



SEALBHÚ
Lárionad Taighde DCU
um Fhoghlaim agus Teagasc
na Gaeilge

Multilingual Parents and Children's Experiences of Irish-medium Education

AN DR AISLING NÍ DHIORBHÁIN

SEALBHÚ: LÁRIONAD TAIGHDE DCU UM FHOGHLAIM & TEAGASC NA GAEILGE

SEIMINEÁR AN FHÓMHAIR: 11 DEIREADH FÓMHAIR 2022

An Chomhairle um Oideachas
Gaeilge & Gaelscolaíochta



Clár na Cainte

Overview of the Presentation

Introduction: Research team, rationale, questions and methodology

Part One: Multilingual parents' experiences of Irish-medium education: reasons for choosing Irish-medium education, benefits of learning Irish, Irish-medium education and multilingualism, potential challenges

Part Two: Multilingual children's experiences of Irish-medium education: benefits of learning Irish, Irish-medium education and multilingualism

Main findings and recommendations arising from the research

Multilingual Parents and Children

Multilingual children - children who speak a home language that is different from Irish or English with at least one parent

Multilingual families - families in which at least one parent speaks a home language that is different from Irish or English

Also includes families and children for whom neither English or Irish is a home language

- Part of a larger study included interviews with principals (n=5) and teachers (n=8) in Irish-medium schools.

- Funded by COGG

- **Focus on Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools at primary level in Republic of Ireland**

Research team



An Dr Aisling Ní Dhiorbháin



An Dr Lorraine Connaughton-Crean



An tOllamh Pádraig Ó
Duibhir

Research on Multilingual Children in Immersion education

- Research clearly shows that minority language students in immersion programmes reach a standard of achievement in the majority language and in academic subjects that is on a par or higher than minority language students in non-immersion programmes.
- Minority language students in immersion programmes will reach a similar level of proficiency in the majority societal language as minority language students in non-immersion programme without any significant time delay

(Lindholm-Leary & Genesee, 2014)



Rationale for the research

Linguistic and cultural diversity in Ireland has increased over recent decades

Over 200 languages spoken daily and Polish is spoken by 2.85% of the population in the Republic of Ireland (CSO, 2017)

Population increase to over 5 million and over 190,000 people coming from abroad to live in Ireland between 2016-2020 (CSO, 2022)

Ireland is an increasingly multilingual and multicultural society

Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in schools



Over **10%** of children attending English-medium primary schools speak a home language that is different from Irish or English.

An estimated 1.8% of children attending Gaeltacht primary schools and **1.1%** of children attending Irish-medium schools speak a home language other than Irish or English.

(Department of Education, 2022)

Children from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds are **underrepresented** in Irish-medium education.

Research Questions

Part One

What are multilingual parents' reasons for choosing Irish-medium education?

What are multilingual parents' perceptions of the Irish language and Irish-medium education?

Part Two

What are multilingual children's perceptions of learning Irish and Irish-medium education?

Research Methodology

Ethical approval from DCU Research Ethics Committee (REC)

Process of identifying schools

Principals as gatekeepers disseminating information

Part One

Semi-structured interviews with parents (n=18) on DCU zoom platform, one interview face to face

Parents from 6 Irish-medium schools (n=15) and 2 Gaeltacht schools (n=3)

Interviews with parents were conducted in English, lasted approx. 40mins

Research Methodology

Part Two

Permission from Chairperson of Board of Management and school principal to carry out the research in the school; consent from parents and assent from children

Focus groups with children in 5 Irish-medium schools (n=16)

Multilingual children from 3th-6th class

Focus groups on site in schools with the researcher and in the presence of another teacher

Language – Mostly in Irish and some English, approx. 15-20 minutes

Interviews and focus groups audio-recorded, transcribed, analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Part One

Multilingual Parents

MULTILINGUAL PARENTS' REASONS FOR CHOOSING IRISH-MEDIUM EDUCATION

MULTILINGUAL PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING IRISH AND IRISH-MEDIUM EDUCATION

Parents' Reasons for Choosing Irish-medium Education: What does the research say?

Interest in Irish and Irish culture, wanting children to be fluent in Irish, Irish/English bilingualism, past pupils of Irish-medium schools, good reputation of the school, positive reports about the school from contacts

High level of parental satisfaction with Irish-medium education

(Kavanagh, 2014; Mhic Mhathúna & Nic Fhionnlaoich, 2021; Ní Thuairisg & Ó Duibhir, 2016; Nig Uidhir et al., 2016; Ó Duibhir et al., 2017)

Gap in the current research in Ireland about reasons multilingual parents choose Irish-medium education and multilingual families' experiences of Irish-medium education.

Reasons Multilingual Parents choose French-immersion Schools in Canada



Intrinsic motivation (Canadian identity) and **extrinsic** motivation (employment) (Davis et al., 2021)

Immersion education as a means to acquiring linguistic, cultural, social and economic capital (Dagenais, 2003; Dagenais & Berron, 2001; Dagenais and Day 1999).

Bourdieu's theory of linguistic capital whereby knowledge of certain languages bestows particular benefits on individuals (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977)

High levels of parental satisfaction (Davis et al., 2021)

Linguistic Background of Parents in this study

11 families spoke English and another language at home:

Danish (n=1)

French (n=2)

Lithuanian (n=1)

German (n=1)

Spanish (n=3)

Montenegrin (n=1)

Vietnamese (n=1)

Brazilian Portuguese (n=1)

One family had Irish and Spanish as home languages

5 families spoke a home language other than Irish or English:

Polish (n=3)

Russian (n=1)

Spanish (n=1)

Main Reason for choosing Irish-medium education

An Interest in Multilingualism and Early language learning

But there was never really any doubt. I always thought the more languages the better, you know. I always think that, that can only be a good thing for them. (T11)

Advantages: cognitive and metacognitive skills to support further language learning; increased educational, economic, sociocultural advantages. Irish-medium education as a means to acquiring linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Benefits of Multilingualism and Early Language Learning

Me and my partner we were talking about the schools, we were trying to find the better, best opportunity for the kids. So ehm my partner, he was doing most of the research, of course, and he said the Gaelic schools are really good, great, and our children will have a better, maybe job opportunities when they're grown up, because they can choose. Probably there will be more choice for them in the future. And also like, because they are bilingual, for them it's easier, probably, to multitask, it will be for them easier to plan the things, to maybe problem solving things. It all goes with multilingual children. (T10)

Reasons for Choosing Irish-medium Education

Early Language Learning

My understanding for the general languages in kids is that because it is natural for them to learn any language, and even it could be in French, Irish or anything, even the number of words are in the brain when they are little, kind of makes it easier to expand the brain and make easier the learning process for Irish for any other language. (T8)

Cultural heritage: Irish-medium education as an opportunity to be immersed in the Irish language and culture.

Parents' own multilingual background was a positive influencing factor

People say, why do you manage to pick up on these things? I managed to pick up on these things because I learned languages when I was very young and I have an interest when I was very young. That's the reason why. (T7)

Other Factors

Positive reports about the school from friends and family (Nic Fhionnlaoich & Mhic Mhathúna, 2021; Ní Thuairisg & Ó Duibhir, 2016; Nig Uidhir et al., 2016)

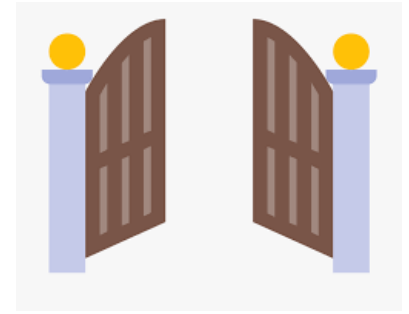
I talk to well not a lot but I talk to some people that I trust and they all told me that going to Irish school was probably the best thing that had ever happened to their kids. (T2)

Additional factors: location, building and resources, policies, ethos – Catholic or multidenominational

Interest in Irish: (n=4) (Mhic Mhathúna & Nic Fhionnlaoich, 2021; Nig Uidhir et al. 2016; Ní Thuairisg & Ó Duibhir, 2016; Ó Duibhir et al., 2017)

Parents were interested in multilingualism and in their children learning Irish as part of a multilingual repertoire

Role of the Gatekeeper



Three out of five families for whom Irish/English was not a home language choose the Irish-medium school **as there were no places in an English-medium school.**

All families for whom Irish/English was not a home language, explained that **support from the school principal or teacher in the school was a deciding factor**

It was very nervous time for us just because my main fear was that he would be struggling with speaking two languages at the same time both English and Irish. I had a very nice interview well not interview, meeting with one of the teachers múinteoirs from Irish school and Mary told me leave him with me. At around 11 or 12 he will be speaking both perfectly, English and Irish. So that was some sort of a convincing factor for me. (T2)



Benefits of learning Irish and Irish-medium education

Benefits of Multilingualism: benefits of learning multiple languages - supporting additional language learning, development of children's cognitive, metacognitive, sociocultural and communicative skills. Children's ability to use multiple languages for multiple purposes. Children's interest and pride in language learning and understanding of cultural diversity.

But just the ability to switch between languages and what it gives them of additional learning, additional insights into languages, how people think in different ways in different languages is really beneficial. While it's not the most useful language from a European perspective it's nearly the invisible benefits of it. (T1)

Benefits of learning Irish and Irish-medium education



Cultural value: Irish-medium education as a means of integrating with Irish heritage and culture

And second thing we came to Ireland to stay here forever and some areas of the country speak Irish and Ireland invests a lot into Irish language. I think it's a very nice idea to speak native language of the country you are going to spend your life forever. (T2)

I suppose if you're a parent like you know, because you're going to school with them in a way, you kind of get to know about the Irish culture I suppose as well and the Irish language a bit. (T9)

Benefits of learning Irish and Irish-medium education

Educational, economic and social capital

Additional points in the leaving Certificate, employment opportunities – teaching, civil service (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Dagenais, 2003; Davis et al., 2021)

It's a huge advantage. And I hope the Leaving Cert won't be a problem for her. And I know there's somethings, you know, if she will decide to work for the public sector or anything. Yeah, it'll be easier probably for her as well. (T5)

Potential Challenges?

Not knowing Irish was not a problem for parents and schools adopted an inclusive ethos

Some schools you hear they are very strict with parents only speaking Irish in the yard and things like that. They know that most of the parents don't have Irish or have very limited Irish so they are very supportive. So while they always address you in Irish they switch into English and they get to know the parents very quickly to know who do and who don't speak Irish. (T1)

Parents' experiences differed from the experiences of Irish-medium parents in previous research who felt excluded due to lack of proficiency in Irish (Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013; Nig Uidhir et al., 2016; Ní Thuairisg & Ó Duibhir, 2016)



Potential Challenges?

Lack of knowledge of Irish was not a barrier to parental participation

Bilingual communication with parents and communication in home languages in certain cases, Irish classes for parents

Homework was not a significant challenge

Homework was assigned so that children could work independently and parents were happy to ask for help. Parents relayed the usefulness of digital resources - translation apps, apps to support pronunciation, teacher reading on see saw

Digital resources for parents (Stenson & Hickey, 2019)



Children's Language Development

Language development in English did not pose a significant challenge

Parents for whom English was a home language were not concerned about children's English language development

Absolutely no, that's a bunch of nonsense, because English is all around (T7)

Parents for whom English/Irish was not a home language had initial concerns which were eased after talking with the gatekeeper and their child's/children's experience in school.

Children's Language Development

Children were using different languages for different purposes (García, 2009)

Children used Irish at school, English to socialise after school, home languages to communicate with parents and relations

Home language maintenance was mostly left to families

Parents had mixed views on whether their home languages should be supported at school

Many parents felt it would be positive for schools to actively support home languages and cultures



High level of parental satisfaction

Parents interviewed were very happy with Irish-medium education

The majority of parents were in favour their child continuing to an Irish-medium secondary school and would recommend Irish-medium education to other parents

Some parents (4 out of 11) from families who spoke English and another language at home felt that they would not have chosen Irish-medium education if one parent did not have English/Irish at home.

If my partner was French, I would have gone a completely different pathway, because he is Irish and he has the Irish I knew it would still be there, in case, you know, for the support, you know, in case, it was needed (T9)

Families for whom English/Irish was not a home language

There was some hesitancy among a small number of parents to recommend Irish-medium education to families for whom neither Irish or English is a home language.

There may be some reluctance among families for whom English/Irish is not a home language to choose Irish-medium education for their children.

Need to share evidence-based information on the suitability of immersion education for students from linguistically diverse backgrounds (Davis et al., 2021; Mady, 2016; Somers, 2017; 2018).

In this study all families for whom English was not a home language were happy with their children's learning experiences in Irish-medium education.



PART TWO: MULTILINGUAL
CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF
IRISH-MEDIUM EDUCATION



Children's Home Languages other than English or Irish

Russian (n=2)

Polish (n=4)

French (n=3)

Lithuanian (n=1)

Spanish (n=2)

Hungarian (n=1)

Slovakian (n=2)

Brazilian Portuguese (n=1).

Value of learning Irish and Irish-medium education

Positive attitudes towards Irish and Irish-medium education similar to Irish-medium students in previous research (Department of Education, 2021; Devitt et al. 2016; Ó Duibhir et al., 2017)

Tá sé teanga ón Éireann. (GFB).

[It is the language of Ireland]. (GFB).

I think it's better to come here because this school is something different than the other schools. The school helps you with English and Irish and it's better for you to know and in some schools they don't have Irish like here. (GFE).

Value of learning Irish and Irish-medium education

Irish as language of socialisation

Is maith liom teangacha. Is maith liom bheith ag caint as Gaeilge a lán agus is féidir liom caint leis mo chairde as Gaeilge. (GFC)

*[I like languages I like speaking Irish a lot and I can talk to my friends in Irish]
(GFC)*

Irish as linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991)

Tá Gaeilge níos fearr ná other languages. If tusa ábalta speak Gaeilge then beidh tú ábalta get a job. Tá mé ag iarraidh bheith i mo mhúinteoir. (GFD)

[Irish is better than other languages. If you can speak Irish then you will be able to get a job. I want to be a teacher]. (GFB)

Multiple Languages, Multiple Uses, Multiple Benefits



English as lingua franca

Irish to speak to friends, as a language in school

Home languages to communicate with parents and relations

I think it's important to use Lithuanian and Russian, like if I go to Lithuania and I don't know Lithuanian and Russian, then people won't know what I'm saying or feeling. I would be left out. If I didn't know Lithuanian or Russian, then what's the use in going there? People wouldn't understand you if there was something very important. (FGB)

Multiple Languages, Multiple Uses, Multiple Benefits



Emerging language awareness

Tá cúpla focal tá siad ana-chosúil le Polish. Píolóta so like pilot, tá sé like i Polish pilot. (GFD)

A few words are really like Polish. Píolóta so like pilot, it's like Polish pilot. (GFD)

Benefits of knowing multiple languages

Ceapaim go bhfuil sé níos éasca teangacha a fhoghlaim nuair atá ceann agat...tá a fhios agat gur thógann sé a lán ama. (GFD)

[I think it's easier to learn languages when you have one... you know that it takes a long time]. (GFD)

Summary of Findings

What are multilingual parents' reasons for choosing Irish-medium education?

Advantages associated with multilingualism and early language learning, and learning Irish as means of gaining linguistic, cultural, educational and economic capital.

Additional reasons were positive reports about the school and factors associated with the school.

An interest in learning an additional language was a stronger influencing factor than having a specific interest in Irish.

For some parents for whom neither Irish or English was a home language, Irish-medium education was not their first choice. The principal or gatekeeper played an important role in parents' decision making.

Summary of Findings

What are multilingual parents' and multilingual children's perceptions of learning Irish and Irish-medium education?

Multilingual parents and children's experiences of Irish-medium education **were very positive**. Parents and children had positive attitudes towards learning Irish in terms of its cultural value and the value of Irish as a part of a multilingual repertoire

Parents and children associated **cognitive, sociocultural, educational and economic benefits** with multilingualism and Irish-medium education

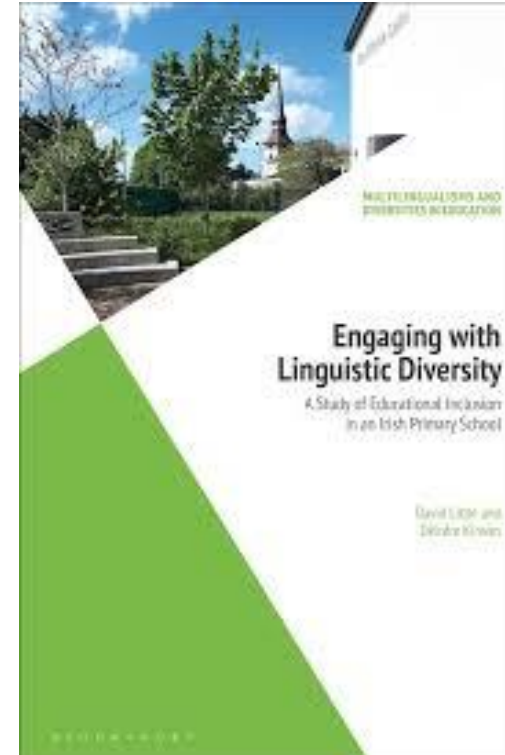
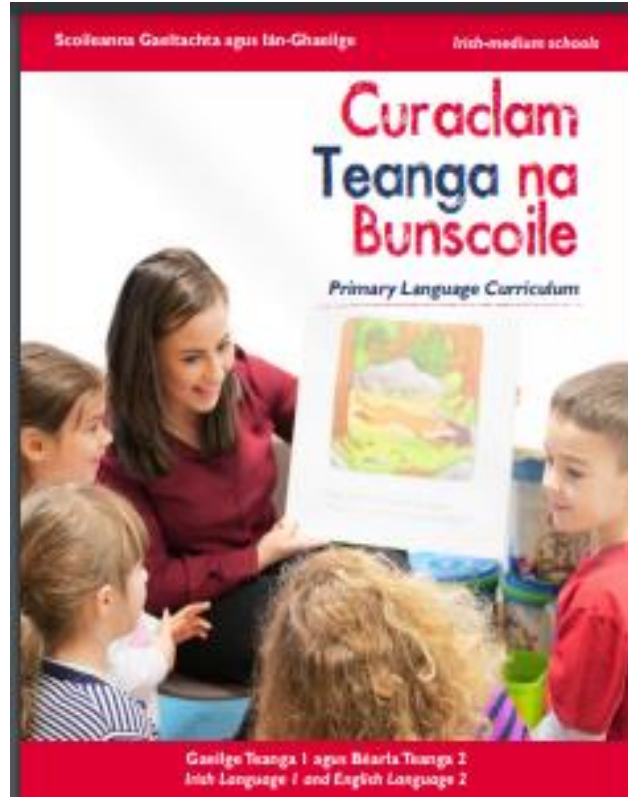
No significant challenges emerged for multilingual parents and children. Findings cannot be generalised to all Irish-medium schools due to the small number of schools in the study.

Recommendations

- Shift from a **bilingual Irish/English** view of Irish-medium education to a **plurilingual perspective** that includes **all languages and cultures** and **affirms linguistic and cultural diversity** (Swain & Lapkin, 2005; Little & Kirwan, 2019; Mady, 2016).
- Policies to ensure **equal access** to learning Irish and Irish-medium education
- Sharing **evidence-based information** on the suitability of immersion education for all students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds
- The provision of **more Irish-medium schools** where schools are oversubscribed so that Irish-medium education is a choice for all parents

Recommendations

- Advertising Irish-medium education **in a variety languages** and explicitly stating that **parents do not need to have Irish/English as a home language for their children to benefit from Irish-medium education**, sharing information about school curriculum e.g. teaching of English as a subject.
- Publicising Irish-medium education across a **variety of platforms**.
- **Regular communication** between school and home, bilingually and in home languages
- Encouraging and supporting the **parental participation** of multilingual parents in schools
- Emphasising a **positive attitude** towards Irish and immersion education rather than parents' knowledge of Irish
- The development **of more digital resources in Irish**



A plurilingual approach to teaching and learning

(CUMMINS, 2021; GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND, 2019; LITTLE & KIRWAN, 2019, 2021; NCCA, 2005; NÍ DHIORBHÁIN, 2021)

A Plurilingual Approach

- A **plurilingual approach** supports the **use of all children's languages** in school
- A **visible profile** of linguistic and cultural diversity in all schools – signs, displays, newsletters, website, books etc.
- Children who share home languages can use home languages when working together on tasks & report to the class in school language – **translanguaging**
- **Language Awareness Approach:** Encouraging children to compare and contrast words and grammatical structures across languages – English, Irish and home languages
- Encouraging and supporting **reading and writing in home languages** with support from parents; creation of dual language or plurilingual texts
- **Teacher education and professional development** to support teachers in developing strategies to support linguistic and cultural diversity in schools

Affirming Linguistic and Cultural Diversity



**Little and Kirwan
(2021, p.22)**

*Language and
Languages in the
Primary School Some
guidelines for teachers:*
**[https://ppli.ie/ppli-
primary-guidelines/](https://ppli.ie/ppli-primary-guidelines/)**

Zoe is ainm don mhainicín. Ba mhaith léi bheith in múinteoir. Tá gruaig fhada fhionn aici agus súil donn. Tá Zoe ag caithneamb T-leíne, dubh "NIKE" agus bríste reatha dubh "Nike" chomh maith. Is fearr léi an dath bán-dearg. Is maith léi Ealain.

My models name is Zoe. Her dream is to be a teacher. She has Long brown hair and brown eyes. Zoe is wearing a black Nike shirt and pink Nike bottom. Her fave colour is pink. She likes to do crafts.

Mon mannequin s'appelle Zoe. Son rêve est de devenir professeur. Elle a les cheveux longs et châtain et les yeux marrons. Elle porte un T-shirt noir "Nike" et un pantalon rose. Sa couleur préférée est rose. Elle aime les arts plastiques.

Az én modellom neve Zoe. Tánró szeretne lenni. Hosszú barna haja és szeme vörösesbarna. Rózsaszín nadrág és fekete póló van rajta. Rózsaszín a kedvenc színe. Szeret kézműveskedni.

Plurilingual text with four languages
English, Irish, French and Hungarian

*Language and Languages in the
Primary School: Some guidelines for
teachers.*

Little & Kirwan (2021, p.34)

Téama: Faisean; Theme: Fashion

<https://ppli.ie/ppli-primary-guidelines/>

Focal Scoir



I feel with multilingual families, they already have these conversations about having different languages and they're kind of nearly a step ahead of Irish people who might not have these conversations. So if Irish schools want to expand, that's where the focus should be and everything else will follow for multilingual families then, you know. (T6)

I think, it's a great extra asset to have that extra language. You know it's just the more languages the better. (T9)



Buíochas

We would like to most sincerely thank the parents, children, principals and teachers who participated in this study.

We would also like to thank Board of Management of the schools and parents who gave their consent for children to participate.

MÍLE BUÍOCHAS LIBH

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