



HERITAGE LANGUAGE EDUCATION AT A CROSSROADS

A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF TWO DECADES OF RESEARCH IN THE UK (2004–2024)

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Scope & Methods



83 Empirical Studies Reviewed

This review examines twenty years of research on heritage/community language education in the UK (2004–2024).

Key Terms

- **Heritage/Community Language Education:** Languages associated with migration and minority communities in the UK
- **Complementary Schools:** Community-run, often volunteer-led weekend or after-school provision supporting heritage language, cultural, and social learning.

What Can I Learn?

Beyond Classroom Walls



Heritage language learning is **shaped by** experiences across **home, community schools, and wider society**, requiring long-term support across all settings.

Holistic Development



Learning a heritage language **supports language maintenance, learner wellbeing, social participation**, and broader academic development.

Learner Experiences



Patterns of **progress** and engagement **vary** based on how children navigate their evolving **roles in home and community contexts** as they grow older.

What Does the Research Find?



- Provision **relies on volunteers, families, and local networks** — not national infrastructure.
- **Uneven access** to trained teachers, assessment pathways, and materials.
- **Innovative pedagogies** (digital storytelling, arts-based learning) **remain small-scale**.

How Can I Use the Findings?



Complementary School Teachers

Use **creative pedagogies** (digital storytelling, drama); frame heritage language as **identity** resource.



Mainstream School Teachers

Recognise heritage languages through **everyday acts**; support GCSE/A-level pathways.



For Families

Combine home language practices with **digital and transnational resources**, sharing responsibility for support.