Salzburg Statement for a Multilingual World offers a view that multilingualism "denotes both the explicit teaching of languages, and the informal patterns of communication that emerge in multilingual societies".[12] According to the Statement, multilingualism is as much about social, institutional, cultural and political attitudes or environments as it is about an individual or social group's innate ability to communicate in different languages. The "explicit teaching of languages" suggests a clear civic duty to embedding language provision and learning through public fora, institutions, policies and frameworks, as well as recognising "the informal patterns" of language use that emerge through daily or private interactions.[13]

10   UNESCO (2024) 'What you need to know about languages in education', *UNESCO* [accessed November 2024].
11   CEDEFPOP (2018) 'Multilingual Competence/Multilingual Skills/Multilingualism', *CEDEFPOP*
        [accessed November 2024].
12   Salzburg Global Seminar (2017) *'Salzburg Statement for a Multilingual World'*, *Salzburg Global*
        [accessed November 2024].
13   Ibid.

The difference between 'private' use (e.g., families or households) and 'public' recognition (e.g., official, professional or institutional) presents a further challenge for a coherent definition of multilingualism. For example, a place may be considered multilingual by virtue of several different co-existing linguistic communities. Yet whether the co-existence of multiple language groups in a space renders it truly 'multilingual' is unclear, particularly when there is a lack of political or social will to support and recognise language learning and skills.

For example, in the UK, there is an increasing number of families who speak more than one language at home, and it is now estimated that more than 300 different languages are spoken by school-aged children.[14] However, language promotion and formal learning are declining in the UK, and language provision increasingly disincentivised.[15] Since English remains the main international language for expediency and efficiency, the resulting 'anglonormativity' has fuelled a longstanding culture of complacency.

This is reflected in education policies, the impact on language learning in schools and universities, the attrition of language teachers and native language assistants, and departmental closures within UK HEIs.[16] The deepening issue of geographic "cold spots" in languages provision, particularly for students entering university with lower tariff levels, reveal regional and socioeconomic disparities in accessing opportunities to study languages.[17] We see a conflict, then, between diverse languages spoken in homes and among families, and the absence of a concerted strategy to support the acquisition of multilingual skills for all learners.

While devolved jurisdictions support (indigenous) language learning and provision, there remains an uncoordinated approach to multilingualism at a national level, whether for languages learned through mainstream education or in a home, heritage or community setting. Wendy Ayres-Bennett and Emma Humphries suggest a cross-jurisdictional endeavour to promote languages, which is echoed in the British Academy and partners' *Towards a National Languages Strategy*.[18] Not only is a coordinated and collaborative approach required to expand multilingual provision across all levels of study, but this approach must also extend beyond the classroom. Ayres-Bennett and Humphries stress that education is neither the top nor the only domain pertinent to languages policy, with public health, law and crime as among the top three sectors where language planning and provision are highly relevant.[19]

To that end, strengthening diverse language skills and capabilities should be viewed as a cross-sector priority. Strategies that support multilingualism and embed language learning across all levels of society can enhance our intercultural agility, productivity, and our capacity to leverage soft power. This extends from cross-border communication to economic advantages and engagement in international markets, brokering social cohesion and preserving cultural identity and relevance.

[14] Cambridge Bilingualism Network Forums (2017) *Multilingualism and wellbeing in the UK* [accessed November 2024]; Bailey, E and Marsden, E (2017) 'Hundreds of languages are spoken in the UK, but this isn't always reflected in the classroom', *The Conversation* [accessed November 2024]; Office for National Statistics, 'Language, England and Wales: Census 2021', release date: 29 November 2022 [accessed November 2024].

[15] The British Academy and the University Council of Modern Languages (2022) *Languages Learning in Higher Education: Granular Trends* [accessed November 2024].

[16] The British Academy (2020) *Languages in the UK: A call to Action* [accessed November 2024].

[17] Muradás-Taylor, B. (2023) 'Undergraduate language programmes in England: A widening participation crisis,' *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 22(3); The British Academy (2024) 'Mapping SHAPE provision in UK higher education', *The British Academy* [accessed March 2025]

[18] The British Academy, British Council, ASCL, AHRC and Universities UK (2020) *Towards a National Languages Strategy* [accessed November 2024].

[19] Ayres-Bennet, W and Humphries, E (2022) *The hidden face of public language policy: a case study from the UK* [accessed November 2024].

3.2   Languages and research capabilities

Languages are strategically important to the vitality and health of our academic research. They allow us to be agile in a globalised environment while promoting accessible and responsible research. Multilingual capabilities are inextricably linked to stronger research capabilities, yet this link is often under-recognised by policymakers.

More than two decades ago, the Nuffield Languages Enquiry appealed for stronger language capabilities in the UK at a time of rapid globalisation. Suggesting that "monolingualism implies inflexibility [and] insensitivity", the Enquiry warned that reliance on English alone poses a risk to our capacity to engage in emerging markets and trading patterns, respond to shifts in international security and diplomatic priorities, as well as adapt to cultural and mass-communication trends.[20]

Strong language skills are vital because they serve as an essential piece of innovation infrastructure. Languages build connections and partnerships, linking people, organisations, sectors and ideas. The echoes of the Nuffield Enquiry resonate in the British Council's 2017 Languages for the Future review, which stresses that multilingualism enables our participation in strategic areas to drive social, economic and cultural benefits for all. This includes our capacity to engage in research and knowledge production or exchange.[21] Languages form the critical building blocks for understanding and navigating global issues.

Recent government policies have emphasised the need to think more strategically about the UK's research capabilities in the face of changing patterns in global competition and collaboration.[22] A recurring call from both sector and central government policy is for greater interdisciplinarity and internationalised approaches to research. In 2021, under the Johnson premiership, the government published 'Global Britain in a Competitive Age: Integrated Review'. It put forward the ambition to make our research sector more competitive and match our research capabilities with international competitors.[23]

At that time, the UK's Chief Scientific Advisor, Sir Patrick Vallance, described the need to deliver strategic advantage through end-to-end enabled research and innovation. End-to-end enabling, i.e., from idea generation through to implementation, as Vallance outlined, is highly dependent on skills and partnerships as much as on investment.[24] A critical component of innovation infrastructure is strategic and strong partnership-building. This is reemphasised in the current government's 'Plan for Change', which envisages a connected and well-coordinated research base to translate the UK's world-class research to commercial success.[25] Similarly, UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) current five-year strategy sets out five themes "to tackle large-scale, complex challenges" by harnessing the full potential of the research ecosystem across all disciplines, emphasising systemic coordination in a changing global order.[26]

However, languages remain under-recognised in innovation policies or strategies and are siloed off as priorities for Modern Language departments only. To be clear, there are certainly benefits to a shared common language in international settings, particularly across large blocs or for urgent cross-border challenges. Major global institutions and partnerships such as the European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN) have embedded different approaches to their

[20]   The Nuffield Foundation (2000) *Languages: the next generation*, p.14 [accessed November 2024].

[21]   The British Academy (2020) *Languages in the UK: A call to Action* [accessed November 2024].

[22]   RAND Europe (2023) *Strategic Advantage in a Competitive Age: Definitions, Dynamics and Implications* [accessed November 2024].

[23]   Cabinet Office (March 2021) 'Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy', *GOV.UK* [accessed November 2024].

[24]   Sir Patrick Vallance (2022) 'Creating strategic advantage in science and innovation', *The Foundation for Science and Technology* [accessed November 2024].

[25]   HM Government (December 2024) 'Plan for Change: Milestones for a mission-lead government', *GOV.UK* [accessed January 2025].

[26]   UK Research and Innovation (2022) 'UKRI Strategy 2022 to 2027: transforming tomorrow together', *UKRI* [accessed November 2024].

official, legal and working languages, to balance acuity and equity, using one official language where appropriate. Similarly, in research, monolingual spaces can and do serve an important role. Gunnar Sivertsen, advocating for a "balanced multilingualism" in research, notes that international collaboration may render the place of multilingualism redundant in pursuit of shared missions or research projects.[27]

The UK boasts a highly internationally collaborative approach to research, which is evidenced in part by bibliometric data. According to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, the UK's research base had the highest number of co-authored publications among its comparators in 2022, noting that "international partnerships achieve higher citation impact than domestic collaborations".[28] Further, the majority of international collaboration is funded by UK awards or institutional investment, demonstrating a strong impetus in the sector for partnership building.[29]

However, multilingualism has been described as "the neglected dimension of research assessment", with the requirement to publish or communicate in English seen as "a form of marginalisation".[30] This resonates for international scholars especially but is also applicable to the UK. First, there is the issue of linguistic injustice faced by scholars in HEIs in devolved jurisdictions. With greater pressure for researchers to publish in prestigious or high-impact journals where English is preferred, this creates a precedent that pushes scholars with Welsh, Gaelic or Irish proficiency, for instance, toward publishing or communicating in English. In this instance, the dominance of English publications results in a lack of complexity in how knowledge is understood across languages and cultures, including across different scripts, and is strongly contributing to epistemic, as well as linguistic, injustice. Monolingual scholarship poses a problem for achieving parity between, on the one hand, the internationalisation of research impact and reach, and on the other hand, ensuring it retains social or local relevance.[31]

Moreover, citation metrics are only one aspect of measuring research impact or influence. For the UK, they present a wholly positive albeit incomplete picture of research collaboration and co-production. Monolingual biases in research may be challenged by changing geo-political structures – particularly since the Nuffield Languages Enquiry – that elicit a multipolar linguistic shift.[32] If academics cannot participate in key or emerging debates due to a lack of language skills, they face an increasing disadvantage in the broader research context where the ecosystem is multilingual. This applies to both the research design and methodology, as well as the instrumental role played by languages in engaging and sharing research results with wider, often international audiences. Further, some participants in our survey and interviews felt that they were unable to pursue more specialised research interests in their fields that gained higher traction in other parts of the world, since they lacked the appropriate skills, limiting their ability to influence in these domains.

There are certainly discipline-specific distinctions regarding the extent to which multiple languages are embedded in academic knowledge production. Researchers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics – STEM subjects – may be far more likely to adopt English as the lingua franca across all stages of research.[33] But as Sivertsen and others explore, and as this report will go onto discuss, languages play far more than a passive role in science as a vehicle to convey scientific information.[34] Scientific language is iterative, generating new words

27   Sivertsen, G (2018) 'Balanced multilingualism in science', *Universitat de Barcelona* [accessed November 2024].
28   Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (2022) 'International Comparison of the UK research base, 2022', *GOV.UK* [accessed November 2024].
29   Universities UK (2022) 'The UK's global research outlook: what does the data say?', *Universities UK* [November 2024].
30   San Franscico Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) (2021) 'When more is more: a DORA community discussion on multilingualism in scholarly communication', *DORA* [accessed November 2024].
31   Sivertsen, G (2018) 'Balanced multilingualism in science', *Universitat de Barcelona* [accessed November 2024].
32   The Nuffield Foundation (2000) *Languages: the next generation* [accessed November 2024].
33   Sivertsen, G (2018) 'Balanced multilingualism in science', *Universitat de Barcelona* [accessed November 2024].
34   Ibid; Ford, A and Peat, D (1988) 'The Role of Language in Science', *Foundation of Physics*, pp.1,233-42 [accessed November 2024].

to express evolving meanings and ideas. A lingua franca presupposes that scientific literacy is or should be universal, when instead it is often contingent on different cultural or social practices – from the laboratory to dissemination to beneficiaries of scientific knowledge.

To be clear, while the study of other languages, cultures and societies may be more intrinsically rooted in SHAPE disciplines than STEM, assumptions about language use or need exist within these disciplines too. For instance, data-gathering through international fieldwork and participatory research methods occurs in both SHAPE and STEM disciplines. There has been a long-standing debate as to the feasibility or need for researchers conducting fieldwork to know or communicate in the language(s) of their area of study.[35] However, a lack of multilingual capabilities across different contexts may risk creating or reinforcing assumptions or biases about areas, social groups and communities being studied.

More broadly, then, supporting language training and use among scholars enhances greater accessibility and self-reflexivity in research that is responsible and attentive to local contexts.[36] For example, the Academy's *Shaping the Covid Decade* report links vaccine hesitancy among underrepresented or marginalised social groups to poor literacy or English comprehension, with public health and participatory research relying on a range of language skills to reach these cohorts.[37]

Stronger multilingual capabilities therefore increase the accessibility of research outputs and engagement, aligning with a democratic enterprise for enhancing public knowledge as well as strengthening collaborative goodwill with other researchers. Examples such as the vaccination programme – a clear case of strong end-to-end enabled research – show how diverse language skills among researchers add value.[38]

3.3   The role of languages in UK academic research

There is a clear role for languages in academic research, but the challenge is active recognition of their value and relevance. The relationship between languages and the UK academic research base has been the subject of various studies that have considered the gaps in language training and how to embed this at both the institutional, disciplinary and sector level.

In 2019 the Centre for Language Acts and Worldmaking undertook an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project to understand the language skills and needs of the UK postgraduate research (PGR) community. The resulting report provided a foundation and some key insights for the present research.[39] The report sought to answer three questions related to: the research-related and personal language learning needs and interests of PGRs; the kinds of formal, non-formal and informal language activities that PGRs engage in; their perceptions and views of language learning support available.

Notably, according to the study, most PGR students (66%) expressed an interest in learning a new language and "44% stated that their research involved language(s) other than English". Meanwhile 37% said they had no language needs directly related to their research, and 7% did not have the languages they needed and were learning from scratch. Some respondents noted that the language knowledge was "critical in their choice of research".

35   Jocano, F, L. (1970) 'Language learning as part of fieldwork technique: some problems in communication', *Asian Studies*, pp.203-27

36   See: 'Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication', [accessed November 2024]

37   The British Academy (2021) *The COVID Decade: understanding the long-term societal impacts of COVID-19*, p.55 [accessed November 2024].

38   Sir Patrick Vallance (2022) 'Creating strategic advantage in science and innovation', *The Foundation for Science and Technology* [accessed November 2024].

39   Álvarez, I, Montoro, C, De Medeiros, A, Kelly, D and Hazard, A (2020) 'Language learning experiences of postgraduate research students in the UK', *The Language Learning Journal*, 48(5), pp.672-684

As the report notes, it is striking to see how, at an early stage in a researcher's career, the question of language competence influences the research they undertake and their sense of engagement with their topic, and there is an ambivalence about what is "crucial or critical" in research written in languages to which they do not have access. These insights ring true with the RAND Europe findings, which found that academics in the Humanities and Social Sciences believed limited access to research in its original language could impact the extent to which scholars could influence research further afield.[40]

However, demand for language learning is not always met with the supply of resources. The Centre for Language Acts report further observes that "most research students need and are interested in improving their language skills in languages they already have knowledge of rather than picking up new languages".[41] Related to this is a concern about the amount of investment of time and money in learning a new language, as well as a startling lack of knowledge of provision in their universities: a large majority (77%) were not even aware of the existence of local institution-wide language provision (IWLP).

This aligns with the findings from the Association of University Language Communities (AULC) and University Council of Modern Languages (UCML - now University Council of Foreign Languages) annual survey into IWLP in UK universities.[42] Although presented predominantly from a student perspective, the 2022 edition warns that since the mid-2010s, that the number IWLPs delivered via centralised language centres in universities has decreased, while those within academic departments has increased. This has impacted the visibility of these courses and means a more limited set of language learning options, given the added burden on languages departments.

As one respondent said: "[a] generation of scholars from the UK, who can only read English, are being produced each year due to these constraints!"[43] This research found similar preoccupations, results and attitudes, and they bring up serious questions about the true global engagement, reach and impact of the UK academic research base.

Conclusion

This chapter presents the findings from a selective literature review into the relationship between languages and research in the UK. It argues that languages bear a vital strategic role for the UK, not least in areas such as trade, diplomacy, education and technology, but also for the resilience and rigour of our academic research. However, the importance of languages remains under-recognised or invisible in many disciplinary areas, not least due to inconsistent or conflicting languages policy, both from government and the sector. Given the value of languages both intrinsically and instrumentally in maintaining an agile and robust research sector, this signals the need to study current language capacity and demand across disciplines to strengthen the call for greater recognition and learning opportunities.

40   RAND Europe (2009) _Language matters: The supply and demand for UK born and education academic researchers with skills in languages other than English_ [accessed November 2024].

41   Álvarez, I et al (2020) 'Language learning experiences of postgraduate research students in the UK', _The Language Learning Journal,_ 48(5).

42   Association of University Language Communities and University Council of Modern Languages (2022) _Survey of Institution-Wide Language Provision in Universities in the UK (2021-22)_ [accessed November 2024].

43   Álvarez, I et al (2020) 'Language learning experiences of postgraduate research students in the UK', _The Language Learning Journal,_ 48(5).

4 Survey findings

This chapter presents the main findings from the survey.[44] The survey was developed to engage with as broad a pool of academic researchers in the UK as possible with the aim of producing a quantitative and qualitative profile of their language capacities, professional opportunities to use language skills, and any barriers to learning or maintaining languages. It is not representative of the UK academic research base, either in terms of respondent characteristics or the use of languages in disciplines beyond Modern Languages; since the survey was more likely to have appealed to those with an existing interest in languages, it is possible that the respondents display above-average language capacities and usage. The survey should therefore be interpreted as an exploratory exercise that opens new avenues of research into the relationship between languages and academia.

4.1   Profile of respondents

The survey gathered a total of 340 responses. The majority of respondents indicated an affiliation with a UK institution. Since the survey call specified UK-based responses, non-UK affiliated responses were removed. Furthermore, responses were received from academics in Modern Languages and cognate fields. This gave a total of 64 entries that were separated from the main sample size in order to focus on an analysis of language skills and use in research pertaining to non-Modern Languages fields. This gave us a final sample size of 276 responses.

4.1.1   Disciplinary areas

Academics from over 40 disciplines responded to the survey call, representing a wide disciplinary coverage (see Table 2). Where indicated in the response forms, subject specialisms within these disciplinary areas were equally diverse. Some respondents noted highly specialist fields as their disciplinary home, while a minority provided a very broad area that did not correspond to a specific field.

To ensure consistency and to make observations across and between disciplines, the original responses were assigned new categories that could encompass a wide enough range of disciplines or sub-fields without being too generic. We used HESA's Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH) Levels 2 and 3 for subject areas as a loose guide.[45] For example, in the following analysis, Theology and Religious Studies is used as the disciplinary category to group together responses that ranged from Bible Studies to Early Christian Studies to Ancient Judaism. This is in no way meant suggest that these disciplines are indistinguishable; rather we sought a degree of standardisation to allow for more meaningful analysis and comparison of language use within and across academic areas. Meanwhile, some respondents recorded their discipline as "social sciences" or "humanities". Where there was little qualitative information to determine their specific area of research, these responses were categorised as "Social Sciences (non-specified)" or "Humanities (non-specified)".

Overall, the highest share of responses came from History scholars at 19%, followed by Political Theory, Politics and International Relations at 11%, and then English and Literary Studies, Geography and Theology and Religious Studies, each at 7%.

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[44]   Please see Annex A for the original survey call, launched in March 2024.
[45]   See: Higher Education Statistics Agency, *The Common Aggregation Hierarchy*, [accessed November 2024].

Table 2: Top 20 disciplines of survey respondents (n=276)

Discipline	Proportion
History	19%
Political Theory, Politics and International Relations	11%
English and Literary Studies	7%
Geography	7%
Theology and Religious Studies	7%
Ecology and Conservation Sciences	5%
Linguistics and Applied Linguistics	5%
Music	3%
Sociology	3%
Anthropology	3%
Film, Media and Culture Studies	3%
Social Sciences (non-specified)	2%
Biology and Biological Sciences	2%
Health Sciences	2%
Psychology	2%
Economics	2%
Education	2%
Social and Public Policy	2%
Physics	1%
Earth and Environmental Sciences	1%

Table 3 shows the proportion of survey respondents according to their overall disciplinary group. A total of 82% of respondents belonged to SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts for People and the Economy) disciplines (n=227). Around 17% of respondents worked in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) field (n=46). This was anticipated given that the linguistic scope of this exercise would more likely overlap with SHAPE scholarship and engagement than STEM subjects. Further, since the survey call was circulated via the British Academy and Centre for Language Acts and Worldmaking's channels, SHAPE researchers would have been more likely be familiar with these organisations.

There was some ambiguity over subject areas such as Geography, as this can include STEM specialisms such as Physical Geography and SHAPE specialisms such as Human Geography. While we categorised all Geography responses under the same subject area, we found that half of the responses could be linked to either a SHAPE or STEM specialism. For the other half, this was not possible. This ambiguity applied to Psychology too; we could not glean from some of the responses which sub-field of Psychology was most appropriate. Where this was the case, we marked these as 'Other', which made up 1% of the total responses by overall disciplinary group.

Table 3: SHAPE and STEM response breakdown (n=276)

SHAPE	82%
STEM	17%
Other	1%

4.1.2 Career stages

We asked respondents to provide their job title which we then assigned to a broad corresponding career-stage. This was done by repurposing the HESA guide on combined staff levels.[46] Table 4 presents the breakdown of survey respondents by their career stage, from PhD to late-career. A total of 28% of respondents were at the early-career stage, followed by another 28% for late-career, and 25% at the mid-career stage.

Table 4: Career stages of respondents (n=276)

PhD	8%
Early-Career	28%
Mid-Career	25%
Late-Career	28%

4.1.3 Institutional breakdown

Respondents were asked to provide the name of their institution which we then matched against a mission group, where possible. An overview of institution-types is useful since it can allow for analysis into the opportunities and barriers for language-learning and use that may be subject to different institutional cultures, practices or pressures. As seen in Table 5, most respondents were located at a Russell Group university (57%), followed by institutions without a mission group status.

Respondents from King's College London made up the highest share, which increased the overall share of Russell Group institutions. The 'Other' category, which accounted for 37% of respondents, covered a large range of institutions based across the UK, including larger research intensive universities as well as smaller and specialist institutions.

Table 5: Mission groups of respondents (n=276)

Mission Group	Proportion
Russell Group	57%
Other	37%
University Alliance	4%
MillionPlus	2%
Cathedrals Group	1%
GuildHE	1%

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[46] See: Higher Education Statistics Agency, *The Common Aggregation Hierarchy*, [accessed November 2024].

4.2   Language capacity, usage and opportunity

4.2.1   Language capacity – range of languages

In the first instance, the survey set out to establish the supply and range of languages among the survey sample. Respondents indicated capacity in a total of 114 languages -including modern, ancient and classical languages). We accepted the full range of what respondents had indicated for their first language(s) and any additional language(s) as evidence of capacity, whether this was native proficiency in their first language(s) or basic working knowledge of any additional language(s). This could include, for example, listening, oral or written understanding, or daily use.

Breaking this down, the most common first language was English, corresponding to 66% of respondents (see Figure 1). This was followed by German (9%), Spanish (4%), Italian (3%) and French (3%). Other first languages with six or fewer respondents include Dutch, Portuguese, Russian, Catalan, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Finnish, Swedish, Sinhalese, Japanese, Romanian, Punjabi and Bosnian. Around 4% of respondents had two or more first languages.

Figure 1: Most common first languages of respondents (n=276)
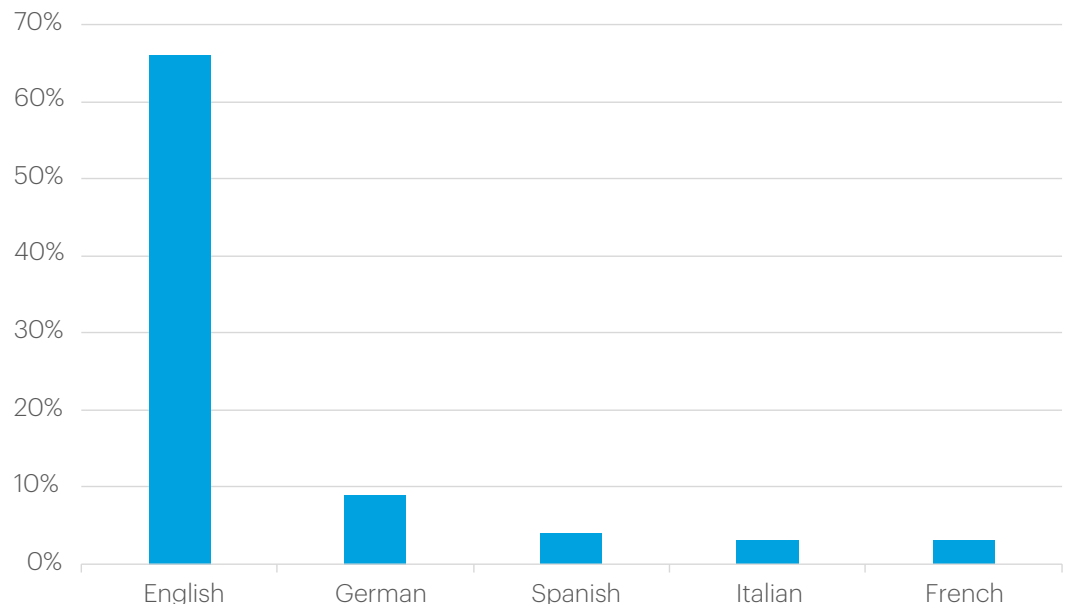
A total of 91% of respondents reported competency in other languages in addition to their first, and 66% of respondents indicated competency in at least two additional languages. This demonstrates the diverse linguistic capacity among the sample. Figure 2 shows a greater variation in additional languages than the share and spread of respondents' first languages. The most common additional languages were French (56%), German (36%) and English (34%). A total of 93 respondents whose first language was not English listed English as an additional language.

Figure 2: Most common additional languages of respondents (n=276)
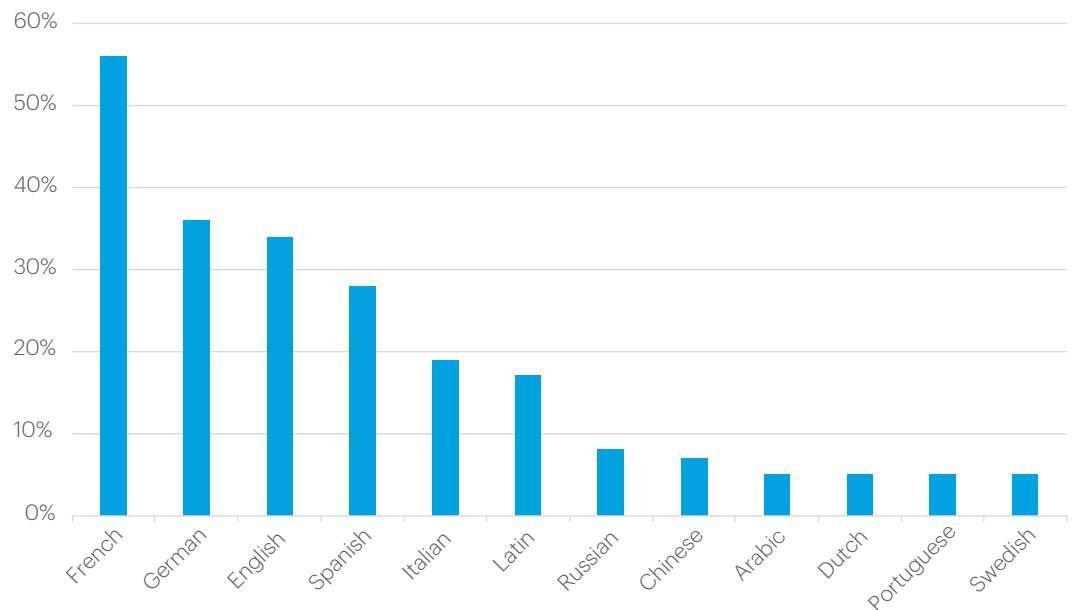
While the survey aims to examine the range and role of languages used in UK academia other than English, it is nonetheless useful here to consider English as an additional language in relation to the profile of survey respondents, especially for international scholars based in the UK. Overall, 35% of respondents indicated that English is not their first language. This roughly corresponds to HESA data for 2023/24 which shows that 34% of academic staff have a non-UK nationality.[47]

Any direct comparison should be approached with caution, since first language does not necessarily reflect nationality, and vice versa, nor did this survey enquire about respondents' nationality. However, this prompts discussion on language capabilities in the UK research base compared to its international counterparts more broadly, particularly when considering the differences in language skills between those with English as a first language and those with English as a second language (see section 3.3).

All respondents whose first language was not English reported competency in additional language(s), compared with 86% of respondents whose first language was English.[48] This is expected, given that these respondents are affiliated with a UK higher education institution and have responded to this survey conducted in English, which inherently requires multilingual capacity. Notably, a higher proportion of respondents whose first language was not English demonstrated competency in at least two additional languages: 71% compared with 64% of respondents whose first language was English.

Among respondents whose first language was English, 62% of respondents reported additional competency in French, followed by 42% with competency in German (Figure 3). Competency in these two languages is slightly higher among those with English as a first language than for the overall survey cohort. Meanwhile, the proportion of respondents competent in Spanish among English first-language speakers is slightly lower than the total response share - 26% versus 28%. Italian ranks fourth at 21%, followed by Latin at 15%.

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47   Higher Education and Statistics Agency (2024) 'HE academic staff by nationality and cost centre 2014/15 to 2023/24' *HESA* [accessed January 2025].

48   One respondent had said they did not have competency in any additional languages but had included a secondary language for research. We therefore decided to include this in the overall number for additional language competencies among respondents whose first language is not English.

Figure 3: Additional languages of respondents with English as a first language (n=182)[49]
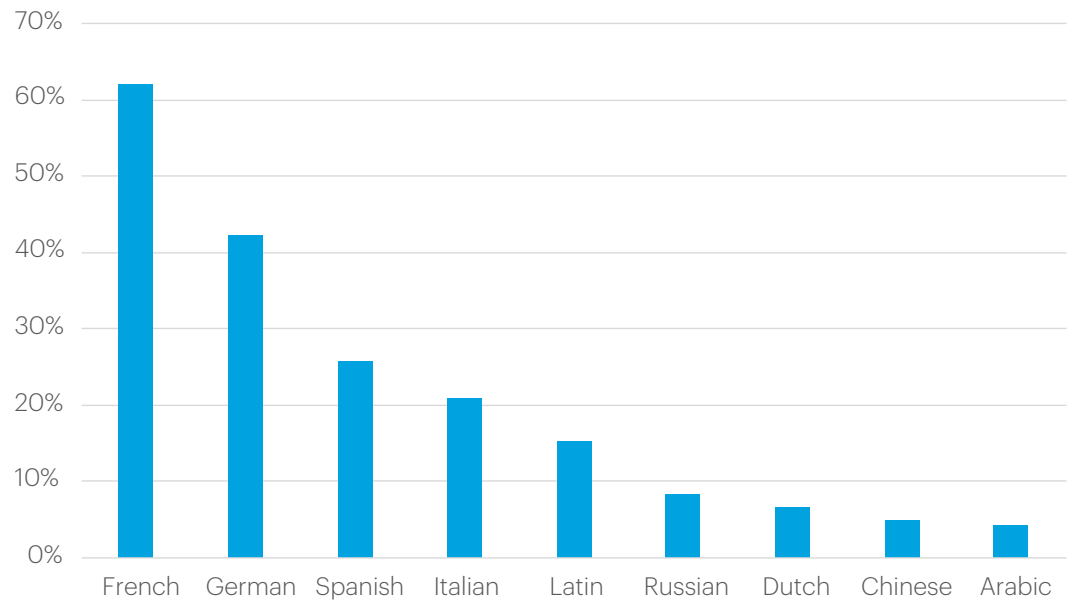
As expected, all respondents whose first language was not English selected English as an additional language, as seen in Figure 4. The second most common additional language among this group was French, 44%. Spanish was notably overrepresented in this cohort compared with the overall survey response, with 31% of respondents here reporting competency in Spanish. Furthermore, a higher share among this group had competencies in Chinese (including Mandarin and Cantonese), at 9%, and the share of those competent in Arabic was the same as those with English as a first language (4%).

Figure 4: Additional languages of respondents without English as a first language (n=96)
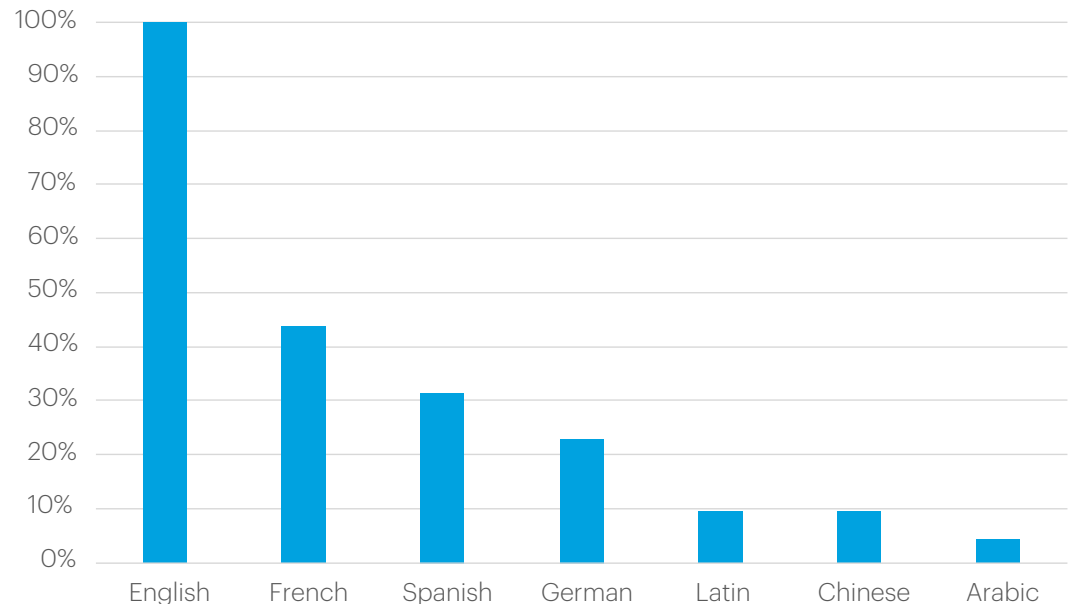
4.2.2 Language use in research – role of languages

By investigating the language capacity of the respondents through their first and additional language(s), this allowed for a comparison of the extent and contexts in which these languages skills are used in their professional lives. Respondents were asked for their primary research language(s) and any additional language(s) they currently use or have used in their research. By 'primary' research language, there was no specific research activity or frequency of activity defined. For example, a respondent may describe their primary research language as that in which they write or read, with additional languages pertaining to those used at conferences or other forms of engagement.

In Figure 5, 82% of respondents selected English as one of, or their only, primary research language. This figure is higher than the overall share of respondents with English as a first language, suggesting that many who conduct their research in English do so as an additional language. English is then followed by Russian, where 4% of respondents identifying this as their primary research language.

Notably, 90% of those with Russian as a primary research language did not speak it as a first language. Looking more closely, these respondents were researchers in History (64%), Political Theory, Politics and International Relations (27%) and Ecology and Conservation Sciences (9%), all of whom described regular or daily use of Russian in their research. These respondents cited diverse reasons for learning and adopting Russian as their primary research language. An early-career historian whose first language is German, for example, noted that their knowledge of Russian opens many doors to their immediate research and longer-term prospects: "Access to sources, cultural understanding, multinational career opportunities (I had academic jobs in three different countries)". Russian was succeeded by French, German and Latin as the next primary research languages (all 3%).

Figure 5: Primary research languages of respondents (n=276)
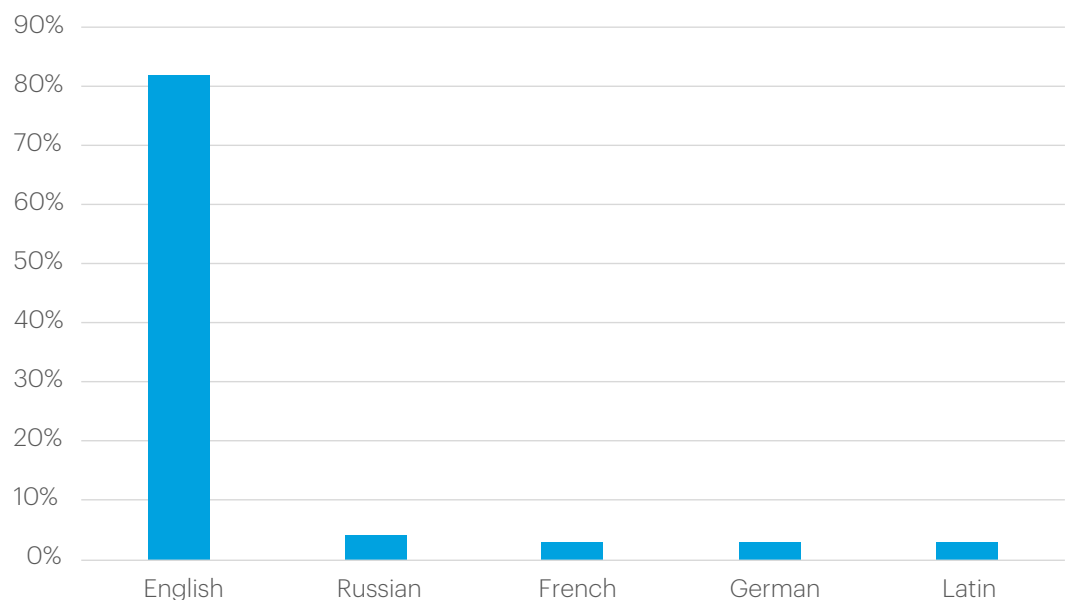
A total of 7% of respondents used at least two primary research languages and 4% used three or more. For respondents who used three or more primary languages in their research, all were based in a SHAPE discipline. Notably, 80% of these respondents indicated that they had received some kind of language training (see section 3.2.3 for further information on training), which suggests that language learning has, to varying degrees, been formally embedded into their research.

Respondents with more than three primary research languages described their multilingual skills as indispensable to their work. The term "impossible" frequently appeared in qualitative answers to highlight that, without knowledge and use of other languages, they would not be able to conduct or complete their research:

> *It's impossible in my area of work to not use other languages. As an anthropologist, I have to train in other languages to conduct ethnographic fieldwork (e.g., participant observation).*
>
> Early Career Researcher, Anthropology

> *It's impossible to collect primary data in English. My research is in migration studies and [I] often collect data from migrants or in other countries.*
>
> Early Career Researcher, Sociology

> *My research is impossible without [Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Ancient Greek, Canaanite, German, French].*
>
> Late Career Researcher, Theology and Religious Studies

> *I research Ukrainian and Russian Politics. My work would be impossible without language skills.*
>
> Mid-Career Researcher, Political Theory, Politics and International Relations

When asked about additional research languages, the respondents showed a far greater variety than for primary use (Figure 6). French had the highest share as an additional language used in research (45%), followed by German (35%), and Spanish (23%). Since English was overwhelmingly the primary language of research for the majority of respondents, it was far less cited as an additional research language, accounting for 5% of the total share. For respondents who did not use any additional languages, 65% were SHAPE respondents and 35% were in STEM disciplines.

Figure 6: Additional research languages of respondents (n=276)
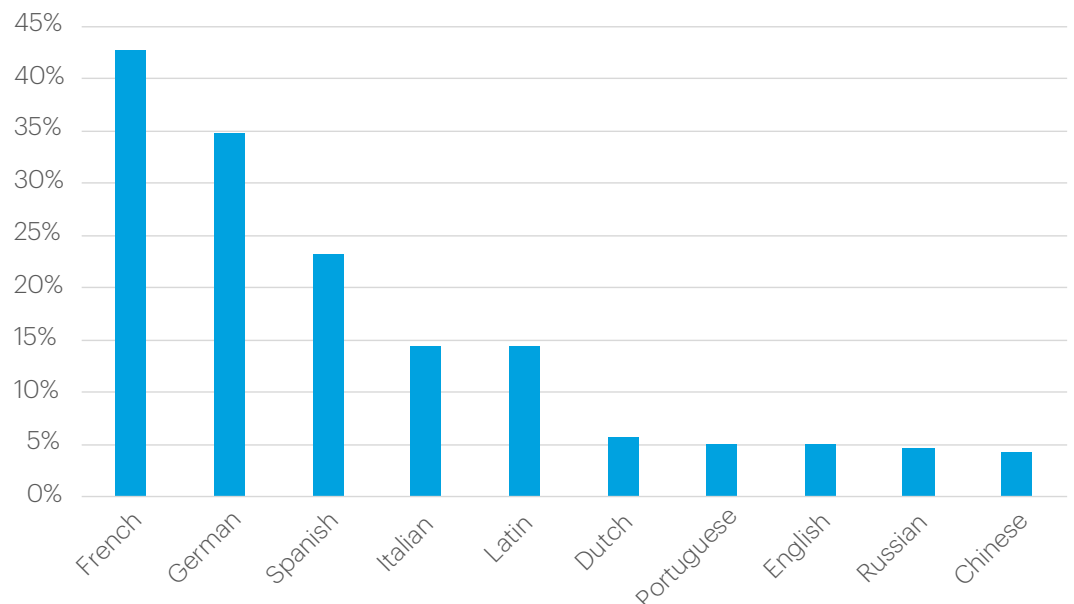
However, what is striking is the difference between potential use and actual use of languages in research. More precisely, this refers to the gap between language capacity – such as those outlined in section 3.2.1 – and the application of those skills in research.

By 'application', this may range from sustained or day-to-day language use to occasional or rare use, provided that this relates to respondents' professional activities rather than their private language use. Since English is overwhelmingly the primary research language for almost all of the respondents, this was omitted from the following analysis to better gauge multilingual use across predominantly Anglocentric research environments at UK HEIs.

This comparison between language capacities and therefore potential use on the one end, and actual languages used in research on the other end, revealed four key observations:

-     the languages with the greatest alignment between capacity and use
-     the languages with the least alignment between capacity and use
-     the disciplines with the overall greatest alignment between language capacity per person versus their actual use
-     the disciplines with the overall least alignment between language capacity and use

In the first instance, Figure 7 shows the top languages where there is an even alignment between capacity and use. Latin had the most even alignment, as 17% of respondents both know and use Latin in their work, whether as a primary or additional research language. This is followed by Arabic (5% of respondents with both capacity and research use), and then Hebrew, Polish and Ukrainian (all at 4%).

Where researchers' language skills are put to professional use, this is predominantly for community, heritage, and pre-modern and classical languages. This may indicate where respondents have pursued a particular field of research based on prior language knowledge, or vice versa. For example, the disciplines where we see the highest proportion of Latin use in research are Theology and Religious Studies, where 50% of respondents in this discipline use Latin, followed by, History (41%) and, interestingly, Ecology and Conservation Sciences (30%).

Figure 7: Comparison of languages with even alignment between capacity and actual use in research (n=276)

Legend: ● Language Capacity ● Actual Language Use
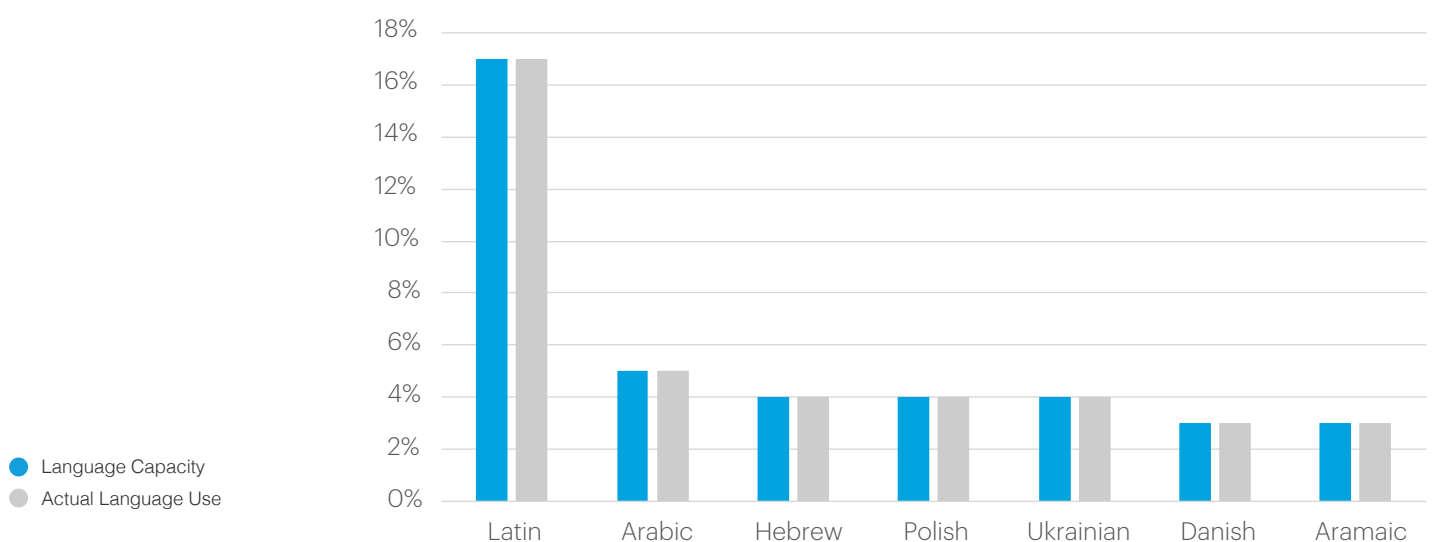
However, in contrast, over a third of respondents' language competencies were not applied as either a primary or additional language in their research. Figure 8 shows the languages with the biggest differences. For example, there was a thirteen percentage-point difference between French capacity and actual use of French in research. This was the largest difference, followed by German at eight percentage-points and Spanish at seven percentage-points.

Figure 8: Comparison of languages with least alignment between capacity and actual use in research (n=276)
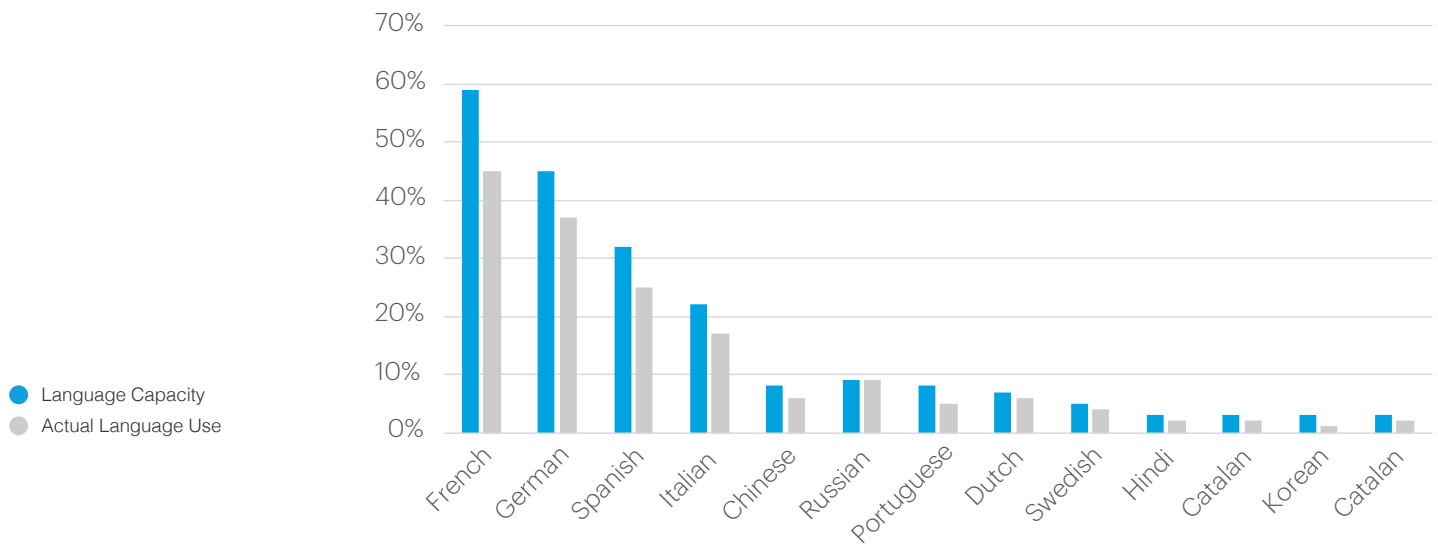
In addition to languages, the survey findings shed light on differences within academic disciplines. Figure 9 shows which disciplines in the survey had even alignment between the average number of languages spoken per person and the average number of languages used in research per person. Theology and Religious Studies had both the highest average number of language capacities per person and in research, at an average of 5.83 languages per person. History follows with 4.45 languages per person across both capacity and actual research use, History of Art at 3.5, English and Literary Studies at 3.1, and Film, Media and Culture Studies with an average of 2.43 languages.

It is worth re-emphasising that these figures are not representative of these disciplines more broadly, but that respondents to the survey generally displayed diverse multilingual skills. Indeed, for Theology and Religious Studies and History, the majority of respondents in both areas reported capacity and application of a combination of modern or ancient languages. As one respondent from History observed about the need for multilingualism in their work:

> *It is impossible to study any period in history using just one language, as the vast majority of societies in the past were multilingual [and] the form of the language you know (e.g. English) in the past can be quite different…Monolingual researchers can only address quite narrow research questions from the last 100-150 years, if that.*

Mid-Career Researcher, History

Figure 9: Disciplines with even alignment between average language capacity per person and average languages use in research per person

- Language per person - Capacity
- Language per person - Use in research
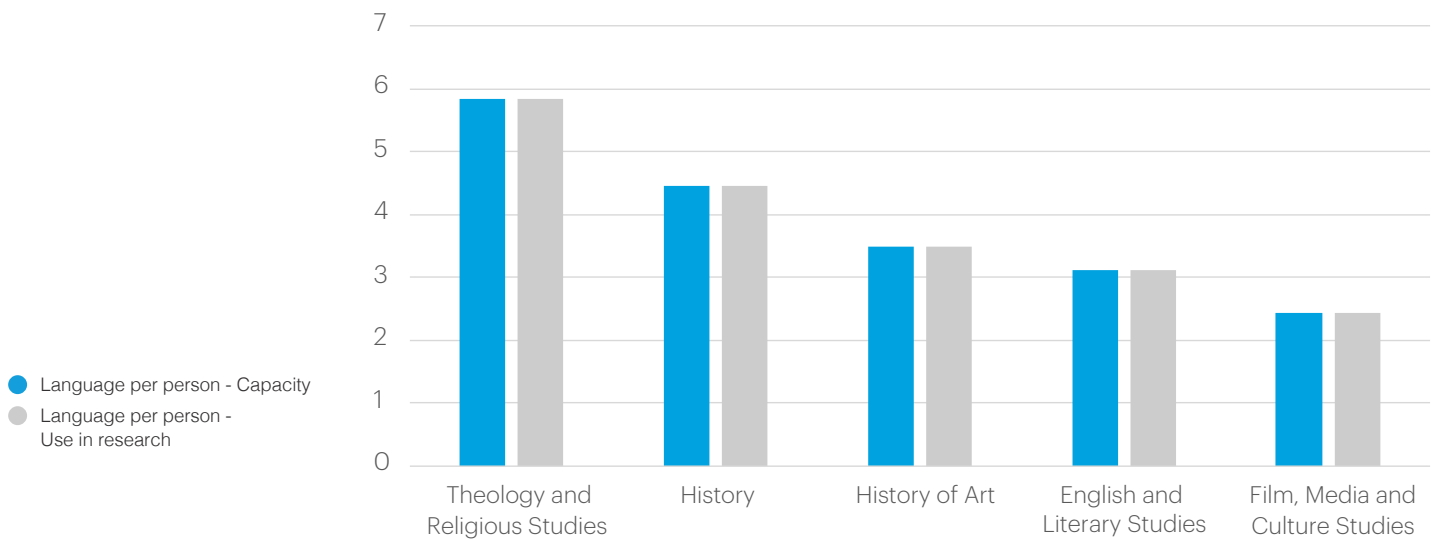
Looking at gaps in language capacity versus research use, almost three-quarters of the academic disciplines represented in the survey show a decline in the average languages used per person compared to the average language competencies per person when removing English across all markers. Figure 10 shows the disciplines with the highest drop in language use per person (i.e., a loss of 1.5 or more languages). More precisely, fewer respondents within these disciplines apply their diverse language skills in their research. Among these disciplines, Law respondents have the highest number of language competencies per person (4.5), which drops to an average of 3 languages per person used by respondents in their research. Meanwhile, Philosophy and Mathematics see the greatest change – an average loss of two languages per person. These are followed by Physics respondents who also experienced losses in language capacity, going from an average of 2.25 languages spoken per person to 0.5 languages used in research per person.

Figure 10: Comparison of disciplines with highest drop in average language capacity per person against average languages use in research per person

- Language per person - Capacity
- Language per person - Use in research
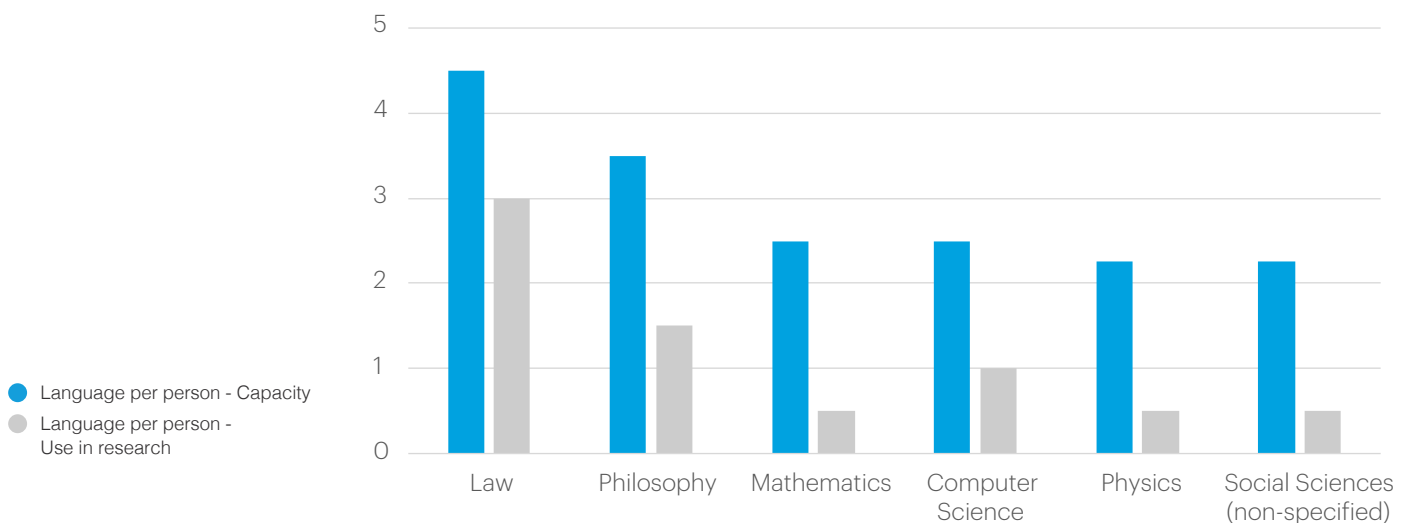
4.2.3   Language opportunities and training - recognition

Among the sample, it is apparent that there is rich linguistic potential yet opportunities to use, learn or maintain languages for research varies greatly. The third part of the survey analysis is therefore concerned with the recognition or appreciation of diverse language skills among researchers, weaving in some of the qualitative responses to support the analysis. This includes where and why languages are used in research, researcher perceptions on the necessity or relevance of language use to their research, their views on discipline-specific expectations and institutional recognition, such as through institution-wide language provision (IWLP).[50]

First, to examine where there are opportunities for language use in research, respondents were asked to specify which of the following areas they used their language skills: reading for research; writing; communicating with other researchers; in research communities and networks; at conferences; and through public engagement or communication of research.

Figure 11 shows that reading for research was the most common area of language use (89%), followed by communicating with other researchers (68%), in research communities and networks (60%) and at conferences (57%). Respondents who used other languages overwhelmingly saw multilingualism as necessary to read and interpret primary data, and therefore the ability to engage in emerging or existing research discussions:

> *Benefits include being able to consult original language texts (translated or untranslated); having access to a wider range of material…Working only in English would restrict the ideas I have access to.*
>
> Mid-Career Researcher, English and Literary Studies

> *Ability to read primary sources and scholarship in other languages.*
>
> Late Career Researcher, Theology and Religious Studies

> *I gain more respect from researchers - it's vital for primary source reading*
>
> Early Career Researcher, History of Art

In addition to communicating or collaborating with colleagues in other countries, many respondents highlighted how language skills benefited either their teaching or engagement with students in the UK:

> *I have helped other students read papers in other languages. I have also helped them fill out paperwork for placements in French-speaking countries.*
>
> PhD Student, Biology and Biological Sciences

> *My language skills [also] help with teaching my students and working on data analysis. There is also a cultural element, and feeds into my work in politics (e.g., looking at Brexit).*
>
> Mid-Career Researcher, Linguistics and Applied Linguistics

There is a clear theme of collaboration and relationship-building in the other most popular answers for language use in research. For instance, 8% of respondents indicated that they use languages for fieldwork, including data collection, participatory research and ethnographic research, and other forms of engagement under this category. Almost all responses here employed languages skills here in combination with other areas, such as reading for research and collaboration with other academics, to bolster their work:

> *Conducting interviews [in research participants'] native language helps with richness of data, since interview participants are able to express themselves much better in their native language.*
>
> Mid-Career Researcher, Accounting

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[50]   There is, indeed, a fourth component that would include attitudes towards multilingualism in the wider research and innovation sector, which is beyond the scope of this report.

Nearly 20% of those who employed language use in fieldwork (n=22) were scholars in Political Theory, Politics and International Relations, the same proportion as those either in Sociology or a non-specified Social Sciences subject, followed by 14% in Geography. Other disciplines where respondents use languages for fieldwork include Ecology and Conservation Sciences, Biology and Biological Sciences, and Anthropology.

Figure 11: Breakdown of language use by research activity (n=222)

Survey respondents were asked to provide a reason for not pursuing any additional or further languages (figure 12). Nearly 70% stated time constraints as the main or one of the main barriers to picking up new or additional languages. This was predominantly due to research or teaching responsibilities, other professional commitments, and caring responsibilities. Expense was the second highest barrier, with 22% of respondents who answered this question considering language learning to be a costly investment, particularly where there is little incentive to do so.

As to whether there was a direct need for languages in research, 19% of respondents to this question found that they had not learnt new or additional languages as there was no meaningful connection or impact upon their research. In a separate question as to whether a lack of language skills can negatively impact research (i.e., Q, 22. Have you ever felt that your research has suffered because of any lack of language skills on your part? In which language(s) and why?), many of these respondents pointed out that by working in monolingual – often Anglophone - contexts, there was little incentive to acquire or apply new language skills to their work.

Some felt that, as researchers, they were always in the process of acquiring and developing new skills, and that languages were not a priority against other pressing or competing interests:

> *English is the de facto lingua franca of the world; it doesn't seem particularly necessary and there are a lot of other skills I need to develop*
>
> Early Career Researcher, Film, Culture and Media Studies

However, notably, there was recognition among others in this group that while there may not be an imminent or essential need for multilingualism in their research, a diverse linguistic skillset nevertheless expanded the scope of research opportunities available to them:

> *I haven't felt that my research is directly limited by monolingualism, but the possibilities for research are constantly conditioned by this limitation; so it's more a provincialising background condition rather than a direct impediment.*
>
> Early Career Researcher, History

This was true for respondents who altogether had no need for other languages on a daily basis, but who nevertheless believed that languages could widen access to very technical or specialist knowledge:

> *Some papers are only available in other languages, so it would be good to access that. When travelling to conferences and abroad it is good to be able to orient myself a little, and knowing at least one other major language such as Spanish, French, Arabic, Portuguese or Chinese would be helpful.*
>
> PhD Student, Mathematics

Figure 12 also shows that 12% of respondents had concerns about their competency or lack of proficiency with learning new languages, which in itself was seen as a barrier to investing the time or resource. This was a trend that was observed throughout the survey, where respondents felt that they either did not have, or would never be able to achieve, the level of competency needed to use their other languages for research purposes:

> *I wish my German was better! For the most part, I can make sense of what I need to, but it is always a huge chore. Unfortunately for me, Germans have had a lot to say about my area of specialism.*
>
> Mid-Career Researcher, Philosophy

The underlying assumption seems to be that a highly specialised level of language competency needs to be achieved in order to use these skills professionally. Researchers may, in turn, feel or be discouraged from venturing into research areas that would require them to start learning another language – which in turn puts limitations on the diversity and breadth of research undertaken in the UK. One respondent described the little pay-off with developing language skills for research:

> *I work with archival documents relating to science and technology and so I think I would find it very difficult to develop a high enough level of skill in a second language to be confident in such a specialised context.*
>
> Early Career Researcher, Geography

Another significant barrier to language learning was a lack of opportunity or sufficient resource other than time or funding. As seen in Figure 12, 19% of respondents felt that this was a major obstacle to learning or improving their skills. For some, this pertained to a lack of appropriate or local training courses:

> *As an adult it is logistically harder to learn languages (finding a course in my area, finding people to practice with)*
>
> Early Career Researcher, Ecology and Conservation Sciences

Others found a lack of opportunity by way of limited options for either in-person or remote language learning, based on their preferences or scheduling:

> *I wanted to pick up Spanish but didn't want to do an online course and just be stuck behind a screen for an additional hour*
>
> PhD Student, Linguistics and Applied Linguistics

Figure 12: Barriers to acquiring new or further languages (n=165)
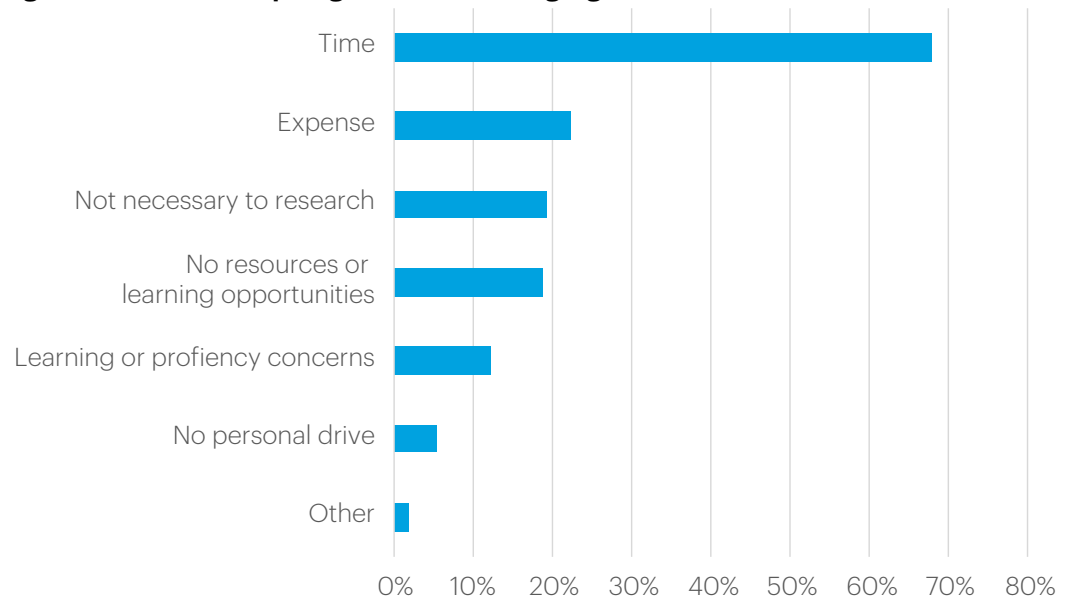
However, a recurring theme among these responses, was an observation that their departments or institutions did not provide sufficient or relevant language learning opportunities, whether for personal or professional fulfilment. To explore language opportunities and provision, survey respondents were asked about the type of language training they may have received, for example, for speaking, writing or listening-based training (Q. 16. If you have received any language training in relation to your research, what form did this take?). Roughly 40% of all respondents had received some degree of language training.

Where respondents had received language training (Figure 13), the most popular form was conversational language skills training (65%), then discipline-specific training (51%) and academic-writing (19%). When looking at all three training types, just under 40% of respondents who had received training did so in a UK-based institution. Most of this group had English as their first language (88%) and, with the exception of three respondents, were all scholars in a SHAPE discipline, where there was a link between language training and disciplinary use. Within this, 58% had received discipline-specific language training, either alone or in combination with training for conversational language skills or for academic writing.

Examining discipline-specific training further, since this gives a better indication of where language training has served research focus specifically, 35% of respondents who had undertaken this form of training either on its own or in combination with other forms of training were History scholars. Also overrepresented in this category are Theology and Religious Studies (27%) and Anthropology (5%). For all three of these disciplines, 9 respondents had undertaken their training at a UK HEI but 18 had received their language training elsewhere.

Within this small sample size, respondents suggest that language training opportunities are available at UK universities; however, anecdotally, unless a language is directly tied to the discipline's field of study, the type of language training can be limited or basic. One respondent observed that at their institution, "languages [are taught] for conversation, not research". While training opportunities were seen as helpful for personal use, there was a sense that there was not enough robust training offered to researchers that could benefit their multilingual capacity in research. This is echoed in the Association of University Language Communities and University Council of Modern Languages (now the University Council for Languages) annual survey into IWLP in UK universities, as cited earlier in this report, where many participants described IWLP at their institution as offering language classes for beginners, but that intermediate or advanced study was often unavailable.[51]

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[51]   Association of University Language Communities and University Council of Modern Languages (2022)
         Annual survey into Institution Wide Language Provision in UK universities, 2021-22

Indeed, 45% of all respondents to this survey agreed or strongly agreed that there was a lack of opportunity at their institution to learn or maintain language competencies. The response findings by mission group show that the Cathedrals Group, MillionPlus and the diverse 'Other' universities are overrepresented here. Proportionate to the responses received per each mission group, most respondents belonging to these particular institution types were more likely to find a lack of opportunity for language learning and maintenance.

Figure 13: Breakdown of language training type (n=110)
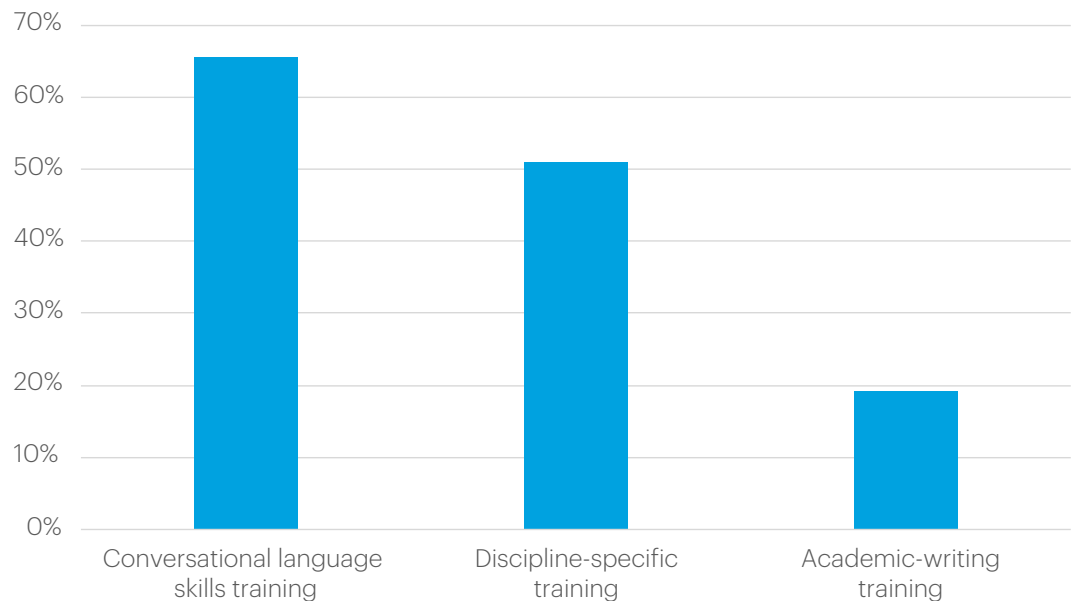
4.3   Summary of recurring themes

Diverse language skills enrich both SHAPE and STEM research, yet languages are underutilised

On the whole, the survey findings reveal rich and diverse language capabilities among the sample size, with competency in over 100 languages. Language capabilities range from modern to pre-modern (e.g., German to Latin) and from official to minority and 'minoritised' languages (e.g., from Turkish and Spanish to Kurdish and Catalan).

There is real potential for these language skills to be applied to and enhance research, yet there is a gap between the language capacity of respondents and where or how they apply their languages to their research. This gap between potential and actual use varies according to discipline or language-type, yet there was an overall strong sense from respondents that languages add significant value to their research. Responses ranged from seeing languages as an essential part of the research process to acknowledging that increased linguistic capacity can better promote and leverage research outcomes to diverse international audiences.

Notably, respondents recognised that multilingualism could enrich and expand the scope of their research. For example, many respondents said that language skills add nuance, complexity and depth to research. This was particularly true for those working in a SHAPE discipline. A respondent in the Social Sciences captured this: "There is no direct Arabic translation of the key concept in my research, [forcing] me to reconceptualise it in a way that wouldn't have occurred to me if I was working in only one language." At the same time, it is encouraging to see in the responses that multilingualism in research is not just a SHAPE pursuit. Several STEM respondents highlighted where diverse language skills were integral to their research and where a lack of language skills could, for example, directly inhibit work.

Researchers see languages as vital for responsible and ethical research

Participatory research and fieldwork – particularly international – constitute an important area of research language use since it ties directly to the ethical framing of research production. As one respondent described, employing their language skills in their research helps to combat "'parachute' science", the idea that researchers are deployed straight into different cultures or communities without any relationship-building or sustained engagement. Overall, there was a strong sense among respondents that additional language competencies are fundamental to the integrity of their research. For fieldwork and cross-cultural collaboration, language skills were seen as vital for creating a culture of respect and trust with research participants. For example, a respondent in Ecology and Conservation Sciences noted that having competency in another language to support their international fieldwork was respected by people in these local communities: "People [feel] that I value them and their culture, and that I'm not just a fly-by-night external person coming in."

Multilingualism was also seen as a necessary condition by some for epistemic justice and equal access to research for the researchers themselves, as well as the wider public. Responses observed that without the relevant language skills, their research may be limited since this hinders their ability to access data sources or present and engage in key discussions. These responses emphasised the capacity to engage or influence emerging research, particularly for those with niche areas of study that do not receive the same attention in the UK as they may do in other countries. Others emphasised that the opportunity to write and publish in other languages promotes fair and inclusive scholarship and research assessment.

Demand for languages is context-specific and varies, with time constraints the most common barrier to maintaining or learning languages

Demand for languages is highly context-specific; some researchers may not require new or existing language skills as a core part of their research methodology, but several respondents identified that a lack of these skills could limit other activities, such as at conferences or their wider research networks. While some respondents noted that they had no imminent need to develop or apply their language skills for research purposes, the qualitative responses revealed an overwhelming perception that languages are still valuable, even among those who were more ambivalent.

Rather than a lack of disciplinary demand, respondents cited time constraints as the chief obstacle to language learning and application. Indeed, languages were deemed useful but often de-prioritised. Some respondents pointed to scheduling pressures from the Research Excellence Framework (REF) (e.g., "Should I spend an hour working on Chinese, or should I spend that hour writing a paper that my institution wants for the REF?") while others raised the responsibility creep that came with moving up in their roles and the subsequent limitations this placed on their day-to-day priorities.

There is a lack of appropriate institution-wide language provision, despite researcher demand

Whether respondents indicated that languages were or were not directly necessary to their research, most responses acknowledged that access to language training is highly beneficial. However, the offer of training in HEIs varies greatly and is often a one-size-fits-all syllabus that does not always suit researchers' needs, competencies or even linguistic interests. As a definitive conclusion cannot be drawn from these results alone, this opens up the possibility for future work to examine any trends or correlation between institution type and language resourcing for academic staff, particularly where there is a correlation to advanced or discipline-specific research.

Indeed, some respondents noted that the buck does not nor should not stop with HEIs; rather, there is a problem with languages education more broadly in the UK, where prior educational attainment at school or the curriculum was cited as an obstacle to language-learning as an adult. For example, one respondent from the UK found that A Level qualifications were too narrow for a multilingual education if students wish to pursue a wide range of subjects; they preferred the educational offer of the International Baccalaureate since this enabled multilingual study without restricting oneself to a 'languages-only' pathway.

5 Interviews

This chapter presents a summary and analysis of the interviews. The semi-structured interviews concerning language skills and capabilities in the UK research base were guided by the questions posed to all interviewees (see Annex A), while also allowing space for additional points and experiences to be expressed. The interviews provided in-depth perspectives and nuanced insights on issues raised by the survey data, and were based on experiences across disciplines, career stages and differing academic and research environments.

5.1   Interviews: summary

The interviews may be summarised as covering: personal experience of knowledge and competencies in languages (Q1); awareness of language learning opportunities and research (Q2); the acquisition of language competence, including motivation for this (Q2, 3); observations of and attitudes to language competence in research (Q3, 6, 7); language skills and research limitations (Q4, 6); language skills and research enhancement (Q5, 7); raising awareness of the place of language competence in research, including in project development and funding applications (Q7).

Strikingly, all interviewees agreed that language skills had some effect on the types of research projects which they personally undertake. For some, proficiency in a language other than English was essential for the conduct of their research. This included the need for languages for the collection of primary data, sensitivity towards the context of their research, or the conceptualisation of findings. For others, using languages other than English was not necessary, and working in English (whether English was a first language or not) presented little or no obstacle to their choice of or engagement in research projects. However, there remained an awareness that monolingualism had subtle effects – or indeed "not so subtle effects" as one interviewee expressed it – on how and where their research was formulated, carried out, discussed, presented and published.

Interviewees generally considered it preferable for researchers to be "closer" to the data, enabling them to "better understand and communicate" with their sources. While a researcher may not need to know another language to "do the science", the overarching view was that researchers perform better when they understand the culture in which the data is produced and when they can engage directly with communities or original sources without potential interference through linguistic mediation. Language skills and use therefore have direct impact on research breadth and quality.

Interviewees working primarily within Social Science, Arts and Humanities (SHAPE) disciplines were particularly aware of the need for and benefits of languages other than English to conduct world-leading? research, including accessing primary sources and archives, carrying out fieldwork, analysing and expressing findings, and conducting comparative analysis. Interviewees stated that a multilingual approach allows for researchers to "stress test" theories, methodologies and hypotheses in more than one language/cultural area in order to strengthen research evidence, findings and claims. Such an approach was considered important not only to research in disciplines in which this may be expected, for instance Modern Languages, Linguistics, and History, but across many disciplines across both SHAPE and STEM.

In terms of motivations for use of languages other than in English in research, interviewees generally agreed that there is evident personal interest in using and learning languages for some researchers whose work is directly linked to languages other than English or focused on or working with different cultures and geographical contexts. It was, however, tactfully noted that interviewees were well aware of researchers who work on cultural and geographical areas

without having language competence in those areas, which may have implications for research integrity in particular. Interviewees also, however, had experience of themselves or colleagues being motivated to learn a language from a desire or need to interact with international colleagues in an increasingly global research context.

All interviewees, whether they had English as a first or additional language, observed that UK-trained and/or -schooled researchers tend not to have the same level of language skills as researchers whose education had taken place elsewhere. Many mentioned the decline in the teaching and learning of languages at school and undergraduate levels in the UK, and how this decline was becoming increasingly evident in the UK's research landscape. The consequent lack of language competency has an impact on the opportunities of UK trained/schooled researchers, as well as a perceived effect on research breadth and quality. Further, there was an understanding that the decline of language skills in the UK, at a time where language skills including English skills were improving elsewhere, meant that the UK was losing its "competitive edge" in the international research landscape.

5.2   Interview data: recurring themes

5.2.1   The impact of language skills on research

Recurring themes in the interview data

- The impact of language skills on research
  - Research quality
  - Research breadth
  - Research integrity
- Language skills as undervalued in the research landscape
- The possibilities and limitations of English
- Anxieties around levels of language competence
- Opportunities, time and funding investment needed for acquiring/improving language skills

Interviewees explained the direct or indirect impact that their language skills – or lack thereof – had on research, ranging from their choice of research project to fieldwork and access to data, to opportunities for research dissemination. The effects can be seen across research quality, research breadth and research integrity.

Research quality

A thread that ran through the interviews was that of the relationship between language skills and research quality. In the following two quotes, a lack of language skills is linked to a negative impact on the quality of research:

"From my experience talking with other colleagues, I know that some people, they just start collaborating with someone who does speak that language, and I think on the one hand, this is, this is good because I think collaboration is a good part of research and you cannot have all the skills that you need to complete the research project. And it also means that, especially if you're working in developing countries, you're also bringing on board people that are scholars from these developing countries [….] But, I mean, again, this is just from my perspective of seeing people present their work, you can see when people do not understand the language, it's also more difficult for them to just understand what's going on and again have access to the appropriate documentation. I mean, you know, maybe you're great at technical stuff and data processing, but then you why are you presenting? I don't know it's something that truly baffles me. And it feels to me that, you know, maybe the results are there, but then if you don't

know the context because you don't speak the language, then you cannot really interpret or you cannot really see the implications, and it really doesn't let you go one step further".

Mid-Career Researcher, SHAPE

"One example is a project recently in in Kenya that I was involved in where one of the PhD students was doing focus groups and I still think that [their] results are very valuable, but they would have been better if we would have spoken the local language. But that's not even Swahili […] No, that's a very local dialect that only spoken in that region. […] But I can imagine that, yeah, there, if you would actually speak the language that would improve."

Mid-Career Researcher, STEM

Some researchers illustrated that lack of certain language skills can limit access to data and information, and that this limit can have the effect of biasing results:

"We recently did a review of news articles report related to drought to flood events and there [our language skills] did limit what we could do. So we had several people in the project with different language skills or that spoke different languages, but obviously there are a lot of languages that we didn't cover. So it does [..] bias my results sometimes maybe, in that sense."

Mid-Career Researcher, STEM

"So for me, language skills are an important part of the type of research or the type of projects that I choose to do because my research has a lot to do with data and I believe that data needs to be understood within a context and in order to understand the context, looking at an Excel file is not gonna [sic] do it. You need to be able to read, and you know if possible, read in the language where that data originated, and that's something that I personally feel more comfortable with. So yeah, I definitely try to go for projects in countries whose language I speak".

Mid-Career Researcher, SHAPE

Interviewees also discussed how language skills could enhance their ability to access data sources (including written material, interview data and fieldwork) and to understand their cultural context from which the data emerges. This comes across as a major point of motivation to pursue the development of language skills, as it is seen as improving the quality of the research.

"I think as a historian… you'll have to have skills of understanding other languages and where archives might be found that can inform the research."

Mid-Career Researcher, SHAPE

"[The research team] are fluent and can discuss and coordinate with our collaborators in China. And trying to, well for all of us, to try to understand the different science culture they have […] I would say, I mean, [our collaborators] all tend to speak English to some degree, but when it comes to the nitty gritty, then then it's a huge advantage to have people on your team actually being able to speak to them in their mother tongue. I mean, we certainly had situations where, where if we didn't, if we wouldn't have learned what the issue actually was".

Late Career Researcher, STEM

"You're better able to understand people you're interviewing if you speak their language or if you're able to interview them in their native language and you can understand what exactly they are saying. So I think there it becomes quite important and that would, I think, motivate a lot of people, and it would certainly motivate me, to try and learn a language."

Mid-Career Researcher, STEM

One interviewee illustrated how while language skills did not directly impact their research, upon reflection, they did naturally limit the sort of projects they could embark on or bid for, suggesting that lack of language skills can have a negative effect on research breadth:

> *"I don't necessarily think so, but, I don't know whether it's one of those, I don't think we do because we don't bid for projects that would require the skills we don't have. Like, I know most of the people, when going abroad, tend to go to places either where partners are there who speak English or they speak that language. For me, I mean I wouldn't bid for something that required me...it's like anything, you don't bid on a skill you don't have."*
>
> Early Career Researcher, STEM

Some interviewees also commented on the positive impact of language skills on transnational collaboration. For example, the quotes below point to the increasing internationalisation of research projects, and how having language skills has emboldened researchers to take on and be directly involved in more international research. Language skills are in this way linked to increased opportunity:

> *"My projects, like for a lot of people in [my field], have become increasingly international and transnational [....] Having these language skills has emboldened me, if you like, to embark on this kind of research, and do my own research rather than to hand it over to research assistants".*
>
> Professor, STEM

> *"I found that particularly in these collaborative projects that I was talking about where we had pan-European collaborations, in certain situations whether it was science or management, it was just very useful to speak the native language of other partners, whether it was to resolve particular situations, but often just, just to allow people whose first language wasn't English to be better understood".*
>
> Professor (emeritus), STEM

> *"The ability to interact with your colleagues abroad and to operate in an international and global research context... I have to say that in my experience in that regard is that when I did my PhD it was a matter of honour to us – and possibly also of survival – that we would make ourselves competent in [the language] if we weren't already. For me, it was just something that was self-evident. It was also the case that our colleagues [from outside the UK] didn't have as good English as they do now and, by contrast, my experience is that these colleagues' English is at least as good as [my competence in their language]."*
>
> Professor (emeritus), SHAPE

Research integrity

Another theme that can be seen throughout the interview data is the relationship between language use and research integrity. Interviewees noted how researchers use written translations and interpreters for fieldwork, which sometimes leads to productive collaborations and enhances research in developing countries. At the same time, some interviewees discussed the complexity of translation and interpreting: how it mediates the conversation, the language, and the data. There are also many potential problems that might arise with poor translation/ interpretation, including the ethical consequences of using interpreters who, while they might speak the language, might not be suitable to the context or the project. Interviewees also stressed the importance of language skills in building trust with communities, both for research and outreach purposes. Language skills and use are tied to research ethics, particularly when conducting research directly with people.

> *"I think there [has been] a lot of research done on people rather than with people and I think that a lot of that has had to do with languages."*
>
> Early Career Researcher, SHAPE

> *"If you don't have that competency I think you have to think quite carefully about why you're doing that, particularly with vulnerable groups [...] [Language learning] shows commitment and it just shows that you are wanting to engage with these groups for the long term."*
>
> Early Career Researcher, SHAPE

5.2.2   Language skills as undervalued in the research landscape

Many of our interviewees expressed the views that language skills are often undervalued in the research landscape, and that this has resulted in a reduction in language skills in the research base. Some interviewees also linked this to a larger undervaluing and decline in the study of languages seen earlier throughout the educational pipeline in the UK.

> *"The decline in the take up of Modern Language teaching at undergraduate level has fed into the opportunities and skills that students have to do postgraduate research. Britain, before Brexit, was I think a net importer of talent […]. A native speaker [of a language other than English] was not only a native speaker, but also came well-trained, very well-trained as undergraduate students and post-docs".*
>
> Late Career Researcher, SHAPE

> *[on UK-trained/schooled colleagues] "I see often enough a lower level of competency and sensitivity [to language] than I would expect. There is a kind of depth of understanding from that kind of training [in languages] that you gain over many years, starting in school, that too few people in Britain have now".*
>
> Late Career Researcher, SHAPE

All interviewees, whether they had English as a first or additional language, observed that UK-trained and/or -schooled researchers tend not to have the same level of language skills as researchers whose education had taken place elsewhere. Multiple interviewees cited the decline in the teaching and learning of languages at school and undergraduate levels in the UK, and how this decline was becoming increasingly evident in the UK's research landscape. These interviewees were also aware of the practical and intellectual impacts on the types of research, topics and opportunities undertaken by researchers in the UK as a consequence of this decline. Some interviewees had witnessed that, amongst their own doctoral students and colleagues, language competency (or rather, lack of competency) limited the ability of UK-schooled and/or -trained researchers to apply for or take up opportunities for study and for research and academic posts outside the UK. Even if teaching was carried out largely in English in the institution in which they might work, there were day-to-day living, working and communication issues to deal with, and this precluded applications.

Furthermore, interviewees noted the impact of the lack of language competency on areas of research undertaken and the types of projects developed by and engaged with by UK- schooled and/or -trained researchers, together with the consequent effects for the breadth and depth of the UK research base across disciplines. One interviewee expressed the challenges of finding competent language specialists for research projects in the UK due to "inadequate training and funding", despite the "obvious" fact that "language proficiency enhances research". Further, some interviewees commented on their experience of how, at the same time of the decline in UK competence in languages over recent decades, there had been an improvement in the English language skills of a range of international colleagues who then equally deploy one or more languages in addition to English which then gives them a "competitive edge in their work". The decline in language skills therefore has implications for the competitiveness and perception of the UK's research base.

> *[on the future of the research subject area]: "You can't do it if you don't have the language skills either as an individual or as a team. In the continental European context, the colleagues who are making the running are the ones who have the competence in several relevant languages. Here [on recruiting post-docs] where are going to find someone who has the key language skills?"*
>
> Late Career Researcher, SHAPE

Despite a general agreement that lack of language skills can limit the quality and nature of research, interviewees' observations on the place of English in research practice and publication were nuanced. Some interviewees perceived the role of the English language as a big part of the undervaluing of other languages in academic and research settings. The dominance of English in the global research landscape, the use of the language as a de facto lingua franca, and the increased competencies of international researchers in English all can lead to a perception that languages other than English are a nice-to-have, but not necessary.

> *"I'd say, generally in the UK, I mean when we're working with partners abroad, the default is usually to speak English because, yeah, it's other people who speak different languages."*
>
> Early Career Researcher, STEM

> *"I'm lucky being a native English speaker because so much is either done in English first of all, or translated into English so I have access to a lot of literature I guess as compared with, perhaps, a non-native speaker, and I guess that brings me to a second point which would be I think there's been a kind of growing awareness and interest [in my area of research] about issues of linguistic justice. And so I've also thought a bit about what are the kind of systematic ways in which non- native speakers may find it difficult to be operating in a second language [...] So, I guess in those kind of indirect ways there is in the background these kind of questions about what languages are and what other people around me speak and what implications that has".*
>
> Early Career Researcher, SHAPE

At the same time, many interviewees were aware of the limitations that an English-only approach to research may have, to their research and to their opportunities. Some of the interviewees, especially those who have worked outside of the UK, reflected on the potential loss to their disciplines as the research of those who cannot write up their findings in English may never reach a wider audience.:

> *"It's realising that you're only ever reading evidence in English, and actually there's this whole world outside of that, and that's quite kind of like a 'wow' moment when you really consider that."*
>
> Early Career Researcher, SHAPE

> *"In [my field] most work that most people are going to want to seek out is either in English or translated into English, or it's been produced in other countries in English, but by no means all. [...] I mean one country that springs to mind would be Turkey, where there's a very, very strong research community, some excellent research being produced, but also a very large proportion of strong researchers who go to North America, to the UK or to Australia or to Europe and work in English, but there are a lot of researchers in Turkey producing work in Turkish that isn't getting out to people beyond Turkey."*
>
> Mid-Career Researcher, SHAPE

5.2.3   Anxieties around language competence

Another theme that came up in interviews was anxieties around language competence. This also mirrored some responses made in the survey. Participants agreed that often, in the case of language competencies of UK-trained researchers, "perfect is the enemy of the good". This refers to the observation that there is a tendency amongst researchers across disciplines and across career-levels to not take up or continue the study of languages other than English because they feel they cannot reach their desired level of competency. The underlying belief here is that a language most be spoken "fluently" or "perfectly" to be useful.

> *"I often hear from English native speakers that they are actually quite ashamed that they are not able to speak another language and that I feel like they have more of a barrier of trying to learn another language. And [you don't] have to learn a second language anyway because you know everyone has to learn English. Once people do decide to learn another language, I don't think there's necessarily a difference, but I do think that I've noticed that colleagues more often feel barrier to trying to learn a language because they think they won't be able to."*

Mid-Career Researcher, STEM

> *"Yes this is where my anxiety about my own language skills comes out because I've read stuff [by Anglophone researchers in another language I'm fluent in]… and I know it's just mistakes […] I realise that the English translations people are using are wrong and but sometimes people are generalising from the couple of [texts] they know rather than from the from the entire corpus. And they're generalising from the ones that they have translations for. And it's that kind of thing where I'm spotting where other people go astray that makes me anxious about what I would do in a in a language that I have an imperfect grasp of."*

Mid-Career Researcher, SHAPE

Yet some interviewees touched on how a high level of competency is not necessarily the most important element or motivating factor for language learning, tying into earlier themes of languages as they relate to research ethics and integrity:

> *"You know you're not going to get to the required level in order to carry out all the data collection, but you can show to your research participants that you are committed and that you're trying, and that will build trust […] like there are reasons to invest in your language skills that aren't purely like lexical, you know, like, if you're working with like, I don't know, Vietnamese refugees, you're not going to be able to speak Vietnamese in a year and a half to the point where you need to have these delicate conversations, but you can show that you are committed. It's about respect for the participants."*

Early Career Researcher, SHAPE

> *"I guess there's a bunch of different motivations [for researchers to use or learn languages], and I mean, I think there's a kind of very general personal development motivation. I think there's a lot of good things about learning a language, whoever you are, and whatever you're doing because it kind of allows you to understand a culture better and to see the world in a different way."*

Mid-Career Researcher, SHAPE

5.2.4   Opportunities, time and funding investment needed for acquiring/improving language skills

The final theme that emerged was one of opportunity, resourcing and time. None of the interviewees were aware of direct opportunities provided within their respective departments and institutions or within their research environments for researchers to practice, improve or develop language skills.

> *"I don't think, so far in my career, that I have come across a kind of targeted language offer in relation to specific research projects that I've been working on."*

Early Career Researcher, SHAPE

Some interviewees mentioned the availability of institution-wide language programmes (often called "Languages for All" programmes), but these were perceived as focused on undergraduate students and therefore not promoting or providing language learning for postgraduate students or researchers, or academic or research staff. Some of the interviewees further referenced lack of funding and lack of time to enable them to pursue language courses and study.

"I think, honestly, a lot of [other colleagues in the field] don't speak those languages because they honestly do not have the time […] In the same way that sometimes we have away days that are for research or teaching, we don't have such a thing for, you know, it could be for languages […] Once you become a lecturer, then with the teaching and the more demanding research and applying for grants, you don't have time to invest in getting additional skills, especially ones that are not that valued by your peers".

Mid-Career Researcher, SHAPE

"So for me, I think for me it would be ideal if, for instance, when you apply for a grant you could say I would need not only money in order to be able to pay for those classes, but also the time to do it".

Mid-Career Researcher, SHAPE

"I don't know whether there should necessarily be funding [for language acquisition] for the project, but I do think there should be funding available for researchers to learn independent of the project, simply because we're already on very short timescales for a lot of projects […]. Specific funding to learn languages, from that you would feel capable to bid for other projects. It would just take too long otherwise. […] When you're bidding, though, I do think it would be good if there was some sort of, like, consideration when deciding who to award funding to, if someone's saying, well, actually I feel like I could do something with this project, specifically, for example, if it were an engagement project, well, I do speak other languages so would be able to work with different communities […] it would be a way to make sure languages are supported and also be an incentive to learn languages because you might get the bid."

Early Career Researcher, STEM

6   Research Excellence Framework Impact Case Study analysis

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is a national peer-review assessment of the quality of research undertaken by UK higher education institutions (HEIs). During REF2021, HEIs were evaluated across three areas: research output, impact and environment. The submission and subsequent assessment of Impact Case Studies is considered a tool to measure the impact of research: the REF2021 impact database includes 6,681 case studies across all disciplines. These present an opportunity to recognise the achievements of research coming out of UK HEIs, and to articulate the value of this research and its impact both in the UK and globally.

In 2024, the British Academy commissioned a report that used the Impact Case Studies as an evidence base to articulate the value and effects of SHAPE research on people, the economy, policy and society. The SHAPE of Research Impact report, analysis and accompanying dashboard allow us to better understand the impact of research coming from 'within' the disciplines of Modern Languages and Linguistics (REF2021 sub-panel 26). An analysis of this sub-panel shows research impact beneficiaries across the globe, and impact across topics including colonialism and slavery, education and inequality, finance and cybersecurity, international rights and justice, political violence, and psychology and health.

Understanding therefore that the Impact Case Studies can provide a useful evidence base, we wanted to go beyond sub-panel 26, and indeed beyond main panel D where most Arts and Humanities research sits, to show how language skills and use can be beneficial or even crucial to research impact in disciplines beyond Modern Languages. We used the Impact Case Study database to identify examples where language skills played a significant role in the research.

6.1   REF2021 Impact Case Studies

Our goals in this analysis are to complement the findings discussed earlier in this report by:

- Exploring the use of languages in research as well as their role in achieving research impact across a variety of disciplines.
- Examining at what stages of the research process – from design to dissemination – languages skills come into play
- Exposing the "hidden work" of languages, which is not necessarily discussed or mentioned in the published write up of the case studies, but emerges in discussions with the researchers.

Necessity and use of language skills within research are not regularly explicit in the Impact Case Study database, and therefore a methodological approach to identifying language use proves difficult. Using keyword searches as well as the filters for impact location, we manually selected from each main panel 2-3 impact case studies where use of multiple languages was either mentioned or suggested. We deliberately excluded case studies from sub-panel 26 Modern Languages and Linguistics, as our aim is to stress the applicability of languages beyond these disciplines. We contacted the research teams of our selected case studies and asked whether

they would be willing to answer a short series of questions relating to the use of languages in their research. Five teams agreed, and we held short, structured interviews, where we presented the principal investigators (PIs) of each case study with a set of questions about the use of languages in their research (see Annex A).

Table 6: REF 2021 impact case studies included in analysis

	Case study	Institution(s)	Main panel	Sub-panel
1	Addressing the Global Burden of Disease from Household Air Pollution: Prevention through equitable scale of clean cooking in Cameroon	University of Liverpool	A	2: Public Health, Health Services and Primary Care
2	Improved infection awareness, prevention and treatment in hard-to-reach groups	University of Manchester	A	5: Biological Sciences
3	Advancing Environmental Access Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean	Kingston University	C	19: Politics and International Relations
4	Improving truth of BBC documentaries about indigenous people	University of Cambridge	C	22: Anthropology and Development Studies
5	Increasing participation, access and inclusion for signing deaf communities	Heriot-Watt University	D	25: Area Studies

We acknowledge that our sample size is small and do not claim it to be representative. Through this exercise we do not wish to make generalised statements about the use of languages in particular disciplines or in submissions of REF impact case studies. Instead, we wish to complement our previous analysis provided in this report by providing concrete, illustrative examples of how languages work may be embedded and sometimes hidden in the research conducted out of UK institutions, yet is beneficial, or even crucial to, the research process and its wider impact.

6.2 Emerging Themes

6.2.1 Linguistic skills and multilingual research teams

In four of the five case studies, the PIs stated that multilingual research teams were integral to research, to the point where the shape and possibility of the research projects were predicated on the linguistic skills of the research team. Each case study had multiple linguistic "layers" which required a set of linguistic skills – for example, "official" national languages as well as local and/or indigenous languages, or, in the case of case study 5, a focus on sign language as a language in its own right alongside different forms of sign languages in various cultural or national contexts. This means that multilingualism, and not just bilingualism, was an essential quality to the makeup of the research teams. In case study 3 for instance, a part of the project was undertaken in Guyana. The "official" language in Guyana is English, but the research team were only able to carry out fieldwork with indigenous Wapishana and Macushi communities as members of the research team had pre-existing skills in these indigenous languages.

The PIs' own language skills came into play to different extents in the case studies – ranging from not at all to playing a pivotal role. In case study 2 for example, the PI's language skills were necessarily relevant to the research and dissemination. In case study 1, the PI undertook language learning, not to perfect fluency but to the level that they could hold conversations, meetings and presentations. In case study 4, the project and case study were dependant and predicated on the PI's own fluency in two languages (Indonesian and Korowai) which they had been developing, through intensive language courses, self-study and time spent in the field, since the 1990s. These language skills shaped the course of their research career.

In many of the case studies, what proved crucial was not just the linguistic skills of the research team, but effective collaboration with those that aided them in the research project linguistically and otherwise, such as: researchers at partner local institutions, translators and interpreters, ESOL teachers (in the case of case study 2), community leaders and community health workers, who often facilitate the research and act as gatekeepers. The PI from case study 1 especially stressed the significance of community health workers and their varied and flexible linguistic skills, recommending that community health services are involved more in research and outreach given their multilingualism and deep understanding of the communities they work in.

The use of translators and/or interpreters was mentioned explicitly in three of the five case studies. In case study 5, interpreting was "baked into" projects, The researchers worked very closely with sign language interpreters, some of whom were also researchers feeding into or directly working on the project(s). Translation methods including "reverse translation" were used to develop bilingual materials as part of the project outcome. The PI noted that sometimes finding sign language interpreters with suitability to the project and context proved difficult, and there were funding and resourcing issues around the amount of translation needed.

6.2.2   Outreach and dissemination

Languages play a valuable role in disseminating research both within academic circles and beyond, especially in community outreach.

In case studies 1 and 2, which focussed on public outreach regarding health research, and case study 3, which dealt with environmental access rights, researchers discussed what one PI referred to as the "double translation challenge". This challenged involved translating and/or interpreting specialised, conceptual or technical terms and finding ways to communicate them effectively. In these cases, researchers explained how often no "direct" translations exist as language is deeply shaped by cultural context, experiences and worldviews. A PI from case study1 provided a concrete example: the word "wheeze" has different meanings depending on the cultural setting. As part of the project, the team conducted formative anthropological work to identify the appropriate right terms.

Another important issue that emerged was the accessibility of communication in outreach efforts. One PI pointed out that the outreach process revealed not just challenges of communicating in multiple languages but also differences in communication styles within languages, particularly between specialist and publicly accessible language. The issue of accessibility was also raised within Case Study 5, where the researchers found that accessibility needs are often framed, by ableist norms. For instance, assistive technologies intended to support participants and researchers might inadvertently limit those they aim to help, as they are based on assumptions of what is 'missing' from 'ordinary' abilities and not empowering those within the deaf community.

Interestingly, many of these case studies (including Case Studies 1, 2 and 3), also utilised visual methods like photography and video to complement their outreach work and materials produced. These techniques did not replace the need for a multilingual and cross-cultural approach; instead, they were used creatively to overcome barriers and ensure that the outreach was accessibly to as many people as possible.

6.2.3   Research integrity

As in the interview section of this report, research integrity emerged as a key theme. The chosen case studies we examined reinforced the idea that language skills are particularly important in participatory research and outreach, where building trust and mutual respect with communities is crucial. Researchers stressed that in their research contexts, before any research or outreach could take place, sensitisation, explanation and the building of trust within communities were essential. This process takes time, and, according to our interviewees, requires language skills.

The PIs shared that making the effort to communicate in local and/or community languages goes a long way in building trust with communities. The importance of ongoing cultural learning and sensitivity was also emphasised. In one case study, the PI explained how shame and pride related to speaking one's own indigenous language emerged as an unexpected theme of the research. Sensitive issues arose concerning indigenous people's willingness or reluctance to speak their native languages, particularly given their histories of oppression and severe language policies and control. The research team had to navigate these challenges sensitively while continuing to support those who wished to speak their own languages in the process.

7 Key findings and discussion

This report has explored the role and recognition of language skills and capabilities in the academic research base in the UK. This final chapter ties together the evidence and insights captured through the literature review, survey, interviews and REF analysis, presenting the key recurring findings and sketching the possibilities to incentivise multilingualism in research.

Multilingual capabilities can enrich academic disciplines and are integral to research excellence, impact and integrity, not least in a globalised and interconnected research environment.

Multilingualism is important to the UK research landscape. In a globalised research environment, and in a time of global challenges, multilingual capacities are vital not only to connecting the UK's research base to that of the rest of the world, but also to maintaining its competitiveness and strategic advantage. This report has found that language skills and use can augment research quality, breadth, integrity and impact. They also have implications for the opportunities available to researchers, whether that is in terms of choice of research topic, access to sources, or international mobility or collaboration.

Further, diverse linguistic and communicative apparatuses can help in the brokering of trust between researchers and the public, thus combatting institutional mistrust and also helping with the effective dissemination of information to the public. There are therefore considerable opportunity costs involved in not harnessing and developing the skills and resources to ensure that the UK's multilingual potential is realised within its research base.

While there is rich multilingual potential among UK academic researchers, this potential may be underutilised and undervalued, and language use can sometimes remain 'hidden' within the research process.

This report has highlighted that there is a wealth of linguistic potential already existing within the UK's research base. Yet this potential is not always utilised. The findings point to a problem of recognition, where the demand for languages in the UK's research base is perceived as significantly lower than the reality. Anglonormativity in research and publishing lead to an assumption that English is the only language that is needed.

As a result, skills and capabilities in languages other than English are often undervalued and underutilised, the work they do often hidden or unmentioned. This is not only unjust, but also impacts negatively on their supply. The devaluing of languages reinforces more barriers, including lack of opportunities, funding or time for language learning, and then leads to a further reduction in language capabilities in the research base.

Yet as pointed out by participants earlier in this report, being restricted to English means being limited in what literature, resources, knowledge and opportunities one can access, which directly or indirectly impacts on what kind of research is possible and, as is also stressed by participants, on its quality. Further, acquiring language skills is not just about skill but about integrity. Languages – even when used imperfectly – are building blocks of trust and collaboration. Building language skills is not just about learning the language itself but about understanding the social and cultural contexts within which research, outreach and international collaboration occur, which are crucial to achieving both integrity and impact.

Demand for languages can vary; however, barriers to language acquisition and application risk undermining the importance of language capabilities in the research base.

As the survey and interviews demonstrate, the demand for languages can vary across disciplines, across research topics, across subject areas and across stages in the research process. The level of usefulness of language skills will be context-dependent: they matter more in some research contexts than others. For the research landscape as a whole, however, multilingualism is crucial, whether there is a direct or indirect need.

Participants across the survey and interviews noted that it is overwhelmingly time constraints, followed by a lack of funding, that are the main barriers to learning or maintaining languages to use in their research. While a lack of discipline-specific demand was the third most common reason, the qualitative responses suggested that knowledge of other languages can be or has been useful at some stage. Importantly, a lack of training opportunities at institutions present a major challenge for researchers.

Further, while there are barriers to language learning at the level of the higher education institution, in the UK, the barriers to opportunities for language learning often start much earlier in the educational pipeline. This is part of a broader argument to support outcomes of disadvantaged students and, by extension, to improve access to the right skills for researchers from all backgrounds. Improving the multilingual capacities of the UK's research base is tied to improving the multilingual capacities of the UK as a whole. This involves addressing languages education holistically: from early years to the workforce.

Looking ahead: there is a need to capture, incentivise and capitalise on multilingualism in academic research in the UK

Looking ahead, more needs to be done to incentivise and support language learning and use in the higher education and research context. There are, indeed, other pressing concerns with regards to the recognition and use of languages in research (and more broadly) that are beyond the scope of this report. For example, further analysis is needed to examine the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the consequences for language learning and publications in academia.

A first step to such incentivisation would be to make the usefulness and value of languages more visible, specifically by improving the data captured on research impact to explicitly include and highlight language use. A dedicated space in REF submissions, (notably within the Impact Case Studies) to identify languages and linguistic skills used in research and outreach, for example, may be an effective tool to highlighting their necessity to achieving impact. Researchers can elaborate on how languages were used in and contributed to the research. This would help reveal and make explicit the impact of languages skills on impact, and thus provide more incentive for the provision, funding and take up of language training across disciplines.

Funders and other bodies also have a role to play in support of language acquisition and training across all disciplines and to relieve financial burden on researchers. For example, the London Arts and Humanities Partnership, an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded Doctoral Training Partnership, offers funded language courses to its PhD students though the LAHP Language Fund to provide students with news skills and to increase employability.[52]

In addition to funding, bodies should consider adding a section within grant applications to invite candidates to evidence their language skills and/or indicate any multilingual needs of their proposals. This includes whether the applicants can speak the required language(s) or not. Similar to the ethics section of an application, a section on languages can enable funders to monitor and capture multilingual trends and use in research.

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[52] For further information, see: LAHP (London Arts & Humanities Partnership) Additional funds to support research training [accessed February 2025]

To better incentivise language learning among researchers, universities and research institutions should think about how to improve their language training offer to researchers, and how funding and time might be allocated and protected for such purposes. At a time of increased funding pressures throughout the sector, languages education – for students and staff – is under threat: however, as this report has demonstrated, languages are indispensable to the integrity and competitiveness of research, and a lack of investment poses longer-term risks to the vibrancy and excellence of UK academia.

8 Annex A

8.1 Survey questions

1)   What is your institution?

2)   What is your disciplinary area?

3)   What is your role?

4)   Which language is your first language?

5)   Do you have competency in any language(s) other than your first language? For example, listening, oral or written understanding. If so, which one(s)?

6)   What is the primary language you use in your research?

7)   Do you use, or have used, your additional languages in your research? If so, which one(s)?

8)   If you use more than one language in your research, where do you use/have you used English? If you use more than one language in your research. Where do you use/have you used languages other than English?

9)   Have you ever received any language training in relation to your research? If you have received any language training in relation to your research, what form did this take?

10)   If you use skills in language(s) other than English in your research, what do you see as the benefits? For example: intellectual, cultural, economic, career options.

11)   If you do not use other languages in your research, do you think learning another language would benefit your research? Why/why not?

12)   Have you ever felt that your research has suffered because of any lack of language skills on your part? In which language(s) and why?

13)   If you could learn a language for your research, which one would it be, and why?

14)   If you have not learned an additional language, why not? For example: no need, lack of time, expense?

15)   Have you found there to be a lack of opportunity within your institution to either learn or maintain language competencies?

8.2 Interview questions

1)   Does a lack of language skills ever limit the nature and the quality of research that some researchers in your field can undertake? If so, can you give examples?

2)   Where language skills are needed in order to conduct top-quality research, do UK trained and/or UK-schooled academics tend to have the same level of language skills as researchers trained and/or schooled elsewhere?

3)   How do language skills and access to language training shape the kinds of projects you undertake as a researcher?

4)   What availability is there for language learning as part of research training in your research environment?

5)   What do you think the motivational factors for researchers to use or learn languages might be?

6)   Should financial support for language skills acquisition, where appropriate, be part of the funding for research projects?

8.3   Research Excellence Framework questions

1)   Did the project(s) require or anticipate the need for multiple languages? If so, how and when were multiple languages actively factored into the project(s)?

2)   How did the research team cater for the multilingual needs of the project(s) if or when they emerged? For example, if languages other than English were used, was this done using the researchers' own language skills, outsourced translation, interpreters or any other medium (e.g., online platforms)?

3)   Did you find there to be any barriers to incorporating multiple languages into the project(s)? For example, these could be discipline-specific or institutional.

4)   What, if anything, did the team learn about language needs in delivering the project, and what might they do differently?

5)   If no other languages than English were used, would there have been any potential benefit in incorporating other languages into the research design and/or dissemination?

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