DELTEA Submission to Has the Love of Learning been lost? Call for Evidence - 2025

Submission from:

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In this submission we address the following questions, particularly in respect of learning a foreign language. We then share related findings from our research.

5. How can technology be harnessed to support richer and more engaging educational experiences?

6. To help the APPG create a practical set of approaches and recommendations: What examples are there of schools doing particularly well in fostering a good learning environment for students and teachers?

Promoting a Love of Learning: Foreign Language Education

Fostering a love of learning requires the creation of an environment where students are intrinsically motivated to engage with educational content. Intrinsic motivation is at the heart of an important motivational theory, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Ryan and Deci (2000). When learners are intrinsically motivated, they engage in learning for the sheer joy and personal satisfaction it brings rather than external rewards.

Intrinsic motivation is in turn driven by the meeting of three core psychological needs:

- **Autonomy**: The feeling of being in control of one's learning process.
- **Competence**: Mastering new skills and knowledge, feeling capable of undertaking challenging and valued, meaningful activities, at an optimal level of challenge.
- **Relatedness**: The need to connect with others through shared learning experiences and activities that are perceived as having personal relevance.

The development of **intrinsic motivation** is in turn supported by **creativity and empathy**. Creative individuals use their curiosity and knowledge to generate new ideas, while empathetic learners apply their understanding to build meaningful connections with others

a. Creativity and Intrinsic Motivation

Creativity-driven activities—such as problem-solving, artistic expression, storytelling, and innovation challenges—can support intrinsic motivation by:

- **Enhancing autonomy**: Creative tasks often allow for open-ended exploration, giving learners control over their ideas.
- **Developing competence**: The process of **mastering** creative skills and expressing oneself creatively builds confidence and **reinforces motivation**.
- **Enhancing relatedness**: Engaging students in **real-world problem-solving tasks** helps learners see the relevance of what they are learning and feel connected to something bigger than their classroom.

b. Empathy and Intrinsic Motivation

Empathy-driven activities—such as storytelling, role-playing, and social justice discussions—stimulate intrinsic motivation by:

- **Enhancing relatedness**: Empathy-rich learning experiences fulfil the need for **social connection**, a key driver of motivation.
- **Encouraging meaning-driven learning**: When learners **see the real-world relevance** of their learning they develop **intrinsic passion** for knowledge.
- **Promoting perspective-taking**: Engaging with diverse viewpoints leads to **intellectual curiosity**, which deepens learning motivation.

We know that at primary school learners generally express high levels of enjoyment for language learning, but that this declines during the latter years of primary school and especially during the first year of secondary school (Davidson et al., 2024; Graham et al., 2016). We also know, however, **that the use of technology can help address such a decline.**

Case Study: Digital Stories in Foreign Language Education

The role of technology was explored in a research project funded by UKRI, and undertaken at the Universities of Southampton (Dr Alison Porter) and Reading (Professor Suzanne Graham). It involved 17 primary schools in England and Scotland (covering approximately 1000 learners).

In that research, Year 5 learners of French or Spanish from ten schools worked with digital, multimodal stories in those languages. Technology was used to enable the combination of sound (spoken text), print and images and hence to offer what was called **'supported challenge'.**

The intervention incorporated elements to support the three key components of intrinsic motivation:

- **Competence:** The stories were at a linguistic level that was slightly above what the children were used to experiencing, and were cognitively challenging in that they covered themes of migration, love and persistence. Children were then supported to understand the stories through the combination of sound, print and images, made possible by digital technology, and from the teaching of specific comprehension strategies to foster still further a sense of competence.
- **Autonomy:** The stories were embedded in the learning platform Nearpod, where they were supplemented with activities that encouraged creative and empathetic thinking. For example**,** activities asked children to use their imagination to think about what they themselves might do if they were in a situation like the ones in the story, or how they might solve a particular problem presented. Technology supported the use of different response types by children e.g. drawing, text, audio recorded reflections, providing opportunities for autonomy.
- **Relatedness:** Children , using tablets, worked in pairs on such activities, encouraging relatedness. A sense of interconnectedness with the wider world was fostered through activities that encouraged children to consider how themes in the text resonated with wider global issues such as hunger or poverty. Still others asked children to think about situations in the story from multiple perspectives, encouraging empathy, openness to points of view**,** and an appreciation of people and cultures from different countries.

Outcomes:

We compared outcomes for the children who experienced the stories intervention with those who did not, establishing the following very positive findings for intervention children:

- Increased competence in French/Spanish vocabulary and reading comprehension, at a statistically significant level;
- Increased creativity at a statistically significant level, particularly with regard to flexible thinking;
- Increased self-efficacy/sense of competence for children learning French at a level approaching significance;
- The vast majority of intervention children (70% plus) who completed a questionnaire about their experience with the stories agreed that:

❖ they had enjoyed the stories
❖ children in other schools would enjoy them
❖ they had enjoyed taking part in the research activities
❖ being able to hear the story read aloud and seeing the text at the same time helped them read aloud themselves and learn the key sounds of either French or Spanish

- learning the reading comprehension strategies helped them understand the stories and that they were using similar strategies for problem-solving in other school subjects.

When asked what they had learnt from reading the stories, learners commented most often that on the one hand they had learnt new words and how to pronounce them, and on the other that they had developed their cultural and emotional understanding, including the importance of perseverance, empathy, caring for others, and respecting differences.

Below are some sample comments showing clear evidence of both learning and enjoyment (in original spelling)

Case study: The 'Joy of Reading' Project

In order for such positivity to be maintained into the start of secondary school, it is important that supported challenge, facilitated by technology, be integrated into the Key Stage 3 language learning curriculum.

The University of Reading was approached by a group of girls' schools based around London to help them enhance Year 9 students' love of learning in respect of foreign languages, by tackling the key aspects of intrinsic motivation:

Competence: Learners were again supported to read and enjoy a wider range of more challenging but interesting material in French, German and Spanish through the teaching of reading comprehension strategies.

Autonomy: Students in turn became involved in selecting authentic web-based reading materials that they found interesting.

Relatedness: The selected resources were shared with other learners and discussed at reading clubs the students set up.

Following the project, Professor Graham pooled the resources students found and supplemented them with others. All resources have been uploaded for free, digital access at: **https://pdcinmfl.com/online-language-learning-for-all-olla-2/junior/**

Outcomes:

In questionnaires completed at the end of the 'Joy of Reading ' project, staff and learners reported the following benefits, all indicating an enhanced love of learning:

- *the frequency of reading increased*
- *the average time girls spent reading increased (from 33 minutes per week to 40 minutes)*
- *double the number of girls stated they enjoyed the **challenge** of reading*
- *girls were less likely to give up in the face of difficulty than before*
- *vocabulary gains were recorded*
- *girls read more non-fiction in the foreign language*
- *students reported increased engagement in lessons*
- *teachers reported increased resilience in the students – not giving up in the face of challenging texts*

Conclusion

Our research and collaborations with schools suggest that technology is most effective when it:

- Gives students control over their learning process.
- Provides meaningful, appropriately challenging activities.
- Encourages collaboration and social interaction.

To cultivate a love of learning, schools should integrate technology in ways that support intrinsic motivation. This means designing digital experiences that promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When used effectively, technology can transform education into an engaging, student-centered experience that fosters lifelong curiosity and learning.