



# Language attitudes of parents in Irish-medium primary schools in County Dublin

Vanessa Mas-Moury Mack

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University College Dublin

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THÈSE DE DOCTORAT EN COTUTELLE

EN «ÉTUDES ANGLOPHONES»

# **Language Attitudes of Parents in Irish-Medium Primary Schools in County Dublin**

*Les attitudes des parents d'élèves envers le gaélique,  
dans les écoles primaires d'immersion du comté de  
Dublin (Irlande)*

Présentée et soutenue publiquement le 24 mai 2013 par

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## RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude de recherche s'intéresse aux attitudes envers la langue gaélique en République d'Irlande. Le gaélique, tout comme l'anglais, est la langue nationale officielle et est enseignée comme matière obligatoire de l'école élémentaire au lycée. Bien que le nombre de personnes utilisant le gaélique dans la vie quotidienne reste faible, il existe depuis les années soixante-dix un regain d'intérêt pour cette langue. Celle-ci se traduit, entre autres, par une expansion du nombre d'écoles d'immersion gaéliques à l'instigation des parents, tout particulièrement dans les régions où le gaélique n'est pas pratiqué au sein de la communauté. Cette étude cherche à éclaircir ce phénomène en analysant les attitudes envers le gaélique des parents d'élèves d'écoles primaires d'immersion en zone urbaine, et plus précisément, dans le comté de Dublin. En effet, peu de recherches ont été effectuées sur les attitudes envers le gaélique au sein des familles ayant choisi une éducation par immersion pour leurs enfants.

Les personnes participant à cette étude se composent de parents d'élèves avec une expérience plus ou moins longue de l'enseignement en immersion, ainsi que d'enseignants des écoles participantes. Les données recueillies pour cette étude proviennent d'un questionnaire auto-administré ainsi que d'entretiens suivis.

La question sur la motivation des parents à choisir un enseignement en immersion est centrale au thème des attitudes envers le gaélique, puisque dans ce contexte, l'anglais est la seule langue utilisée dans la communauté ainsi que dans la plupart des foyers. Les résultats d'analyse révèlent que les parents participant ont choisi ce type d'éducation car ils considèrent, d'une part, que le gaélique est un marqueur d'identité culturelle, voire ethnique pour certains, et d'autre part, qu'il permet d'acquérir du capital culturel. En effet, les participants s'intéressent de près à la qualité de l'éducation de leurs enfants et valorisent le bilinguisme additif. Ainsi, ils attribuent au gaélique une valeur culturelle importante. Cette étude montre également que les parents d'élèves ont une attitude positive envers la langue gaélique. Ceci s'explique de par leur choix initial d'éducation mais aussi de par leur contact avec ces écoles d'immersion, environnement dans lequel le gaélique est mis en valeur. Cependant, malgré les efforts des parents à intégrer la langue gaélique à la maison ou dans les activités récréatives de leurs enfants, ce milieu ne semble pas être déclencheur de pratiques bilingues au sein de la famille. Néanmoins, cette étude indique que les écoles d'immersion favorisent la création de liens entre quelques familles communiquant entre elles en gaélique.

## ABSTRACT

This study explores attitudes towards the Irish language in the Republic of Ireland. The Irish language—alongside with English—is the national official language and is taught in school as a compulsory subject from primary school through to the end of secondary level. Despite the low percentage of daily Irish-speakers in the country the demand for Irish-medium education as an alternative means of education has been growing since the 1970s, especially in English-speaking areas. This current study focuses on the language attitudes of parents whose children attend an urban Irish-medium primary school in County Dublin and analyses the reasons for choosing such an education. Although there has been a considerable number of research studies conducted on language attitudes towards Irish in the Republic of Ireland, very few have recently concentrated on families involved with Irish-medium education.

Participants included parents with both short term and long term experience with immersion education through Irish. The main research instruments included a self-administered questionnaire and follow-up interviews with a sample of questionnaire respondents as well as teachers from the participating schools.

One of the main focuses of this study is parental motivation for sending their children to an Irish-medium school. Results reveal that participants selected such education for their children for two main reasons: identity and cultural capital. Firstly, most participants regarded Irish as a strong cultural identity marker while others also considered the language as a strong marker of ethnic identity. Secondly and most importantly, participants expressed a strong interest in both education and additive bilingualism thus attributing a high cultural value to the Irish language. Findings also show that participants have very positive attitudes towards the Irish language. This is mainly due to their natural favourable disposition to Irish but also to their exposure to the Irish-medium school environment which tends to enhance this positive attitude. But despite participants' efforts to include some Irish in their child's life, either during recreational activities or at home, self-reports did not indicate the emergence of bilingual families. However, there is some evidence that the school facilitates the creation of Irish-speaking social networks between a few families.



## **MOTS CLÉS**

Attitudes envers le gaélique; gaélique irlandais; éducation monolingue gaélique; enseignement en immersion; identité culturelle; motivations des parents d'élèves; bilinguisme.

## **KEYWORDS**

Language attitudes; Irish language; Irish-medium education; immersion education; cultural identity; parental motivation; bilingualism.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>RÉSUMÉ.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>MOTS CLÉS.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>KEYWORDS.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>PART I.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>OVERVIEW OF IRISH LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES AND LANGUAGE ATTITUDES .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>I- LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES, LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.2 Language ideologies: a symbolic power of the dominant majority.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>1.3 Language and identity.....</b>	<b>43</b>
1.3.1 Definition of ethnicity and ethnic identity .....	44
1.3.2 Multiple identities .....	47
1.3.3 Language as an identity marker .....	51
<b>1.4 Bilingualism and bilingual education.....</b>	<b>58</b>
1.4.1 Definition of bilingualism .....	59
1.4.2 The effects of bilingualism.....	65
1.4.3 Language ideologies and bilingualism .....	71
1.4.4 Bilingualism in additive bilingual settings.....	74
1.4.5 Bilingual education .....	77
<b>1.5 Immersion education in the Republic of Ireland.....</b>	<b>89</b>
1.5.1 Background to the Irish education system .....	90
1.5.2 Ideology in education language policy .....	93
1.5.3 Immersion education in Irish-medium schools .....	98
<b>1.6 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>II- LANGUAGE ATTITUDES.....</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>2.2 Language attitude theory.....</b>	<b>118</b>
2.2.1 Definition of attitude .....	119

2.2.2 Attitude and behaviour .....	121
<b>2.3 Review of the relevant literature on language attitude research</b>	<b>124</b>
2.3.1 Attitudes to a minority language .....	125
2.3.2 Attitudes to second language learning.....	128
<b>2.4 Irish language policy</b>	<b>136</b>
2.4.1 The early phase of language policy: 1922-1948 .....	138
2.4.2 The period of stagnation: 1948-1971 .....	142
2.4.3 The <i>laissez faire</i> language policy: 1970-1990 .....	144
2.4.4 The dual language policy: 1990s onwards.....	146
<b>2.5 Language attitudes in the Republic of Ireland</b>	<b>151</b>
2.5.1 The Irish linguistic situation: Census of the Population .....	153
2.5.2 General Irish language attitude surveys: 1973-2007/08 .....	156
2.5.2.1 Attitudes to Irish as an ethnic symbol .....	159
2.5.2.2 Attitudes to the viability of Irish .....	162
2.5.2.3 Attitudes to public and state support for Irish .....	166
2.5.2.4 Attitudes to the Gaeltacht .....	170
2.5.2.5 Attitudes to interpersonal use of Irish.....	172
2.5.3 Attitudes towards Irish in education .....	176
2.5.3.1 Attitudes to learning Irish in school.....	179
2.5.3.2 Attitudes to Irish in relation to other subjects .....	187
2.5.3.3 Attitudes to Irish-medium schools .....	192
<b>2.6 Current attitudes to Irish expressed in print media</b>	<b>204</b>
<b>2.7 Conclusion</b>	<b>214</b>
<b>PART II.....</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>PARENTS' ATTITUDES TO IRISH AND IRISH-MEDIUM EDUCATION IN TEN IRISH-MEDIUM SCHOOLS IN COUNTY DUBLIN: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS.....</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>III- Methodology.....</b>	<b>218</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction</b>	<b>218</b>
<b>3.2 Research rationale, aims and objectives</b>	<b>222</b>
<b>3.3 Design of the parents' questionnaire</b>	<b>226</b>
1. The gaelscoil and you .....	230
2. Irish at home.....	233
3. Irish and your social life .....	237
4. General attitudes towards the Irish language .....	239
5. Personal information .....	242
<b>3.4 Research fieldwork: selection of schools, questionnaire administration and response rate</b>	<b>244</b>
<b>3.5 Follow-up interviews: aim, design, procedure and response rate</b>	<b>257</b>
<b>3.6 Data processing</b>	<b>264</b>
<b>3.7 Presentation of findings</b>	<b>266</b>
<b>IV- Parents questionnaire: quantitative data.....</b>	<b>267</b>

<b>4.2 General attitudes towards the Irish language</b>	<b>271</b>
4.2.1 Overview of parents' attitude to the Irish language.....	272
4.2.2 Parents' attitudes to Irish in a school context .....	278
<b>4.3 Irish-medium schools and education through Irish</b>	<b>284</b>
4.3.1 Reasons for choosing a gaelscoil .....	285
4.3.2 Advantages and disadvantages to Irish-medium education .....	294
4.3.3 Parents' commitment to Irish-medium education .....	303
<b>4.4 Irish language competence and use</b>	<b>311</b>
4.4.1 Competence in Irish.....	312
4.4.2 Parents' encouragement regarding their child's use of Irish.....	319
4.4.3 Parents' use of Irish .....	320
<b><i>V- Interviews with teachers and parents: qualitative data</i></b> .....	<b>330</b>
<b>5.1 Background information</b>	<b>332</b>
<b>5.2 Selection of an Irish-medium education</b>	<b>336</b>
5.2.1 Parents' reasons for choosing an Irish-medium primary school .....	337
5.2.2 The Irish language as a core aspect of Irish identity.....	341
5.2.3 Commitment to Irish-medium education after Sixth Class .....	348
<b>5.3 Parents' attitude to immersion education</b>	<b>354</b>
5.3.1 Parents' attitude to immersion education according to teachers.....	355
5.3.2 Parents' attitudes to immersion education according to interview participants.....	362
<b>5.4 Attitudes to Irish conveyed by parents</b>	<b>372</b>
5.4.1 Evaluation of the importance of the Irish language .....	373
5.4.2 Child's attitude to the Irish language according to parents .....	386
<b>5.5 Parents' use of Irish</b>	<b>393</b>
5.5.1 Parents' use of Irish on the school grounds .....	394
5.5.2 Parental involvement in education .....	403
5.5.3 Parents' use of Irish outside the school .....	410
<b>5.6 Reaction to current issues</b>	<b>415</b>
5.6.1 Parents' attitude to the promotion of Irish in the Republic of Ireland.....	416
5.6.2 Parents' attitude to the concept of elitism within the gaelscoileanna.....	422
<b>5.7 Discussion</b>	<b>431</b>
5.7.1 Parents' motivation for selecting an Irish-medium education .....	432
5.7.2 Home and social use of the Irish language .....	437
5.7.3 Societal bilingualism and Irish identity .....	442
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>447</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>457</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Irish speakers, 1851-2006</b>	<b>458</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Distribution of Irish speakers, 1800-2011</b>	<b>461</b>
<b>Appendix 3: Effects of bilingualism</b>	<b>465</b>
<b>Appendix 4: Irish Education System</b>	<b>466</b>

<b>Appendix 5: Daily Irish speakers</b>	<b>473</b>
<b>Appendix 6: Irish Language Attitude Surveys</b>	<b>474</b>
<b>Appendix 7: Irish-medium schools (statistics)</b>	<b>475</b>
<b>Appendix 8: Parents' language attitudes, 1976-2002</b>	<b>477</b>
<b>Appendix 9: Parents' questionnaire</b>	<b>481</b>
<b>Appendix 10: Letter to School Principals (June 2009)</b>	<b>496</b>
<b>Appendix 11: Irish-Medium Primary Schools Participating in the study, 2009/2010</b>	<b>497</b>
<b>Appendix 12: Teachers' Interview Questions</b>	<b>499</b>
<b>Appendix 13: Parents' Follow-up Interview</b>	<b>500</b>
<b>Appendix 14: Data Comparison between the Current Study and Other Studies</b>	<b>503</b>
<b>Appendix 15: Attitude change towards Irish</b>	<b>509</b>
<b>Appendix 16: Attitudes to Irish-medium education</b>	<b>511</b>
<b>Appendix 17: Use of Irish</b>	<b>515</b>
<b>Appendix 18: Bilingualism and language preference</b>	<b>516</b>
<b>Appendix 19: Attitudes to the promotion of the Irish language</b>	<b>518</b>
<b><i>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</i></b>	<b><i>520</i></b>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Irish-Medium School Attendance outside the Gaeltacht at both Primary and Secondary Levels, 1999-2010	104
Table 2.1: Functions of Minority Language Competence	129
Table 2.2: Attitudes to Irish as an Ethnic Symbol, 1973-2000	159
Table 2.3: Attitudes Regarding the Usefulness of Irish, 1993	163
Table 2.4: Aspirations for the Irish Language, 1988-2007	164
Table 2.5: Attitudes and Perceptions Regarding the Viability and Future of Irish, 1973-2000	165
Table 2.6: Attitudes towards Public and State Support for Irish, 1973-2000	167
Table 2.7: Attitudes towards the Promotion of Irish Language Radio Programming, 2004	168
Table 2.8: Future of Irish Language Radio by Current Listenership, 2004	169
Table 2.9: Policy Preferences if Gaeltacht Disappears, 1973-1993	171
Table 2.10: Attitudes to the Irish Language in the Gaeltacht, 1973-1993	171
Table 2.11: Personal Inclination to Speak Irish in an Ideal, Fully Bilingual, Ireland, 1973-1993	172
Table 2.12: Attitudes to Interpersonal Use of Irish, 1973-1993	173
Table 2.13: Degree of Commitment to the Conversational Use of Irish, 1973	174
Table 2.14: Attitudes towards Children Learning Irish in School, 1973-1993	179
Table 2.15: Attitudes towards Irish in School and Now, 1973-2007	180
Table 2.16: Parental Attitudes to Irish and to Irish Being Taught to their Child, 1989-2002	181
Table 2.17: Percentage Distribution of Parents according to the General Attitude towards Learning Irish they Try to Encourage in their Child, 1989-2002	182
Table 2.18: Policy Preference regarding Irish in Secondary Schools, 1988	185
Table 2.19: Importance of Continental Languages vis-à-vis Irish, 1973-1993	187
Table 2.20: Percentage Distribution of Parents according to the Frequency with which they Praise their Children's School Achievements in Different Subjects, 1989	190
Table 2.21: Attitudes to the Importance of Knowing Irish for Children Growing Up, 1988-2010	190

<b>Table 2.22: Attitudes towards Irish-Medium Schools, 1973-1993</b>	<b>193</b>
<b>Table 2.23: School Language Programme Considered Most Suitable for Most Children in Primary Schools, 1983-2000</b>	<b>194</b>
<b>Table 2.24: Public Attitudes towards Irish-Medium Schools, 1983-1993</b>	<b>194</b>
<b>Table 2.25: Comparative Reading of Attitudes towards Irish between the General Public (1973) and Gaelscoil Mothers (1976)</b>	<b>196</b>
<b>Table 2.26: Readership Estimate of any Newspapers Classified by Age and Social Class, 2008/09</b>	<b>204</b>
<b>Table 2.27: Readership Estimate of the Three Main Daily Newspapers Regularly Dealing with the Irish Language Issue, Classified by Age and Social Class, 2008</b>	<b>205</b>
<b>Table 3.1: Total Number of Eligible Respondents per Class in Each School</b>	<b>253</b>
<b>Table 3.2: Return Response per Class in Each School</b>	<b>254</b>
<b>Table 3.3: Response Rate per Class in Each School</b>	<b>255</b>
<b>Table 3.4: Total of Respondents Agreeing to Participate in a Follow-Up Interview</b>	<b>258</b>
<b>Table 3.5: Distribution of Interview Participants per Class in Each School</b>	<b>261</b>
<b>Table 4.1: Respondents' Highest Educational Qualifications</b>	<b>268</b>
<b>Table 4.2: Parents' Disposition towards the Irish Language</b>	<b>272</b>
<b>Table 4.3: Language Choice in a Hypothetical Fully Bilingual Ireland (1973, 1983, 1993, 2009)</b>	<b>273</b>
<b>Table 4.4: Attitudes towards Bilingualism</b>	<b>275</b>
<b>Table 4.5: Parents' Attitudes to Irish in the Gaelscoil Context</b>	<b>279</b>
<b>Table 4.6: Parents' Reasons for Choosing a Gaelscoil for their Child</b>	<b>285</b>
<b>Table 4.7: Reasons Why Parents Had Always Considered an Irish-Medium Education for their Child</b>	<b>289</b>
<b>Table 4.8: Reasons that Influenced Parents' Decision over an Irish-Medium Education for their Child</b>	<b>290</b>
<b>Table 4.9: Further Reasons that Influenced Parents in the Selection of an Irish-Medium School</b>	<b>290</b>
<b>Table 4.10: Parents' Arguments Supporting the View that Irish-Medium Education Benefits Children Educationally</b>	<b>294</b>
<b>Table 4.11: Disadvantages to an Irish-Medium Education</b>	<b>296</b>



<b>Table 4.12: Sixth Class Parents' Arguments for the Neglected Teaching of English in the Gaelscoil</b>	<b>299</b>
<b>Table 4.13: Reasons for Choosing an Irish-Medium Secondary School</b>	<b>305</b>
<b>Table 4.14: Reasons for Not Choosing an Irish-Medium Secondary School</b>	<b>307</b>
<b>Table 4.15: Respondents' Use of Irish on the School Premises</b>	<b>321</b>
<b>Table 4.16: Frequency of Irish Use at Home</b>	<b>322</b>
<b>Table 4.17: Circumstances and Frequency of Irish Use at Home</b>	<b>324</b>
<b>Table 5.1: Comparison of Marital Status between Questionnaire Respondents and Interview Participants</b>	<b>332</b>
<b>Table 5.2: Parents' Attitudes to Irish According to Interviewed Teachers</b>	<b>373</b>
<b>Table 5.3: Parents' Input on their Child's Understanding of the Role of the Irish Language Outside School</b>	<b>384</b>
<b>Table 5.4: Reasons for Valuing or not Valuing Irish as a Living Language</b>	<b>387</b>
<b>Table 5.5: General Use of Irish on the School Grounds</b>	<b>398</b>
<b>Table 5.6: Use of Irish with Other Parents on the School Grounds</b>	<b>399</b>
<b>Table 5.7: Use of Irish with Teachers on the School Grounds</b>	<b>400</b>
<b>Table 5.8: Use of Irish with Children on the School Grounds</b>	<b>400</b>
<b>Table 5.9: Reasons why Parents Feel Irish Is or Is Not a Barrier to their Involvement in the School</b>	<b>406</b>
<b>Table 5.10: Places where Families from the Gaelscoil Socialise through the Medium of Irish on a Regular Basis</b>	<b>413</b>
<b>Table 5.11: Reasons why Gaelscoileanna are Not Elitist</b>	<b>424</b>
<b>Table 5.12: Reasons Accounting for a General Perception that Gaelscoileanna are Elitist</b>	<b>426</b>
<b>Table 5.13: Reasons why Gaelscoileanna are Elitist</b>	<b>428</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Census of the Population.	153
Figure 3.1: Example of a Closed Ended Question.	226
Figure 3.2: Example of both Quantitative and Qualitative Question	227
Figure 3.3: Example of Filter Question	227
Figure 3.4: Selection of Schools by Foundation Date	245
Figure 3.5: Selection of Schools by Location	245
Figure 3.6: Critical Comments.	248
Figure 3.7: Modification of Question 46	250
Figure 4.1: Classification of the Respondents according to their Social Class	270
Figure 4.2: Change in Attitudes to the Irish Language: Comparative Reading of Mac Gréil's National Survey (2007/08)	281
Figure 4.3: Comparative Reading of Parents' Reasons for Choosing a Gaelscoil in 2009 and 1976/77	286
Figure 4.4: Parents' Views on How Important it is that their Child Receives an Education through Irish	292
Figure 4.5: Senior Infant Parents' Feelings towards their Child's Education through Irish	297
Figure 4.6: Sixth-Class Parents' View on Irish-Medium Schools Neglecting the Teaching of English	298
Figure 4.7: Parents' Views on the Best Time to Introduce the Teaching of English	300
Figure 4.8: Selection of a Secondary School by Senior Infant Parents and Sixth Class Parents	305
Figure 4.9: Respondents Selecting an Irish-Medium Secondary School, Classified by School	308
Figure 4.10: Ability in Irish: Comparative Reading of ITÉ National Survey (1993) and Mac Gréil's National Survey (2007/08)	313
Figure 4.11: Respondents' Ability to Understand and Speak Irish	314
Figure 4.12: Parents' Adult Irish Class Attendance	315

<b>Figure 4.13: Comparative Reading of Respondents' Ability to Speak Irish between the Time their First Child Started School and the Present Time</b>	<b>316</b>
<b>Figure 4.14: Comparative Reading of Respondents' Ability to Speak Irish between the Time their First Child Attended the Gaelscoil and the Time their Child Reached Sixth Class</b>	<b>317</b>
<b>Figure 4.15: Frequency of Irish Use between Socialising Gaelscoil Parents</b>	<b>327</b>
<b>Figure 5.1: Questionnaire Respondents' Highest Educational Qualifications</b>	<b>333</b>
<b>Figure 5.2: Interview Participants' Highest Educational Qualifications</b>	<b>333</b>
<b>Figure 5.3: Classification of the Interview Participants according to their Social Class</b>	<b>334</b>
<b>Figure 5.4: Comparison of Ability to Speak Irish between Questionnaire Respondents and Interview Participants</b>	<b>335</b>
<b>Figure 5.5: Teachers' Views on Parents' Reasons for Sending their Child to a Gaelscoil</b>	<b>338</b>
<b>Figure 5.6: Parents' Primary School Choice in a Hypothetical Situation where Irish would not be Mandatory at Secondary Level</b>	<b>340</b>
<b>Figure 5.7: Irish Identity as a Reason for Choosing a Gaelscoil</b>	<b>343</b>
<b>Figure 5.8: Parents' Views on the Absence of a Sense of Identity in English-Medium Schools.</b>	<b>345</b>
<b>Figure 5.9: Parents' Views on Choosing a Gaelscoil as a Result of a Perceived Loss of Irishness</b>	<b>346</b>
<b>Figure 5.10: Percentage of Pupils Going to an Irish-Medium Secondary School According to Teachers</b>	<b>349</b>
<b>Figure 5.11: Teachers' Views on Parents' Reasons for Sending their Child to an Irish-Medium Secondary School</b>	<b>350</b>
<b>Figure 5.12: Teachers' Views on Parents' Reasons for not Sending their Child to an Irish-Medium Secondary School.</b>	<b>351</b>
<b>Figure 5.13: Teachers' Views on Parents' Understanding of Immersion Education</b>	<b>355</b>
<b>Figure 5.14: Teachers' View on Parents' Understanding of Immersion Education Classified by Teaching Class Level</b>	<b>357</b>
<b>Figure 5.15: Teachers' Views on Parents' Concerns about their Child's Level of English.</b>	<b>359</b>
<b>Figure 5.16: Parents' Views on the Introduction of the Teaching of English from the First Term of Junior Infants</b>	<b>363</b>
<b>Figure 5.17: Arguments in Favour of Full Immersion.</b>	<b>365</b>

<b>Figure 5.18: Reasons Parents Have to Feel Confident about their Child Being Entirely Taught through Irish.</b>	<b>367</b>
<b>Figure 5.19: Parents' Views on the Introduction of More Irish in the Curriculum in English-Medium Schools.</b>	<b>369</b>
<b>Figure 5.20: Teachers' Views on Parents' Encouraging their Child to Use Irish for Recreational Activities</b>	<b>375</b>
<b>Figure 5.21: Children Participating in Extra-Curricular Activities in the School</b>	<b>376</b>
<b>Figure 5.22: Reasons for Children not to Take Part in Extra-Curricular Activities Organised by the School</b>	<b>377</b>
<b>Figure 5.23: Parents' Views on the Importance of Taking Part in Recreational Activities through the Medium of Irish</b>	<b>378</b>
<b>Figure 5.24: Parents' Views on Children's Participation in Recreational Activities through Irish</b>	<b>379</b>
<b>Figure 5.25: Parents' Views on their Child's Understanding of Irish as a Living Language in Ireland</b>	<b>386</b>
<b>Figure 5.26: Parents' Views on Children's Association of the Irish Language with School Only</b>	<b>389</b>
<b>Figure 5.27: Evidence Showing that Children Do Not Exclusively Associate Irish with School</b>	<b>390</b>
<b>Figure 5.28: Teachers' Assessment of Parents' Language Use when Speaking to Teachers</b>	<b>394</b>
<b>Figure 5.29: Teachers' Assessment of Parents' Reason for Using English when Speaking to Teachers</b>	<b>396</b>
<b>Figure 5.30: Teachers' Views on Parents' Use of Irish when Participating in School Events</b>	<b>402</b>
<b>Figure 5.31: Teachers' Views on the Irish Language as a Barrier to Parental Involvement in the School</b>	<b>405</b>
<b>Figure 5.32: Teachers' Views on the Amount of Irish Used at Home between Parents and Child</b>	<b>410</b>
<b>Figure 5.33: Parents' Language Preference in the Hypothetical Case of a Fully Bilingual Ireland</b>	<b>417</b>
<b>Figure 5.34: Parents' Views on the Promotion of Irish as Being the Job of Voluntary Organisations as Opposed to the Job of the Government</b>	<b>420</b>
<b>Figure 5.35: Parents' Views on Gaelscoileanna as Being Elitist</b>	<b>423</b>

# INTRODUCTION

The Irish language is one of the oldest languages in Europe that is still spoken today. Despite its official status as first national language,<sup>1</sup> Irish is a minority language in Ireland<sup>2</sup> with just under 2% of the population claiming to use the language on a daily basis (CSO, 2012). While public attitudes favour government support for Irish (Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009), individual initiatives and voluntary-based organisations are also concentrating on the promotion of the language. This is the case in the education sector with the expansion of Irish immersion schools as a result of parents' demand. Although this study does not focus on the group of parents who initiated the establishment of those schools, it explores the language attitudes of those who chose this alternative over an English-medium education which includes the teaching of Irish as an individual subject. Before exploring language attitudes among parents who selected an Irish-medium education for their children, it is important to give an overview of the history of the Irish language by reviewing its origins, the demography of its speakers and the historical and political context that led to its current status.

Irish is a Celtic language stemming from the Proto Indo-European language spoken in the Caucasus perhaps as early as 5,000 BC (Ó hUiginn, 2008). Once it came to insular Britain and Ireland, it evolved into two subgroups referred to as Q-Celtic and P-Celtic. The Q-Celtic group represents Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx, languages which have retained the sound [k], whereas it evolved to [p] in the P-Celtic group which includes Welsh and Breton. Although it is unclear when the first Irish speakers came to Ireland it is estimated that Irish was present around 500 BC. Both the Irish language and Gaelic culture were so well anchored in Ireland that the Christian missionaries who arrived during the fifth century chose not to undermine Irish and used the vernacular to evangelise the Irish people. Ireland also witnessed various invasions such as the Vikings from 795 AD and the Anglo Normans during the twelfth century. However, these peoples were not a threat to the Irish language as most of them assimilated or moved away. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the English monarchy asserted its supremacy. The emergence of a new English-speaking landed aristocracy contributed to the erosion of the Irish language. From then onwards, it was no longer the dominant economic, religious and political language. As a result, Irish became associated with the socially disadvantaged and gradually

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1 According to Article 8 in the Constitution of Ireland, 1937 (Bunreacht na hÉireann) English is recognised as a second official language.

2 There are three dialects of Irish co-existing in Ireland today: Munster, Connacht and Ulster. A standard written variety was created in the 1940s as an official version for government use as well as a basis for education and publication. The process of standardisation brought changes to the language including spelling, grammar, the use of the Roman alphabet instead of the old Gaelic script and the addition of new vocabulary for modern terms (Purdon, 1999; Ní Chartúir, 2002).

retreated as a living idiom in the nineteenth century. Its demise was accelerated due to the growing predominance of English in the Irish institutions and economy (Hindley, 1990, Cronin, 1996; Purdon, 1999; Todd, 2000). However, the language never died out. It kept being pushed away from the eastern economic centre and eventually became confined to remote rural areas in the West of Ireland before gaining significance again with the establishment of the Irish state.

Although Irish is not the thriving language it used to be when over six million people lived on the island in the early nineteenth century—a majority of whom spoke Irish (Cronin, 1996)—census records have shown an increase in the number of Irish speakers since 1926 after a dramatic drop. As can be seen in Table A1.1 in Appendix 1, the percentage of Irish speakers was at its lowest in 1911 (17.6%) when the number of Irish speakers started to be recorded in 1861. Various factors led to the decline of the Irish language. It seems that Irish people first started to abandon their native language in the eastern part of the island at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Hindley, 1990, p. 13). Purdon (1999, p.33) argues that it was the combination of factors such as the growth of urbanisation, improvements in communications, exposure to outside influences, increased bourgeois prosperity and the subsequent increased use of the English language, among other factors, that caused the decline of the language. Other historical factors such as the Anglicisation of both the Church and education, the Great Famine and subsequent mass emigration further weakened the state of the Irish language (Hindley, 1990; Purdon, 1999; Todd, 1999). As the maps in Appendix 2 show, the geographical distribution of Irish speakers changed drastically in just over a century. While Irish was spoken by a vast majority in the seventeenth century, it had disappeared from the eastern part of the island by the end of the nineteenth century. Once the Irish State was established, it focused on the remaining Irish-speaking heartlands as an attempt to stop the language from declining further (see Ó Riagáin, 1997). Special areas called Gaeltacht areas were drawn up in 1926 and their boundaries were reviewed in 1956 and 1967 (see maps in Appendix 2) to reflect the linguistic reality of the Irish-speaking community.

Language policies formulated at the time of the foundation of the Irish State in 1922 marked a shift in the history of the language as they aimed at its maintenance in the Gaeltacht and at language revival<sup>3</sup> in the rest of the country (Ó Riagáin, 1997; Ó hÍfearnáin, 2000). The new independent state was determined to recognise Irish as a distinctive marker of the Irish nation (Ó Tuathaigh, 2008). After centuries of oppression, emigration and economic pressure which eventually precipitated the decline of Irish as a community language, the Irish language revival was promoted among the general population through the education system. Despite an increase in the number of Irish speakers

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3 Language revival is used in the context of minority languages. It can refer to general language enhancement or to the promotion of a language that is no longer the community language with the aim to revive it within a group or the community (see Chee Chen, Connerty, & Bratt Paulston, 1993).

recorded in the census figures over the years, only a minority today is reported to make use of the language on a daily basis (CSO, 2007). While there were 1,774,437 (or 40.6%) Irish speakers in 2011 only 1.8% represented daily Irish speakers outside the education system. One in four of daily Irish speakers were in the school-going ages of 3 to 18 years (CSO, 2012).

Even though Irish has not been restored as a community language alongside the English language, it should be acknowledged that its revival was possible due to positive attitudes towards it which translated into support for Irish language policies. In order to understand what happened in terms of change in language attitudes, it is important to situate attitudes to Irish at a time when the language had started to disappear. In the second half of the nineteenth century, scholars started to express an interest in Irish literature written in Old Irish as the latter was dissociated from the Irish spoken in poor remote rural areas. This period of cultural activity in Ireland also corresponded to a period of political tensions when the Gaelic League (Conradh na Gaeilge) was established (1893) and started its work of reviving the Irish language. The League was created as a non-political organisation to preserve the Irish language where it was spoken and to extend it to the rest of the population (Ó Néill, 2005). The revival of the Irish language was in fact part of a broader European movement known as Romanticism that had spread from Germany in the late eighteenth century. Intellectuals leading this cultural movement emphasised the need to find one's own identity and discover one's roots (Hutchinson & Smith, 1994, p. 5) as well as rediscover the vernacular languages that their ancestors spoke (Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 179). These ideas permeated the ideological discourse that emerged around the same period and that is known as nationalism. One definition of nationalism is based on the unity of the people in a historic territory, legal equality and a common cultural heritage transmitted through the generations, and that is therefore an expression of their authentic identity (Hutchinson & Smith, 1994, p.4; Smith, 2010, p.37). It is this pre-existing sense of ethnic ancestry that was used to appeal to a people and lead this political ideology (Smith, 2010) in order to establish nation-states. While an ethnic group can be discerned by an outside observer, a nation is self-defined (Connor, 1994a, pp. 45-46). In other words, a nation is an ethnic group that has become aware of its uniqueness. Members of the group have a sense of national identity when they perceive differences and distinctiveness in relation to other national communities (Smith, 2010).

The Irish revival was led by an intellectual elite, which was mostly affiliated to the Gaelic League. Although the League was apolitical it attracted at the same time many Irish nationalists. Members of this intellectual elite later played an important role in the establishment of the Irish State by constructing the new Irish nationality around its Gaelic heritage, emphasising the Irish language as a symbol of national identity and distinguishing themselves from any British influence (Ó Croidheáin, 2006). Both the Irish peasantry and the Catholic lower classes were also used by intellectuals to

provide cultural myths, values and traditions which thereafter played an important role in mobilising support for Irish independence (Smith, 2010, p.61). Irish was a key element in an Irish Romantic Movement arguing for a return to roots through the development of national language and folklore, as well as serving a different political purpose as a rallying point against British rule (Ó Croidheáin, 2006). Hobsbawm (1994) observed the importance of the ethno-linguistic element in nationalist movements that developed towards the end of the nineteenth century. While these include Baltic peoples, the Jews, the Welsh, the Basques and the Catalans to cite but a few, they also include the Irish. The Irish language was not part of the Irish national movement before the foundation of the Gaelic League (1893) as it did not appear in the campaign for the Repeal of the Act of Union. This was led by Irish political leader Daniel O'Connell and it opposed the fusion of the Parliaments of Ireland and of Great Britain. Nor did it appear in the Fenian programme which was dedicated to the establishment of an independent Irish Republic (p. 181). It should be noted that the revival of the Irish language led by an elite and based on cultural nationalism did not get support from the working classes as the movement fostered a culture that was opposed to all British influence but was alien to the masses (Ó Laoire, 1996a). Nonetheless, from the nineteenth century onwards, a significant shift in attitudes towards Irish took place, first coming from the elite's efforts to try to reach out to the whole population, through the Gaelic League, and then through language policies once the Irish State had been established.

Language attitude surveys carried out in Ireland since the 1970s have shown that Irish people still consider Irish to be a symbol of ethnic identity. In other words, Irish is considered to be their language. This appears to be somewhat paradoxical given the linguistic situation in Ireland where Irish is only spoken as a community language in a few areas known as Gaeltacht areas; whereas English is the main language spoken throughout the island. Research has revealed that there is a weak commitment to the actual use of Irish (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin, 1997). However, as Barth (1969) pointed out in his discussion of ethnicity, a group identity is not defined by objective characteristics that highlight differences with other groups. Rather, it is defined by features that members of the group regard as significant and relevant to their group identity whether they are social, political or cultural. Furthermore, historians have observed that groups tend to define themselves by comparison to strangers (Armstrong, 1994, p.141). By considering the Irish language as one element of the group identity it is very clear that the language that was spoken by their ancestors is unique to this group and contributes to a sense of uniqueness when compared with other languages spoken in neighbouring countries. However, recent research has shown that the position of Irish as a symbol of ethnic identity is weakening (Ó Riagáin, 2007). Due to its status as the first official language, Irish people are exposed



to Irish. However, their daily contact with the language is mainly passive and involuntary through bilingual signs, mostly found in the public service domains, official documents, the media (Irish language radio/television programmes at certain times of the day or on specific stations/channels, publication of Irish language content in some newspapers, etc.) or the education sector—as Irish is a compulsory subject from primary to the end of secondary schooling. But whether or not the general public choose to be exposed to, learn and use Irish, language attitude surveys have shown that they have supported its promotion nationwide and its maintenance as a community language in the Irish-speaking heartlands (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984; 1994; Ó Riagáin, 2007; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009). Therefore, although Irish as a marker of ethnicity may be weakening, the language is still considered an important cultural attribute. After all, the Irish language occupies a special position in the identity of many Irish people because of the history associated with it (Smith, 1981, p.51).

Unlike the studies referred to above which surveyed a sample of the general public, the current study focuses on one particular group showing an interest in the Irish language. It includes families who made the choice to send their child to an Irish-medium primary school, also known as *gaelscoil*. In the Republic of Ireland Irish-medium education is a minority form of education where all the subjects (with the obvious exception of English) are taught through the medium of Irish. By contrast, other schools provide the national curriculum through the medium of English, and include the teaching of Irish as a compulsory subject. Irish-medium schools or *gaelscoileanna* are of particular interest as they have been growing in number since the 1970s due to parents' demand. Unlike the Irish-medium schools set up by the Department of Education from the 1920s onwards, which were an attempt to reintroduce the Irish language within the community—but which eventually closed down due to their unpopularity, *gaelscoileanna* are a parent-led initiative that emerged after some parents raised concerns about the teaching of Irish in school (Hickey, 1997; Ó Riagáin, 1997). It is acknowledged that the immersion education sector plays an important role in the context of language revival and language maintenance, as demonstrated in the case of the Hebrew language as well as the Maori language in New Zealand (Fishman, 1991, 2004; Spolsky, 1999; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006). Spolsky defines early immersion programmes as “attempts to find formal and informal solutions to the problem of increasing the ability of group members to know and to use an endangered ethnic language” (1999, p.185).

The cohort of parents who took part in the current study does not belong to the cohort of parents who took part in the foundation of a *gaelscoil*. All participating schools have been established for a decade or more.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore a group of families using a service that is available to them and which

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<sup>4</sup> The schools participating in the current study were established between 1917 and 1999.

has already been established for some years. The rationale of the current study is based on the absence of research in recent years into parents' motivation for selecting immersion education for their children, the socio-economic as well as educational background of the families involved, their attitudes towards the language, as well as the impact Irish-medium education has on parents' use of Irish in the home. While generally positive attitudes towards Irish were expected among gael scoil families—as shown in previous research (Ó Riagáin, 1979; Ó Donnagáin, 1995)—their understanding of immersion education as well as their personal commitment to the Irish language are not so obvious. Although these families are to a certain extent supporting the Irish language by sending their children to an Irish-medium school, their commitment to Irish-medium education does not necessarily guarantee language maintenance. Actual use of the language is also necessary. In large English-speaking areas such as the Dublin area the Irish language is promoted primarily through the educational system. It is taught as a compulsory subject as part of the national curriculum and its development is generally considered, according to Ó Laoire, to be “secondary bilingualism” (1996a, p. 51) due to its almost exclusive use in the classroom. However, Irish is taught differently in Irish-medium schools as it is the main language of instruction. Immersion education worldwide seems to be the pattern that has most to offer in terms of language revival and language maintenance (Spolsky, 1999). Williams pointed out, when referring to Welsh-medium schools in Wales, that “schools are the primary extra familial agency for language transmission” (1999, p. 278). Immersion education offers pupils a sense of purpose and a sense of language use in second language learning in the context of bilingualism (Ó Laoire (1996b, p.70). Furthermore, it was shown in a study carried out in English-medium and Irish-medium schools in 2002 which assessed pupils in Irish listening, speaking and reading, that children attending Irish-medium schools outside the Gaeltacht are fluent speakers of Irish by the end of primary school (Harris, Forde, Archer, Nic Fhearaile, & O’Gorman, 2006) despite the predominantly English-speaking background they live in, whether it is within the community or within the family. It is however difficult to predict their linguistic behaviour outside school. As Wright observed: “effecting change in an area as profoundly personal as language use is neither easy nor predictable” (1996, p. 3). Although there is a need for further research into the linguistic situation in the homes of Irish-medium school children, as suggested by Ó Laoire (1996a), the current study concentrates solely on parents’ attitudes to Irish as laying the foundations for future research on home bilingualism among families involved with Irish-medium education.

Language attitudes are valuable in terms of language planning as support from the community is essential for language policies to flourish (Baker, 1992). In the particular case of Irish-medium education, one is very likely to find positive attitudes among the participants since they chose to have their child educated through Irish. Their motivation for selecting such an education together with their

attitudes towards the immersion practice may however shed more light on their personal attitudes to the language and their own commitment to using it. While the view that the popularity of *gaelscoileanna* is closely related to parents' interest in an education for the elite has been expressed in newspaper opinion pieces and the like (McWilliams, 2005; Carey, 2008, Holmquist, 2008), it has also been acknowledged that a minority of Irish people support the Irish language for its communicative role (Hindley, 1990). In an attempt to assess the current situation, this study examines the relationship parents of children attending Irish-medium primary schools have with the Irish language, in terms of its symbolic role as well as its communicative use. It includes two sections on language attitudes and the Irish language. The first section comprises two chapters which aim to situate the study in a broad context before narrowing it to the Republic of Ireland. The concepts of language ideologies and language attitudes are defined in two different chapters so that the general context in which language attitudes are formed can be set. It is argued that language ideologies precede language attitudes and that language attitudes are shaped by language ideologies in a society or community (Dyers & Abongdia, 2010). However, they are not treated separately as language ideologies and language attitudes are interlinked. Language attitudes are referred to in Chapter One while Chapter Two reviews language ideologies reflected in language policies in Ireland. The second section comprises three chapters which focus on the analysis of the data collected in participating number of Irish-medium primary schools in Dublin.

Although language ideologies, when broadly defined, refer to people's attitudes, values and beliefs about language, they belong to a more abstract level of organisation. Ideologies of language are not only about language (Woolard, 1998) but are always socially situated and related to questions of identity and power in societies. The first chapter provides the broad context of language ideologies and the power relations that exist between languages, especially in predominantly monolingual countries such as Ireland. Language ideologies are all the more important as they impact on language attitudes by defining norms and conventions. The relation of power between majority and minority languages is also of interest regarding the concept of ethnic identity as language may be a core value in a group's identity. As previously mentioned, this study deals with language attitudes and focuses on a particular group of parents who are predominantly English-speaking, but who have chosen to support Irish as a minority language by sending their child to an Irish-medium school. Although specific reasons for choosing an Irish-medium school are explored in depth throughout the thesis, this particular focus group is of interest because its linguistic choices do not seem to coincide with those of majority language group. Members of a majority language group would choose to learn the minority language either for economic gains or because they sympathise with or wish to integrate with the minority ethnic group. However, Irish has little economic capital and despite being spoken by a

minority it is historically the language of the Irish people. There is therefore a sentimental value attached to Irish (Smith, 1981). Whereas the literature on language ideologies refers to “first language” and visualises language groups in a relation of power, the present case involves English monolinguals learning Irish—the minority language—as an additional language in an area where it is not the community language. Furthermore, because *gaelscoil* families are not a specific ethnic group supporting Irish as their community language, the association of the Irish language with an identity marker, which was made during our fieldwork, does not correspond to definitions of ethnicity and group identity found in the literature. It consequently raises the following question: can language be an identity marker for a community that does not speak the language? Although the debate on Irish identity exists at national level, it does not seem to be an issue among families attending the *gaelscoil*. They regard the linguistic element as an identity marker. The question that divides this community is more centred on the importance Irish has when considering Irish national identity. Is it a marker of their ethnic identity or more so of their cultural identity? While this first chapter situates the study in a broader context by reviewing fundamental questions on language ideologies and ethnic and national identity as an integral part of language attitudes, it also reveals a degree of inadequacy with the present focus group. The focus of the first chapter then moves on to language ideologies in education and more specifically to bilingualism in education as an essential background for this study. It explores the advances made in the sector while referring to language ideologies. Whereas the first half of the chapter refers to Ireland's situation in relation to its apparent monolingual status the second half deals with the bilingual language policy that is mostly enforced through education by examining the history of bilingualism in Ireland through the education system and its language policies. A final section introduces the current situation of immersion education in Ireland.

Irish-medium education is a growing sector in which participants generally have a positive attitude to the Irish language (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979; Ó Donnagáin, 1995; Hickey, 1997, 1999). However, this has not always been the case in the history of Irish education. Since the revival of the Irish language at the beginning of the twentieth century relied heavily on the educational system, the only contact most Irish people had with the language was in school. While a majority of Irish people support the language (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984, 1994; Mac Gréil, 1996; Ó Riagáin, 2007; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009) attitudes towards Irish also include the “dead language discourse” whereby people believe English is more useful (O'Reilly, 1999). According to O'Reilly, this is partly due to negative experiences with the language in school (1999, p.154). Yet, at the other end of the spectrum, Irish families enrol their children in Irish-medium immersion schools. Baker suggests that “favourable attitudes may be fostered by the experience of success” (1992, p. 103) in the context of minority language policies, for instance. As a matter of fact, the Irish-medium education sector is

successful in the sense that parents' demand for immersion schools is on the increase. While these non-fee paying schools offer the same curriculum and opportunities as other national schools they also produce fluent Irish speakers (Harris et al., 2006). Looking at both examples of the "dead language discourse" and of the *gaelscoileanna* it is clear that there are a variety of language attitudes that co-exist. Chapter Two deals with the complex issue of language attitudes in terms of attitude formation and attitude change as well as the relationship between attitudes and behaviour. Although research into language attitudes is quite extensive, the present literature review refers only to attitudes towards a minority language and towards second language learning. Both areas are central to this study given that for most Irish immersion pupils/students, Irish is an additional language learnt in school that is not spoken in the community and not spoken at home. In order to set the general attitudinal context in the Republic of Ireland, it is first essential to examine language policies regarding Irish as an influential instrument on attitudes to the language. Various phases in language policies can be observed from a national revivalist approach in the early 1920s to the more lenient approach that is currently servicing bilingual communities and facilitating individual linguistic choice (Ó Riagáin, 1997; 2008). The focus of language policies began to shift from the mid-1960s when the government started to align its policies with the general direction of public opinion. This shift was further accentuated when the first large scale language attitude survey was published (CILAR, 1975). From that period on, several public surveys have been conducted—the most recent one being carried out in 2007/2008 (Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009). Their respective results are analysed and compared in this second chapter. The general overview of language attitudes deals with attitudes to Irish as an ethnic symbol, attitudes to the viability of Irish, attitudes to public and state support for Irish, attitudes to the *Gaeltacht* and attitudes to interpersonal use of Irish. This is followed by an analysis of more specialised surveys which looked at attitudes to Irish in education which first examines attitudes to learning Irish in English-medium schools before narrowing its focus to Irish-medium education. Finally, the last section gives an overview of attitudes to Irish and Irish-medium schools found in the print media around the time the fieldwork was carried out.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology that was adopted for this study. This is followed by a descriptive analysis of the data collected in both the questionnaire (Chapter Four) and follow-up interviews (Chapter Five). The rationale for this study is mostly based on the absence, in recent research, of studies of parents' motivation for choosing an Irish-medium education for their child. Parents' attitudes to Irish are first compared with the general trend recorded in several national surveys over the years. Results show that the cohort examined expressed positive attitudes towards the Irish language and as expected, scored higher than the national average on various attitudinal items including attitudes to interpersonal use of Irish, attitudes towards bilingualism, attitudes to Irish

as an ethnic symbol, attitudes towards public and state support for Irish, attitudes and perceptions regarding the viability and future of Irish, and attitudes to Irish in school. The analysis then focuses on attitudes to Irish-medium education by examining parents' motivation as well as attitudes to immersion education. Findings tend to indicate that reasons for choosing an Irish-medium education are more complex than observed in previous studies. They all include integrative and instrumental elements. Despite this observation, bilingualism and cultural identity are considered the most important factors. Socio-economic elitism did not appear to be a conscious motivation although findings show that the cohort examined formed a homogeneous group in terms of their interest in cultural capital. Since most families are English-speaking, parents' understanding of bilingualism and immersion education is crucial although it may not be systematic. This study reveals that very few parents had concerns about their child being taught exclusively through Irish. Such concerns were temporary and were held by parents with little experience in immersion education. However, only a small majority were actually in favour of early total immersion during the survey, which emphasises the need to inform parents better on the actual functioning and benefits of the early total immersion practice.

The ability to speak Irish and the use made of Irish either within the home or outside the home was also examined through respondents' self-reporting. While respondents' ability to understand and speak Irish was higher than the national average found in previous language attitude surveys (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984; 1994; Ó Riagáin, 2007; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009), all levels of competence in Irish were represented among the gaelscoil cohort. Despite the lack of Irish-medium facilities outside the gaelscoil, respondents were found to encourage their children to use Irish. They would also make an effort to speak Irish with their own child, the principal and the teachers. Although results show that Irish was rarely used between parents on the school grounds, a small number of respondents reported socialising through Irish with other gaelscoil families. This finding highlights the potential of Irish-medium schools to facilitate and enhance social networking through Irish in an English-speaking environment.

Finally, although the question of language and identity was not pursued directly in the questionnaire, the notion of Irish as an identity marker was explored throughout both quantitative and qualitative data. Analysis of the latter revealed that Irish is an important marker of Irish cultural identity and ethnic identity. Interestingly, respondents seemed to be divided on the role of the English language in Irish identity.

Although both Irish and English are official national languages in the Republic of Ireland they are not regarded as equals, and one—English more often than not—will be preferred over the other

depending on the context, whether economic, political, cultural, etc. It is this relation of power between languages brought about by various language ideologies that the next chapter examines, before moving on to the issue of language and identity.

**PART I**  
**OVERVIEW OF IRISH LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES AND LANGUAGE**  
**ATTITUDES**



# I- LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES, LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION

## 1.1 Introduction

As the introductory chapter, Chapter One presents the general background and defines key concepts of the current study. In the present case, it involves examining language in different contexts. In this study, language is understood in relation to attitudes to a specific language which is Irish, in terms of official national language—as defined in the Constitution of Ireland (1937)—as well as minority language when considering the percentage of daily Irish speakers.<sup>5</sup> The Irish linguistic situation therefore poses the question on the role the Irish language plays in the definition of national identity. Furthermore, language is viewed here in an educational context which is itself embedded in a broader context of bilingualism.

The concept of language ideologies, which is dealt with in the first section, is necessary to understand the situation in which language attitudes are formed and evolve. Language attitudes, that is to say the evaluations of a language, are not formed in a vacuum. Beliefs constitute the basis for attitude formation (Fishbein & Azjen, 1975). Although beliefs may come from direct observation, they can also be established by some informational source (ibid.) such as relatives, acquaintances, the media, etc. Therefore, attitudes, and in this case language attitudes, need to be considered in a broader context. This involves ideologies or “common-sense assumptions” as they have been defined, for they are part of conventions and are a way of legitimising existing social relations (Fairclough, 2001, p. 2). In the case of a speech community, shared beliefs about appropriate language practices among the community members designate a language ideology (Spolsky, 2004).

Language ideologies and language attitudes both consist of evaluations, that is to say judgements that fix the value of something. Attitudes, which are held by individuals, are more unconscious and subjective than ideologies:

*Attitudes can be defined as subjective evaluations of both language varieties and their speakers, whether the attitudes are held by individuals or by groups. This may be [a] way that they contrast with ideologies. (...) If [the] evaluation is subjective, this means that it is an opinion and therefore the value it fixes does not have an objective basis. In contrast, ideologies are more often closely related to a factual base. (Myers-Scotton, 2006, p.120)*

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<sup>5</sup> In 2011, the Census of the Population reported that 1.8% of the population spoke Irish on a daily basis outside the education system (CSO, 2012).

Language attitudes also differ from language ideologies insofar as attitudes are more concerned with how a group's language variety is meaningful to others, whereas ideologies focus on the existence of different and competing ideologies within the same community and how differences in languages are used in politics (Myers-Scotton, 2006). Language ideologies are reflected in actual language practice that is to say in particular behaviours and even in language policies. For instance, the official language of a country or the medium of instruction in school are often the direct result of language ideologies. Individuals live in societies where particular language ideologies already exist. They have the choice of accepting or rejecting them and shaping their own attitudes towards language. Attitudes to languages can also be related to power and control (Thomas, 2004) which are generated by language ideologies. Dyers and Abongdia (2010) point out that the distinction between language ideologies and language attitudes in the literature can be fuzzy at times. Yet, Dyers and Abongdia clearly differentiate both concepts: "ideologies are constructed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group, i.e. they are rooted in the socio-economic power and vested interests of dominant groups" (2010, p. 123). Language ideologies, which usually originate from the elite (Larrain, 1979; Myers-Scotton, 2006) to create norms and notions of correctness (White, 2006), imply a relation of power between dominant and minority language groups. When ideologies are shared by substantial majorities within a nation they become common sense knowledge (Ricento, 2006). By contrast, when ideologies are opposed, the power based relationship that exists between dominant and majority language groups can prove to be problematic for some ethnic groups in terms of asserting their identity as language is fundamental in defining identity (Spolsky, 1999, p. 181). The example of language ideologies under Franco's dictatorship in Spain illustrates the power relationship between Spanish which was the only official national language and other regional languages such as Basque which were banned. The fall of Franco's regime subsequently led to the re-emergence of regional cultures and languages and the expression of various ethnic identities (Montaruli, Bourhis, & Azurmendi, 2011).

In the case of Ireland, the Irish language played an important role in the nationalist discourse that shaped the new Irish identity (Kelly, 2002; Ó Croidheáin, 2006). At the end of the nineteenth century, the Irish language was seen as a common basis for Irish unity and national identity. This culturalist outlook rapidly became a politicised one in which Irish was one of the ethnic symbols of the nation (Ó Croidheáin, 2006). After independence, its significance was further enhanced by a language ideology which facilitated its inclusion on the school curriculum (Ó Riagáin, 1997).

This chapter therefore explores how language ideologies can impact on minority language groups and intermingle with defining ethnic identity and how they can influence language policies. The first section deals with various situations involving language and power and sets the context in which

beliefs about a language and attitudes towards it can be formed. The second section examines the notion of ethnic identity and national identity paying special attention to language as a key identity marker. In particular, it also looks at the way Irish identity is promoted and whether or not the Irish language plays an important role in the definition of what it is to be Irish. This chapter then narrows its focus to language ideologies in education with specific emphasis on bilingual and immersion schools—as the latter form the broad part of this study—and analyses the impact they can have on minority languages. Finally, an introduction to the Irish education system and its language policies is given as an essential background to the present study.

## **1.2 Language ideologies: a symbolic power of the dominant majority**

*Languages are seldom admired to death but are frequently despised to death.  
(Dorian, 1998, p. 3)*

This section first examines monolingualism as a world view and the relations of power it entails between majority and minority linguistic groups. The ideas of norm, standardisation, the legacy of colonialism and the impact of globalisation all constitute the core of language ideologies and can be linked to the Irish case. Furthermore, forms of resistance to linguistic domination which have started to emerge through multilingualism are also explored as an important aspect of language ideology.

Jorge Larraín defines ideology “as the expression of the world-view of a class” (Larraín, 1979, p. 14). Ideologies can be defined as “the opinions, theories and attitudes formed within a class in order to defend and promote its interests” (ibid.). They are further seen as ideas or practices allowing a particular dominant social group to acquire or maintain power (Woolard, 1998; Morrison & Lui, 2000). These ideologies are usually imposed by the dominant majority and are usually regarded as the norm (Fairclough, 2001; Myers-Scotton, 2006).

*Ideologies are patterns of beliefs and practice, which make some existing arrangements appear natural and others not. To a dominant majority, existing arrangements almost always seem “natural”, because they (or their forebears) are the ones who put these arrangements in place.  
(Myers-Scotton, 2006, p. 135)*

Majority monolingualism in some European countries such as France or Spain as well as the United States is one example of a language ideology that looks natural to the language majority.

The use of one language, as Phillipson puts it (1992, p. 17), generally implies the exclusion of others, although this is not necessarily so. It should be noted that dominant groups have not always imposed their language on subordinate communities. Rather, it is a phenomenon that coincides with the rise of nationalism in Europe during the nineteenth century where intolerance towards ethnic languages increased considerably (Dorian, 1998). Cobban (1994) explains that nation states existed before the development of nationalism. Because there was then no specific relationship between the political state and culture or language, people living in the same state or empire—such as the Habsburg Empire between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries—spoke different languages and had different cultures. But with the emergence of nationalism, nations started to break away from their traditional allegiances. Nationalism selectively uses the pre-existing, historically inherited cultural and linguistic heritage to assert group boundaries (Barth, 1969; Smith 1981; Wardhaugh, 1987) as detailed in Section 1.3 Language and Identity. According to Gellner (1994), nationalism is the general imposition

of an invented high culture on society which was previously constituted of a variety of low cultures. The diffusion of this high culture through institutions such as the education system makes it the norm.

When something does not conform to the norm it is considered different and peripheral. Minority language groups, for instance, are regarded as the “other” and are often given negative labelling (Singh, 2004). Negative attitudes towards ethnolinguistic minorities can emerge from the perception that these minorities can be a threat to more powerful groups (Talbot et al., 2003). Singh (2004) shows the connection made by majority groups between otherness and threat referring to the solution offered by a member of the government, following riots between ethnic minority groups and English dwellers in 2001; which was based on the integration of ethnic minority groups through the learning of English. Majority groups may also hold negative attitudes towards minority language groups when they fear such minorities are given privileges. By expressing negative attitudes majority language groups enhance their distinctiveness and self-worth (Baker, 1992, p. 100).

Because of the supremacy of one language over others in predominantly monolingual contexts an emphasis is put on learning one language after the other—that is when the subordinated language has not been totally proscribed but is tolerated. This leads, for example, to a hierarchy of terminology such as first language, second language, and so on, (Nic Ghiolla Phádraig, 1994, p. 23):

*The term mother-tongue is often used interchangeably with the term “first language” — the inference being that languages are learnt one at a time. It is a notion of great attraction in the English-speaking countries whose populations are largely monoglot English speakers.*

The term mother tongue dates from the Middle Ages when it was used to describe in a pejorative manner the unlearned language of women and children as opposed to Latin, the “father's language” (Haugen, 1991). The ideology at the time regarded woman's language or “mother tongue” as inferior and promoted Latin which was learnt solely by men. Although the meaning of mother tongue has evolved, it is still part of a hierarchy of terminology.

The notion of language hierarchy, especially in predominantly monolingual countries, is criticised by Halliday et al. who deem it a “misapprehension that some languages are intrinsically better than others (Halliday, McIntosh & Stevens, 1968, p. 160). Languages are adapted to the needs of their speakers and the changes occurring in the community. They expand their lexis in different ways when it is necessary—e.g. in the case of new technologies, new vocabulary is needed. In the Irish language, for example, new terms reflecting modern technologies were added to the vocabulary such as “cuisneoir” for fridge, “teilifís” for television, “ríomhphost” for email, etc. Halliday et al. conclude that “there is no such a thing as a primitive language” (ibid.). However, it seems that the assumption that people whose culture is not technologically advanced speak a primitive language still prevails widely

today (Dorian, 1998, p. 9). Similarly, spoken languages, in rural areas for example, are not considered modern or civilised languages if they do not have written forms with norms of correctness (Gal, 2006).

This reflects another ideology known as standardisation which establishes norms and rejects other linguistic forms or variations. Language ideology can vary depending on the country or on the language community. Countries with a dominant language and a long history of monolingualism tend to have a standard language ideology according to which language is uniform. Monolingual communities, however, are not homogenous when regional and social varieties in “what is thought of as one language” are taken into account (Romaine, 1995, p. 9). The process of standardisation is usually implemented through language policy in areas such as education. This approach does not accept variations of the language that would not be found in grammar books or dictionaries for example. As James W. Tollefson illustrates “the obsession with errors and error correction in language teaching is probably the most striking manifestation of standard language ideology” (1999, para 6).

An official reform of orthography, for instance, usually means that there is only one correct way to spell, write and sometimes pronounce the language. It also implies that any other forms or structures are simply incorrect (Schieffelin & Charlier Doucet, 1998). Dorian (1998, p. 8) explains for example that in Scottish Gaelic the adjective normally follows the noun which, when compared with English syntax, is abnormal and therefore could appear as a language deficiency in the eye of monolingual English speakers. She further explains that the Scottish Gaelic syntax would not appear incorrect to a French speaker, for example, as most adjectives follow the noun in French. Yet, Gaelic speakers who were taught English in school and transpose the English syntax onto Scottish Gaelic seem to have adopted the standard language ideology whereby the English language represents the norm and to a certain extent what is correct. This ideology also devalues other languages. The example of the Scottish Gaelic language highlights the dichotomy between the dominant language which is rich, precise and rational and the minority languages which are regarded as poor and inadequate. This legitimization of English as a dominant language is known as anglocentricity which is defined as judging other cultures and languages by the English culture's world view (Phillipson, 1992, pp. 47-48). But this power relationship in terms of defining linguistic correctness can also occur within the same language where language varieties compete with each other. This is the case in Irish, for instance, where 'Dublin Irish' or 'New Irish' spoken in the English-speaking areas may be perceived by Irish native speakers as a language variety coming from a long-anglicised area that determines what is correct and what is incorrect in Irish (Hindley, 1990, p. 205). Also, Kabel (2000) refers to the gap that exists between native speakers and language enthusiasts—defined here as second language learners—as the latter group tend to use Irish archaic words and neologisms unknown to the native speaker. By contrast, native speakers' use of Irish is pragmatic, which includes borrowing from the English language.

Standardisation may be seen as a way to bridge differences and enable the members of a community to communicate easily (White, 2006). However, standardisation is controlled by an elite and the imposition of norms on a language usually results in disagreement or resistance from the users of the other language varieties:

*The main reason for reaction is that the elaboration of an orthography implies the choice and standardization of one dialect over the others. And when a variety, through its officialization, is given the status of a standard, the users of the other varieties sometimes react with a surprising virulence because they feel that their language variety and its speakers are denied representation. (Schieffelin & Charlier Doucet, 1998, p. 306)*

In the case of Irish, the dialectal diversity was kept after the establishment of the Irish State until the 1940s. Standardisation occurred in different stages starting with orthography in 1945, followed by the publication of a standard grammatical guide in 1953 and of an English-Irish dictionary in 1959 (Ní Chartúir, 2002). Although the three major dialects Munster, Connacht and Ulster were preserved, a standard version was necessary to give Irish an official status, that is to say a basis for governmental and educational purposes as well as for all sorts of publication (literary, governmental, journalistic, etc.,). The standard language was highly influenced by Munster Irish, which was contested by Irish speakers who defended their own dialects (Purdon, 1999).

Language used by the media can be another manifestation of standard language ideology. The radio, for example, by using the spoken word sets up models of verbal interaction (Spitulnik, 1998). New technologies such as the Internet have also been affected by standardisation, for example through the codification of characters including all graphical systems in the world such as are present in the Chinese language or even Egyptian hieroglyphics (Maurais, 2003).

The ideologies of monolingualism and standardisation are the legacy of a ruling class that were implemented in homes and in territories at the time of colonisation. Although most of the colonised countries worldwide have gained independence they are still today under the influence of colonialist language ideologies. The imposition of English or similar high-status languages in colonies as a way to assert power and control over all aspects of economic life has been defined as linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992). Linguistic imperialism and more specifically, English linguistic imperialism, is a type of linguicism. Linguicism is defined as “ideologies, structures, and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language” (ibid., p. 47). Linguicism may consist of ignoring speakers of a minority language when speaking their mother tongue or stigmatising the minority language. The second practice, for instance, has been widely used in school where children speaking their mother tongue were disciplined as only the use of the dominant language was

allowed (Smolicz, 1981; Baker, 1992; Kelly, 2002). This is the case in nineteenth-century Ireland when children were punished by teachers and parents when caught speaking Irish during school hours. This method of punishment also resulted in the language being discredited among the younger generation (Kelly, 2002, p. 4). This practice may therefore have detrimental consequences on self-confidence among speakers of a minority language (Dorian, 1998; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002). Paugh (2005) points out in her study on language ideologies that Patwa speakers in Dominica, West Indies express feelings of shame on the one hand and pride on the other hand towards Patwa, a French-based Creole language. These two contradictory feelings are the result of the enforcement of the English culture and language on the island inhabitants together with its overwhelming language ideology that views the Creole language as an inferior language:

*they strongly reflect the negative attitudes accorded Patwa since colonial times. Villagers claim that Patwa has "held them back," hindering their personal and community development. Some call it "broken French," and others doubt that it is a "real" language at all. (Paugh, 2005, pp. 1810-1811)*

Therefore most of the time Patwa speakers address their children in English—the official language—so as to give them the chance to get more opportunities in their adult life, such as higher level education, a good career, etc. However, Patwa is still the community language in many villages and people feel it is more appropriate for personal interactions. Patwa is for them more intimate and more meaningful than English. Therefore, these ideologies “associate English with education, politeness, accommodation, formality, and 'the outside', and Patwa with individual will, autonomy, informality, and community” (ibid. p. 1813). The Patwa example in Dominica, West Indies is reminiscent of the situation of the Irish language in the nineteenth century when English was the language of education and of Irish economic life. Irish-speaking families started to use the English language with their children as it was perceived as the language of social mobility (see Hindley, 1990). The strong support expressed by minority communities towards a language that is not theirs can sometimes be explained on pragmatism and efficiency driven grounds. This is the case for English in former colonies where the natives accept English as the language of government, economy, education, etc. However, Spolsky (2004) disagrees with Phillipson’s (1992) argument that the spread of the English language was caused by linguistic imperialism. Rather, changes in the domains of economy, technology, politics, and the like are more likely to have happened along with local and individual language acquisition decisions.

Although notions of linguistic imperialism are frequently less found today there is still a strong belief that there are advantages to knowing the English language (Talbot et al., 2003). Morrison and Lui (2000) claim that the notion of linguistic capital is more appropriate when discussing contemporary situations of English domination than that of linguistic imperialism which refers to colonial times. The



concept of linguistic capital comes from Bourdieu's (1997) theory of cultural capital within the area of education. This theory relates to the advantages some children have in terms of cultural background and to positive dispositions such as the motivation to learn, positive attitudes to school, parental support, social advantage, and so on, which enhance their life opportunities. Cultural capital, unlike money, cannot be transmitted instantaneously (*ibid.*, p. 48). Its transmission relies on the time spent accumulating it.<sup>6</sup> Linguistic capital is similar in the sense that children who have linguistic capital, that is to say fluency in a dominant language which possesses high status and is used by groups with social, political or economic power, are afforded better opportunities in life (Morrison & Lui, 2000).

The situation in Singapore exemplifies how the English language has been established as a language of power (Phillipson, 1992). English is one of the official languages in Singapore although it is not the national language. Yet, it is promoted as a supra-ethnic language of integration (*ibid.*, p.29). Knowledge of the English language and proficiency in English has enabled the Singaporean elite to participate in the world economy. Thus the English language provides access to cultural and economic capital.

The unequal relation of power between the English language and other languages is not, however, a stable relation. The current English-medium education system in Hong Kong which reproduces somewhat the elite education of colonial times may be challenged by the increase in the popularity of Chinese-medium education (Morrison & Lui, 2000). Although the English language is still essential in domains like science, economics and business, English linguistic capital may lose some, but not all of its value—for economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 54)—over the Chinese language.

Dominant languages such as English can however be considered 'neutral' in countries where more than a hundred languages compete for national status (Halliday et al., 1968). The Indonesian case appears to be an exception to the general trend of former colonies adopting the dominant colonial language as the official language. But the Indonesian success story is “self-deceiving” as the new version of the Indonesian language, although it departs from the colonial Malay language, is another standard language assumed by a national elite (Errington, 1998, p. 281). “Assimilated into and subordinated to the institutions and ideology of the nation-state, exemplary language becomes an object in and for a standard, public culture” (*ibid.* p. 279). Indonesian language ideology therefore promotes homogeneity across the country mainly through formal education, superimposing the

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<sup>6</sup> “it is because the cultural capital that is effectively transmitted within the family itself depends not only on the quantity of cultural capital, itself accumulated by spending time, that the domestic group possess, but also on the usable time (particularly in the form of the mother's free time) available to it (by virtue of its economic capital, which enables it to purchase the time of others) to ensure the transmission of this capital and to delay entry into the labor market through prolonged schooling, a credit which pays off, if at all, only in the very long term.” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 54).

Indonesian language on diverse linguistic communities. The superimposition of certain languages on others usually engenders homogeneity and endangers linguistic diversity with the disappearance of some language varieties, dialects or even languages. This phenomenon is reminiscent of globalisation in that it enhances homogeneity.

Globalisation conveys an ideology of uniformity whereby cultures influence each other and become more alike (Arnett, 2002, p. 774). This is true in different domains such as production and marketing, culture (e.g. American pop-culture), or even languages. Mar-Molinero (2006) defines globalisation as a form of linguistic imperialism but with wider social, political and economic processes. Globalisation is “a term which can refer to anything from the Internet to a hamburger. All too often, it is a polite euphemism for the continuing Americanisation of consumer tastes and cultural practices.” (Strange, 1996, Preface, p. xiii). Globalisation mostly refers to the spread of Anglo-Saxon influence (O' Sullivan, 2006). Although it is not a new phenomenon, its process has been accelerated in the past few decades because of advances in telecommunications and the increased worldwide interdependence of markets, economies, societies and political systems (Arnett, 2002; O' Sullivan, 2006). Anderson (1994) explains that print-capitalism created languages of power as many nations have national print languages in common such as English in Britain, Australia, the United States and the like or Spanish in South American countries. As globalisation is facilitated by new technologies such as the Internet, it extends new powers of influence for certain languages. This is true for the languages of technologically advanced countries such as English, Spanish and French. However, these technologies are also a powerful tool for speakers of endangered languages as they can be used to maintain contact between the scattered members of the same linguistic community (Kibbee, 2003).

Globalisation therefore reflects imbalances between languages: “globalisation promotes the increasing power of various languages that are already established as the languages of wider communication, whether in a single country or in the world” (Myers-Scotton, 2006, p. 136). The expansion of some languages can therefore engender the disappearance of others. The extinction of languages is not due to linguistic causes but is the result of a balance of forces (Maurais, 2003). According to one study (Gribbon, 1997 cited in Chaudenson, 2003) today's position of power is to change drastically by 2050 with new globalising languages emerging such as Chinese, Hindi and Arabic and other international languages such as French retreating. The case of French, for instance, has been addressed by Robert Chaudenson (2003). According to Chaudenson, the fate of French will be determined not in Europe where it cannot expand further but in Africa in the former French colonies. French is the official language in many African countries, however demand for French supply is limited to the educational system which excludes 60-70% of the school age population (ibid., p. 296). If French

language domination in Africa is not reinforced effectively in order to spread among the populations it may lose its position of power.

The relations between a dominant group and a minority group is in fact about how a group in power imposes its values. These relations determined by power are also known as symbolic domination (Myers-Scotton, 2006). Unless the people who speak a language have power and prestige their language might not enjoy prestige. These relations of power go even further as the people whose language is associated with low-prestige may shift to a more socially favoured language (Dorian, 1998). Different social values are linked to different languages: some languages are seen as more suited for science for example while others appear more suitable for cultural expression, and some can represent several ethnic groups while others cannot (Spitulnik, 1998). This implies a hierarchical ranking of the languages. Spitulnik (1998) shows that broadcasting in Zambia reproduces key language ideologies according to which English is a prestigious language and as the official language of Zambia represents the Zambian people. These ideologies are reflected in the national language policy that allows mass media to use eight languages out of twenty existing languages in Zambia. However, each language is attributed a different status through the division of airtime, which corresponds to actual social divisions. English is extensively promoted as it is given a larger share of airtime. Spitulnik sees this practice as antithetical as it rationalises a sociolinguistic hierarchy while trying to promote an ideology of ethnolinguistic egalitarianism. Although diversity is encouraged on the radio, through the use of eight different languages, the emphasis put on the English language and the time granted to English result in “muted pluralism” (ibid., p. 182).

Relations of power between languages are also present in institutions such as schools. Heller (1995), for example, focused on the symbolic domination that exists in the English-speaking province of Ontario, Canada between the English and French languages. Although French immersion schools are now thriving in Ontario there was a time when French as a language of instruction was banned from the schools. However, the ban was overridden and community French-medium schools were established in the early twentieth century. These schools were then a symbol of resistance to Anglophone domination. Although the situation has now changed following the recognition of French as the second official language of Canada in 1969 there is still an imbalance of power relations between the two languages. French immersion schools are now promoted by the government and attract many English-speaking students. But in order to produce competent bilinguals, the main language ideology of these schools is one of monolingualism, which puts French at an advantage. The emphasis is put on the French language as most students are English speakers, in a dominantly English-speaking country. However, teachers are faced with challenges in the classroom on a day-to-day basis

which include code-switching<sup>7</sup> and preference for conversing in English or in other languages for non-Canadian nationals. This consequently makes it difficult to implement a monolingual curriculum. Another form of symbolic domination can also be observed between the varieties of the French language. The institutional French variety used in these schools—referred to as standard French—in reality better suits students with a higher education and socio-economic position. Standard French as the norm allows social mobility and denigrates the Canadian French vernacular. This domination can be seen through the provision of two class levels, a general level and an advanced level for those with a better command of standard French, which usually includes middle-class students. French immersion schools in Ontario therefore reflect relations of power on two levels: between majority English speakers and minority French speakers and between French speakers using different French varieties (Heller, 1995).

The impact dominant languages have on other languages can be detrimental to communities. Some communities have suffered from an ideology of contempt for such a long period of time that they subsequently have social and psychological self-confidence issues. This makes it very difficult to reaffirm the importance of their own language in situations where linguistic diversity is now encouraged (Dorian, 1998). The ideology of contempt and humiliation towards Breton, for instance, was present in the schools in the first half of the twentieth century which created a feeling of shame among Breton speakers towards their language. This often led parents to abandon the transmission of Breton to their children (Lellouche, 2000). Skutnabb-Kangas (2002, pp. 49-51) speaks for example of “mental harm” caused by forced assimilation of minority groups to a dominant language in the context of education. Although language death (Hindley, 1990) has been associated with Celtic languages such as Irish after centuries of British domination, Barré (2007) explains that the first objective of the British Crown was the annexation and political subordination of Ireland, Wales and Scotland. Language and cultural assimilation occurred in Ireland, Wales, Scotland as well as Brittany mainly during the nineteenth century as nationalist ideologies in both Britain and France were oriented towards linguistic homogenisation. The education system was instrumental in the imposition of English culture in Ireland and Britain and French culture in Brittany and contributed to the decline of Irish, Welsh, Scottish Gaelic and Breton. However, Barré highlights that schools were not the sole medium of language assimilation and that a change in attitude occurred among the speakers of Celtic languages towards English and French which were the languages associated with social mobility.

Language assimilation effectively occurs in school and does not always appear to be oppressive. The United States is an example of a state requiring minority-language speakers to be educated in the

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7 “Code-switching refers to the mixing, by bilinguals (or multilinguals), of two or more languages in discourse, often with no change of interlocutor or topic” (Poplack, 2010, p. 15)

dominant language. However, the availability of learning support to help minority language children with cultural and linguistic difficulties encountered during their schooling is not always systematic (Snow & Hakuta, 1992; May, 2001). Their aim is to foster the use of the English language as a national language. The ideology of “English Only”<sup>8</sup> promoted in the United States is justified in terms of unity of one people (Senator Huddleston, 1992) and national identity. This ideology is driven by the belief that the USA has always been a monolingual English-speaking country (May, 2001), and it is commonly perceived as being threatened by multilingualism (Hakuta, 1986; Fillmore, 1992; Fishman, 2004), especially by those who hold power (Talbot et al., 2003). As a result bilingual education is not recognised for its merits and is strongly criticised. Furthermore, it is assumed that English is the language that leads to social mobility (May, 2001).

Although English is indisputably a globally dominant language (Spolsky, 2004)—as observed throughout this section—it is nonetheless resisted by other languages. Hamel (2003) refers, for example, to the regional alliance against English hegemony that is in place in South America. This form of resistance has been organised under Mercosur the socio-economic alliance bringing together Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. This partnership has made Spanish and Portuguese the official languages without endangering the various existing indigenous languages which still play an important role in local communication, education and identity planning. Both Spanish and Portuguese are sufficiently strong languages to resist the international hegemony of English in domains such as international relations, trade, science and technology. What is more, their relationship seems to encourage multilingualism.

Another form of support for multilingualism is present within the European Union where a shift in language ideology has occurred in the past few decades from the national-language ideology to the protection of regional languages with the right for all nations to use their own language (Dorian, 1998). The importance of linguistic diversity as part of Europe's heritage, the value of multilingualism and the protection of autochthonous minority language rights were addressed in the 1992 European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. It should be noted, however, that only 16 out of the 27 member states of the European Union have ratified the treaty while three others have signed it but never ratified it. Ireland is among the eight member states that never signed the treaty.<sup>9</sup> Respect for linguistic diversity within the European Union was also acknowledged in article 22 of the 2000 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Furthermore, various projects and initiatives have since

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8 In the 1980s new laws and state constitutional amendments were enacted against the use of languages other than English (Fishman, 2004, p.414). These initiatives impacted tremendously on language minorities (Peréa & García, 2008). See (May, 2001, pp. 204-224) and (Peréa & García, 2008, pp. 224-225) for a detailed review of the “English Only” movement.

9 <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/ChercheSig.asp?CL=FRE&CM=&NT=148&DF=&VL=>

received funding from the European Union to protect and promote minority languages. Numerous documents on multilingualism have been published while the European language policy encourages the acquisition of a second language.<sup>10</sup>

The role of ideology in contexts of multilingualism can in fact contribute to language maintenance. This was observed among the Arizona Tewa community (Kroskrity, 1998) who despite migrating more than 300 years ago to a Pueblo hosted by the Hopi, another Native American tribe, maintained their Kiva language in their cultural life. Not only did they maintain Kiva speech for religious ceremonies but they also imposed it on other Pueblos as the model of ceremonial speech. This achievement is due to the resistance to linguistic borrowing among ceremonial leaders from both the English and the Hopi languages that are spoken in the community. Although this language ideology has been qualified as 'linguistic conservatism' it is similar to other ideologies that give any standard language prestige through use in government and formal education.

Some Western language ideologies, such as the European Community ideology, have recently changed focus as they have started to work in favour of minority languages (Dorian, 1998, p. 19). These ideologies have developed within the European Union but also in Australia where multilingualism is now promoted (Smolicz, 2002). Monolingual and mono-ethnic assumptions in some countries can cause conflicts as minority communities cannot express their identity and core values in a free manner. There are only a few pure instances of nation-states where the whole population of a state belongs to a single ethnic group (Smith, 2010). A state usually harbours more than one language but does not necessarily officially recognise the rights of minorities to their cultural heritage. Australia with its many immigrants and aboriginal peoples has declared in favour of a multilingual population. It has been going through a radical change since the 1970s from a European type monolingual nation-state attitude to a multicultural society where the value of minority languages is recognised by the Australian nation and where English-speaking Australians are encouraged to learn a second language (Guy, 1992; Smolicz, 2002). However, earlier European language ideologies still have a strong hold in the US and other European-settled countries, which makes it challenging for small indigenous languages to survive (Dorian, 1998, 2004).

This section has highlighted the relations of power that exist between languages through the various ideologies of monolingualism, standardisation, linguistic imperialism and the phenomenon of globalisation. Although certain languages exert a form of domination over others which sometimes precipitate the disappearance of some languages (Dorian, 1998), resistance to this linguistic domination has also been observed (Kroskrity, 1998; Hamel, 2003). Languages are more than a means of communication and linguistic communities associate other values with their language. As the next

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<sup>10</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/languages-of-europe/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/languages-of-europe/index_en.htm)

section will show, language, as a distinct entity is an important component of a group's identity (Wardhaugh, 1987) and is a key element in national identity.

### **1.3 Language and identity**

*Identity is a catch-all term of our times. It is an empty vessel which can be filled with almost any content. (MacClancy, 1993, p. 84)*

The association between language and identity is well established in research on the sociology of language (Fishman, 1999). However, the key role language plays in defining a group's identity has been contested. As research has moved away from an essentialist approach to ethnic identity there has been recognition of the coexistence of several identities, according to which, members of an ethnic group view differently certain attributes, such as language, as the core value of their group identity (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985; Mahmood & Armstrong, 1992; Moffat, 2008). In effect, Omoniyi criticises essentialism as "the philosophy behind labelling any number of normative characteristics or practices as constituting the core of an individual or group which are then used to define them and held to be true of all members of the group" (2006, p. 16). It considers identity as rigidly fixed, immutable and does not recognise hybridity such as bilingualism.

This section examines the various approaches to the question of language and ethnicity looking at both ethnic group identity and national identity. It first gives some elements of definition to the terms ethnic identity and ethnicity. It then moves on to the issue of multiple identities and how ethnic identity can differ for individuals. Finally, it examines the importance of language as an identity marker with special references to the Irish language.



### 1.3.1 Definition of ethnicity and ethnic identity

Ethnicity refers to a group of people who have properties in common (Bourdieu, 1991; Connor, 1994b; Edwards, 1994) that is to say of people who share a common history and the same culture:

*Ethnicity is primordial, part of one's descent and one shares one's descent with others and may rightly seek to unite with those others. The ethnic group itself not only has a sense of its historical continuity, but it also has traditions, beliefs, and practices which have been handed down. (Wardhaugh, 1987, p. 45)*

According to Smolicz (1981), what are referred to as core values<sup>11</sup> are among the most fundamental components of a group's culture as they symbolise the groups' ethnic cultural identity. Social groups can be identified as separate religious, ethnic, or other cultural communities according to core values. "Core values may be defined in terms of the social system whose members identify with them; and, conversely, a social system may be defined in terms of core values to which its members subscribe" (Smolicz, 1981, p. 112). Furthermore, language is considered an important core value. Wardhaugh also specifies that "among [ethnic characteristics] none is usually more important than the language of the group" as it is very distinct and can easily be identified (Wardhaugh, 1987, p. 45).

Linguistic, religious, racial, geographical, historical and cultural characteristics are all part of objective ethnic attributes and together with subjective attributes which include group members' feelings about identity, a sense of peoplehood, and shared interests, they form the basis for ethnic identification (Wardhaugh, 1987; Edwards, 1994). Smith (1981) also refers to distinctive characteristics such as language, religion, colour, territory and customs, but insists on the sense of common origins and history of the group as the basis for a group's identity:

*For an ethnic community to exist, there must be some common and distinctive cultural attributes and ties, traceable ultimately to the fact of a separate group history and origins. The cultural ties may be more lively than the sense of the history at a given point in time, and much of the history will have to be rediscovered, even 'invented'; but without some real historical foundation and without a sense of those common origins and history, however garbled and 'mythical', no ethnic community can subsist. (Smith, 1981, p. 67)*

Although ethnicity can be viewed as an involuntary state where members of a group share a common culture (Edwards, 1994), not all the characteristics of an ethnic group are necessarily immutable and can change over time (Wardhaugh, 1987). As Smith (1981) points out, ethnicity may persist across generations after links with other generations have disappeared. Likewise, Edwards

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<sup>11</sup> The concept of core value was proposed by Smolicz and his fellow researcher Secombe while doing research in Australia at the end of the 1970s.

(1994) sees ethnic groups as dynamic entities in the sense that their culture may undergo changes, however, there must be a real link for this sense of groupness, so to speak, to persist. In discussing change in the curriculum in Irish primary schools as an attempt to recognise cultural and ethnic diversity in Ireland brought about by recent immigration (from Poland, Nigeria, China, etc.), Waldron (2004) explains that shared meanings and traditions should not be neglected as they form the historical roots of Irish identity. As a matter of fact, they are linked to the historic conception of Ireland (Ó Croidheáin, 2006; Smith, 2010).

It is therefore the combination of objective and subjective ethnic attributes, of immutable and mutable characteristics that allows ethnic groups to persist. Barth explains that groups' characteristics or "cultural contents" (1969, p. 14) do not simply originate from a list of objective cultural features that highlight differences with other groups. Only features that members regard as significant and relevant to their group are emphasised as characteristics of their group identity and these can change over time. Therefore, the focus is more on how the group distinguishes itself from other groups rather than on its cultural characteristics: "ethnic groups are best defined by patterns of boundary-maintaining behaviour" (Wardhaugh, 1987, p. 45). Alterity is therefore paramount in defining identity.

Despite modifications in a groups' culture with the passing of time, the continuity of the group as a unit rests on the continued existence of group boundaries (Barth, 1969; Edwards, 1994). The idea that ethnic boundaries are defined in opposition to outside groups has been supported in theoretical literature (Barth, 1969; Bourdieu, 1991). When considering boundary maintenance, one approach acknowledges that groups constantly search for power. To achieve this goal they must unite with individuals who share the same values against others whom they see as different (Wardhaugh, 1987). This approach can be applied to the Basque nationalist discourse according to which you are not born Basque but you can become Basque by uniting with the Basque people, sharing the Basque language and culture and supporting independence for the Basque nation (MacClancy, 1993).

Bowie (1993) points out that "identity is seen as problematic, it needs to be fought for and over, talked about and defended, defined and rejected" (p.170). She explains for instance that Welsh identity was constructed in opposition to English identity. To this aim, the creation of Welsh identity occurred using historical myths, literature, religion and most importantly the Welsh language. This is in line with Wardhaugh's (1987) definition of ethnicity which similarly acknowledges that historical characteristics are an ideological creation, a myth that members have about their ancestry (Wardhaugh, 1987; Smith, 1981, 2010). After Independence in Ireland, the emphasis was put on the historical significance of the Irish language to build the new Irish identity which Kelly describes as "an imaginary early Irish Utopia" (2002, p. 15). This ideal past can then be used to create and legitimise ethnic identity. This can be related to Bourdieu's theory (1991) according to which criteria of ethnic

identities are not objective per se but are the objects of mental representations as well as strategies of symbolic manipulation which once imposed on a group establish meaning and a consensus about the identity and unity of the group.

It should be noted that an ethnic group is not necessarily a minority group (Wardhaugh, 1987; Connor, 1994b; Edwards, 1994). Connor (1994) criticises American sociologists who define ethnicity as a subgroup as it makes it synonymous with minority. An ethnic group may be the dominant element within a state. Although nation and state do not always coincide, it should be pointed out that the main difference between ethnicity and nationalism is one of scale. Nationalism can be viewed as having the same characteristics as ethnicity to which a political dimension has been added which is the idea of a national self-government (Edwards, 1994, p. 129). Once a nation-state has been created and nationalism institutionalised, one can speak of national identity. O' Mahony and Delanty (1998) and Suleiman (2003) refer to national identity as a set of values and beliefs that can be divided into two discourses. The first one, national cultural identity, refers to cultural and social values and practices that define a sense of collective belonging to a group, whereas the second one, national political identity, focuses more on the establishment of a common state, political practice and the decision of who can become a member of the group as a citizen. It should be noted, however, that other identities co-exist with national identities such as class identities, regional identities, and so on, and that group membership can be multiple (Fishman, 1999).

### 1.3.2 Multiple identities

It is recognised that individuals—and by extension groups of individuals—have multiple identities (Goffman, 1969). Mahmood and Armstrong (1992) have shown, for instance, how people from the same village in the Netherlands can see themselves as being both Frisian and Dutch. Although some respondents to the attitude survey said they were primarily Frisian, others indicated they were first Dutch, second Frisian while a minority declared themselves as just Dutch. Similarly, Mac Gréil and Rhatigan (2009) studied the complex question of ethnic self-identity in Ireland between the various categories being Irish, being from a particular Irish county, being British and being European. They observed that the affiliation of Irish people with the Irish national identity was stronger than with their local identity or the European identity. According to Mac Gréil and Rhatigan, the decline in local self-identity in contrast to national identity may come from a shift in social-class identity, with middle-class people expressing a broader national self-identity of Irish (2009, pp. 90-91). These two examples therefore illustrate the complexity of ethnicity and its multiple identities and emphasise the fluid characteristic of identity whereby people can move in and out of identity categories.

According to Goffman (1969), the phenomenon of multiple positioning and multiple selves allows an individual in the presence of others to act in a particular way that gives others an impression in his favour in a moment of identification. Omoniyi (2006) explains that the choice of an identity at a given moment is not done to the exclusion of others but is the result of a hierarchy of identities where the most important one in a particular situation is foregrounded: “one identity isn't simply chosen from an array of possibilities over the others which are discarded; there is on the contrary a cluster of co-present identities but with varying degrees of salience. The latter depends on the most preferred presentation of self in a given moment.” (Omoniyi, 2006, p. 20). When applied to sociolinguistics, Fishman speaks of a “repertoire of usages, sometimes speaking one way and sometimes another, in accord with what suits [the individual's] fluctuating purposes and intentions.” (1999, p. 153). Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985, p. 181) similarly point out that an individual will change linguistic behaviour to his/her advantage and choose to speak a certain language so that he/she can be identified with a certain group or so that he/she can distinguish himself/herself from a certain group. Giles and Johnson (1987) observed this behaviour among bilingual Welsh teenagers whose first language was Welsh and who attended a Welsh-medium school. It was found that where language is a salient element of ethnic group identity and is perceived as having high vitality Welsh is likely to be used as the in-group language. In contrast, those who identify less strongly with the ethnic group and perceive its vitality to be low may perceive the group norm differently as they may see the language as dying or dead. It was

observed that the teenagers belonging to the second group used the English language among themselves.

The existence of different levels of identities can have consequences for the nature of ethnic relations but also for minority language revitalisation efforts. The example of multiple identities in the Autonomous Communities of Spain highlights this issue (Montaruli et al., 2011).<sup>12</sup> Following the fall of Franco's regime under which national identity was the only legitimised identity, regional cultures and languages re-emerged and brought about the expression of various identities. Montaruli and her fellow researchers distinguish three main groups of ethnic identities within the five Autonomous Communities of Spain under scrutiny. The first group includes polarised Spanish-Autonomous Community identities in which language use is seen as a function of ethnolinguistic identification. Strong Spanish identifiers are likely to be monolinguals whereas strong Autonomous identifiers are likely to transmit their language to their family and therefore participate actively in the language revival. The second group refers to individuals with a strong dual identity. As previously mentioned, identity saliency depends on the social context (Omoniyi, 2006). The last group includes individuals who have chosen an alternative identity by showing a preference for one identity over the other without rejecting either of the two identities. Whereas the relationship between strong-Spanish and strong-Autonomous identifiers may be conflicting, moderate dual identifiers do not appear to take sides and therefore are more likely to foster harmonious relations in these bilingual regions, "to promot[e] favourable intercultural relations, more permeable ethnolinguistic boundaries and mutual acceptance" (Montaruli et al., 2011, p. 116). However, this moderate dual identification may only be a transition to a stronger dual identification.

As the Spanish case demonstrates it is difficult to define national identity. In effect, there exist different models of national identity within the same nation. As Mahmood and Armstrong show (1992, p. 8), members of an ethnic group share most, but not all, characteristics, as certain traits may not be considered of equal importance in people's minds. In the case of Frisian identity in the Netherlands, it was agreed among respondents that the Frisian language was a dominant feature of the Frisian identity. However, not all respondents spoke the language despite their ideological commitment to it. This is very similar to the Irish case as the result analysis of the current study will show. Ethnic affiliation is not clear cut, rather it is represented in classical anthropology by a series of circle with widening levels of inclusion and exclusion. Mahmood and Armstrong (1992) indicate that in the case of the Frisian identity individuals affiliated to this specific ethnic group may have different features from one another. For example, an individual could live in a typically Frisian house and speak the Frisian

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<sup>12</sup> The Basque Country, Catalonia, Galicia, Navarre and Valencia are five of the existing seven communities that were represented in the study (Montaruli et al., 2011).

language whereas another individual may participate in Frisian sports but not necessarily share the other two traits mentioned above. In addition, some features may appear to inhabit a fuzzy area between being Frisian and being Dutch, yet the individual may feel an affiliation with Frisian identity. It therefore seems difficult to define a group's identity according to a list of features they have in common. Bowie (1993, p. 190) also points out the conflicting descriptions of what it means to be Welsh. For Welsh speakers living in Welsh-speaking areas being Welsh means speaking the Welsh language. However, non-Welsh speakers who consider themselves Welsh cannot accept this definition of Welsh national identity.

Although there is no inevitable association between language and ethnicity, language remains a significant feature of ethnic or national identity (May, 2001). As Safran (1999, p. 91) puts it, “the sentiment of belonging to an ethnonational community is not necessarily connected with a language, although a specific language may be considered part of the cultural heritage of that community.” In this case, Safran distinguishes different views which members of the same 'ethnonational' community may have regarding a specific language as an identity marker: those who have an instrumental view of the language and decide to learn it in order to reaffirm their identity, those who have an expressive view of the language and are supportive of its 'officialisation' and promotion at a national level and those who are indifferent to the language and simply regard it as one of many other identity markers.

Whether the language is regarded as a marker of national identity or not depends on the strategies the nationalist elites used to build the nation (Suleiman, 2006, p. 57). White (2006) explains that after independence in 1921 the nation building of the Republic of Ireland focused on the Irish language as a way to look for authenticity and to define itself as not English. However, because Ireland has been part of the global economy since the 1960s the Irish variety of the English language seems to have had a more important role in linking Irish people's local identity to the global identity than the Irish language. White (2006, pp. 228-229) argues that because Irish people tend to be loyal to their regional variety of the English language which she refers to as Irish English, this variety of the English language is therefore more adequate and more appropriate to express Irish national identity today. Safran (1999, p. 90) also points out that in the context of globalisation the English language has become so universal that various nationalisms could comfortably be expressed in it. Although the Irish language has been described as a strong marker of identity (e.g. Tovey, Hannan & Abramson, 1989) its low usage in both the private and public spheres raises the question of the suitability of the language to express Irish identity as a societal collective identity. Census figures show that in 2011, 77,185 people said they spoke Irish on a daily basis outside the education system, which represents 1.8% of the population aged 3 and over (CSO, 2012, p.27). There were also 110,642 people (2.4%) who said they spoke the

language on a weekly basis outside education (ibid.). Nowadays, there is some evidence of an increased eclecticism among the Irish in terms of collective identity:

*A sense of fixity is no longer of the essence in forming identity and a sense of belonging need no longer be rooted to a particular place. Increasingly, identities can be chosen or rejected. They can be customised to serve the interests of individuals as they see fit. (Corcoran & Share, 2008, p.7)*

The next section focuses on the debate on the importance of the Irish language as an identity marker.

### 1.3.3 Language as an identity marker

Language has been described as a very important core value that can play a central role within a community. Smolicz (1981) gives the example of the Polish language that became the most important core value of the Polish people during the nineteenth century. While dominant language neighbour countries (e.g. German empire) were trying to suppress the Polish language, forbidding its use by punishing children using their native tongue in school and by deporting parents caught secretly teaching Polish to children in their homes, Polish gradually became the symbol of their identity as a distinctive cultural group as well as a symbol of resistance.

*The attempts to extirpate the mother tongue and, through it, the culture as a whole, succeeded in this instance in elevating that language to a symbol for the survival of the group as a separate entity and for the preservation of its cultural heritage.*  
(Smolicz, 1981, p. 106)

This type of action is believed to occur in the presence of external pressures such as the threat of being assimilated by the culture and values of the majority (Smolicz, 1981; 2002). The case of Hebrew is another example of language as a core value although it was emphasised as a core value after the establishment of the state of Israel. Prior to the existence of Israel Jewish ethnicity was defined by other values such as religion. However, the preservation of their ethnicity brought about the re-emergence of a common tongue associated with the cultural Jewish community (Smolicz, 1981).

According to White (2006), language is an acceptable identity marker. Spolsky (1999) goes even further in regarding language as fundamental to defining identity—which explains why so many ethnic revivals are language-related: “language maintenance or revival is commonly a central component of an ethnic movement” (1999, p. 181). Language is therefore a distinctive marker of a group and a powerful symbol of national and ethnic identity (Edwards, 1994; Spolsky, 1999; Talbot et al., 2003). The link between language and national identity depends however on the role attributed to the language by the elites at the time when national identity is constructed (Suleiman, 2006; Ó Croidheáin, 2006). In the case of Ireland, the Irish language was instrumentalised at the end of the nineteenth century by an intellectual elite involving the Gaelic League. The League was created in 1893 to preserve the Irish language where it was spoken and to extend it to the rest of the population through the provision of Irish language classes (Ó Néill, 2005). Irish was presented as a key element in defining Irishness due to its ancestral origins and cultural heritage attached to it. Yet, the Irish language was never part of the Irish national movement before the foundation of the Gaelic League. It did not appear in the campaign for the Repeal of the Act of Union led by Irish political leader Daniel O’Connell, which opposed the fusion of the Parliaments of Ireland and of Great Britain. Nor was it mentioned in



the Fenian programme which was dedicated to the establishment of an independent Irish Republic during the nineteenth century (Hobsbawn, 1994, p. 181). By including Irish as an ethnic characteristic it was possible for the Irish to distinguish themselves from British influence, considered as the Other, and define themselves as a unique group.

The revival of a language, such as the revival of the Irish language, is the expression of the need to establish a new identity or reorient an existing identity (Edwards, 1994; Spolsky, 1996). These ethnic-based ideologies are typically led by an elite class and depend on the general public's attitudes. The revival of the Hebrew language in Israel is an example of success in terms of reasserting Hebrew identity. Spolsky (1996; 1999) explains that its successful revitalisation was due to two important factors. On the one hand the introduction of a low variety of Hebrew alongside the prestigious existing language variety within the school system and on the other hand a general commitment to the ideological significance to learning Hebrew. By contrast, Irish leaders failed to persuade the Irish population to achieve language shift after the Irish State was established (Wright, 1996; Ó Laoire, 1996). Ó Laoire highlights the difference between the Hebrew and Irish language revival movements. Irish families living outside the Gaeltacht had no previous knowledge and exposure to Irish. Unlike Hebrew families who were committed to the ideological intent of reviving Hebrew, they reacted negatively to the teaching of Irish in school. According to Ó Laoire, Irish families “had become alienated from the cultural nationalism model on which the revivalist premises were based” and that children were forced to learn Irish “in an ideological vacuum” (1996b, pp. 60-61).

In the case of Celtic languages such as Welsh and Irish, the importance of the language to a sense of ethnic identity has been called into question (Edwards, 1985; Wardhaugh, 1987; Bowie, 1993; Parsons, 1998), especially when compared with other factors, such as religion. Edwards (1985) gives the example of Ireland where its people did not lose their sense of ethnic identity despite losing their mother tongue. Wardhaugh (1987) explains that the Irish won their independence using the English language they had adopted. They subsequently developed a new Irish identity that did not require the Irish language to express what it was to be Irish. “While they spoke English, they were not English: they were Irish who just happened to speak that language as an accident of history.” (ibid., p. 93). The symbolic value that was given to Irish as a basis for Irish unity and national identity before independence (Ó Croidheáin, 2006) turned out to be a mere political weapon against the British Empire which would be of no use in Irish political life between two opposing Irish parties (Ó Huallacháin, 1994, p. 66). Today, Irish people seem to express their identity through the Irish varieties of the English language (Wardhaugh, 1987; White, 2006) as “most Irish feel no need of any kind for the [Irish] language and exist quite satisfactorily without it” (Wardhaugh, 1987, p. 94).

Language is a unique way for a group to connect with its ancestral heritage (Dorian, 1999, p. 39). What makes the Irish language so special in Ireland is the history that it transmits, expresses and symbolises which gives the Irish people a sense of historical unity (Smith, 1981). Although it is not a shared characteristic of Irish national identity in that Irish people are Irish whether or not they speak Irish, it has a symbolic value. In effect, it appears that a language that has lost its communicative role can remain a symbolic feature of ethnicity (Edwards, 1994; Moffatt, 2008). Although support for a language as a symbol of ethnic identity does not necessarily prevent language shift (Fishman, 1991; May 2001), it usually retains sentimental value and can contribute to the maintenance of group boundaries (Edwards, 1994, pp. 126; 128). O'Reilly (1999) discusses this sentimental value in one of the four language discourses that are present in the Republic of Ireland. The "cultural discourse" (ibid., pp. 150-151) emphasises the Irish language as culturally valuable as a unique language and as an integral part of the Irish heritage. This does not automatically translate into a desire to learn and speak the language fluently or to use it on a daily basis. This discourse explains people's interest in the Irish language, sometimes to the point of having their children learn Irish or learning it themselves as a hobby. It should be noted that this discourse is not politically influenced. It is also different from the "national discourse" that is present in the Republic of Ireland where efforts concentrate on developing a sense of national identity.<sup>13</sup>

Overall, people in Wales, Scotland and Ireland are in favour of the maintenance of Celtic languages although only a minority regard it as personally beneficial and useful to them (Williams, 1999, p. 283). Williams highlights the fact that for a majority of people the maintenance of their national identity does not depend on fluency in the national language. The national language in this case is more a marker of cultural identity. Findings in a small-scale study of secondary-school students in the Republic of Ireland<sup>14</sup> (Fitzpatrick, 1998) showed that respondents took great pride in their nationality; however, it did not include the Irish language as it was not perceived as useful in modern Irish society. In contrast, a minority of Irish people would regard Irish as a lost heritage that they would attempt to reclaim as something relevant to the present day in order to reaffirm their identity; something they would call "our own language" (O'Reilly, 1999, p. 174). But language as an identity marker becomes problematic when a large majority identifying with the ancestral language no longer speak that language (Dorian, 1998). The discrepancy between Scottish Gaelic speakers who think that being able

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13 O'Reilly also refers to the 'minority language discourse' which in a European context benefits the Irish language as it can avail of special protection and funding as well as to the contrasting 'dead language discourse' which questions the useful aspect of Irish (1999, pp. 152-154).

14 A total of 120 students took part in the study.

to speak the language is necessary to be a true Highlander<sup>15</sup> and Highlanders who do not speak Scottish Gaelic and who do not think it is necessary (Dorian, 1998, p. 20) is reminiscent of the Welsh national identity crisis (Bowie, 1993, p. 190; Parsons, 1998) which requires rethinking Welsh national identity. To try to summarise, the Welsh identity issue is even more complex as it goes beyond the Welsh-speaker/non Welsh-speaker dichotomy and questions the legitimacy of second language speakers as members of the Welsh ethnic group by first language speakers (Robert, 2009).<sup>16</sup> Negative attitudes towards the rising number of second language speakers could therefore be a deterrent to learning and using Welsh in what is officially a bilingual Wales and consequently put further distance between the Welsh language and Welsh identity.

Identities are, in fact, constantly under construction: “identity is not something which can actually be 'found' or mislaid, but it is rather the object of continuing invention and construction and is consequently the subject of an unending quest” (Parsons, 1998, p. 57). There is evidence that an ideological change has started to take place through the recognition of multiple identities in Ireland, which contrasts with the traditional concept of Irish identity as being culturally and religiously homogenous (Waldron, 2004). The emergence of a new Northern Irish identity is an example of the creation of a new identity which distinguishes itself from the British and Irish national identities and which is based on a geographical aspect rather than religious elements (Threw, 1998).

There is also a sense of continuous construction of identity in the Republic of Ireland as Waldron (2004) highlights the need to name, discuss and debate the emergent Irish identity that immigration has promoted in recent years as Ireland used to be homogeneous but has now to embrace cultural and ethnic differences (Waldron, 2004; Moriarty, 2005). “The new plurality brings with it tensions and concerns about identity and belonging” (Waldron, 2004, pp. 209-210). Similarly, Arrowsmith (2004) points out the emergence of a post-nationalist identity whereby Irishness is not defined in opposition to Britain any more but acknowledges the hybridity and diversity of the Irish diaspora as well as the diversity of immigrants attracted to Ireland. He gives the example of sports contrasting what the GAA stands for, that is to say an authentic and traditional Irish identity, and soccer that has transcended its association with Britain and has asserted Ireland as a nation on the international stage. Arrowsmith explains that soccer has produced a new version of Irishness that is more inclusive and cosmopolitan: “this kind of Irishness rejects old ideas of racial or cultural authenticity and celebrates inauthenticity as the natural condition of any nation” (ibid., p. 468). Clancy (2009) has also observed a change in the way Irish national identity is branded. National identity and national branding intersect: “in today's

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<sup>15</sup> Highlander in this context refers to inhabitants of the Scottish Highlands. This region was historically Scottish Gaelic-speaking. A few Scottish Gaelic-speaking areas still remain today in the North West of Scotland and form the stronghold of the language (Outer Hebrides).

<sup>16</sup> Similar issues exist for the Irish language. Native speakers do not necessarily accept second language learners as equals and insiders within their group (Kabel, 2000, p.136).

world of media and marketing bombardment, branding plays a significant role in constructing Irish national identity” (ibid., p. 136). Despite the fact that it retains some elements of a traditional Ireland as tourists would expect to see—empty countryside, friendly old-fashioned country folk, pub life—both branding and advertising acknowledge that Ireland has changed as a modern and developed country. The advertising videos realised by Discover Ireland which is operated by Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority responsible for supporting the tourism industry, combine traditional and modern features. Discover Ireland videos usually show the empty countryside in which people are seen to do family activities (hiking, cycling, etc.) or extreme sports (rock climbing, water sports, etc.), the old-fashioned country folk playing traditional Irish music in a pub while the video clip itself plays a modern pop rock song. O’Boyle (2008, p. 252) further refers to a new kind of essentialism to describe the emergence of past and present elements that articulate this rather new Irishness. Although it is challenging to define the concept of being Irish, it is clear that Irish national identity is ‘in flux’ (Clancy, 2009, p. 95). The mix of traditional and hybrid elements is therefore a way for Irish people to deal with the destabilisation of social identity and create a sense of belonging (Corcoran & Share, 2008, p. 4). While the Irish language was used as a difference marker between Irish identity and British identity, now it no longer represents a hard boundary (Moffatt, 2008, p. 112). Language is the main issue fuelling nationalist movements wherein language and linguistic culture are perceived as ways to define boundaries and bind populations into homogenous nations: “one of nationalism’s abiding myths is the identification of nationality with language” (Smith, 1981, p. 45).

Although the Irish language never replaced the English language, Irish does have a role as an identity marker as it is the first official language of Ireland and its presence as a mandatory subject in the curriculum reinforces the association between the Irish language and Irish identity (Moffatt, 2008, p. 114). However, the consideration of Irish as an essential attribute to Irish identity is highly contested. Despite Irish being accepted as a badge of national identity, most Irish people seem satisfied with this tokenism and do not seek any further functional or instrumental use of the language in their daily life (Hindley, 1990, p. 163). Although there is some evidence suggesting that the relationship between the Irish language and national ethnic identity is weakening (Ó Riagáin, 2007) various surveys and studies (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994; Edwards, 1994; Moffatt, 2008; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009) have indicated that Irish people strongly agree that the Irish language is a symbol of Irish identity.

But this response changes when Irish people consider the role of Irish at a personal level. A study conducted in four secondary schools in Dublin<sup>17</sup> (Moffatt, 2008) showed that students believed that Irish as a marker of identity was important to others rather than to them personally. It therefore

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17 The total population sample was 352.

implies that there are multiple ways to define Irishness and that some identity symbols may not be relevant to everybody: “[Irish] is a floating symbol 'out there' which has little impact on how [young people] go about constructing an Irish identity for themselves” (ibid., p. 109). This shows that Irish identity is an ongoing construction (Parsons, 1998; Clancy, 2009) and that ethnic identity can be established separately from language identity (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985). For Moffatt (2008, p. 115), it is not possible for Irish to operate as a hard boundary of Irish identity, rather it is a porous boundary.

The usefulness of Irish has, for example, been questioned by young people (Fitzpatrick, 1998, Ní Riain, 2003; Moffatt, 2008) as it is threatened by a utilitarian attitude which manifests itself in the preference for English as a global language with economic advantages. O'Sullivan (2006) explains, however, that Ireland, unlike other European countries, is not concerned about the negative impact globalisation may have on national identity and cultural identity through the export of Anglo-Saxon culture. Ireland's historical exposure to British influence for centuries—from which it never totally became independent—left “a heavy Anglo-Saxon footprint on cultural and social life” (ibid., p. 43). Nonetheless, Ireland distinguishes itself from Britain. Certain elements of Irishness, Irish language included, have remained salient despite the Anglo-Saxon influence. The emphasis on markers that are unique to the nation actually makes the creation of a local identity to counter globalisation possible.

*Ethnic, religious, and national identities have become more salient and explicit (...) as a direct and conscious counter response to the homogenizing force of globalization. (...) Thus aspects of identity that may have been assimilated without reflection in previous generations have become consciously self-selected as the pressure of globalization has grown. (Arnett, 2002, p. 780)*

The expressed nostalgia and the resurgent nationalism found in some Irish advertising can be interpreted as a sort of defensive reaction against globalisation (O'Boyle, 2008). Because of the impact globalisation has on traditional ways it is more important to preserve or create a viable identity than before. Identity now seems to be based more on individual choices than on prescribed social roles (Arnett, 2002, p. 781).

Individual choices in the context of education which have led for instance to the opening of immersion schools in Ireland, Scotland, Brittany, and the like, can result from a need to reinforce one's identity. Maguire (1991) shows that parents' choice to send their child to an Irish-medium primary school in Belfast was motivated by identity reasons as Irish represented a sense of belonging to the Irish nation and distinguished itself from Britishness. “The shift towards bilingualism constitutes a conscious attempt to reinforce one's sense of identity” (ibid., p. 99). Ó Laoire (1996a, p. 62) also indicates that the Irish language could play a large part in national identity and culture in the Republic of Ireland in the current bilingual context, especially among young people as Irish is already going

through a positive revival. Similarly, bilingual education in Wales enhances a sense of national pride, among both Welsh-speaking and non-Welsh-speaking families (Williams, 1999). These examples tend to indicate that in a bilingual context, language ideology within the education sector can impact on the sense of belonging and national identity.

It has been demonstrated throughout this section that individual, group and national identities are multiple. It is understood that members of an ethnic group share many—though not all—characteristics, as certain traits may not be considered of equal importance in people's minds (Mahmood & Armstrong, 1992). One of the most common characteristics of an ethnic group identity is its language, although the role of language as a strong identity marker has been contested. This is true in the case of the Irish language in the Republic of Ireland. Even though the Irish language was replaced by a variety of English referred to as Irish English (White, 2006), the ancestral language has remained a strong symbol of ethnic identity (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994; Edwards, 1994; Moffatt, 2008; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009). Today, only a minority associate the concept of being Irish with speaking Irish against a majority who think Irish is not important to them personally but is part of Irish cultural identity (O'Reilly, 1999). Yet, Irish is still important as it is present in government institutions and most significantly in the schools.

One particular type of school in Ireland called the *gaelscoileanna*, which is an immersion school system, fosters the use of the Irish language as a community language and has become popular among English-speaking families. This type of school is part of a broader system of education promoting bilingualism.<sup>18</sup> Immersion schools are of interest here as they are part of the fieldwork of the current study. Furthermore, they are considered in the next section of this chapter, together with bilingual schools, as they play a significant role in facilitating the diffusion of language ideologies in the context of language revival and language maintenance (Fishman, 1991; May, 2001).

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18 Although Irish-medium schools in Ireland practise immersion education they are considered part of a larger system of bilingual education in the literature (Genesee, 1987, 2004; Fishman, 1991, 2004; Cummins, 1997; Baker, 2001; O. García, 2009).

#### **1.4 Bilingualism and bilingual education**

The unequal relation that exists between languages—which was discussed in the first section of this chapter—engenders the need for protection for minority languages if the latter are not to be supplanted by the dominant language. Language policy proposed by governments in order to achieve language maintenance commonly includes the provision of bilingual education (May, 2001).

Although Irish-medium schools in Ireland practise full immersion (i.e. the use of Irish as the sole medium of instruction) they are treated in the literature as a variety of bilingual education (Genesee, 1987, 2004; Baker, 2001; O. García, 2009). While Section 1.5 examines the Irish immersion system in detail this section focuses on the promotion of bilingualism through various types of education. As the name bilingual education suggests, the notion of bilingualism is central and contrasts with the monolingual education system that has been the tradition in the Western World. Because bilingualism is usually considered “as the exception” both in Northern America and Western Europe—whereas “in fact, half the world's population is bilingual” (Grosjean, 1989, p. 4)—it is necessary to first give some introductory elements about bilingualism. While there is still a great deal to explore about how bilingualism affects bilinguals either intellectually or socially, this section attempts to produce a brief account of the negative and positive effects of bilingualism that linguists have been highlighting for more than a century. It then concentrates on bilingual and immersion education—which has been a very common area for research in bilingualism—and examines the notion of language ideologies in different bilingual and immersion programmes.

### 1.4.1 Definition of bilingualism

There is no single phenomenon of bilingualism. There are several key variables to be considered in defining a bilingual person. Mackey (1968) observed that several factors have to be taken into account when defining bilingualism as it varies in degree, function, alternation and interference:

- degree: this factor involves testing the bilingual's skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) and levels (phonological-graphic, grammatical, lexical, semantic, and stylistic) in both languages so as to determine how bilingual he/she is. A bilingual person may, for instance, have a good understanding of the second language but not be able to speak it properly or he/she may have a good grasp of the spoken language but not have a good pronunciation of the words nor a correct rhythm.
- function: this factor refers to the uses the bilingual makes of the language and the conditions under which he/she has used it. The functions can be external in so far as they are determined by “areas of contact” such as home language, community language, school language, mass media language, etc. and by the variation of each in duration, frequency and pressure (economic, historical, religious, political, etc.). There are also internal functions the goal of which is non-communicative such as in internal speech through the means of counting, praying, cursing, dreaming, note taking, etc. Internal functions are also characterised by intrinsic aptitudes which influence the bilingual's behaviour. The main aptitudes are age (especially for children as a child can change mother tongue<sup>19</sup> in a matter of months), sex, memory, attitude (the bilingual's behaviour can change depending on the different areas of contact in which each language is used) and motivation (especially for the second language).
- alternation: this involves the various changes from one language to the other depending on the bilingual's fluency in each language and on the languages' external and internal functions. Three main motives explain the alternation between two or more languages: the topic of the conversation, the person present or addressed as well as the tension felt by the bilingual either in an oral or written situation. Grosjean (1989) observes two different speech modes: the monolingual speech mode which results in the deactivation of the other language—for example in a situation where the interlocutor is monolingual which prevents the bilingual from alternating between languages for efficient communicative reasons; and the bilingual speech mode where both languages are activated. This can lead to code-switching—when a bilingual

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19 Mother tongue commonly refers to an individual's first learnt language. See (Romaine, 1995, pp.19-22).



switches to the other language for a word, a phrase or a sentence—or to speech borrowing—when the speaker borrows a word from the other language.<sup>20</sup>

- interference: this factor relates to the use of features (word, phrase, intonation, rhythm, etc.) belonging to one language while using another one.

Mackey's factors cannot be treated separately. The degree factor, for example, which is about the speaker's proficiency in a language influences the function factor that is to say the use to which the bilingual puts the language. Similarly, proficiency in a language is linked to the alternation made between one language and the other. Although dated, Mackey's factors have remained influential in the research of individual bilingualism. Wei (2007), for instance, gives four factors to be considered in defining a bilingual person. They include age and manner of acquisition, proficiency level in specific languages, domains of language use, and self-identification and attitude. While some factors are given more prominence in Wei's categories, all were acknowledged by Mackey. Like Mackey, Wei highlights the importance of assessing the bilingual's proficiency level (listening, speaking, reading and writing) as a means of defining a bilingual person. Age and manner of acquisition are key variables that help to distinguish bilinguals who are exposed to two or more languages from bilinguals who acquire a second language at a later stage, and bilinguals who have acquired languages in a natural way (home, community) from bilinguals who have learnt languages in school, for instance. It should be noted that age and manner of acquisition have little impact on the bilingual's proficiency level in a particular language. Similar to Mackey's factors of function, alternation and interference, Wei highlights the importance of the domains of language use in defining bilingualism as bilinguals use their languages for different purposes in different domains. While the domains of language use may be distinct (e.g. French spoken at home with family and friends and English used at work with colleagues) bilinguals may in other cases use both languages all the time in all contexts. This is known as code-switching. It involves the alternate use of two languages during the same conversation, often with no change of interlocutor or topic (Hoffmann, 1991, p.110; Poplack, 2010, p.15). Finally, Wei's attitude factor that was part of the internal functions influencing the bilingual in Mackey's function factor is given more prominence here. Wei points out that not all bilinguals want to be described as bilinguals as it may be associated with a socially disadvantaged position or they may have a different view of what bilingualism is and may not consider themselves bilinguals. It seems therefore impossible to give a simple general definition of bilingualism as every bilingual situation is unique depending on attitudinal, social and educational factors. In general terms, bilingualism involves the use of two or more languages in alternation by the same individual in his/her everyday life (Mackey, 1968; Grosjean,

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<sup>20</sup> Speech borrowing is different from language borrowing which refers to a word that has become part of the base language (Grosjean, 1989).

1989). However, there is no easy way to assess this phenomenon. As Mackey puts it “the point at which a speaker of a second language becomes bilingual is either arbitrary or impossible to determine” (1968, p. 555).

Scientific interest in bilingualism has resulted in broadening its definition. There are in fact different degrees of bilingualism—which will be dealt with further down—such as ideal bilingualism as opposed to partial bilingualism and different definitions such as having a native-like command of the two languages (Bloomfield, 1984 originally published in 1933) or, according to Haugen, being able to produce meaning in the other language. “Bilingualism [...] is understood to begin at the point where the speaker of one language can produce complete, meaningful utterances in the other language” (1969, p. 7). Haugen distinguished between the bilingual and the *pre-bilingual* who is defined as a person who is no longer monolingual but can only utter single words in the other language (Haugen, 1969, p. 6). Similarly, Diebold (1961) distinguished the initial learning stage from bilingualism in general and coined it “incipient bilingualism”. Whereas it is difficult to define and observe native-like control of two languages (Hakuta, 1986) as suggested by Bloomfield (1984), Haugen's definition turns out to be much broader and possibly includes the field of second-language acquisition.

As mentioned, different degrees of bilingualism exist depending on the level of proficiency in each language. These include passive bilingualism, partial bilingualism and ideal bilingualism. If bilingualism is defined according to minimal proficiency in the language, this means that a person who is able to understand utterances in a language without being able to speak the very same language is considered to be a bilingual to a certain extent (M. Ó Murchú, 1971; Romaine, 1995). Passive bilingualism occurs when exposed to a second language before being required to use it actively (McLaughlin, 1984). It suggests a strong imbalance between the two languages. McLaughlin gives the example of Spanish-speaking children in the United States whose dominant language before starting school is Spanish. However, when attending school the emphasis shifts to English, the socially and economically dominant language. In this case the child is not acquiring two languages equally. Rather, there is a strong imbalance in favour of the language that is actively used in school which can result in a poor level of competence in both languages: “passive bilingualism—i.e. the situation where comprehension skills have developed somewhat without corresponding development of production skills—can lead to less successful acquisition of the two languages” (McLaughlin, 1984, p. 28).

The second degree of bilingualism described here, partial bilingualism, is usually present where there are various dialects and languages within the same community. Members of the community therefore can speak several languages although some of them are limited to certain domains such as the home or the workplace. Some people may not be able to read and write the language they can speak. These instances highlight the difficulties in evaluating bilingualism, especially in self-reports

where respondents may not consider one of the languages they speak as a “real” language or may not think they have sufficient competence in a language to claim bilingualism or multilingualism (Romaine, 1995).

In contrast, the “real bilingual” is depicted as the person who is equally fluent in two languages (Grosjean, 1989). However, this notion remains an ideal and does not really exist (Romaine, 1995). It is therefore referred to as ideal bilingualism:

*The search for the true balanced bilingual depicted in some of the literature on bilingualism is elusive. The notion of balanced bilingualism is an ideal one, which is largely an artefact of a theoretical perspective which takes the monolingual as its point of reference. (Romaine, 1995, p.19)*

Grosjean refers to this definition of bilingualism as the monolingual or fractional view of bilingualism which regards monolingualism as the model of the “normal speaker-hearer” (1989, p. 4). He denounces the monolingual bias in language sciences that regards the bilingual as a person who has two separate language competencies. The bilingual is expected to be as competent in L1 and L2<sup>21</sup> as an L1 monolingual and an L2 monolingual would be competent in their respective languages. In other words, the monolingual view of bilingualism sees the bilingual as two monolinguals in one person. This view is a real problem when applied to language testing. Bilinguals have often been evaluated in terms of fluency and balance in the two languages, taking the monolinguals' level or proficiency as a benchmark. Grosjean qualifies these tests as inappropriate because they do not take into account the “bilingual's differential needs for the two languages or the different social functions of these languages” (1989, p. 4). As mentioned in Mackey's factors (1968), bilingualism cannot be solely reduced to the bilingual's level of proficiency in each of the two languages (degree). Bilingualism is also about the use and the role of each language in the bilingual's everyday life (function), about the extent to which he/she alternates between the languages (alternation) and whether he/she manages to keep the languages separate or whether they are mixed (interference).

In contrast with the monolingual view of bilingualism the bilingual or holistic view claims that the bilingual is not made up of two separate parts: the bilingual is “an integrated whole, a unique and specific speaker-hearer, and not the sum of two monolinguals” (Grosjean, 1989, p. 6). The bilingual develops competencies according to his/her needs and those of the environment. Grosjean concludes that it is important that the bilingual be studied as such and not always in comparison with the monolingual. With this aim, the bilingual's two languages have to be examined either separately—through the means of monolingual speech mode tests for each language—or together—in mixed language tests—so as to reflect his/her daily communicative needs. Methodology in testing

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21 L1 stands for first language L2 stands for second language.

bilingualism in individuals is crucial as it can lead to erroneous conclusions if the bilingual is not evaluated in relation to his/her competencies in the two languages.

Bilingualism is also a societal phenomenon as it occurs when two languages are in contact in a given speech community; therefore it is essentially sociological as opposed to purely linguistic (Diebold, 1961, p.99). Bilingualism has long been considered exceptional and confined to a few bilingual countries. However, this turns out to be erroneous as the number of people on earth who speak more than one language represents over half the world population:

*Bilingualism is not the exception to the rule of monolingualism. In fact, it is highly likely that a Martian landing at a random location on earth would conclude, after observing the linguistic environment, that the inhabitants are bilingual. (Hakuta, 1986, pp. 5-6)*

As Mackey observed already as early as the late 1960s, “bilingualism, far from being exceptional, is a problem which affects the majority of the world's population” (1967, p. 11). There are indeed 6,909 known living languages in the world today.<sup>22</sup> However, even though bilingualism is present everywhere in the world it has never really been accepted in Western countries such as the United States (see Fishman, 2004). The New World originally welcomed immigrants from all over Europe, therefore mixing different languages and cultures together. Thus, the new American nation had a multilingual beginning even before English was accepted as the lingua franca (Castellanos, 1992). Yet, multilingualism was never truly encouraged, which resulted in forms of resistance to the English language among ethnic communities with for instance, the establishment of German-medium schools for the German immigrant community (Castellanos, 1992, pp. 17-18; Hakuta, 1986, pp. 16-22) or the creation of large networks of supplementary language and culture programmes that are community-led to teach other languages to children (O. García, 2009). According to Haugen, it is this kind of situation (i.e. a mixing pot) where different ethnic groups live in the same society that gives bilingualism its importance. Bilingual speakers are the only people who “form a link, a bridge, [...] a channel of communication between groups” (1969, p. 7). This societal role contrasts with the low prestige that was attributed to bilingualism until the end of the 1960s when research on bilingualism took a different direction. Although research on bilingual individuals had been conducted before this turning point (Saer, 1924; Jones, 1966; Macnamara, 1966) researchers were more focused on the measurement of the effects of bilingualism on intelligence. Therefore, very few attempted to distinguish between different types of bilinguals and no agreed definition of bilingualism was articulated (Jones, 1959).

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.ethnologue.com/>

As mentioned, attitudes towards bilingual individuals—and as a result towards societal bilingualism—changed in the 1960s as researchers discovered problems in the methodology used until then to assess bilinguals. Those methodological issues have been the cause of scientific debates over decades about the effects of bilingualism on individuals (Lebrun & Paradis, 1984; Wei, 2007). The next section examines scientific views on the effects bilingualism has on individuals. It is an essential background to the current study as the positive effects of bilingualism which are highlighted by the promoters of Irish-medium education (Gaelscoileanna Teo, An Foras Pátrúnachta, etc.,)<sup>23</sup> are likely to influence parents' decision in terms of school choice.

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23 See section 1.5 for more details on Irish-medium education. Gaelscoileanna Teo is the national body supporting the development of Irish-medium schools at primary and secondary level. An Foras Pátrúnachta is the largest patron of Irish-medium schools.

### 1.4.2 The effects of bilingualism

The debate on the effects of bilingualism is an ongoing one. There seem to be two different views, one which warns against the negative effects of bilingualism whereas the other highlights its positive outcome, especially in the child's development.

The controversy over bilingualism, and more specifically early bilingual education, is an old debate that dates back at least to the early nineteenth century (Lebrun & Paradis, 1984; Wei, 2007). The brief review of the studies that follow (Laurie, 1890; Penfield & Roberts, 1959; Saer, 1924) gives an overview of the widespread belief that bilingualism had detrimental effects on intelligence. They are typical examples cited in the literature on bilingualism that illustrate the old debate about early bilingual education (Lebrun & Paradis, 1984; Baker, 2001; Wei, 2007). It was believed at the time that having only one mother tongue was as natural as having only one mother. It was also commonly acknowledged that if two or more languages were acquired it would result in a confused mind as well as verbal and cognitive retardation, with a child not able to master either language (Lebrun & Paradis, 1984, p. 9). At the end of the nineteenth century, S. S. Laurie, a professor at Cambridge University, praised the learning of languages and described language as necessary for the growth of mind (Laurie, 1890, p. 105) as it feeds, trains, disciplines and cultivates. Yet, he warned against the danger of bilingualism. According to Laurie, intellectual growth would not benefit from bilingualism, on the contrary it would be halved.<sup>24</sup>

However, some argued differently and tried to prove that early bilingualism was beneficial. Wilder Penfield, a North American neurosurgeon, advocated bilingualism among young children as early as 1939 when he claimed during a talk that before the age of nine any child could easily learn various languages at the same time.<sup>25</sup> Penfield claimed that because the first language was well set by the age of 4 or 5 a second language learnt even before that time would be equally set without interference (Penfield & Roberts, 1959, pp. 243-244). What is more, Penfield rejected the idea of mental confusion as a child in contact with three languages, for instance, would learn the units of all three languages without effort nor confusion (*ibid.*, p. 254). He emphasised the positive effects of early bilingualism

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24 "Mind grows only in so far as it finds expression for itself; it cannot find it through a foreign tongue. It is round the language learned at the mother's knee that the whole life of feeling, emotion, thought, gathers. If it were possible for a child or boy to live in two languages at once equally well, so much for the worse. His intellectual and spiritual growth would not thereby doubled but halved. Unity of mind and character would have great difficulty in asserting itself in such circumstances. (...) as we have not two lives but only one, we can have only one language." (Laurie, 1890, pp. 15-16).

25 "Before the age of nine to twelve, a child is a specialist in learning to speak. At that age he can learn two or three languages as easily as one. It has been said that an Anglo-Saxon cannot learn other languages well. That is only because, as he grows up, he becomes a stiff and resistant individualist, like a tree—a sort of oak that cannot be bent in any graceful manner. But the Anglo-Saxon, if caught young enough, is as plastic and as good a linguist as the child of any other race." (Penfield & Roberts, 1959, pp. 235-236).

that gives the child who learnt more than one language a greater facility for the acquisition of additional languages in adult life (*ibid.*, pp. 242, 256).

Despite the existence of opposite ideas on the effects of bilingualism, researchers in the first half of the twentieth century were rather opposed to it. Cummins (1976) observed a change in the treatment of bilingualism from 1962 onwards with the study of Peal and Lambert set in Canada which for the first time showed that bilingualism had positive effects on both verbal and non-verbal intelligence. Earlier studies all tended to agree on the lower performance of bilinguals in comparison with monolinguals on measures of verbal intelligence (Cummins, 1976; Romaine, 1995). Cummins explains the discrepancy between the findings of earlier studies and the findings of more recent (post-1962) studies as resulting from a change in methodology and a change in the type of bilinguals participating in the studies. Earlier studies tended to measure verbal intelligence through the bilingual's weaker language (Cummins, 1976; Romaine, 1995) which usually was the language of instruction in school as well as the child's L2. Moreover, they used standardised IQ tests, which did not take into account important variables such as socio-economic status, sex and the degree of the bilingual's knowledge of the two languages (Jones, 1959, 1966; Macnamara, 1966; Cummins, 1976). Saer's (1924) study of urban and rural Welsh children is a case in point. Children from the age of 7 to 14 years from monolingual and bilingual backgrounds were given an IQ test. The results appear in a table in Appendix 3. Saer's overall conclusion was that bilinguals manifested lower intelligence than monolinguals. Yet, the socio-economic status variable was not taken into account, which led to the erroneous conclusion that all bilinguals were mentally inferior. If one has a closer look at the figures one can see that urban bilinguals scored as high as or higher than monolinguals from both rural and urban districts. Jones (1966) observed that several studies focusing on urban and rural areas drew similar conclusions about the inferiority of rural children. But when the children were grouped according to their family social background (based on the father's occupation) the urban-rural differences disappeared. The lower scores obtained by rural bilinguals in this case may be explained by the lack of opportunity to use English as opposed to urban areas where bilinguals are more likely to be in contact with the English language (Romaine, 1995).

Such methodological errors were already pointed out in the late 1950s when Jones (1959) re-analysed a study on the effects of bilingualism conducted in 1951 in Bangor, Wales, paying special attention to the occupational variations between the different linguistic groups under scrutiny, that is English-speakers only, Welsh-speakers only, Welsh bilinguals and English bilinguals. His results showed significant differences in average scores on a non-verbal test of intelligence compared with the original findings of the 1951 survey:

*It would appear that various groups of monoglot and bilingual children do not differ significantly in intelligence, provided that they are also of similar socioeconomic status as indicated by parental occupations. It is concluded that bilingualism as such need not have an adverse effect on performance in a non-verbal test of intelligence.*  
(Jones, 1959, p. 46)

In a nutshell, as MacNab puts it, “on closer examination these earlier studies do not give evidence of the inferiority of bilinguals so much as of the inadequacy of measurement” (MacNab, 1979, p. 235).

The other particularity that makes post-1962 studies<sup>26</sup> different is that they involve balanced bilinguals in additive bilingual settings, that is to say that the bilingual subjects usually attain a high level of competence in L2 without endangering their level of competence in L1 (Cummins, 1976). This contrasts with pre-1962 studies as they mostly involved bilinguals from language minority groups in situations where their L1 was gradually being replaced by their L2—a more prestigious or a dominant language (ibid). This situation, called subtractive bilingualism (Lambert, 1975) or “balance effect”<sup>27</sup> (Macnamara, 1966), implies that the bilingual develops skills in L2 but his competence in L1 gradually decreases over time. It may eventually result in the lack of native-like competence in either of the two languages, hence the negative effects of bilingualism frequently highlighted (Cummins, 1976).

Likewise, Hakuta (1986) pinpoints the difference between the methodology and motivations of the research studies of the first half of the twentieth century and those of more recent studies: earlier work aimed to answer the question of whether or not bilingualism had a negative effect on intelligence whereas post-1960s studies were concerned with whether or not bilingualism had a positive effect on intelligence. The shift in motivation was mainly due to the change in the bilingual subjects under scrutiny. Earlier studies took place mainly in the United States with immigrant populations with a low socio-economic status whereas more recent work was conducted in Canada and Europe with bilinguals from middle-class backgrounds (Hakuta, 1986; McLaughlin, 1984; Baker & Hornberger, 2001, p. 37).

Bilingualism in the United States was not highly regarded in the first half of the twentieth century as it was associated with racial and ethnic groups also referred to as “new immigrants”—in contrast to the “old immigrants” from Northern Europe who had long been assimilated (Hakuta, 1986, pp. 16-22). Two major views of bilingualism competed at the time: the “hereditarians” claiming that immigrant children were genetically inferior, hence the poor results in the intelligence tests; and the other group of linguists, called the environmentalists, who concluded that bilingualism led to mental confusion and a poor development of verbal skills, also known as “language handicap” (Hakuta, 1986). McLaughlin

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26 The year 1962 refers to the study of Peal and Lambert conducted in French immersion schools in Canada. It is considered the first piece of research showing the positive effects of bilingualism on both verbal and non-verbal intelligence, marking a change in the treatment of bilingualism (Cummins, 1976; Romaine, 1995).

27 See Section 1.4.3 for further details on subtractive and additive bilingualism.



(1984) explains that children with lower socio-economic status are likely to be discriminated against socially. Therefore, it is these social and economic factors rather than language per se that may have caused their poor performance on language tests (ibid., p. 41).

However, the bias that exists in the selection of bilingual subjects is also present in some of the studies carried out in Canada showing the positive effects of bilingualism. McLaughlin (1984), for example, highlights the highly selective way bilingual children were chosen in Peal and Lambert's study (1962). Subjects were selected on the basis of bilingual ability as measured by tests in both French and English: the ten-year-old children whose competence in English matched that in French took part in the study. What has often been questioned is the equal linguistic ability and intelligence between the bilingual subjects and the monolinguals. According to McLaughlin, Peal and Lambert's bilingual subjects were likely to be more linguistically gifted as they already had at the age of 10, a command of English equal to their command of French (1984, p. 37). MacNab also noticed how Peal and Lambert's "balanced bilingual" criterion probably eliminated a significant number of eligible children, therefore resulting in a bias (1979, pp. 237-241). This point highlights the gap in the definitions of bilingual and unilingual in earlier studies. The absence of an agreed definition of bilingualism therefore resulted in contradictory findings in earlier studies (Jones, 1959).

It has largely been acknowledged that studies prior to 1960 had methodological defects (Jones, 1959; Cummins, 1976; 1978; McLaughlin, 1984, pp. 37-38; Rondal, 1984, p. 135-136; Romaine, 1995), with most findings showing that bilinguals suffered from language handicap (Cummins, 1978; Hakuta, 1986). But there is no evidence to suggest that bilingualism negatively affects intelligence (Jones, 1959; Bain, 1978; McLaughlin, 1984). Overall, the history of bilingualism research shows that bilingual subjects have not always been studied with a full understanding of their environment nor has their ability in both L1 and L2 been assessed in the right conditions. Cummins proposed criteria in order to better evaluate bilingualism and avoid erroneous interpretations (Cummins, 1978, pp. 861-863). Among them were:

- the control of the non-linguistic background of the subjects: both bilingual and monolingual groups have to be matched on various measures, including socio-economic, sex, age and general intellectual ability (IQ) measures,
- the description of the context of language acquisition as well as the level of competence in L1 and L2 of the bilingual subjects.

While it is important to control for diverse variables as suggested by Cummins (1978), MacNab (1979) observed a problem of mismatching variables. Controlling for the father's occupation, for instance, may not be adequate for socioeconomic status in the case of immigrant families restricted to lower paid jobs on linguistic and ethnic grounds. Moreover, controlling for age, sex and father's

occupation is not sufficient. Variables should include a broader comprehension of the difference between bilinguals who by learning a second language show a commitment to a second culture and those who remain monolingual (MacNab, 1979). There are actually further socio-cultural factors to take into account in a child's home environment when measuring and matching bilinguals and monolinguals (Cummins, 1976; MacNab, 1979).

Another example of the importance of controlling social variables in the context of bilingual learning was highlighted in a study carried out in the United States in the early 1980s (Rosenthal et al., 1983). Students from bilingual and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) education programmes were tested on their achievement level and learning. Two major groups were compared: the Spanish-dominant group and the English-only group. Both groups had similar low socio-economic status. The results revealed that the Spanish-dominant group occasionally showed an advantage over the English-only group (ibid., p. 96). This finding goes against the assumption that language is the cause for low achievement in bilingual and English-as-a-second language programmes and emphasises the need for adequate help for children with difficulties. Unlike children in additive bilingual situations, whose families strongly support their education, minority-language children do not get much support at home. They are more likely to profit from bilingual education if the school provides a supportive and motivating environment (Bialystok, 2001).

Studies carried out in additive bilingual settings in which bilinguals matched monolinguals with socio-economic status, sex and age variables showed that bilinguals performed at a higher level in verbal and non-verbal intelligence tests as well as in divergent thinking (Cummins, 1976; Hakuta, 1986). When L1 is developed and reinforced outside the school environment the acquisition of L2 occurs without any loss of L1 competence. The intensive exposure to L2 is then likely to result in high levels of L2 competence. This contrasts with situations where L1 is poorly developed—i.e. in the case of language minorities in a subtractive setting—and where intensive exposure to L2 can negatively affect the development of L1. Moreover, if the development of L1 is poor the acquisition of competence in L2 will remain limited (Cummins, 1978, p. 856). In other words, “thrust into second (majority) language learning without mastery of his mother tongue the child may become 'semi-lingual' in both languages” (MacNab, 1979, p. 244).

Cummins (1976; 1978, p. 858) suggests that a certain “threshold” must be reached by the bilinguals before observing any positive effects. This threshold requires a minimum level of competence in both languages.

*There may be a threshold level of linguistic competence which a bilingual child must attain both in order to avoid cognitive deficits and allow the potentially beneficial aspects of becoming bilingual to affect his cognitive functioning. (Cummins, 1976, p. 37)*

Conversely, this threshold theory also implies that bilingual education may have a negative influence on the development of the child if he/she fails to attain adequate skills in the second language. A study of children attending English-medium primary schools in Papua New Guinea (Clarkson, 1992) showed that bilinguals competent in both Pidgin and English outperformed their monolingual peers in general mathematics and mathematical word problem tests. However, the results showed that bilinguals with low competence in both languages were disadvantaged. This study therefore supports the threshold theory.

Provided that the child overcomes the initial difficulties in coping with two languages, bilingualism is likely to positively influence cognitive functioning (Cummins, 1976, p. 35; Clarkson, 1992). In the case of total immersion education, the child may attain the threshold level of L2 competence more rapidly than a child in a partial immersion programme as he/she spends little or no time on L1 (Cummins, 1976, p. 23; Cummins, 1978, p. 878; Carlisle et al., 1999). Therefore “a greater proportion of his cognitive operations in the school setting must be expressed through the medium of his second language” (Baker & Hornberger, 2001, p. 42). Thus when a child spends more time using (speaking, listening, reading, etc.) the second language his/her level of competence in L2 is likely to be higher, which means the child is less likely to experience cognitive disadvantages. In contrast, partial immersion pupils need more time to attain a threshold level of L2 competence. Because they are not exposed to L2 in an early immersion programme they experience no enhancement of cognitive or academic skills (Cummins, 1978, p. 878).

Lasagabaster's study (2000) on Spanish children learning Basque showed that only children in an immersion programme—or maintenance programme for children whose L1 is Basque—reached high competence in both Spanish and Basque. It also showed that only competent bilinguals were able to take advantage of their bilingualism to attain high competence in English as an L3. This study therefore supports Cummin's threshold theory in a situation of three languages in contact.

Cummins' Threshold Theory is seen as a resolution of contradiction (Baker & Hornberger, 2001) as it proposes a hypothetical explanation for the various contradicting results found in the history of research on bilingualism. His theory has been influential ever since, although more research has yet to be done, especially in additive bilingual settings where positive cognitive outcomes are associated with bilingualism. While there are still questions that remain unanswered—such as whether the L2 competence in those cases was attained at the expense of their L1 (see Macnamara, 1966 for “balance effect”) or whether they had attained a high level of competence in both languages—the ideological context of second language learning appears to play an important part in the acquisition of L2.

### 1.4.3 Language ideologies and bilingualism

It is not until the 1970s that a clear distinction was made between different bilingual settings such as subtractive and additive bilingualism, which enabled researchers to consider bilingualism under different circumstances. It should be noted that this distinction coincides with two different language ideologies: one of language assimilation and one of multilingualism enhancement.

Wallace E. Lambert (1975, pp. 67-68) pointed out the difference between bilingualism in a setting where ethnic minority groups are forced to learn the dominant language in order to survive in society and a setting where the two languages are recognised and treated equally in terms of social value. The first setting is referred to as subtractive. It implies social pressures upon the ethnic minority groups as they are forced to learn the dominant language and put aside their own language. National education policies are usually very influential as the development of linguistic skills in the dominant language gradually leads to the replacement of the ethnic language:

*Their degree of bilinguality at any point in time would likely reflect some stage in the subtraction of the ethnic language and its replacement with another. (Lambert, 1975, p. 68)*

Lambert's (1975) subtractive bilingualism is somehow similar to Macnamara's (1966) balance effect in terms of the second language that is acquired—at the expense of the first language—but is never fully mastered. Although the concept of balance effect was not relevant in the study he conducted in Ireland, it was very influential at the time. The neuropsychologist Trites, for example, quoted Macnamara when speaking about retardation in reading skills among children who had first been taught to read in the second language (1976, p. 194). Cummins criticised Macnamara's findings on the balance effect among pupils attending an Irish-medium school. According to Cummins, the comparison group comprised of British pupils was given an advantage during the English language test as Irish immersion pupils had been taught literacy through Irish as opposed to English, their first language—for the most part. Furthermore, Irish immersion pupils were tested through Irish in the arithmetic test, which was their weaker language (1978, pp. 864-865). The results therefore showed that bilingualism led to retardation in written English and problem arithmetic (Macnamara, 1966).

In contrast, the additive form of bilingualism is to be found in a society that respects the two languages. The second language is as socially relevant as the first language (Lambert, 1975, p. 68). The acceptance of the second language shows general sociocultural and political realities:

*In a situation of additive bilingualism, the ethnolinguistic group sees the learning of the language of the other linguistic group as positive and not threatening to its own cultural and political well-being or survival. [...] it is felt to be a valuable addition to the developmental background of the child. (Rondal, 1984, p. 138)*

The additive bilingual setting allows individuals to become balanced bilinguals by adding a second language to their linguistic skills without having to drop or replace their first language by the second language. “The development of high-level skills in L2 does not imply a corresponding loss of L1” (Lambert, 1975, p. 68; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002, p. 52).

The distinction between subtractive and additive forms of bilingualism is somewhat similar to the distinction made between the high and low socio-economic status of the bilingual subjects. Various studies focused on immigrant groups from a disadvantaged background such as in the United States or on rural populations such as Saer's study (1924) conducted in Wales. The findings associated with these studies were rather negative and denounced for example lower intelligence and a retardation in the child's development (Saer, 1924). It has been argued, however, that social and economic factors were more likely to be the cause of poor results in language tests among children with a lower socio-economic status (MacNab, 1979; McLaughlin, 1984, p. 41). Studies carried out in Canada for instance, showed different results and emphasised the positive aspects of bilingualism (Stern *et al.*, 1976). These studies which found higher levels of cognitive performance compared bilinguals with monolinguals of similar well-off backgrounds (Baker & Hornberger, 2001, p. 37).

Yet, it has been acknowledged that while intelligent children in an additive environment are likely to become fully bilingual, less intelligent children are not required to become balanced bilinguals if it is too difficult for them (MacNab, 1979). As speakers of the majority language intelligent children have more options available to them and can spend less energy on becoming fluent in the L2. In contrast, less intelligent children in a subtractive context are penalised by being forced to learn the second language to be able to function in society and this, at the expense of other aptitudes that they may have in other subject areas.

Although this view is not wide spread, subtractive education—i.e. the teaching of a dominant second language at the cost of the mother tongue—has been depicted as a form of “forced assimilation” that causes mental harm (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002, pp. 49-51). According to the 1948 UN International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (E793 1948), Article II (b) and Article III (c) refer to mental harm and the prohibition of the use of the language of a group in daily intercourse, in school or in the media. Subtractive bilingual education is therefore recognised by Skutnabb-Kangas as a case of linguistic genocide: “All subtractive models of 'bilingual' education can be and often are genocidal” (2002, p. 51). In contrast, additive forms of bilingual education are enriching as they enable new languages to be added to the child's repertoire without endangering the first language (Lambert, 1975, p. 68; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002, p. 52).

Another dual dimension of bilingualism and bilingual education, known as elitist and folk bilingualisms accounts for disparities in negative and positive effects of bilingualism. Furthermore, elitist and folk bilingualisms are examples of power based relationships between languages. Elitist bilingualism involves the learning or the acquisition of a second language as something voluntary. The failure to gain sufficient command of it will have no serious consequences for the individual. It is mostly a matter of choice and exists among the educated and upper classes. “This type of bilingualism has never been an educational problem” (Baker & Hornberger, 2001, p. 38). In contrast, folk bilingualism involves minority ethnic groups who are left with no choice but to become bilingual to survive. It is this kind of bilingualism that has been associated with negative effects on cognition and academic ability, although negative consequences can also be explained by other factors such as negative attitudes towards the language (stereotypes), the prestige and functions of the language, etc., (ibid).

The additive/subtractive or elitist/ folk distinctions are not sufficient to explain the children's proficiency—or lack thereof—in L1 and L2 as some children living in an additive setting may not be proficient in both languages. Similarly, children from a subtractive context may attain a good level of competence in both languages. However, it is mostly in an additive context that bilingual education has been associated with advantage.

#### 1.4.4 Bilingualism in additive bilingual settings

Research has shown that bilingual children have a cognitive and metalinguistic advantage over monolingual children (Lambert, 1975; Ben-Zeev, 1977; Bialystok, 1987; Clarkson, 1992; Carlisle et al., 1999). It has been found that bilingual children have an advantage on measures of cognitive flexibility, creativity and divergent thought. Divergent thought, for example, reflects imagination. The Canadian “paper clip experiment” which consisted of making a list of all the different ways a paper clip could be used, showed that bilingual children could give more examples of use of a paper clip than monolinguals (Lambert, 1975, p. 65).

A bilingual advantage was also found in cognitive processes related to the concept of word. Ellen Bialystok (1987) showed in three studies involving monolingual English-speaking children and bilingual children from French immersion programmes in Canada in Grade 1 (aged 6 or 7) that bilingual children scored higher in some exercises. Bilingual children were more advanced in word counting in sentences in the English language (ibid, p. 135). Furthermore, they were able to do as well as or better than their monolingual peers in another test focused on the arbitrariness of words (ibid, p. 137). Children were asked if it was possible to call the sun “moon” and the moon “sun” while imagining that everybody had come to an agreement beforehand to replace the words by each other. The test consisted of two other questions: “what would be in the sky at night?” and whether it would be dark or bright. Again, bilingual children scored at a higher level. Yet, they did not outperform their monolingual peers on the same test involving the words “cat” and “dog”. One of the explanations given to justify their lower score in the second part of the test was that cats and dogs were probably too familiar to them, and that as such they could not imagine these words being arbitrarily replaced by each other. These sets of tests were argued to show that bilingual children had a more advanced understanding of some aspects of the concept of word:

*Bilingual children were most notably advanced when required to separate out individual words from meaningful sentences, focus only on the form or meaning of a word under highly distracting conditions, and reassign a familiar name to a different object. (ibid, p. 138)*

The mastery of these skills was however confined to specific uses of language and was not, as a consequence, uniform. Metalinguistic awareness, in this case, could help children develop the understanding that an object can be represented in more than one way.

Metalinguistic awareness—defined as the ability to think about and reflect upon the nature and functions of language (Baker, 2001)—was also found among Hispanic children from disadvantaged areas attending a maintenance bilingual programme in the United States (Carlisle et al., 1999).

However, as suggested by the threshold theory (Cummins, 1976; 1978), metalinguistic performance depends on the degree of the child's bilingualism:

*it seems that children must be immersed in learning and using a second language in order for cross-language metalinguistic benefits to accrue. (...) Our results support the idea that early and comprehensive bilingual experiences foster the development of metalinguistic skills". (Carlisle et al., 1999, p. 474)*

Sufficient vocabulary must therefore be acquired in L1 and L2 before children can benefit from bilingualism.

A more recent study carried out on English-speaking and Mandarin-speaking monolinguals as well as on bilingual Mandarin and English speaking children aged 3 to 4 years old found that monolinguals in each language showed similar performance on all the theory mind-related tasks. When compared to bilinguals' performance on the same mind-related tasks the study showed a bilingual advantage. This would imply a metalinguistic advantage which would help develop representational abilities for instance, and a greater sociolinguistic awareness (Goetz, 2003).

However, despite numerous studies pointing out the bilingual advantage, the issue raised by Cummins (1978) of controlling variables still remains. While Morton and Harper (2007) acknowledge the growing evidence that bilingual children outperform monolingual children in various selective attention and cognitive flexibility tasks (Bialystok, 1987), they propose that the differences in the attention control of monolinguals and bilinguals are partly due to differences in ethnicity and socio-economic status. The bilingual advantage can be explained by the practice bilingual children have in dealing with two languages (Morton & Harper, 2007, p. 719). However, when the social variables are taken into account the results differ from earlier findings. Canadian monolinguals and bilinguals aged 6 to 7 years were put to the test. They were all Canadian-born, had very similar socio-economic status and were not different in general intelligence. Language status was the only difference as the subjects were all from a majority English-speaking part of Canada. The participating families were generally well-educated with middle-class incomes. All children had equivalent vocabulary and bilinguals used as much French as English in everyday life. The Simon task consisted of showing children coloured squares (red and green) on a computer screen and asking them to press a coloured key (red and green) on the keyboard that corresponded to the colour of the square on the monitor. The results demonstrated that bilinguals failed to show an advantage over monolinguals' cognitive control. Morton and Harper argue that the bilingual advantage found in other studies can be explained by the difference between the participants coming from Canadian immigrant and non-immigrant families. "The results suggest that controlling for differences in ethnicity and SES [socio-economic status] can attenuate the bilingual advantage" (ibid., p. 723).



As the question of positive and negative effects of bilingualism is still debatable to this day, Baker and Hornberger proposed to adjust the focus of research on bilingualism. Because each bilingual situation is unique it is impossible to give a definite overview of bilingual learning and the effects bilingualism has on cognitive processes. Research should therefore concentrate on the identification of conditions under which bilingualism is likely to cause either retardation or acceleration of cognitive growth (2001, p. 33).

Although bilinguals may experience losses and gains in certain areas of cognition, these are outweighed by the ability to use two languages. More people seem to see the benefits that bilingualism can bring to the individual and to society. This is seen by way of the increasing number of students attending bilingual and immersion programmes the world over. However, not all bilingual programmes aim to produce competent bilinguals. The difference between the various bilingual programmes in Western countries and their ideologies will now be examined.

### 1.4.5 Bilingual education

The term bilingual education usually refers to the use of two (or more) languages of instruction at some stage in a person's school life. The emphasis is on language as a medium of instruction rather than just the teaching of the language as a subject (Cummins & Corson, 1997). This requires the use of an additional language other than children's home language (O. García, 2009).

The popularity of bilingual and immersion programmes is an international phenomenon with more and more bilingual and immersion schools established in developed countries such as Canada, the United States, Spain, Scotland, Wales, New Zealand, Japan, to name a few (Cummins, 2000; Lasagabaster, 2000). There is actually more than one model of bilingual education. Bilingual education is a global term used in the literature that includes immersion programmes based on the Canadian system and other bilingual programmes. The main difference between the various programmes is whether the pupils belong to the majority or the minority language group in the country in which they live and are educated (Genesee, 1987; Baker, 2001). It also depends on whether the instruction is defined in relation to means (i.e. transitional bilingual programme in the United States where immigrant students are taught through their mother tongue until they are proficient enough in English to carry on their school career through English, their L2) or goals (i.e. immersion programmes such as in Canada where pupils achieve a level of proficiency in both English and French) (Fishman & Lovas, 1970; Cummins & Corson, 1997; Baker, 2001). The various motives behind this movement of bilingual education are related to the revival or the maintenance of endangered languages as cultural heritage such as Basque (Cenoz, 2008; Etxeberria & Elozegi, 2008; Zalvide & Cenoz, 2008) or Scottish Gaelic (McLeod, 2003) and the preservation of minority languages such as Spanish in the United States because they are the home language of the ethnic minorities. Another example is the case of a second national language such as Irish in Ireland, French in Canada, Welsh in Wales or Flemish in Belgium that is nationally promoted and given importance in economic and social domains (Lobelle, 1972).

In the introduction to the *Encyclopedia of Language and Education* Volume 5 (1997) Cummins gives a general classification of various existing bilingual programmes in the world. This classification is not exhaustive as more complex factors must be taken into account such as sociopolitical and sociolinguistic conditions in order to give an accurate representation of worldwide bilingual and immersion programmes. Cummins distinguishes five different programmes:

- Type I involves the use of indigenous languages as mediums of instruction in countries with a history of colonisation where the bilingual programme aims at language revival or revitalisation, for example the Maori language in New Zealand.

- Type II involves the use of a national minority language which sometimes has an official status and aims at language maintenance or revitalisation, examples being Irish, Welsh, Basque, Catalan, etc.
- Type III involves immigrant minority languages when living in a host country and is designed to help students progress through their school career in the country's majority language. Australia and the United States are good examples.
- Type IV focuses on the deaf and hard-of-hearing community.
- Type V is aimed at children whose mother tongue is the majority language. This programme helps them develop proficiency and literacy in both their mother tongue and the second language, for example French immersion programmes in Canada or two-way bilingual programmes in the United States.

It should be noted that this classification is not rigid and some languages can fall into different categories such as Basque in Type I and Type II.

O. García (2009) distinguishes two major groups of bilingual education types according to their ideologies. The monoglossic types are based on monolingual ideologies whereas the heteroglossic types promote bilingualism as well as biculturalism. The transitional programme, for example, belongs to the first group. It is the most frequently used throughout the United States to teach immigrants. The aim of this programme is assimilationist (Baker, 2001; O. García, 2009). Pupils are taught in their mother tongue in the early classes until they “adjust to school” and until they are proficient enough in English to receive the entire curriculum through the medium of English. This programme does not aim to support and maintain the pupils' mother tongue. Rather, it fosters monolingualism (Snow & Hakuta, 1992). “Such programs are basically interested only in [...] arriving at the stage of English monolingual education normality just as soon as is feasible without injuring the pupil or arousing the community” (Fishman & Lovas, 1970, p. 217). The developmental education programme is aimed at non-dominant language groups whose language has not suffered an extensive language shift and is therefore not endangered. Children participating in this programme develop academic proficiency in both their home language and the dominant language. It belongs to the heteroglossic group as it is based on a bilingual and bicultural society with an emphasis on equality and multiple identities (O. García, 2009). The immersion revitalisation programme on the other hand caters for ethnolinguistic minorities who have experienced language shift (e.g. The Maori people in New Zealand). The two-way bilingual programme, also known as dual language education, also belongs to the heteroglossic group. This programme involves the immersion of children with different linguistic profiles (e.g. in the US, 50% English speakers and 50% speakers of another language) and is based on the interactions between children (ibid.). This is regarded as the ideal programme where pupils/students' skills in both languages

are developed in all subjects. Both languages are the media of instruction. Students are models for each other, which increases their chance of becoming proficiently bilingual (Snow & Hakuta, 1992). Two-way bilingual education promotes bilingualism and biculturalism for both language minority and language majority children as well as linguistic equity among the children (Fishman & Lovas, 1970; Pérez, 2004; E. Garcia, 2008). However, its societal goals are not clear in that no fully balanced bilingual society exists as there is no need for the co-existence of two equivalent functioning languages (Fishman & Lovas, 1970).

The distinction between the monolingual and the bilingual/bicultural ideologies in those educational programmes is essential to the background of the current study. It is illustrated below through the example of bilingual education aimed at minority language children in the United States and immersion education aimed at majority language children such as in Canada and Ireland. Unlike schools in the United States which run different bilingual programmes—a majority of which belong to the monoglossic group (O. García, 2009)—Irish schools provide immersion education promoting bilingualism.

The United States has a long history of bilingualism and bilingual education (O. García, 2009). However, with the exception of the relatively new dual language programmes (E. Garcia, 2008) and of a few immersion programmes such as found in Maine and Louisiana using French as the main language of instruction (Lambert et al., 1968), bilingualism has not been advocated much among English-speaking parents. As a result it has hardly aroused interest in being fluent in another language. As Cohen and Swain already observed in the 1970s, there has been no incentive for parents to want their child to become bilingual:

*The majority group of English speakers have not been the target group of federal and state bilingual programs, and this has both limited the majority group's participation and generated only a moderate concern for becoming fluent in a minority language.*  
(1976, pp. 59-60)

The controversy over the introduction of minority languages in the American school system is still very much alive. There is indeed pressure on school providing bilingual programmes to limit the time spent in such programmes to a maximum of three years (Snow & Hakuta, 1992; Cummins, 2000; O. García, 2009). This can lead minority language students to academic failure if they do not benefit from learning support in English (Cummins, 2000).

Unlike the immersion education system in Canada, Wales, Scotland or Ireland, for instance, which is mostly parent-led (Genesee, 1995; Ó Riagáin, 1997; Baker & Prys Jones, 2000; Barré, 2007) and provide a second-language education to majority language pupils, the bilingual programmes found in the United States cater mainly for minority language groups such as Spanish-speaking pupils:

*In bilingual education programs, students receive academic instruction in their home language along with instruction in English as a Second Language. The main objective of bilingual education programs is to foster English language proficiency through first language development so that the students can participate successfully in all-English classes. (Genesee, 1987, p. vii)*

Negative attitudes towards bilingual programmes in the United States are said to be based on the recognition by bilingual programmes of the validity of languages other than English and other cultures than the American one (Hakuta, 1986; Fillmore, 1992; Baker, 2001; O. García, 2009):

*Bilingual education is seen by the public, and by too many of the educators charged with implementing it, not as having limited-English proficient students a fighting chance to function in an otherwise all-English environment, but as freeing them from the obligation of immediate and absolute assimilation. (Fillmore, 1992, p. 376)*

As a result, the recruitment of qualified staff in a large number of bilingual programmes is neglected, English is sometimes the exclusive medium of teaching and of communication in the school and students are often assessed through their non-dominant language, that is English (Fillmore, 1992, pp. 368-374).

The concepts of unity and of linguistic and cultural assimilation seem to define the American people, associating the melting pot with monolingualism rather than multilingualism:

*Almost alone among the world's very large and populous nations, the United States enjoys the blessings of one primary language, spoken and understood by most of its citizens. The previously unquestioned acceptance of this language by immigrants from every linguistic and cultural background has enabled us to come together as one people. (Senator Huddleston, 1992, pp. 114-115)*

The threat that most monolingual Americans may feel regarding the spread of bilingualism has been described as one of weakening the status of English and splintering the nation (Snow & Hakuta, 1992, Fillmore, 1992) taking the path to another Tower of Babel and to segregation (Senator Huddleston, 1992; Baker, 2001). This is probably due to the fact that bilingualism in the United States is associated with immigrants and lower social classes (Snow & Hakuta, 1992). Minority groups were sometimes portrayed in the 1980s and 1990s as using bilingual education for separatism (Baker, 2001). In 2002, the Bilingual Education Act expired, which according to Peréa and García Coll (2008) is a sign that bilingual education is being dismantled at the federal level. The purpose of the Bilingual Educational Act (1968) was to provide schools with grants to establish innovative educational programmes for children from linguistic minorities with limited English abilities. In 1994, new grants for programmes promoting bilingualism were introduced. However, the positive bilingual approach

changed in 2002 when the Bilingual Educational Act was renamed the English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act.

The monolingual-oriented ideology implied in the title of this act is widely practised in bilingual schools in the United States. As mentioned earlier, a large number of American bilingual programmes aim at immigrants' acquisition of the English language (Fishman & Lovas, 1970; O. García, 2009). One programme in particular, known as submersion, contrasts with the immersion system practised in Ireland which is defined further down. It engenders various linguistic, academic and ethno-cultural problems. The practice of submersion—also called the “sink or swim” approach—refers to the school experience for minority language children where no adjustments are made to take account of their cultural and linguistic difference. It is “a cheap route to second-language learning” (Snow & Hakuta, 1992, p. 391) where no special teachers, classes, curricula or programmes are required. The minority child is therefore confronted with various problems which can be detrimental to his/her linguistic abilities on the one hand and academic achievement on the other hand. Here are a few examples given by Cohen and Swain (1976, pp. 55-56):

- minority children are mixed with native English speakers, which implies difficulties in communicating with others. This situation can cause a sense of insecurity and failure as the child is not able to interact with his schoolmates.
- minority children attend English-as-a-second-language lessons. This can lead to segregation as they are not mixed with other pupils, and stigmatisation as they need help with their level of English, which is the dominant language in the school. Furthermore the child can sense a certain language handicap which is likely to damage his/her self-esteem.
- minority children are not allowed to use their native language in the school
- teachers usually have low expectations of minority ethnic pupils
- the schools provide little or no resources to make subject matter instruction possible through the children's native tongue
- parental involvement among ethnic minorities is very limited because of the language barrier.

Similarly, MacNab (1979) observed that the minority child is usually denied any status and is expected to attain low levels of academic achievement because he/she is often thought to be stupid. This attitude often leads to the child's low achievement independent of the language factor. Contrary to children learning an L2 in an additive context, children under “sink or swim” conditions are forced to learn the majority language and get no credit for learning their mother tongue. Whereas the majority language children learning a second language are rewarded with praise, minority language children get no reward for being proficient in their mother tongue. On the contrary they are likely to get sanctioned by school authorities or even ridiculed by their peers (ibid., p. 249). Language minority children in

submersion education are therefore likely to encounter problems of social and emotional adjustment alongside problems of language (Baker, 2001).

The difference between positive and negative effects of bilingual education lies in the interaction of rewards, opportunities and abilities. Children are more likely to become bilingual in additive settings than average children in a subtractive context who are penalised. The latter are forced to concentrate on second language learning as a necessity in order to survive in society, which means that they do not have the opportunity to specialise in other subject areas and use other aptitudes (MacNab, 1979). Submersion programmes are costly for the child as they often lead to educational delay or even to the child dropping out of school in a situation where the child is barely literate in either L1 or L2 (Snow & Hakuta, 1992). As mentioned earlier, dual language education is different in that it promotes bilingualism. It has aroused the interest of certain American English-speaking families with a positive view of bilingualism. However, due to the socially disadvantaged background of most language minority children participating in this bilingual programme, dual language education in the US also faces issues of high drop-out rates (O. García, 2009).

Immersion programmes are mostly available in additive bilingual settings where majority language speakers are taught entirely through a minority language:

*Immersion programs are a form of bilingual education designed for majority language students, that is, students who speak the dominant language of society upon entry to school. In immersion programs, a second language, along with the students' home language, is used to teach regular school subjects such as mathematics and science as well as language arts. A major objective of immersion programs is bilingual proficiency. (Genesee, 1987, p. vii)*

This definition refers to bilingual education in Canada but is also practised in Wales, Scotland, the Basque country, etc. It however differs from the Irish immersion system in that children's home language—which is English for a vast majority—is not used to teach subjects unless the subject itself is English. Immersion programmes provide pupils with high level of competency in L2 while keeping up with their monolingual peers in L1 literacy development. What is more there are no signs of deficit in their cognitive or intellectual development and children usually have very positive attitudes towards both L1 and L2 (Cohen & Swain, 1976, p. 57; Stern et al., 1976; Bialystok, 2001). Pupils are usually motivated to continue studying rather than drop out. What makes immersion schools a pleasant and stress-free environment for the children is that contrary to submersion programmes all pupils start on an equal basis regarding the level of L2 instructed. This is because most children are monolingual at the outset and have a similar lack of experience with L2 (Baker, 2001). Therefore, there is no fear of ridicule or feeling of inferiority.

*All kindergartens pupils are unilingual in L1. In essence, the successful program starts as a segregated one linguistically. This segregation eliminates the kinds of ridicule that students exert on less-proficient performers. In immersion education, all learners start off linguistically “in the same boat”. (Cohen & Swain, 1976, p. 57)*

Again this is true for most children in the Irish system but it should be noted that some children attending immersion pre-schools may have been raised bilingually at home. The absence of instruction through English in the early years of pre-school and primary schooling—in the case of early total immersion in English-speaking countries such as Canada, Wales, Ireland and Scotland—does not affect the development of English because L1 skills are for the most part developed before the child attends school and continue to be reinforced at home and outside school in general (Cummins, 1978, p. 878). A study undertaken in the Basque region (Lasagabaster, 2000) has shown similar results where the development of the majority language (Spanish) is not retarded. The social predominance of Spanish in the area guarantees children's attainment of a good level of competence in it. On the other hand, the use of Basque as a medium of instruction has an important effect on children's level of competence in this language as it has little presence in the broad community.

It has been shown that the immersion programmes produce pupils with a good level of fluency in the second language (Harris, 1984; Harris et al., 2006). What is more, the majority of pupils experience little difficulty in attaining high levels of bilingualism (Cummins, 1976, p. 23), which can then benefit their learning of an L3 (Lasagabaster, 2000). Many immersion programmes have reported no negative consequences such as retardation in L1, despite the teaching through a minority language. This is mainly due to a high level of L2 skills and favourable conditions such as the learning of a socially relevant language, the strong support of parents, the commitment of teachers, etc. (Baker & Hornberger, 2001, pp. 43-44).

Each country practises a different immersion programme as there is no approved standard model. The immersion programme can be total or partial and can start in the early years of schooling or as late as the first years of secondary school. It has been shown that early and late immersion in the Canadian context produced proficiency in French (Genesee, 1995). The Canadian system is very different from the Irish one as it provides different immersion programmes. In Canada, the number of hours taught through French is reduced for early immersion students from grades 5 to 9, which gives late immersion students the opportunity to “catch up” with their peers (Baker & Hornberger, 2001, p. 98). However, there is an advantage in early immersion that is absent from the other programmes: students are exposed more to the second language and early exposure has often been associated with cognitive advantages (Baker & Hornberger, 2001, p. 98). Furthermore, early total immersion programmes in Canada produce students who have a better command of French than the other two



programmes, which tends to be very close to a native-like mastery of the L2 (Swain, 1978, p. 584). Early, late and partial immersion programmes were monitored in the 1970s from Kindergarten through to Grade Five, which corresponds to ages 4 to 9. The results showed that (ibid., pp. 578-579):

- through to Grade One immersion pupils did not do as well as their monolingual peers in the English language.
- by the end of Grade Three immersion pupils still had difficulties with technical skills such as spelling.
- by the end of Grade Four they performed equivalently.
- by the end of Grade Five they outperformed their monolingual peers on several aspects of measured English skills.

Overall, immersion pupils performed better in French than pupils learning the language as a subject in traditional English-medium schools and performed better than 30% of native French pupils (ibid.). Although there were still differences between immersion and native French pupils in speaking and writing skills after seven years in an immersion programme, immersion pupils performed as well as their monolingual peers in both mathematics and science (ibid., p. 579).

Although late immersion programmes are relatively successful they require much more effort and hard work along with a high degree of motivation to “keep up” in subjects taught in the L2 (Baker & Hornberger, 2001, p. 101).

Although it is widely acknowledged that immersion education produces competent bilinguals (e.g. Swain, 1978; Harris, 1984; Fishman, 1991; Baker, 2001; Baker & Hornberger, 2001; Harris et al., 2006) there is still a considerable gap in the research on the suitability of immersion programmes for all children (Genesee, 2004). A few studies which have concentrated on the effect of immersion education on children with learning difficulties since the 1970s will now be reviewed.

One of the first reports on learning difficulties among children attending French immersion programmes in Canada was published in 1976 by a specialist in neuropsychology, Ronald L. Trites. His study focused on 32 children in immersion programmes who were experiencing difficulties in primary schools. They were compared with other children in mainstream English programmes. The series of testing was completed by a follow-up study involving immersion pupils with and without learning difficulties, pupils who had remained in the immersion programme since the first tests, pupils who had switched to an English programme since the first tests and pupils who had switched to an English programme at the time of the initial testing. His findings revealed that children with a mild maturational lag in the temporal lobe regions of the brain were not suited for immersion programmes although they had normal abilities for school progress in their native language (Trites, 1976, pp. 200-

201; Trites, 1984, p. 133). “The temporal lobes are important brain structures for auditory, perceptual abilities as well as for verbal and non-verbal perceptual and memory functions” (Trites, 1984, p. 132). The results of the follow-up study showed that children with difficulties in French immersion programmes who had switched to an English programme “accelerated in academic skills” although they remained at a lower level than their classmates (1976, p. 200; 1984, p. 132). The results obtained did not imply that children who experienced difficulties in the immersion programme would have had the same difficulties in an English programme:

*there are certain children who, in spite of being bright, highly motivated, coming from an advantaged socio-economic background, and being free from personality or neurological impairment, have a mild maturational lag [...]. These particular children progress normally when they are educated in the vernacular, but are unable to progress satisfactorily in a second-language immersion program. (1984, p. 133)*

According to Trites (1984), most studies (e.g. Peal & Lambert, 1962; Lambert & Tucker, 1972) have ignored or ruled out pupils with difficulties: “very rarely did these studies include a clear statement either to the number or percentage of children who dropped out of [the French immersion] program, or to the reasons for dropping out”, which may reveal a certain selectivity among the sample pupils by not taking account of children with difficulties (Trites, 1984, pp. 96-97).

In response to Trites' findings Cummins (1979, p. 142) argued that contrary to children who had switched to an English programme, immersion pupils had not fallen behind in terms of expected reading skills, despite their difficulties. Stern et al. (1976) also disagreed with Trites' conclusions about immersion programmes being detrimental to the development of the child facing difficulties. Trites' assertion that immersion pupils were behind in English language skills but made rapid gains once they had switched to an English programme is usually the norm among all immersion pupils. Research in Canada has shown that until grade 3 or 4 pupils tend to lag behind their English-educated peers in English skills (Swain, 1978) until they get a formal training in English language (Stern et al., 1976, p. 86).

A second influential piece of research focusing on language disabled children in Canada argued that switching children from an immersion programme to a core programme was ineffective (Bruck, 1978). At the time of Bruck's research it was argued that French immersion either caused or contributed to children's problems. The general belief shared by Trites (1976), among others, was that switching the child to an English programme would be easier for the child and his/her problems would disappear. The research undertaken by Bruck was supported by grants from the Quebec Ministry of Education, the Department of Secretary of State and by the National Health and Welfare Research Development Program. It focused on children with slow language development or language impairments, that is to say, children who acquire first language with “painful slowness” despite normal

intelligence and physical well-being (Bruck, 1984, p. 70). Language impairments can be the cause of academic difficulties (ibid.). The study consisted of evaluating annually four groups of children from kindergarten up to the end of grade 3 (age 4 to 7). The first group included language-impaired children in a French immersion programme who were compared with a group of language-impaired children in an English-medium programme and with two control groups with normal language development in both French immersion and English-medium schools. The results of the study indicated that there was no difference between language-impaired children in French immersion programmes and language-impaired children educated through English (1984, p. 85). According to Bruck's research, being educated through a second-language does not retard the acquisition of the language-impaired children's basic skills in reading, spelling and mathematics, despite the initial difficulty in acquiring those skills (1984, p. 87). This can partly be explained by the general context in which these children are educated as they are from majority culture backgrounds and educated in an additive bilingual environment (1984, pp. 73-74). Bruck's (1984) findings also showed, contrary to what Trites claimed, that switching from a French immersion programme to a core English programme generated the same problems and was detrimental to the child's self-esteem (this brought on a sense of failure, separation from schoolmates, difficulty in readjusting to a new education environment, etc.).

Trites and Bruck, whose respective research studies have been very influential, however, only focused on children with mild language impairments. Jean Rondal (1984), made an attempt to address the suitability of immersion education for retarded children. He distinguished two major groups of children suffering from retardation. The first group referred to as "mildly retarded" had an IQ between 50 and 75 whereas the severely retarded children scoring between 25 and 50 were part of the second group. Although these are only hypotheses, he suggested that immersion programmes would be suitable for "mildly mentally retarded" children provided that second-language learning was delayed—starting around 8 year of age—and that the necessary motivations and additive bilingual situation were established (p. 144). The major difference between mildly retarded children and non-retarded children is that their language development is delayed and incomplete (p. 145). By contrast, immersion programmes are hazardous for severely retarded individuals as they already have great difficulties in acquiring their first language. The addition of a second language could destabilise "their meagre linguistic accomplishments" (pp. 158-159).

There is still today a common belief according to which if one language is hard for a child (e.g. child with language impairments such as childhood aphasia, language-based learning disabilities or developmental language disorders) two languages will be harder. However, the limited research available shows that children with language impairments are capable of learning two languages at least at the same level as their monolingual peers with language impairments (Genesee, 1987, 2004;

Kohnert, 2008). Genesee (1987, 2004), for example, examined the performance of English-speaking children attending a French immersion programme in Canada at both primary and secondary level. The children's intellectual ability was first determined by way of a standardised IQ test. They were then assessed with respect to L1 (English) and L2 (French) development and academic achievement. Their scores were compared with the scores of children attending an English-speaking school. It was found that below-average children were not disadvantaged in their L1 development or academic achievement as a result of participation in immersion when compared with their below-average peers. Furthermore, below-average children in immersion were more proficient in L2 than their peers who were taught French as a subject. Genesee's study therefore suggests that children with low levels of academic intellectual ability are eligible for immersion education:

*low academic intellectual ability is no more of a handicap in bilingual education than it is in L1 programs and, on the contrary, low-performing students can experience a net benefit from immersion in the form of bilingual proficiency. (2004, p.562)*

The suitability of immersion education for all children is also an area of concern in Ireland. It has been observed, for instance, that despite the growth of immersion schools due to parents' demand there was still a lack of guidelines and practical training for teachers to support children with learning difficulties as well as a lack of appropriate standardised tests to assess children's progress (POBAL, 2010). However, POBAL's<sup>28</sup> research report (2010) also highlights that there is no evidence showing any advantage in moving a child from an Irish-medium school to an English-medium school because of learning difficulties.

This section has dealt with the development of research in bilingualism. It appears that there is no simple definition of bilingualism as each bilingual situation is unique and depends on language skills, social pressure, attitudes, and the like. Similarly, there is no simple way to assess bilingualism since it requires the control of a vast range of variables such as age, sex, socio-economic background, language acquisition, language competence, and so forth (Mackey, 1968; Wei, 2007). The history of research on bilingualism shows that there has been a change of methodology and of motivation (Hakuta, 1986). Research has moved away from the Western monolingualist view that prevailed up to the 1960s-70s according to which "a person who has two languages is strange in some sense, obviously different from the *normal* person" (Cook, 1997, p. 280). It progressed from studies concerned with whether or not bilingualism had a negative effect on cognitive development to those exploring the question of whether or not bilingualism had a positive effect on intelligence. Although it has been shown that

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28 POBAL is the umbrella organisation for the Irish language community in Northern Ireland. ([www.pobal.org](http://www.pobal.org))

bilingualism has no detrimental consequences on cognitive growth (Lambert, 1975; Stern et al., 1976; Ben-Zeev, 1977; Bialystok, 1987; Clarkson, 1992; Carlisle et al., 1999; Goetz, 2003) and that it can be suitable for children with learning difficulties (Bruck, 1978; 1984, Rondal, 1984; Genesee, 1987, 2004; Kohnert, 2008), the advantages of bilingualism are still being debated.

Research has shown nonetheless that bilingualism can have positive cognitive effects when considered in favourable settings where the minority language is neither discriminated against nor stereotyped (Lambert, 1975; Rondal, 1984; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002) and is taught in bilingual or immersion schools as a matter of choice on the part of the educated class (Cummins, 1976). The context of acquisition is therefore particularly important and could explain the mixed results on positive advantage to bilingualism. The results from a situation where parental support for the child's acquisition of two languages is strong are going to be more positive than for migrants' children whose mother tongue is stigmatised (Romaine, 1995). While the latter situation is well represented in the USA, the former situation in which parents play an important role is characteristic of Celtic countries such as Ireland.

### **1.5 Immersion education in the Republic of Ireland**

This last section looks at the Irish language situation in the education sector in the Republic of Ireland as a means of introducing the Irish immersion system which is central to this study.

In order to situate the status of the Irish language, it is necessary to first refer to the change in language ideology that occurred during British colonisation. Together with economic and political domination, English linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) contributed to English replacing Irish as the language of social mobility (Ó Buachalla, 1988; Ó Riagáin, 1997) and to the demise of the Irish language (See maps on the geographical distribution of Irish-speakers from 1800s onwards in Appendix 2). In this linguistic context of relations of power, the school was revealed as a significant vehicle of language shift (Barré, 2007). While Irish was spoken by a large majority of the population in the early nineteenth century (Cronin, 1996) the percentage of Irish speakers dropped significantly to 24.5% in 1861. By 1911 only 18.3% were reported to speak the language (see Percentage of Irish speakers in Appendix 1). However, subsequent to Independence another change in language ideology took place with the emergence of a new Irish national identity articulated around the notion of otherness in regards to the former coloniser, Britain. The Irish identity was therefore constructed around the Irish language and Gaelic heritage as dominant symbols of national distinctiveness (Tovey *et al.*, 1989, p. 19; Ó Croidheáin, 2006). Because of the impact the education system had had on the spread of English and the decline of the Irish, language policy makers decided to reverse the linguistic situation using what appeared to them to be the same and only vehicle that caused the loss of the Irish language: the schools (Kelly, 2002).

The first part of this section provides a brief history of the education system in Ireland from the mid nineteenth century to today.<sup>29</sup> It then focuses on language policy in education after Independence as it formed the main ideological strategy for language revival up until the 1970s. Finally, it presents the current system of Irish-medium schools as an essential background to this study.

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<sup>29</sup> See Appendix 4 for a descriptive diagram of the Irish education system.

### 1.5.1 Background to the Irish education system

The emergence of national schools in Ireland occurred in 1831 when the British Crown enacted the Education Act which established a national education system through the medium of English. This educational development engendered a decrease in illiteracy but also contributed to language shift from Irish to English (Ó Buachalla, 1988, p. 19). Although this piece of legislation aimed to convert the Irish people to the dominant English language, the provision of Irish-medium classes never really disappeared. The illegal practice of hedge schools or *scoil scairte* was based on teaching through the medium of Irish (Ní Chartúir, 2002). No definite location was attributed to the running of these classes as they were constantly on the move to avoid being discovered by the British constabulary. Another type of Irish-medium education emerged from the work of *Conradh na Gaeilge* or Gaelic League, a non-political organisation, whose goals were to preserve and promote the Irish language. The Gaelic League was established in 1893 and provided Irish classes for young people, adults and teachers with the possibility of attending summer schools or *coláistí samhraidh* in Irish-speaking areas (H. Ó Murchú, 2003). The Gaelic League proved to be influential in educational planning as the efforts they put together towards the promotion of Irish resulted in the availability of fee-paying Irish classes after school hours in 1879. This advancement was further developed in 1900 when Irish became an optional subject that could be taught during school hours, and reached its peak in 1904 with the provision of bilingual programmes in Irish-speaking areas. In 1921-22 a total of 239 bilingual primary schools were operating (Kelly, 2002, pp. 6-7). One of the first Irish-medium primary schools, Scoil Bhríde, was established in 1917 in Dublin and is to this day the oldest gaelscoil to operate in the country. The Gaelic League also campaigned for Irish to be an obligatory subject for matriculation examinations at the National University of Ireland (NUI)<sup>30</sup> which came into effect in 1913 (H. Ó Murchú, 2003). As a result, the number of students learning Irish at secondary level increased (Kelly, 2002). Furthermore, the Gaelic League proposed in 1919 to include Irish language, history and music in the curriculum (Ó Buachalla, 1988, p. 59). But it was only after the creation of the Free State<sup>31</sup> that the instruction of the national curriculum through Irish was recognised and implemented, reaching a high point in the 1940s with 12% of primary schools and 28% of secondary schools teaching through the medium of Irish in English-speaking areas (Ó Buachalla, 1988, p. 65), that is outside the Irish-speaking heartlands known as Gaeltacht (see Figure A2.4 in Appendix 2).

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<sup>30</sup> NUI is a federal university that was established under the Irish University Act, 1908 (see [www.nui.ie](http://www.nui.ie)).

<sup>31</sup> The Irish Free State or Saorstát Éireann was established in 1922 under the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The Treaty put an end to the Irish War of Independence and separated Northern Ireland from the rest of the island as the latter remained under British dominion. The Irish Free State became the Republic of Ireland in 1937.

After the school curricula for the national schools were established by the new Irish government in 1926 the number of primary schools teaching the first two years of the first level education—known as infant classes<sup>32</sup>—through the medium of Irish increased dramatically. In 1928, there were 1,240 primary schools in the country that taught infant classes entirely through the medium of Irish, 3,570 that taught bilingually and 373 that used the English language as the sole medium of instruction (Kelly, 2002, p. 44). By 1955, only 25 schools out of 4,876 used English only (2002, p. 57). Although the number of students attending secondary schools before 1967—when education became free (Ó Buachalla, 1994, p. 3)—was lower in comparison to primary school pupils, the use of Irish as a medium of instruction was also advocated. By 1941, 102 out of 362 secondary schools taught entirely through Irish while 113 taught partly through Irish (Kelly, 2002, p. 61). However, because of a change in the political climate in the 1970s when Ireland became more incorporated in the system of international capitalism, the percentage of children taught through the medium of Irish at secondary level fell to as low as 3% in 1980 (Ó Gliasáin, 1988, p. 90; Ó Riagáin; 1997, p. 24).<sup>33</sup>

After decades of failed efforts to revive the Irish language by the successive governments since the establishment of the Irish State and due to the fall in the number of Irish-medium schools, parents started to get organised and founded new Irish-medium schools in the 1970s. They were concerned about the standard of Irish taught in school and about the shift in language policy (H. Ó Murchú, 2008).<sup>34</sup> These schools were different from the schools operating during the revival period from the 1920s through to the 1950s in that they were established in response to community pressure (Ó Riagáin, 1997) to promote the language among a new generation of second learners. As a result of parents' determination six new Irish-medium primary schools opened in county Dublin in less than five years between 1972 and 1977 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979). This new generation of schools referred to as *gaelscoileanna* (see map of geographical distribution of Irish-medium schools in Appendix 4) proved to be a successful initiative which paved the way for more school openings nationwide from the 1980s onwards to reach 141 recognised Irish-medium primary schools or *gaelscoileanna* in the twenty-six counties in September 2012.<sup>35</sup> The popularity of Irish-medium primary schools rapidly created a demand for Irish-medium education at secondary level. Although the number of secondary schools is lower there were 36 Irish-medium post-primary education institutions nationwide in

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32 First level education consists of an eight year cycle. Infant classes are pre-primary classes. They include Junior Infant Class and Senior Infant Class “While there is no national provision for pre-schooling in Ireland, first level schools accept children on or after their fourth birthday. (...) Although children in Ireland are not obliged to attend school until the age of six, (...) most four-year olds and almost all five-year olds are enrolled in infants classes in first level schools” (DES, 2004, pp. 5-6, 9).

33 See Appendix 4, Table A4.1: Percentage of Students Attending an Irish-Medium Secondary School 1930-2010

34 The shift in language policy will be detailed in both section 1.5.2 and Chapter Two.

35 See Appendix 4, Table A4.2 Number of Irish-Medium Schools in the Republic of Ireland 2010/2011. There were 36 *gaelscoileanna* in Northern Ireland in September 2012.



September 2012 and this number is set to expand further with the announcement of the opening of three Irish-medium secondary schools in 2014 (Donnelly, 2011).

Due to parents' demand for the establishment of Irish-medium schools in the 1970s, the organisation Gaelscoileanna Teoranta was established in 1973 in order to provide guidance, advice and training to founding committees and boards of management, and to oversee the expansion of Irish-medium education outside the Gaeltacht<sup>36</sup> at both primary and secondary levels as well as communicate with the Department of Education. In 1978, its equivalent for Irish-medium pre-school education, An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta Teo, was founded (Walsh, 2003). It was succeeded by Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta in 2003 which is a voluntary organisation that supports the promotion of education and care services in Irish for children from birth.<sup>37</sup>

The interest in and development of immersion education as it is today was facilitated by early language policies (as described below and detailed in Chapter 2) but is also the result of a lack of state commitment in the past few decades, as the next section will show.

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36 Gaeltacht schools have a different status from Irish-medium schools in the rest of the country as they are located in Irish-speaking communities. The terms Irish-medium primary schools and gaelscoil will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis and refer to the provision of immersion education through the medium of Irish outside the Gaeltacht areas.

37 Since 2004 Forbairt Naíonraí Teo. is responsible for Irish-medium pre-schools or naíonraí outside the Gaeltacht only. Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta is the coordinating body for naíonraí within the Gaeltacht. Naíonraí from the two bodies operate differently. Those under Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta follow a detailed curriculum whereas each naíonra outside the Gaeltacht is free to develop its own learning plans. (Information obtained in a personal correspondence via email with a representative of Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta (July 2011)). See [www.naionra.ie](http://www.naionra.ie)

### 1.5.2 Ideology in education language policy

There was a significant shift in language policy between the early years of the new State and the mid-1970s—the period which followed Ireland's entry in the global market (Kelly, 2002). Although language policy in Ireland is dealt with in more detail in the next chapter, it is important to look at the history of language policy in education to understand better the position of Irish-medium schools in the present situation. As a matter of fact, the school is one of the most important domains for language policy (Spolsky, 2004).

After Independence, the new Irish government envisaged the revival of the Irish language with the aim being that the new nation became fully bilingual. This process was to be achieved mainly through the education system by teaching the Irish language in all primary schools and by encouraging schools with qualified teachers to use Irish as a medium of instruction (Kelly, 2002; Murtagh, 2009). This language policy originated from the perception at the time of Independence that major changes in the education system from the 1830s had contributed to the decline of the Irish language. Therefore, it was thought that by targeting the education system the language would be restored as a community language (Kelly, 2002). The education system was then regarded as a powerful tool for language reversal. This position overlooked the simplicity of the initial argument according to which English replaced Irish through the school system. It omitted the fact that Irish people had also switched to English for social mobility reasons (Ó Riagáin, 1997; Kelly, 2002). Subsequently, as the future would reveal, no such tremendous task of language restoration was likely to succeed by relying solely on schools (Fishman, 1991; May, 2001). Yet, up until the 1960s, the government encouraged pupils, mostly in primary schools, to learn Irish as a “national duty” (Kelly, 2002, p. 17).

The policy of revival has been described as “the single most important policy shaping the education system of independent Ireland” (Kelly, 2002, p. 1). However, revival policies in the education sector generally translated into compulsion for pupils, teachers and parents, which quickly resulted in their unpopularity among both teachers and parents (INTO, 1941; Ó Riagáin, 1997; Kelly, 2002).

In 1920 a conference set a programme that gave Irish a new official status. It recommended that the instruction in infant classes should be done entirely through the medium of Irish and that the subjects of History and Geography of Ireland together with Singing be taught through the Irish language (INTO, 1941). This decision was further developed in 1926—after complaints from the teachers questioning the feasibility of the education programme—and recommended that only teachers sufficiently qualified would teach through the medium of Irish (i.e. a teacher in possession of bilingual or higher certificates or a native speaker) when children were competent enough to receive such an instruction through Irish. The lack of competent teachers was a difficulty that had to be

overcome by restricting the teaching of Irish to situations where qualified teachers were available. The 1926 recommendation also stipulated that the use of Irish in infant classes should be provided in the time frame between 10.30am and 2pm for each school day (ibid.). Another circular in 1934 reinforced these criteria—mainly the provision of instruction entirely through Irish when conditions were good, that is to say when the teacher had the ability to speak Irish and pupils had the ability to assimilate the instruction given in Irish (ibid.). Wherever Irish could not be used as the sole medium of instruction, it was to gradually replace English in the higher course (Kelly, 2002, p. 43). However, the conditions necessary for teaching through Irish were nebulous. As a result, few schools observed the rules and regulations concerning the language.

Despite criticism the programme for national schools came into effect in 1926. It ignored teachers' considerations and the impracticability of such a policy without adequate teaching material and teacher training and the absence of a standardised version of the language (Kelly, 2002). Furthermore, in 1932 the provision of Irish-medium primary schools was made for children with a good command of Irish in areas where the local school was not using Irish as the medium of instruction (ibid., p. 45).

As early as 1924, politicians, teachers and other groups expressed their concern about compulsory Irish. The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) later investigated the matter as Irish education and its role in reviving Irish among English-speakers had become a burning issue:

*The investigation was undertaken because of the growing doubts among the teaching body as to whether the use of Irish as a medium of instruction in English-speaking districts was hindering rather than helping the cause of the language revival. (INTO, 1941, p. 3)*

In 1936, a questionnaire was distributed to 9,000 teachers who had Irish-medium teaching experience (INTO, 1941). In the school year 1936-1937, 288 schools used Irish as the sole medium of instruction in English-speaking areas and 2,032 schools provided some classes through the medium of Irish in the same areas. Only 1,347 teachers answered the questionnaire but the majority confirmed the doubts about the negative impact of Irish-medium instruction on the children's education and development:

*the children do not receive the same benefits from instruction through Irish that they would receive had instruction been through English and that it would be better from the point of view of the mental and physical development of the child that both languages rather than Irish alone should be used when English is the home language. (ibid., p. 20)*

The investigation focused particularly on infant classes and on pupils whose first language was English. Because of lack of research into immersion education at that time the general impression was one of immersion being an impediment to the child's intellectual development. Rather, teachers proposed to alternate lessons through Irish and lessons through English during the school day. They

believed Irish could be revived without being the medium of instruction. However, the government dismissed the report on the grounds that it represented only the views of 10% of Irish teachers (Kelly, 2002).

Outside school, provisions were also made from the 1930s through a system of state grants to encourage children to spend time in the Irish-speaking areas, the *Gaeltchtaí*, by attending summer colleges (ibid.). This initiative was valuable to the Irish revival in that it showed children that the Irish language was not just a school subject but also a community language. Furthermore, the popularity of summer colleges throughout the years indicated parents' and children's commitment to learning the language.

Provision was also made for secondary school teaching where Irish was a compulsory subject. From 1927 onwards, students had to pass Irish or English in order to obtain the Intermediate Certificate. This was extended to the Leaving Certificate examination<sup>38</sup> in 1934 (Ó Gliasáin, 1988; Ó Riagáin, 1997; Kelly, 2002). The use of Irish as a medium of education was also encouraged. This is due to several reasons. It was considered logical in the context of language restoration, necessary for matriculation in the National University of Ireland (NUI) and it did not require as many teachers as in the primary school system since one qualified teacher per school was sufficient. A system of grants favoured schools that used Irish as the sole medium of instruction. It was based on three types of secondary schools (Ó Gliasáin, 1988; Ó Riagáin, 1997; Kelly, 2002; H. Ó Murchú, 2003):

- Class A or Irish-medium schools where the curriculum was entirely taught through Irish.
- Class B or bilingual schools where the curriculum was partly taught through Irish and partly taught through English.
- Class C where Irish was taught as a subject only.

The number of schools A and B increased in the 1930s with 56% of recognised secondary schools by 1935 that changed from class C to class A or B (Ó Gliasáin, 1988, p. 89), and continued to do so in the 1940s. But this growth may have been the result of various financial incentives given to schools, teachers and students. In effect, secondary schools although privately owned depended on state financial support and the minimum requirement to receive grants was to teach Irish as a subject (Ó Gliasáin, 1988). Class A schools enjoyed great success until the 1960s when the lack of third-level facilities through Irish as well as the shortage of books and materials suitable for an Irish-medium education became a real obstacle that could no longer be ignored (Kelly, 2002). Many schools in both

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38 The Intermediate Certificate which became the Junior Certificate in 1992 was the State examination taken at the end of the third year of junior cycle (lower secondary education) when students were 15 years of age. The Leaving Certificate marks the end of secondary education. Students who sit the Leaving Certificate Examination are 17 or 18 years of age and have completed five or six years of secondary education. Performance of participants in the examination can be used for purposes of selection into employment, and into further and higher education. ([www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie))

class A and class B closed down as the Irish language was growing unpopular and was no longer a priority on the political agenda. The introduction of free education in 1967 contributed largely to the loss of students attending Irish-medium secondary schools as “free places were more attractive than the existing grants for Irish-medium secondary schools” (Ó Buachalla, 1994, p. 3). Furthermore, when the school travel scheme was put in place that year no provision was made for students who wished to travel to the nearest Irish-medium secondary school (ibid.). The number of Class A schools in 1960 was 80 but this figure decreased to 19 by 1980. The fall in the number of Class B schools was more drastic as it went from 156 in 1960 to 2 in 1980 (Ó Glasáin, 1988, p. 90). The change that occurred in education policy at secondary level is mainly due to an increase in secondary school attendance and changing socioeconomic opportunities (Ó Glasáin, 1988).

The idea of teaching Irish as a subject had always been considered insufficient for the revival of Irish as a community language. Rather, the use of Irish as a medium of instruction was essential to enhance its use in the school and beyond. This argument was strongly supported by the Department of Education which ignored scientific evidence—when it became available from the 1940s onwards—indicating that children were disadvantaged educationally when taught entirely through Irish (INTO, 1941; Kelly, 2002). Furthermore, the emphasis on the Irish language grew at the expense of other subjects such as algebra and geometry and standards in the English language were lowered: “there could be no question that the standard of education was being sacrificed to the goal of revival” (Kelly, 2002, p. 46). The curriculum programme dating back to 1934 which aimed at the efficient teaching of Irish and the development of teaching through Irish remained largely unchanged until 1971 (ibid.).

The rule of using Irish as a medium of instruction was relaxed in the 1950s. The importance of teaching Irish well rather than teaching badly through the medium of Irish prevailed in 1960. The Department of Education put an end to the use of Irish as a medium of instruction in the majority of national schools. It resulted in the dramatic fall in the number of Irish-medium schools. In 1973 the government abolished compulsory Irish in state examinations—formal examinations at the end of secondary level. Although it was still necessary to sit the exam, the need to pass Irish in order to pass both the Intermediate and Leaving Certificates was abolished. However, the National University of Ireland (NUI) still required a pass in Irish for matriculation (Ó Riagáin, 1997; Kelly, 2002).

The revival language policy formulated in the 1920s which relied heavily on the education system failed. Practical issues such as teachers' qualifications in the Irish language, the availability of teaching materials in Irish and the lack of a standardised version of the language were ignored, which contributed to the failure of the revival. “The attempted revival through the education system illustrated the dangers of allowing ideology win over pragmatism in the formulation of policy” (Kelly, 2002, p. 141).

Today, the Irish language is a compulsory subject taught at both primary and secondary level in all national schools, and is the medium of instruction in 7% of Irish schools.<sup>39</sup> Irish is also a compulsory subject at both Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations and students are encouraged to answer the examination papers in Irish. This incentive gives students the possibility of getting extra marks and a scholarship. The teaching of Irish extends language awareness to the broader community and is also useful in the production of competent Irish speakers to fill positions in the Irish-medium sector (H. Ó Murchú, 2003).

The allocated time for the teaching of Irish was about one hour a day until 1999 when the Primary School Curriculum was revised (Inspectorate DES, 2007a). Despite this provision schools were not able to produce many proficient Irish-speakers as pupils' performance was not up to the standard required. It appears that the curriculum objectives were not realistic and that the general public depended too much on the schools to produce fluent speakers (Harris, 1984). Irish is now taught for a minimum of 3.5 hours a week in primary school (DES, 1999). It has been observed that the standard of read and spoken Irish is declining in primary schools (Harris et al., 2006).<sup>40</sup> In contrast, it has been shown that pupils attending Irish-medium primary schools have much higher levels of achievement in reading and speaking Irish than their peers in English-medium schools (Harris, 1984; Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Harris et al., 2006). In terms of school policy regarding the Irish language, Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools are most advanced in drafting an Irish policy for their schools in accordance with the sections 9(f) and 9 (h) of the 1998 Education Act which places the responsibility of promoting the use of Irish (Inspectorate DES, 2007b). Irish-medium school policy supports the Irish language as the main language of the school as well as of the community—especially in the Gaeltacht areas.

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<sup>39</sup> Education statistics available on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

See Appendix 4, Table A4.3 Number and Percentage of Primary Schools Teaching through the Medium of Irish 1930-2010

<sup>40</sup> What is more, the number of exemptions from Irish is increasing in secondary schools (Inspectorate DES, 2007b). According to the circular M10/94 issued by the Department of Education and Science in 1994, students eligible to an exemption from the study of Irish are students who have spent a certain number of years of primary education outside the Republic of Ireland or students who have recognised learning difficulties.

### 1.5.3 Immersion education in Irish-medium schools

Immersion education in Ireland covers all the different education levels from pre-school to third level even though some are better developed than others. Pre-school education and third-level degrees (other than in the study of the Irish language) are relatively new in comparison to primary and secondary education. This section reviews current Irish immersion education at pre-school, primary, secondary and third-level levels before presenting some of the challenges this type of education is facing.

There has been an increase in the demand of pre-schooling services in Ireland in the past few decades, which coincides with women's increasing participation in the workforce (Hickey, 1997, p.5). Although pre-schooling can be expensive<sup>41</sup> more and more families choose to enrol their children in these institutions so they can interact with other children and develop intellectual skills while playing surrounded by teaching staff in a secure environment. In the case of Irish-medium pre-schools or *naíonraí* the child is introduced to the Irish language through play at an early age.<sup>42</sup> Families who enrol their children in a *naíonra* have for the majority registered their children in a *gaelscoil*. The total number of *naíonraí* in the Republic in 2001-2002, for instance, was 251, 179 of which were located outside the Gaeltacht. This represents a total number of 3,422 children nationwide and of 2,584 children enrolled outside the designated Irish-speaking areas (H. Ó Murchú, 2003, p. 93) In 2002, 292 *Naíonraí* groups (220 outside the Gaeltacht areas) in Ireland were providing Irish language immersion preschools for children 3-6 years of age (Walsh, 2003). It should be noted, however, that most children 4 years of age attend an Irish-medium primary school rather than a *naíonra*. More recently, there were approximately 145 *naíonraí* outside the Gaeltacht for the year 2009-2010.<sup>43</sup> This figure was up 19 pre-schools in September 2010. The number of pre-schools appears to fluctuate from year to year with the closure, new opening and re-opening of *Naíonra* groups but remains higher than the number of Irish-medium primary schools, even at its lowest. The increase observed from 2009 to 2010 is due to several reasons. The appointment of a Development Officer in 2009 and the increase in 2010 in the number of staff available to support individuals interested in setting up a *naíonra*, facilitated the opening of new *naíonraí*. Furthermore, in 2010, a number of English medium services such as crèches and day-care centres, showed an interest in setting up a *naíonra* session within their existing facility. This came as a result of competition in the area from existing *naíonraí* as some *gaelscoileanna* have a policy of giving

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41 Pre-schooling has been free for 3-year olds for one year only since January 2010 under the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme ([www.dcy.gov.ie](http://www.dcy.gov.ie))

42 [www.naionra.ie](http://www.naionra.ie)

43 Information obtained in a personal correspondence via email with a representative of Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta (July 2011) as no official data was available at the time.

preference to children who attended a naíonra. Therefore if there is a gaelscoil in the area, parents wishing to send their children to the gaelscoil the following year, are likely to favour the naíonra over an English medium facility. Finally and most significantly, the Early Childhood Care and Education programme that was put in place in January 2010 and which provides for one free pre-school year for children aged 3 years and over, is also part of the rise in the numbers attending an Irish-medium pre-school.<sup>44</sup> Census data also show that the percentage of 3-4 year olds with ability in Irish increased over the years to reach 13.7% nationally and 12.6% outside the Gaeltacht in 2006 (CSO, 2007, pp. 32-33, Tables 6 & 7A). This rise is closely related to the provision of Irish-medium pre-schooling as figures indicate that 63% of this cohort used Irish daily in education only (ibid., p. 84, Table 35).

Primary education is the most developed and the most popular level of education through Irish. The Gaelscoileanna movement started in Dublin in the early 1970s and was parent-led (Ó Riagáin, 1997; H. Ó Murchú, 2008). The demand from parents to open new schools that would provide for an education through the medium of Irish first came from parents concerned about the level of Irish taught in ordinary schools. But it rapidly became popular among English-speaking families with no real solid command of the Irish language. In the 1977 survey conducted by Pádraig Ó Riagáin and Mícheál Ó Gliasáin (1979) in Dublin, the “newer schools” (post-1970) differed from the “older schools” (pre-1970) in terms of parents' reasons for enrolment in a gaelscoil. Parents with children attending schools established before 1970 were more concerned about the language dimension and had more defined objectives in mind than parents in the newer schools who chose mixed reasons; i.e. language reasons and non-language reasons (ibid., pp. 47 & 54). The majority of respondents were extremely favourable towards the Irish language with 72% of the respondents expressing a very positive attitude compared to 19% nationally (ibid., p. 35). However, only a minority of families were in favour of home bilingualism with 38% of the respondents supporting an all-Irish home (ibid., p. 37). This new generation of Irish-medium schools were therefore schools for second language learners and contrasted with the Gaeltacht schools where Irish is the community language. Very few pupils already had a good knowledge of Irish when they first started attending the school: “it appears that at the pre-AIS [All-Irish school] stage only 15% of the families used Irish extensively (i.e. 50% of the time or more often).” (ibid., p. 60).

Since the 1970s the number of gaelscoileanna around the country has kept growing and reached 141 as of September 2012 with 32 schools in county Dublin alone.<sup>45</sup> There are Irish-medium schools in

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44 Information obtained in a personal correspondence via email with a representative of Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta (July 2011).

45 [www.gaelscoileanna.ie](http://www.gaelscoileanna.ie)



every county.<sup>46</sup> The demand for Irish-medium primary schools between 1973 and 1982 was quite regular with an average of two schools opened every two years except in 1978 and 1980 when one school extra opened in each of those years. The year 1981 was an exceptional year as six schools were recognised by the Department of Education. From that period onwards the number of gaelscoileanna increased significantly with the opening of 27 schools within four years (1983-1986). A gaelscoil boom occurred again from 1993 to 1998 with the opening of 30 schools with the exception of 1997 when no school was recognised. Since 2005 the number of schools opening has increased slightly with an average of four to five schools a year. It must be noted that in between the periods of great growth of the immersion sector the number of schools opening has been around two gaelscoileanna a year. The number of pupils attending Irish-medium schools increased from 1.1% of the population of primary school pupils in 1985 to 5% in 2002 (Harris et al., 2006, p. 64) and to 5.9% in 2012.<sup>47</sup>

Ireland has recently experienced changes in different facets of society including in the sector of education. Since the 1980s parents have become more aware of the notion of choice and the importance of providing a high-quality education for their children. The role of parents has always been seen to be at the centre of the child's education. The Constitution stipulates that it recognises the primacy of parents in their children's education:

*The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.*<sup>48</sup>

Because the active role of parents in the school and more generally in education is relatively new the Constitution is the main legal argument regarding parental choice of school. Most of the schools that have opened since the 1980s are the result of parents' demand for a more diversified provision of education (CSA, 1998). Religious authorities used to be in charge of negotiations with the government on behalf of the parents. The Department of Education now directly deals with parents who wish to exercise their right to demand the provision of an education that is different from the one in place in their area (ibid.). The development of Irish-medium schools as well as Educate Together<sup>49</sup> schools is the most noticeable achievement of the past three decades and has happened in areas where national schools already existed. This accomplishment would not have happened if parents had not demanded it. Parents have therefore taken their role more seriously and have taken a step further by actively

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46 See Appendix 4, Table A4.2: Number of Irish-Medium Schools in the Republic of Ireland 2010-2011; and Figure A4.2: Geographical Distribution of Irish-Medium Schools Outside the Gaeltacht Areas, 2009/2010.

47 <http://www.gaelscoileanna.ie/about/statistics/?lang=en>

48 The Constitution of Ireland/Bunreacht na hÉireann (1937), Article 42.1.

49 Educate Together is the main patron for multi-denominational schools.

participating in the school negotiations, the school management, etc. This is the result of a bigger concern for the quality of education and the need for a meaningful participation (ibid.).

As already mentioned, *gaelscoileanna* began as a parent-led initiative. The involvement of the community in the setting up of new schools is relatively recent, coming into play as Irish society has changed. The change in population both from a demographic and an ethnic point of view—most significantly in the 1990s—has encouraged individuals to take action. In terms of education for example, the appearance of new patrons<sup>50</sup> such as the multi-denominational Educate Together (1984) or Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge (1993)—also known as An Foras Pátrúnachta—that looks after Irish-medium schools shows that people currently living in Ireland have new needs. Parents are now looking for diversity in the provision of education and need to break away from the monopoly of the Catholic and/or English-medium education system. It should be noted, however, that the Irish-medium school patron also supports the Catholic ethos as many of the newer schools have a Catholic ethos. Due to this demand, the Department of Education and Science have recognised new patrons and set up criteria for the recognition of new primary schools.

The common criteria for all primary schools are (CSA, 1998, p. 17):

- that the need for the school be established
- that enrolment numbers be sufficient
- that the patron be suitable
- that the proposer agree to establish a board of management in accordance with Department regulations
- that the proposer agree to manage the school in accordance with the Rules for National Schools of the Department of Education
- that only recognised primary school teachers will be employed

Catholic English-medium schools are the most common in Ireland.<sup>51</sup> However, if a significant number of parents wish to send their children to a school with a different ethos they have to build a

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50 Most primary schools in Ireland are privately owned by patrons. The State contributes to the bulk of the building and running costs. A large majority of schools are supported by different churches. As for multi-denominational schools they are usually owned by a limited company or a board of trustees. The patron of a school usually appoints a board of management to run the school. “The patron has ultimate responsibility for the school ethos, the appointment of the board of management, financial and legal matters and the supervision of staff appointments in accordance with Department regulations.” (<http://www.education.ie/robots/view.jsp?pcategory=10861&language=EN&ecategory=41296&link=link001&doc=34229>).

51 The Catholic Church and Church of Ireland have always been responsible for the establishment of primary schools wherever they were needed through the means of sponsorship until the 1980s when new patrons were recognised by the Department of Education. It should be noted that privately-owned national schools are publicly funded (CSA, 2004, p. 11).

In 2006-2007 the Department of Education counted 3,279 primary schools within the 26 counties 3,039 of which were under the patronage of the Catholic church.

case and present their request to the Department of Education. If parents' demands come from an area where there is already a national school which has not reached its full potential the demand to build a new school will not be regarded as a priority and can only be considered if the community provides further justification. In other words, if the community manages to fulfill the different criteria to open a school they need to justify the unique character that other schools in the area cannot offer. According to the Department of Education and Science (2002) a new primary school will be recognised if: "the proposed school meets a need that cannot reasonably be met within existing provision." Parents interested in opening a gaelscoil in their area usually go to the organisation Gaelscoileanna Teoranta to get help with the administrative procedure.

Gaelscoileanna Teo was founded in 1973 as an advice giving body for parents interested in establishing an Irish-medium school in their living area. This body helps the community to set up a committee—the Founding Committee—and choose a patron. The committee is mainly made up of parents and is responsible for the fund-raising and information campaign while patrons deal with the school management.<sup>52</sup> Gaelscoileanna Teo assists parents in the completion of the application form for state recognition and funding. This process implies that the community has found a minimum of 17 pupils in junior infant class for the first year of operation and projects to have a minimum of 51 pupils enrolled by the third year of operation (DES, 2002). It usually takes one year before the Department of Education grants provisional state recognition to a primary school. In the meantime the community has to raise funds to cover the costs. Provisional recognition is generally granted for two to three years and this leads to permanent recognition if the sustainability of the school is ensured. During this provisional period the Department of Education and Skills (DES)<sup>53</sup> pays for the teachers' salaries only. Because the new school is not permanently recognised, it is entitled to temporary accommodation. The school has to pay rent and, in the case of gaelscoileanna<sup>54</sup>, receives a refund of 75% of the costs from the DES. In order to cover the costs of the other 25% of the rent, furniture, and the like, parents have to organise fund-raising events. When the school is eventually granted permanent recognition it receives capital funding for permanent accommodation. In the case of gaelscoileanna the DES caters for the entire cost of the school building and remains the owner of the school (CSA, 1998). Although Gaelscoileanna Teo supports both primary and secondary Irish-medium education few demands are

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(<http://www.education.ie/robots/view.jsp?pcategory=10861&language=EN&ecategory=41296&link=link001&doc=34229>).

52 The information in this section comes from notes taken at different interviews with Gaelscoileanna Chief Executive Bláthnaid Ó Ghréacháin, the Principal of Gaelscoil Rus Eo (Rush, Co. Dublin) Sinéad Ní Ghuibhir and Alison Carruth Head of the Founding Committee for the opening of a gaelscoil in Tyrrelstown (Dublin 15) unless stated otherwise.

53 The Department of Education and Science was renamed Department of Education and Skills in 2010.

54 Funding support for temporary accommodation varies from 50% to 100% depending on the category the school belongs to (CSA, 1998, pp. 18-19).

made to set up Irish-medium secondary schools as parents are more reluctant to deal with an under resourced sector.

Because of an unprecedented demand for Irish-medium schools the Department of Education and Skills (DES) has been facing accommodation problems. There were 11 gaelscoileanna outside of the Gaeltacht areas in 1972 compared with 100 in 1997 (CSA, 1998) and 139 in September 2010. The growth of the Irish-medium sector has therefore been continuous for the past forty years. The significant number of new Irish-medium schools but also of new multi-denomination schools together with the increasing prices of properties in Ireland have made the provision of permanent buildings extremely difficult. In 1998, the Commission on School Accommodation reported the long waiting-list for the acquisition of a permanent building: “At present, a new school can exist in temporary accommodation for one to fifteen years before it is established in permanent accommodation.” (CSA, 1998, p. 21). Gaelscoileanna Teoranta organised a campaign in May 2007 asking the DES to address the urgent problem of temporary buildings. According to the organisation 53% of gaelscoileanna in 2007 did not have permanent accommodation. Some schools have been waiting for more than ten years and up to twenty years.<sup>55</sup> A significant number of these schools are established in prefabricated buildings or have to share facilities with sport clubs or scout groups. It can impact on the school routine in that teachers may encounter difficulties making the pupils feel comfortable because of low-heating, lack of privacy, lack of space, etc.<sup>56</sup> However, despite these shortcomings the schools still enjoy high rates of enrolment due to very strong support and involvement from the parents.

As figures show in the table below, the percentage of pupils going from an Irish-medium primary school to an Irish-medium secondary school is increasing. However, it only represents over a quarter of the gaelscoil pupils. There is actually a decline in the number of pupils attending an Irish-medium secondary school compared with the number attending primary level.

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55 [www.gaelscoileanna.ie](http://www.gaelscoileanna.ie)

56 Notes from an interview with Sinéad Ní Ghuibhir, Principal of Gaelscoil Rus Eo, Rush, Co. Dublin.

**Table 1.1: Irish-Medium School Attendance outside the Gaeltacht at both Primary and Secondary Levels, 1999-2010<sup>57</sup>**

	Primary Schools	Pupils in Primary Schools	Secondary schools	Pupils in Secondary Schools (2001-2002)	Percentage of Pupils Going from Primary to Secondary Schools
1999-2002 <sup>58</sup>	112	19,491 (1999-2000)	23	4,699 (2001-2002)	24.1% (over a period of three years)
2009-2010	138	28,581	36	7,468	26.1%
2010-2011	139	29,733	36	7,888	26.5%

This loss in number can be explained partly by the unavailability of secondary schools in some areas as the 36 Irish-medium secondary schools are located in 15 of the 26 counties, and 8 of these schools are in Co. Dublin. This problem has been acknowledged and according to the recommendations of the Commission on School Accommodation Report (2004, p. 71), “each child availing of first level education through the medium of Irish should have access to similar second level provision.” The announcement of the opening of three more schools in the counties of Dublin and Cork for 2014 (Donnelly, 2011) seems to address this issue although it is not aimed at counties that are totally deprived of Irish-medium secondary education.<sup>59</sup>

It should be noted that the variety of secondary schools available and the potential they offer for third-level education can be a deciding factor in the choice of secondary school. Some Irish-medium secondary schools are ranked among the top schools in Ireland. In 2005, four of the Top 10 national secondary schools<sup>60</sup> were Irish-medium schools (Murphy & McConnell, 2006, p. 1) with three of them remaining among the Top 10 in 2010.<sup>61</sup>

- Coláiste na Coiribe (Galway) was second in 2005 with 92.8% of its students going on to higher education but was downgraded to 24 in 2010 with 72.7% of its students going on to higher education.

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<sup>57</sup> [www.gael scoileanna.ie](http://www.gael scoileanna.ie)

<sup>58</sup> (H. Ó Murchú, 2003, p. 96)

<sup>59</sup> This will bring the number to 10 Irish-medium secondary schools in Co. Dublin and 9 in Co. Cork.

<sup>60</sup> Secondary schools were ranked by the percentage of students registering in one of the nine universities in Ireland (Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) as well as their associated teacher training colleges or institutes of technology. This list includes schools with a minimum of 100 students.

<sup>61</sup> Sunday Times Parents' Power School Guide 2011 cited in <http://www.schooldays.ie/articles/Sunday-Times-Parent-Power-Schools-Guide-2011#nd> [Accessed on 20.07.11].

- Coláiste Iosagáin (Booterstown, Co. Dublin) was fourth with 86.9% of its students going on to higher education in 2005. It remained fourth in 2010 with 91.1% of its students going on to higher education.
- Coláiste Eoin (Booterstown, Co. Dublin) was sixth with 85.2% of its students going on to higher education in 2005. It was tenth in 2010 with 83.9% of its students going on to higher education.
- Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ (Limerick) was seventh with 83.9% of its students going on to higher education in 2005. It gained two places in 2010 with 89.6% of its students going on to higher education.

The promotion of the Irish language in the third-level sector is ensured by both the Higher Education Authority Act 1971 and the Universities Act 1997. The provision of third-level education through Irish is limited to a certain number of programmes and is only available in some universities (Ó Suilleabhán, 2004). In 1929, special provision was made in University College Galway to extend the use of Irish as a medium of instruction to third-level education (H. Ó Murchú, 2003). Until the 1970s it provided courses through Irish in the humanities, the sciences, economics, engineering and taught the early stages of medicine through Irish (Ó Buachalla, 1994). A few of the oldest courses taught through Irish besides the teaching of the Irish language itself date back to 1932 at Cork University where a few lecturers taught Chemistry, Education, Mathematics and History/Geography (Ó Suilleabhán, 2004). The University of Galway provided for additional lectures in 1945 in the teaching of Chemistry, Physics, French and Botany. However, these subjects were mainly taught to first-year students. Both universities had difficulties at the time regarding the recruitment of qualified lecturers, the number of students enrolled, students' level of Irish and the shortage of textbooks in Irish. University-level Irish requires such an excellent knowledge of written Irish and terminology that even fluent speakers may not have the skills to fill a teaching position. In the earlier years of third-level education through Irish the very small number of students attending the lectures and the uncertainty that a minimum of students would attend the courses each year jeopardised the lecturers' jobs. In 1950 the President of Cork College University already mentioned the low standard of Irish that most students had when starting college and the lack of teaching materials (*ibid.*). These problems are still an issue of concern despite major developments in Irish-medium education in Ireland over the past few decades (see Harris et al., 2006).

The Irish-medium third-level sector is nonetheless growing as the establishment of Fiontar<sup>62</sup> within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Dublin City University in 1993 demonstrates. This department is unique in Ireland as it provides for entrepreneurship education on an interdisciplinary

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62 Fiontar means enterprise in Irish.

basis. It is also the only university in Ireland that offers a full primary degree through Irish to students coming from secondary school in another area than the study of the Irish language (Nic Pháidín, 2004). In 1994, a four-year degree was created in Finance, Computing and Enterprise (BSc). The number of courses available has been growing and in 2000 a one-year postgraduate degree, MSc in Business, Technology and Information was established (Nic Pháidín, 2004). Today, Fiontar has the following teaching programmes:

- BA Business and Irish Language
- BA Irish and Journalism
- MA in Bilingual Practices
- MSc in Business, Technology and Information

In 2003 Fiontar taught 65 modules through Irish and had around 70 students attending the Irish-medium programmes along with ten full-time and six part-time staff (Nic Pháidín, 2004). Fiontar also works on various Irish Language research projects including the 20 Year Strategy Plan for the Irish Language.<sup>63</sup>

While third-level courses taught through the medium of Irish are restricted to some disciplines in certain colleges they are mostly available in English-speaking areas. Nonetheless, there have been developments at the University of Galway (NUIG) such as in 2004 with the establishment of Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge and its satellite units operating in the Irish-speaking areas (Gaeltachtaí).<sup>64</sup> The Irish-medium programmes that it provides are Communication Studies; Language Planning; the Performing Arts; Information Technology; Education Studies; Translation Studies; Applied Irish; Business, Administration and Management Studies and Community Development.

While provision of third-level education through the medium of Irish in the Gaeltacht is relatively new, Irish-medium primary and secondary education has been officially available in the Gaeltacht since the foundation of the State. There are two types of Irish-medium schools in the Republic of Ireland: Gaeltacht schools and gaelscoileanna. Gaeltacht schools are located in official Irish-speaking areas or Gaeltachtaí whereas gaelscoileanna operate outside the Gaeltacht areas. The Gaeltacht schools are different in the sense that their function is to contribute “to the maintenance of Irish as the primary community language” (Education Act, 1998, section 9(h)). Both types of school provide for an education through Irish but the amount of Irish used during the classes can vary from one school to another. One could expect that schools located in English-speaking areas use more English than those

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63 The 20-year plan was published in 2010 and is a government's strategy to preserve and promote the Irish language. Among its objectives is the increase of the number of people who can speak Irish fluently to more than one in twenty by 2028.

64 <http://www.nuigalway.ie/acadamh/>

in the Gaeltacht areas because the majority of its pupils come from an English-speaking background (H. Ó Murchú, 2003). Similarly, one could think that Gaeltacht schools use the Irish language exclusively because it is the language of the local community. But in reality, it happens to be different: gaelscoileanna tend to use Irish exclusively and pupils are required not to use English on the school premises. Enrolling one's child in a gaelscoil is a deliberate choice. In Gaeltacht schools on the other hand, families do not always have a choice. Indeed, many English-speaking families have settled in the Gaeltacht in the past few decades and have naturally raised their children through English. This has led to a complex linguistic composition of the pupils Gaeltacht schools cater for (Mac Donnacha et al., 2005). Because the majority of official Irish-speaking regions are located in rural areas it is sometimes a long trip to get to the closest English-medium school outside of the Gaeltacht boundaries. Therefore it is not always possible to attend an English-medium school, which means that some Gaeltacht schools can have a majority of English-speaking pupils. This situation may influence the choice of the language of instruction (Mac Donnacha et al., 2005; Harris et al., 2006) as well as impact on the level of performance (Harris et al., 2006, pp. 152-153).

Research has shown that the performance of pupils in Irish Listening, Irish Speaking and Irish Reading in Gaeltacht schools is close to the performance achieved by gaelscoil pupils although not as good; but this result may be explained by the lack of tests available to measure native speakers' performance (Harris et al., 2006). Irish-medium education has significantly developed in the primary education sector. Yet, reading and writing in Irish are still a challenge for Irish-medium as well as Gaeltacht schools. Harris et al. (2006) point out in the study *Irish in Primary Schools: Long-Term National Trends in Achievement* that performance in Irish Listening and Irish Speaking in Irish-medium schools remained constant in the period between 1985 and 2002. However, they observed a significant decline in the percentage of pupils attaining mastery in some objectives relating to grammar and morphology from 76.1% in 1985 to 61.3% in 2002 (ibid., pp. 156-157). Difficulties in grammar also appear to be an issue in other immersion programmes such as those found in Canada and are therefore not confined to the Irish context (Harris et al., 2006). Overall Irish-medium schools produce very proficient second-language learners in Ireland but there are still some areas of the Irish language that are challenging and need to be tackled, such as Irish writing (Ó hÍfearnáin, 2004) as it affects the standard of Irish at higher academic and professional levels:

*No frame of reference exists for establishing acceptable levels of literacy appropriate for academic programmes through Irish at third level, particularly in relation to written work. However, the wider context must also be considered. A reasonably accurate standard of written Irish is now a rare and extremely valuable qualification, even among those working with the language in a professional capacity.*  
(Nic Pháidín, 2004, p. 82)



In certain Gaeltacht areas<sup>65</sup>, instead of providing for an education through Irish only, like in a *gaelscoil*, some Gaeltacht schools will choose to teach a few subjects in English whereas others will teach half the subjects through Irish and the other half through English as is commonly done in the immersion programmes in Canada. This is particularly true of secondary schools which have a larger catchment area and sometimes include both Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht districts (H. Ó Murchú, 2003; Mac Donnacha et al., 2005). It seems that each individual school has its own language policy (Mac Donnacha et al., 2005), which makes it difficult to compare pupils' performance from one type of school to another.

This lack of consistency in Gaeltacht schools is mainly due to the absence of support and guidelines on language policy. Whereas *gaelscoileanna* are the result of parents' demand Gaeltacht schools are required to teach through the medium of Irish because they are located in an official Irish-speaking area. Yet, the Department of Education does not have a special policy towards Gaeltacht schools and there are no specific guidelines for primary or secondary schooling through Irish in the Gaeltachtaí (NCCA, 2007). The main challenge for Gaeltacht schools is to cater for a large number of children with no Irish at the start of primary school as well as for children who were raised through Irish (H. Ó Murchú, 2003). As a result, some schools do not teach entirely through the medium of Irish as they should. It has been observed that English is used in 40% of Leaving Certificate classes in some schools (Mac Donnacha et al., 2005, p. 12). There is no special provision in the National Curriculum for Gaeltacht schools that teach entirely through Irish which takes into consideration the presence of second-language learners in these schools (H. Ó Murchú, 2003; Mac Donnacha et al., 2005; NCCA, 2007). Teaching conditions are different for children whose first language is Irish than for children whose mother tongue is English, especially in an area where Irish is the community language. Such difficulties coupled with the lack of adequate teaching resources, the lack of qualified teachers and the absence of guidelines and advice to deal with language policies have led some schools to resort to the English language as a medium of instruction (Mac Donnacha et al., 2005, pp. 17-18). Subsequent to their study in the Gaeltacht, Mac Donnacha et al. (2005, p. 18) recommended that the definition of Gaeltacht schools be reviewed so that clear objectives and guidelines could be formulated for each school model. The school models proposed include a first language education model through the medium of Irish, an immersion education model through the medium of Irish (*gaelscoil* model) and a first language education model through the medium of English.

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65 The Gaeltacht areas were defined by a special Commission in 1926 as a state priority for the maintenance of the Irish language. Two types of areas were recognised: the *Fíor-Ghaeltacht* where more than 80% of people used Irish as a community language and the *Breac-Ghaeltacht* which contained between 25% and 80% of Irish-speakers who would use the language on a daily basis. The Gaeltacht boundaries were revised in 1956 as the first Commission overestimated the number of Irish-speakers (Ó Riagáin, 1997). The example of schools teaching partly through Irish can be found in the *Breac-Ghaeltacht*, such as Co. Mayo (McNulty, 2008).

While it has been shown above that there are no clear guidelines for Gaeltacht schools, immersion schools located outside the Gaeltacht are also confronted with the lack of advice regarding language policies and with the absence of support and teaching guidelines (Mac Donnacha et al., 2005; COGG, 2006). All schools in the Republic of Ireland are required to teach the National Curriculum whether the medium of instruction is English or Irish (DES, 1999).<sup>66</sup> Although the Primary School curriculum was revised in 1999 no policy addresses immersion education in particular. There is no special curriculum either in Irish or English for Irish-medium schools. In terms of literacy it is specified that Irish reading is to be introduced in second class for English-medium schools but nothing is said about the introduction of literacy in Irish-medium schools: “Socrófar sa scoil cén teanga lena dtosófar ar an léitheoireacht fhoirmiúil. (It is the school that decides the choice of language for the introduction of reading)” (COGG, 2006, p. 8). The sole requirement is that only one language should be introduced at a time (ibid.). Despite the variety of models, it seems that a majority of Irish-medium schools outside the Gaeltacht introduce formal reading in Irish initially only (Ní Bhaoill & Ó Duibhir, 2004). A majority of these schools practise early total immersion delaying the teaching of English until the second term of Junior Infants or Senior Infants while others have adopted the daily thirty-minute-teaching of English recommended by the Department of Education (COGG, 2006; NCCA, 2006). In the absence of clear guidelines, the advice of experienced teachers is a strong influencing factor in the school policy in relation to the introduction of literacy in Irish; the Primary Curriculum for Irish and the advice of inspectors is also highly influential (COGG, 2006). By contrast, the wishes of parents appear to have little influence on the reading policy in a majority of Irish-medium schools (ibid., p. 5). The latter finding is likely to change following the decision in 2010 of the Department of Education and Science that Irish-medium schools have now to comply with parents' wish to introduce literacy in English if parents make such a request.

The problematic situation regarding the implementation of early total immersion in Irish-medium schools escalated in 2004 and was brought to the attention of the media. The Department of Education and Science (as it was then called) had thus recommended the teaching of a second language thirty minutes a day including in Irish-medium schools. After an incident in a gaelscoil in Tralee, Co. Kerry the Minister looked for legal advice to enforce this recommendation and in July 2007 announced the Ministerial Circular 0044/2007 “Language and Literacy in Infant classes in Irish-medium schools”:

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<sup>66</sup> It must be noted that Irish-medium schools are considered mainstream schools since they deliver the national curriculum. The perception that they are non-mainstream schools probably dates back to the 1970s when groups of parents set up the first gaelscoileanna as a response to their dissatisfaction with the way Irish was taught in school. While this movement first appeared as counter-current Irish-medium education soon became one among other choices.

*The Minister has decided that in the case of recognised Irish-medium schools the commencement of providing a minimum of 2.5 hours per week for English as Language 2, as set out in the Primary School Curriculum, cannot be delayed beyond the start of the second term in Junior Infant.*<sup>67</sup>

Despite recommendations made by organisations involved to various degrees with Irish-medium education (COGG, NCCA, Gaelscoileanna Teoranta, INTO, Conradh Na Gaeilge), together with the results from international research on immersion programmes showing the benefits of early total immersion the Minister for Education asked for this recommendation to be put in place from January 2008 onwards. Inspectors from the Department of Education visited the Tralee gaelscoil in 2005 and claimed that despite the commitment and good work of teachers the lack of teaching of English in Junior Infants left pupils with significant deficits in English (Murray, 2007).

Early total immersion is practised in Canada, Wales, the Basque region, Scotland and Northern Ireland and is a very successful and efficient means of education (Barré, 2007). Besides, several studies have pointed out the fact that pupils attending an immersion programme perform better in the language of instruction than their peers in a mainstream school<sup>68</sup> and do as well as or even better in the second language which is the majority language of the community (Cummins, 1978; Swain, 1978; Lasagabaster, 2000) although this performance can only be assessed at the end of primary schooling (Mac Donnacha et al., 2005). As the children are dealing with two languages at the same time it takes some time before they master literacy in the majority language as well as their peers do. The conclusions drawn by the inspectors may have been a bit hasty and their report may have not fully taken into consideration that it takes more than two years in infant classes to acquire good skills in English especially in a context where English is only one subject. Moreover the pupils were not assessed in Irish so no comparison could be made between their performance in Irish and the performance of other pupils of the same age attending an English-medium school (Donnelly, 2007 May 15). The inspectors' negative report only covered the results from one school out of 269<sup>69</sup> and went

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67 [http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/cl0044\\_2007.pdf](http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/cl0044_2007.pdf)

68 Mainstream is used as a generic term here referring to the monolingual education given in the dominant language. Its meaning may vary depending on the context. Mainstream schools in Canada, for instance, refer to English-medium schools as French is a minority language there. However, schools teaching through the medium of French are considered mainstream in the province of Québec where it enjoys an official status and where English speakers constitute a minority. Mainstream schools in France do not include the Diwan schools, which are schools teaching through the medium of Breton set up and run by parents, as they do not teach through the official language. As explained above Irish-medium schools are considered mainstream schools in the sense that they deliver the national curriculum in the other official national language. However, they are sometimes perceived as non-mainstream when compared with English-medium schools due to their use of a minority language as a means of instruction or due to the alternative choice they offer in terms of education, that is receiving a bilingual education.

69 It includes gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht primary schools recognised by the Department of Education and Science.

against studies on high quality education and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools (Harris, 2006). According to Seamus Ó Longaigh, a member of the Irish National Teacher Organisation executive, the inspectors used certain tests that emphasise reading difficulties only. He himself conducted a different test, the MICRA-T reading test<sup>70</sup>, which revealed that the reading standard of the school was above the national average for primary school pupils (Donnelly, 2008). Journalist Niall Murray (2008) reported that:

*For the 28 children who were in senior infants during the inspection, 53% were in the top two score bands in the tests, compared to just 40% nationally. At the lower end, only 32% of the class were in the two lowest scoring categories, compared to a national average of 40%. (para. 7)*

The issue of literacy in immersion education emerged in 2004 from Scoil Mhic Easmainn in Tralee, Co. Kerry which practised early total immersion where the school chose not to teach English before first class. A few parents complained that the school was not teaching the daily thirty minutes required for a second language by the Primary School Curriculum. However, the Curriculum does not mention any specific guidelines for the introduction of English in infant classes in Irish-medium schools. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) therefore initiated a review of language and literacy (Ó Laoire & Harris, 2006) consulting teachers, parents, pupils and school boards of management and offered four different models regarding the introduction of English as existing guidelines are still a matter of interpretation. According to the report there are four different stages at which to introduce English in the curriculum:

- during the first term of Junior Infants
- during the second term of Junior Infants (as recommended in the circular 0044/2007)
- during the first term of Senior Infants
- during the second term of Senior Infants

When suggesting these four models it was highly recommended that more research be carried out before taking a decision. According to the DES recommendation, a child should be introduced to a second language as early as possible. However, the case of English as a second language in Irish-medium schools should be granted special status. Indeed, research has shown that early total immersion does not put the pupil at a disadvantage regarding his/her level of English. On the contrary, pupils attending total immersion programmes perform as well as or even better than pupils in English-medium schools (Stern et al., 1976; Swain, 1978; Harris et al., 2006). What is more, for most pupils attending a gaelscoil English is the main language spoken at home and/or in the community. Skills in

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<sup>70</sup> The MICRA-T reading test was developed in 1988 in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. It has been designed for different levels of reading abilities so every pupil can be assessed accurately. The results can also be compared to the national reading standards of primary pupils in Ireland. See <http://www.micra-t.ie/MICRA-Tmenu/index.htm>.

the English language are developed before the child attends school and continue to be reinforced at home and outside school in general (Cummins, 1978; Lasagabaster, 2000). Since Irish is a minority language, as COGG, the Council for Gaeltacht and Irish-Medium Education argued, if English is introduced early the young child might not make an effort to communicate in Irish if she/he sees that the teacher can understand her/him in English:

*When a young child is totally immersed in the target language in a new setting (beginning school) the adult 'code' is accepted. The child presumes that the teachers do not have English and there is an immediate necessity to learn the new language in order to communicate. When English is introduced at the commencement of schooling the child understands that the teacher knows English and so there is no necessity to learn Irish or at least there is no great urgency to do so. (cited in Walshe, 2006, para 3)*

Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoilenna Lan-Ghaeilge, the patron body for 57 Irish-medium primary schools<sup>71</sup> pointed out that this ministerial circular was going against the guidelines for the choice of language regarding literacy and that there had been some confusion between the teaching of reading and writing and the teaching of English (cited in Donnelly, 2007, May 16).

Although the Ministerial Circular 0044/2007 was withdrawn in 2010 no exhaustive studies have been carried out in Ireland to address the issue of early total immersion education in Irish-medium schools. As Gaelscoileanna Teoranta president Mícheál Ó Broin said, “nobody [can] speak with authority on the issue of immersion education until proper research [is] carried out” (cited in Hayes, 2007, para 2). However, the policy of early total immersion is still insecure. As stipulated after the withdrawal of the Ministerial Circular, if parents in a gaelscoil express the need to have their child taught English literacy at an early stage, schools are required to comply with parents' demand. Although the piece of research that would follow the progress of pupils from junior infant class through to sixth class would take eight years it is necessary to respond to the issue of literacy in Irish and English in immersion education in the Republic of Ireland.

Another difficulty encountered by Irish-medium schools is the limited supply of textbooks (Mac Donnacha et al., 2005). Already in the 1920s one of the main concerns about immersion education had been the availability and quality of teaching materials (Kelly, 2002). There has been considerable improvement in terms of books and teaching materials in Irish in the past few years as teachers had often to work with English text books or create their own texts in Irish. However, this situation still exists particularly at secondary level where the resources available in Irish are very often out of date and consequently not appealing to the students (Mac Donnacha et al., 2005).

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71 There were 61 primary schools and 5 secondary schools under the patronage of An Foras Pátrúchata in September 2012 ([www.foras.ie](http://www.foras.ie))

The establishment of An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta or COGG in 2002 following the Education Act of 1998 enabled the issue of inadequate teaching resources to be tackled. COGG is a state agency that provides for teaching resources and support services to all Irish-medium schools, Gaeltacht schools and other schools that cater for the teaching of Irish at both primary and secondary level. It also conducts research on education through Irish.<sup>72</sup> The agency's board gathers elected parents, teachers and management staff from Gaeltacht schools and gaelscoileanna. In contrast to voluntary Irish language organisations, COGG does not receive grants from Foras Na Gaeilge which is responsible for the promotion of the Irish language on the whole island of Ireland. The Department of Education allocates its annual budget.<sup>73</sup> COGG first worked on the provision of text books in the primary education sector. In 2002, before COGG was established, no relevant new books were available. In September 2007 there was at least one updated book available for every subject in each school. The agency also provides for more resources online. Teachers and pupils now have free access to lessons or exercises on their website. Teachers can also share teaching materials online between themselves.<sup>74</sup> Although the problem of textbooks and teaching materials has been addressed in the past few years this progress only concerns primary schools. The revision and development of new Irish-medium textbooks and materials at secondary level, and even more at university level, is costly and necessitates a long-term investment which cannot be justified at the moment due to the insufficient size of the Irish language community (Ó hIfearnáin, 2004).

Although the Irish-medium education sector faces various challenges it is still expanding as the opening of new schools planned for 2014 shows.<sup>75</sup> The Irish language is therefore experiencing growing popularity, at least through the immersion system. Chapter Two explores in more depth attitudes towards the Irish language at national level.

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72 [www.cogg.ie](http://www.cogg.ie)

73 In 2007 the budget was around €800,000 however, the latter included insurance, salaries, rent, etc. (source: private notes taken during an interview with Muireann Ní Mhóráin, Chief Executive)

74 Information collected during an interview with Muireann Ní Mhóráin, Chief Executive, COGG (2007).

75 Donnelly, 2011; <http://www.gaelscoileanna.ie/schools/scoileanna-nua/?lang=en>

## **1.6 Conclusion**

Chapter One reviewed key concepts of language ideologies, language and identity as well as language in education as an essential background to the current study.

This chapter first concentrated on language ideologies and their impact on language minority groups. The Irish example illustrates very well the relations of power that exist between languages. Irish started to decline to become a minority language during the nineteenth century (Hindley, 1990). Language shift in Ireland happened under the influence of colonialist language ideologies—also known as English linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992). It entailed the imposition of the English language to assert British power and control over all aspects of Irish economic life. However, the rise of nationalism brought about new ideologies that involved the instrumentalisation of the Irish language by an elite group to define Irish identity and unite the Irish people. Irish was a way to look for authenticity (Smith 1981, 2010; White, 2006). It was also a distinctive identity marker to establish ethnic boundaries in opposition to Britain (Barth 1969, Wardhaugh, 1987; Bourdieu, 1991; Ó Croidheáin, 2006). However, the elite failed to get support from the working classes for the revival of the language as the nationalist movement fostered a culture that was opposed to all British influence but was at the same time alien to the masses (Ó Laoire, 1996a).

Yet, Irish is still considered a marker of ethnic identity (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984; 1994; Ó Riagáin, 2007; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009) despite the fact that Irish is not spoken by a majority—an average of 41% since the 1996 Census (see Appendix I)—and is only used by about 2% of the population on a daily basis outside education (CSO, 2007; 2012). This is probably due to the historical element attached to the language (Smith, 1981). Both its official status as the national language and its compulsory character on the national school curriculum reinforce its importance. However, belonging to the Irish national community is not necessarily connected with the Irish language (Wardhaugh, 1987; White, 2006). Irish people have no difficulty expressing their national identity even though they cannot speak Irish. Members of the same ethnic community may have different views towards the language as an identity marker whether it is instrumental in reaffirming their identity, supportive of its promotion or indifferent to it (Safran, 1999). Research has indicated that Irish may not be a relevant identity marker at personal level (Fitzpatrick, 1998; Moffatt, 2008). Rather, it has a symbolic value in that most Irish people support the promotion of the Irish language but have a rather passive approach towards it—as it has been observed for Scottish Gaelic, Welsh and Breton (Barré, 2007). Despite the weakening relationship between Irish and ethnic identity (Ó Riagáin, 2007), Irish is regarded as being part of Irish cultural identity (O'Reilly, 1999). The complex relationship between the Irish language and Irish identity is mainly due to the fact that Irish as an ethnic identity

marker was manufactured. While this happened at the time of the nationalist movements, this ideology was reflected in the language policies of the new Irish State—as the next chapter will demonstrate—which mainly focused on the education system.

This chapter showed that the diffusion of language ideologies was facilitated by the schools. As the current study focuses on immersion education, bilingual and immersion programmes were reviewed. It was revealed that while some bilingual programmes aim at language assimilation, others promote bilingualism. Although the initial goal of the provision of Irish-medium education in the late 1920s was to gradually restore Irish as the main national language—as detailed in the next chapter—immersion education as it is today promotes bilingualism. After Independence, language policy aimed at the revival of the Irish language. It mainly focused on supporting the Irish-speaking heartlands economically and on teaching the Irish language to the nation through the education system. While most bilingual and immersion schools that were established from the mid-1920s were closed by the end of the 1960s, a new generation of parent-led immersion schools started opening in the 1970s. This education sector is still growing as there were 141 schools at both primary and secondary level in September 2012. These schools are located outside the Irish-speaking heartlands and cater for a majority of monolingual English-speakers. Although Irish used to be the first language of the Irish people up until the nineteenth century, it is no longer a case of a minority first language being supported through these schools. Therefore, the group of families involved with Irish-medium education cannot be defined as an ethnic community using Irish as their first language. It seems that what brings them together is of a different nature than a sense of belonging to an ethnic grouping community.

Before discussing parents' motivation for selecting an Irish-medium school for their child, Chapter Two examines the context in which the expansion and popularity of immersion education occurred, through the analysis of language attitudes towards Irish.



## II- LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

### **2.1 Introduction**

It was shown in Chapter One that language ideologies imply the dominance of certain languages over others. Similarly, language attitudes are manipulated by power groups by means of subtle influence right through to intensive indoctrination (Baker, 1992). However, this position of power does not always result in the assimilation of one linguistic community into another or the disappearance of the former's language. The form of resistance, if any, expressed by one linguistic community against the dominant language of another depends on its members' attitudes towards their own language. If a community regards its language as a core value and defines its cultural identity in relation to its language its future looks brighter than if its members hold negative attitudes towards their language. The study of language attitudes can therefore offer a valuable means of assessing the vitality of a linguistic community (Baker, 1992; UNESCO, 2003). In the case of Ireland where the Irish language is not the majority's community language, language attitude studies are essential to the pursuit of language maintenance by assessing the public's level of support for language policies. Irish is however different from most minority languages insofar as it is part of the majority language group's heritage as the ancestral language and it receives protection from the Irish government (Fishman, 1991). It also has the advantage of being an institutionalised minority language. However, the current study does not focus on attitudes of a national sample but on a specific group that is mostly English-speaking and is already known to hold positive attitudes towards the Irish language. Since this group chose to get involved in the Irish-medium sector through education, this study of language attitudes has a different focus from the assessment of the support for language policies, for instance. The emphasis is on personal attitudes and commitment to the language and how the language impacts on the daily lives of the members of this group.

Before presenting and discussing the results of this research study, it is important to lay out the context of language attitude research at both international and at national levels. The first section of this chapter introduces the concept of attitude and briefly considers attitude change and the relation between attitude and behaviour. It is followed by a concise review of various language attitude research areas that are relevant to the Irish context. They include attitudes towards the minority language in both majority and minority language groups as well as attitudes towards the learning of a minority language in schools. The latter reviews motivation theory in second language learning and it progressively moves on to the importance of parental attitudes in the child's second language experience. Second language learning in school is in fact an important aspect of Irish language policy.

The third section introduces the language situation in Ireland by examining Irish language policy from the establishment of the Irish State to the present with particular reference to public attitudes. Language policies are important since they are an indicator of language ideology and can influence attitudes (Spolsky, 2004). The fourth section consists of a comprehensive review firstly of language attitude surveys carried out in Ireland at national level as well as of small-scale studies dealing with different domains of Irish language activity such as broadcasting and, more importantly for this study, education. Finally, the last section further examines the public attitude to Irish expressed in the print media as a way to analyse current attitudes and issues surrounding the Irish language and language policies.

## **2.2 Language attitude theory**

Because of the assumed relation between attitude and behaviour, attitudinal studies as well as opinion polls are a useful way to measure and predict future behaviour for language planners and policy makers. When the community shows positive attitudes, language policy can be put in place accordingly and flourish (Baker, 1992). However, the validity of the relation between attitude and behaviour has often been questioned (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Bonher & Wänke, 2002). In the interest of this research study it is therefore necessary to examine attitude theory to fully understand how far attitudes can be regarded as predictors of behaviour.

### 2.2.1 Definition of attitude

Attitude is commonly defined as a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to an object (Baker, 1992; Edwards, 1994; Garrett, Coupland & Williams, 2003). Despite the terms opinions and attitudes being used interchangeably in everyday life, attitudes differ from opinions as the latter can be verbalised and easily developed (Baker, 1992; Garrett et al., 2003). Attitudes also differ from beliefs as they lack any affective component (Garrett et al., 2003). Whereas attitudes represent favourable or unfavourable evaluations of an object, beliefs constitute the information an individual has about the object (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 12). Belief is one component of attitude. To find out about an individual's attitude towards an object, the individual's feelings about the expressed belief must be assessed (Edwards, 1994). Edwards (1994) gives the example of a mother agreeing that learning French is important for her child. However, this belief may be different from her attitude towards the French language for she may dislike or resent French but still think that it is important for her child's career opportunities. The concept of attitude is also defined as a reaction to an object based on one's beliefs or opinions: "an individual's attitude is an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent" (Gardner, 1985, p. 9). Beliefs can be formed in different ways (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) through direct observation when a person perceives that a given object has a certain attribute (descriptive belief), beyond direct observation—although based on prior descriptive beliefs, rules of logic, i.e. A is taller than B and B is taller than C so A is taller than C—(inferential belief) and through information established by some source such as newspapers, books, television, friends, relatives, etc. (informational belief).

It is commonly argued that attitudes are made up of three separate components (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Baker, 1992; Edwards, 1994; Garrett et al., 2003), the first one being cognitive: this component refers to knowledge, thoughts and beliefs about the object. Most of these beliefs are likely to be influenced by social stereotypes "acting as a repository of 'common sense' beliefs or filters through which social life is transacted and interpreted" (Garrett et al., 2003, p. 4); for example, believing that learning the Irish language will (or will not) help to get a job in Ireland. The second component is affective: this component deals with feelings towards and evaluation of an object; for example, enthusiasm for Irish-language cultural festivals such as Oireachtas na Samhna which includes sean-nós singing (unaccompanied traditional Irish singing) and dancing competitions. The third component is behavioural or conative: it refers to the predisposition or intention to act in a certain way; for example, to use the Irish language as much as possible in everyday life.

This tripartite structure of attitude was already mentioned in the definition that the Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research (1975) gave in their report when undertaking the first sociological

attitudinal study in Ireland: “an attitude may be defined in general terms as a relatively enduring system of beliefs about, and associated feelings toward, an object or situation, which predisposes one to respond to it in some preferential manner” (p. 21). It should be noted that this is not a standard definition as some experts claim that it is difficult to consider the cognitive component devoid of affective content as most attitudes are strongly affected by feelings (Garrett et al., 2003).

Attitudes may be acquired through different processes. They include repeated exposure to a stimulus that increases liking for that stimulus (classical conditioning), reinforcement and operant conditioning through reward and punishment, imitation of a model such as parents, peers, teachers, media figure, etc., (Baker, 1992; Bohner & Wänke, 2002). It should be noted that the difference between attitude formation and attitude change is arbitrary (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Bohner & Wänke, 2002). Beliefs evolve. Some beliefs persist, others are forgotten and new ones are formed. Attitudes consequently change. While some attitudes may remain stable over time, others may experience frequent shifts (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 218). Language attitudes often change by exposure to social influence (Baker, 1992). Change can be caused by ideologies, power, conflicts, etc. Baker gives the example of a 'U' turn in attitudes to Welsh in the twentieth century that happened in the education sector through the growth of Welsh-medium education and the increase in the number of adults attending Welsh language classes (1992, p.98). From a psychological perspective, attitudes may change when there is a reward (Baker, 1992; Bohner & Wänke, 2002). In the case of language attitudes, giving the minority language a utilitarian function in a range of careers is a reward. Praise for speaking the minority language may also be used among pupils although it may in some cases have the opposite effects to that intended (Baker, 1992, p. 100). Positive attitudes can also be established by a perceived experience of success. Similar to attitude formation, imitation of someone else's attitudes may cause attitude change (p. 103). Parents' influence on their child's attitudes is a good example. In terms of attitudes towards a minority language certain conditions are necessary for positive attitude change to occur. They include a friendly relationship between majority and minority language communities as well as support from the social, economic, political and cultural environment (p. 108). While attitude formation and attitude change may occur due to internal thinking or when exposed to social influences there appears to be no systematic relation between attitudes and intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

### 2.2.2 Attitude and behaviour

Attitudes cannot be observed directly. They are therefore “latent, inferred from the direction and persistence of external behaviour” (Baker, 1992, p. 11). The behavioural dimension of language attitudes is of interest when studying the future of minority languages—although the survival of a language does not depend on the number of speakers but on community language use (Fishman, 1991; UNESCO, 2003). Yet, its measurement is problematic: the relationship between language attitudes and language behaviour is complex (Ladegaard, 2000). Attitudes often explain and predict behaviour, however, behaviours may lack consistency in certain situations (Baker, 1992; Edwards, 1994; Bohner & Wänke, 2002). While it seems to be quite logical to act according to one's beliefs, in reality it is more complex. It is not always possible to keep one's beliefs and attitudes aligned with one's behaviour (Baker, 1992; Romaine, 1995; Bohner & Wänke, 2002; Garrett et al., 2003). The intrinsic relationship between attitudes and behaviour, that is to say the fact that attitudes can be used to predict patterns of behaviour has therefore been called into question. There is in fact a distinction between attitudes as predispositions to behave in a certain way and actual behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The expression of an attitude can imply the possibility of an action but is not always an indicator of external behaviour (Baker, 1992). There is a gap between the expression of favourable attitudes and the action needed to put these attitudes into practice. In the case of lesser-used languages Ó Laoire (2007) points out that “the correlation between favourable language attitudes and language use remains low, i.e. positive attitudes do not necessarily translate into extended use of the language” (p. 172). Furthermore, broad attitudes are generally poor indicators of a specific action (Baker, 1992). General positive language attitudes do not predict language use. Many reasons could explain why an individual expressing positive attitudes towards a particular language would not necessarily use this language: self-interest, desire to avoid embarrassment, difference between views of an abstraction and of concrete instances (Edwards, 1994). External circumstances also have to be taken into account as they might prevent a person from acting in line with his/her attitudes (CILAR, 1975; Garrett et al., 2003).

*it may be helpful to note that attitudinal measures alone cannot be expected to predict actual behaviour towards an object, since there are many other variables, such as linguistic or social constraints arising from the situation within which the behaviour occurs, which may be equally important in determining it. (CILAR, 1975, p. 21)*

In the context of an attitude survey respondents might give a different response to what they believe in because it might be more suitable to show acquiescence with the general attitudinal trend (Baker, 1992; Garrett et al., 2003). A person can sometimes be overwhelmed by anxiety, fear or have

prejudices that go against previously expressed beliefs. “Overtly stated attitudes may hide covert beliefs. Defence mechanism and social desirability response sets tend to come in between stated and more secret attitudes” (Baker, 1992, pp. 12-13). Therefore, a broader context must be taken into account when studying language attitudes which comprises, for instance, social pressures and accepted behaviour (Ó Laoire, 2007). But even though the correlation between attitude and behaviour is too weak to claim that attitudes towards language determine linguistic changes, “language attitudes are likely to predict broad behavioural patterns of sociolinguistic behaviour” (Ladegaard, 2000, p. 232). The verbal guise attitude experiment showed that participants who expressed the most positive attitudes towards the local language varieties also used the vernacular more often than those who had neutral or negative attitudes towards the local varieties or who expressed more positive attitudes towards the majority language (p. 227).

Behaviour can nonetheless be predicted from a measure of an individual's intention to exhibit a particular behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The closer the intention measurement is to the time of the behaviour the better the prediction is. The best predictor of a person's behaviour is, according to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), their intention to exhibit the behaviour. This is regardless of how low and inconsistent relations between attitudes and single-act (which involves a certain target, a given situation at a given point in time, i.e. attending an Irish language class at the local school this coming Tuesday) or between attitudes and repeated-observation criteria (which involves observing the same specific behaviour directed at different targets, in different situations or at different times, and represents generalisations, i.e. number of Irish language classes attended at the local school in the course of one year) may be. Therefore, the attitude-behaviour relation is high if both measures correspond in specificity. However, there is no evidence that attitudes cause behaviour (Bohner & Wänke, 2002).

When considering the field of second language learning, one can also observe a gap between attitudes and behaviour. For instance, one can express favourable attitudes towards a particular language and even a desire to learn the language to be able to speak it fluently, but it does not necessarily mean that the effort or the drive needed to achieve the goal of learning the language is there. Gardner (1985) observed that in the absence of motivation, that is to say the combination of effort and desire to achieve a goal and favourable attitudes towards this goal, the intended goal is unlikely to be successfully achieved. In other words, for a person to acquire a second language successfully they need to be truly motivated. Favourable attitudes towards the language are simply not sufficient. Although the current study does not examine motivation in second language learning, it relates to favourable attitudes and commitment to attending Irish classes or using Irish with different interlocutors and in various daily situations.

It should be noted that observing behaviour does not necessarily give an accurate picture of social reality: “attitudes may be better predictors of future behaviour than observation of current behaviour” (Baker, 1992, p. 16). Attitude is therefore one factor that influences behaviour (Bonher & Wänke, 2002) and must be considered along with other external contributors in order to predict behaviour accurately.



### **2.3 Review of the relevant literature on language attitude research**

Research on language attitudes derives from the field of social psychology of language (Baker, 1992). There are various research areas in the domain of language attitudes. Baker enumerates the different focuses of language attitudes research (1992, p. 29):

- Attitudes to language variation, dialect and speech style
- Attitudes to learning a new language
- Attitude to a specific minority language
- Attitude to language groups, communities, minorities
- Attitude to language lessons
- Attitude to the uses of a specific language
- Attitude of parents to language learning
- Attitude to language preference

Although the current study only focuses on attitudes to a specific minority language and on parents' attitudes towards it and its learning it is nonetheless important to give a brief account of the main domains of language attitude research that are relevant to the Irish context. The review of attitudes towards a minority language and towards second language learning gives theoretical background to the situation of the Irish language in the Republic of Ireland, before dealing with the review of language attitudes towards Irish and towards its learning in school as detailed in Section 2.5.

### 2.3.1 Attitudes to a minority language

As shown in Chapter One, there exists a relation of power between dominant and minority languages; but it should be acknowledged that a language or dialect is never linguistically superior or inferior since language is an arbitrary system. As Holmes explains, “prestige codes emerge by social consensus and owe nothing to their intrinsic linguistic features” (2001, p. 349). In other words, evaluations of a language are based on social conventions and preferences which are related to prestige and power possessed by speakers of a certain standard variety of the language (Edwards, 1994). An elite class, that is to say a group in power, will regard the language variety they use as superior. Attitudes are therefore sensitive to social and political changes. Some languages which are considered prestigious nowadays might not have always enjoyed a high status. This was the case for the English language in the British Isles before the eighteenth century when Latin (twelfth century), French (thirteenth, fourteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) and Italian (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) were far more dominant languages (Mackey, 1967). Historically, members of the elite class were able to influence the way a language was considered, whether it was seen as best, appropriate or wrong. They usually “reflect[ed] dominant language attitudes derived from preferences and prejudices attaching to the speakers of various languages.” (Edwards, 1994, p. 89). Attitudes to language are subjective evaluations of language varieties and their speakers, which contrasts with language ideologies which are more related to facts (Myers-Scotton, 2006).

Language attitudes are associated with the speakers of a language and with socio-political contexts. People usually express a preference for the socially dominant language, such as English over French in parts of Canada. Lambert and his colleagues (Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner & Fillenbaum, 1960) developed in the 1960s a method to assess language attitudes that is known as matched-guise technique according to which participants listen to recordings of different language varieties and are asked to evaluate the speakers on a number of bipolar adjective scales. Recordings are actually played of the same speaker reading the same passage using different voices and accents (see Garrett et al., 2003, pp. 51-53). Lambert's matched-guise method showed that English-speakers listening to English and French guises reacted more favourably to English than French. Similar results were obtained among French-speakers participating in the study. It therefore indicated that the minority language group had the same reactions as the majority language group acknowledging a relation of power between the two language groups and expressing social stereotypes (Edwards, 1994). In other words, while the dominant language-speaking population expressed a more favourable disposition towards their language than towards the minority language, members of the minority language group also considered the dominant language to be more favourable. This is the case in Britain where West

Indians expressed more negative feelings when hearing West Indian speech, their own language, than when listening to a working-class white accent (Romaine, 1995). Similarly, the French language in Alsace—the region located on the Franco-German border—is regarded as more prestigious than the regional dialect. Alsatian is mainly perceived as a useful instrument for communication in the private sphere. An attitude survey carried out in the Alsace region showed that sentimental reasons or personal satisfaction in speaking Alsatian were rarely mentioned (Vassberg, 1993). Yet, attitudes can evolve from derogatory feelings to respect and acceptance (*ibid.*). For instance, French in Canada has been better valued by English-speaking Canadians since it acquired its official status in the late 1970s (Holmes, 2001). French Canadians in Quebec used to report a more favourable attitude towards English use. However, due to the emergence of new socio-cultural norms in favour of French following the enactment of Bill 101<sup>76</sup> attitudes towards the French language changed (Bourhis, 1983). English-speaking Canadians expressed a more positive attitude towards French and were more favourably disposed to use more French. Similarly French-speaking Canadians reported a more favourable disposition to use French with English-speaking Canadians (*ibid.*).

In a multilingual context, the attitudes of the majority language community can affect the way the minority language community uses its language. Broermann's study (2007), for instance, examined two different minority language communities, the Swedish in Finland and the Sorbs in Germany. Swedish in Finland is a privileged language as it is defined as a national language by the Constitution and is taught as a compulsory subject in Finnish language schools. Swedish may be used with both public and municipal authorities that have a bilingual status. In contrast, the Sorbian language can only be used with municipal authorities in the Sorbian areas of two German federal states. Swedish-speaking Finns aged 16 to 18 years old reported in the study that they often used Swedish in official domains in Finland as well as in private (family) and semi-official (with friends/leisure/with teachers at school) contexts whereas Sorbian speakers of the same age group reported the use of Sorbian in the private domain only. Bilinguals' restricted use of the minority language to certain domains may result from perceived negative attitudes from the majority language community towards their use of the minority language. Sorbian speakers who participated in Broermann's study believed, for example, that German monolinguals did not like when Sorbs were talking to each other in Sorbian as they thought that they were using the minority language in order to talk about them; while Swedish-speaking participants explained that Finns would refuse to have a conversation in Swedish for fear of making mistakes despite their proficiency in the language.

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76 Bill 101 or Charter of the French Language was enforced in 1977. It defines French as the only official language of Quebec and contains fundamental language rights.

This section examined language attitudes that are directly influenced by language ideologies. It clearly showed that groups in power manipulate language attitudes (Baker, 1992). Language policies are an efficient way to convey these language ideologies (Spolsky, 2004). The school, in particular, is one of the most important domains of language policies (ibid.). As the example of learning Swedish in Finland showed (Broermann, 2007), the school environment is a place where positive attitudes towards a minority language may be fostered. But as theory on attitude formation indicated, language attitudes may be influenced by various factors. The next section reviews attitudes to second language learning in an additive context, with special emphasis on the influence of parental attitudes on the ones held by their children.

### 2.3.2 Attitudes to second language learning

It seems that the field of education has been the main point of interest in the study of language attitudes as it is said to have much impact on life opportunities (Garrett et al., 2003). Second-language learning is an important area of language attitude research which is relevant as the main focus group of this current study is made up of parents whose children are learning a second language through immersion. However, before examining the role of parents' attitudes to language learning, it is important to understand the concept of motivation in second language learning. Attitude research in second-language learning is interlinked with the learner's motivation to learn a second language.

The most influential motivation theory in second language learning comes from the work carried out in Canada by Lambert, Gardner and their associates who actually founded the field of research on second language learning. Gardner's theory has been the dominant model for more than three decades and has remained relatively the same since (Dörnyei, 2005). There are three main phases in motivation research (ibid, pp.66-67):

- the social psychological period (1959-1990) influenced by Gardner and associates in Canada. This is the period when motivation for learning the language of the other community—in a situation where two linguistic communities coexist—was regarded as the primary force responsible for enhancing or hindering intercultural communication and affiliation.
- The cognitive-situated period (1990s) dominated by the need for a change in the motivation research domain. This change was characterised by both importing cognitive concepts from motivational psychology research and by focusing on actual learning situations (such as the language classroom) as opposed to the macro-perspective approach of the first phase which relied on a broad view focusing on communities.
- The process-oriented period (2000s) which emerged in Europe and concentrates on motivational change through time. The latter observes ongoing changes of motivation over time such as changes occurring during a single language class or in the context of learning a language for several months or over a lifetime.

Researchers do not agree on the definition of the concept of motivation save the fact that it concerns the choice of a particular action, the persistence with it and the effort expended on it (Dörnyei, 2001, pp. 7-8). Nonetheless, Gardner (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985) developed a very influential theory according to which the individual's attitudes towards the second language (L2) and the L2 community directly influence his/her L2 learning behaviour. In other words, "someone's attitude towards a target influences the overall pattern of that person's responses to the target" (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 48).

Motivation is, according to Gardner (2001, p. 16), responsible for success. His concept of motivation includes motivational intensity, desire to learn the L2 and attitudes towards learning the L2. Motivation presupposes that a goal has been set up. Each goal can be determined by various reasons. In a situation where learning a specific language is the ultimate goal, different sets of reasons can explain the nature of the goal such as to be able to converse with the native speakers of the language in question, to get a job, to please one's parents, etc. Gardner and Lambert (1972) focused on some of the reasons for learning a language and observed two major orientations which they identified as instrumental and integrative. Both instrumental and integrative orientations are two important dimensions in language attitude theory (Baker, 1992). While the first is pragmatic and self-oriented the second is more social and expresses a desire for attachment and identification. However, it is possible that both orientations coexist. Broermann (2007) studied the functions of minority language competence in terms of instrumental and integrative orientations among 16-18 year-old Swedish-speaking Finns and Sorbian-speaking Germans. As displayed in the table below, a few reasons for being competent in the minority language express both instrumental and integrative functions.

**Table 2.1: Functions of Minority Language Competence**

Reason	Function
mother tongue/other emotional reasons	integrative
general advantage in country of residence	instrumental
makes it easier to learn other languages	instrumental
the country of residence is a bilingual country	instrumental/integrative
important for the future/general reasons	instrumental
identity/roots	integrative
bilingualism is important	instrumental
minority language as a “secret language”	instrumental/integrative
generally of great importance	instrumental/integrative

*Note.* Source: Broermann, 2007.

The reasons for learning the minority language given by second language learners in the table above suggest that learning a second language involves more than personal choice and motivation. It is also influenced by general attitudes towards the target language and its cultural community in the country where the learner resides. This has been observed in Hungary, for instance, where three surveys were carried out on 14-year old Hungarian students in 1993, 1999 and 2004 in order to examine their disposition towards five target languages including English, German, French, Italian and Russian (Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh, 2006). The results of the three surveys showed a decrease over time of the magnitude of the relationship between integrativeness and language choice for English despite its growing popularity among students. English was in fact the only language that increased in

popularity from 1993 to 2004 whereas the other languages suffered from a decline in interest. The major difference that was observed between English and the other four languages was that they belonged to two different categories: the “global language” category and the “non-world language” category. Dörnyei and his associates (2006) explain this phenomenon in terms of social attitudes towards the global language where students are expected to learn English as part of a basic requirement in education:

*the pattern we see in the case of English Language Choice indicated that motivation is becoming less of a determinant for choosing Global English; we believe that more and more people do not make a motivated decision to learn English but study the language as an obvious and self-evident component of education in the twenty-first century.” (p. 89)*

In contrast, the learning of non-world languages including German, French, Italian and Russian is stimulated by integrative motivation. The “study [of non-world languages] is becoming less and less expected and increasingly the result of an individual's personal motivation” (ibid).

Inbar, Donitsa-Schmidt and Shohamy (2001) observed however that learners' motivation was not affected by factors such as language choice or compulsory language learning. Rather, the simple fact of being actively engaged in the learning of a second language enhanced language attitudes and motivation: “it is the fact of studying the language and not the condition (choice vs. assigned) that affects students' motivation” (p. 303). The same results were found in the study of Dörnyei et al. (2006) that has just been discussed. It showed that students who were actively engaged in L2 learning scored higher on attitudinal and motivational variables in relation to the particular language they were studying than students who were not engaged in the study of any particular language. The researchers therefore came to the conclusion that “at a national level, active engagement in the study of an L2 exerts a positive effect on the learners' attitudes and motivation” (Dörnyei et al., 2006, p. 72).

Research in Ireland has shown that pupils in primary schools—where the teaching of Irish is compulsory—are well disposed towards Irish and towards integrating with Irish speakers (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). At secondary level, the Irish language has more a utilitarian motive as the state examination at the end of secondary level requires students to sit the Irish examination. Since Irish is spoken as a minority community language only in certain geographical areas, the motive for learning Irish may wane once students have passed the Leaving Certificate examination. There is therefore a need to enhance the use of Irish at community level nationwide so that students' motivation to learn Irish shifts from an instrumental to an integrative attitude (Murtagh, 2007). It seems that educational schemes such as the FÓN project that took place between 2008 and 2010 in six selected secondary schools in Ireland (three schools in Northern Ireland and three schools in the Republic of Ireland) and which studied the use of mobile phones for the teaching, learning and assessment of Irish are the kind

of initiatives needed to foster an integrative attitude towards the learning of Irish. This project was run by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the National Centre for Technology in Education and Foras na Gaeilge. Although it was school-oriented it created a link between the Irish language and new technology which is an integral part of a teenager's social life.

*The use of mobile phones also brought Irish out of the classroom for students, so that the language became more than a school subject, a living language. The opportunity to chat with other students participating in the project, from other schools and regions, facilitated meaningful communication for students. (NCCA, 2010, p. 5)*

Results from the project indicated that the use of mobile phones in Irish language learning improved students' motivation for the language, increased their use of spoken Irish and improved their competence in the language (p. 59).

When comparing second level students from English-medium schools with students from Irish-medium schools (Murtagh, 2007) students attending English-medium schools were found to be less proficient in Irish due to limited exposure to the language. Both limited instructional time in Irish and lack of opportunity to use Irish outside school in social networks appear to affect students' motivation. In contrast, immersion students were found to attain higher level of speaking proficiency and had more opportunities to use Irish outside of school at home or in Irish-speaking social networks (ibid.). Furthermore, they expressed the most positive attitudes to Irish. The importance of parents' positive attitudes to Irish (Harris & Murtagh, 1999) and parental encouragement (Kavanagh, 1999) in the study of motivation must also be acknowledged as immersion students tend to benefit from higher levels of parental support in Irish language learning (Murtagh, 2007). The role of parents in terms of influence on language attitudes is therefore of relevance here.

As mentioned earlier there are two types of attitudes among second-language learners (Gardner & Lambert, 1972):

- instrumental attitude: the reasons for learning a second language are utilitarian for example, passing exams, finding a job, assisting children in bilingual education.
- integrative attitude: the reasons for learning the language express an interest in learning more about the other community and their culture so as to join or identify with them. This can happen after the second-language learner experienced disappointment in his/her own culture or as a way to form friendships.

In terms of integrative attitude the pupil's orientation towards the target language (L2) depends on the parents' attitudinal disposition (Lambert et al., 1968; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). In a study that was carried out in Montreal, the favourable attitudes parents expressed towards the French community had more impact on the child's orientation than his/her exposure to the French language at home. The



study also showed that students with an integrative attitude were more successful in second-language learning. "The integrative motive (...) likely stems from a family-wide attitudinal disposition" (Lambert et al., 1968, p. 475). As for pupils with an instrumental orientation parental encouragement to succeed in French proved to play an important role too as pupils had very good skills in both French and English. (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Furthermore, the study showed that language aptitude was independent from attitude when learning a language as even pupils who did not have great abilities in French could have favourable attitudes towards the language. What is more, pupils with a high aptitude were not guaranteed to succeed in second-language learning. A similar study comparing Americans with Franco-Americans learning French concluded that the development of skills in the second language depended on the combination of two separate factors: an intellectual capacity and a positive attitudinal orientation towards the other language group together with a motivation to learn the language (Lambert et al., 1968).

When comparing monolingual pupils with bilingual pupils it was found that the favourable disposition shared by the family towards the other community positively influenced the bilingual pupil's linguistic achievement in the second language (Lambert et al., 1968; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). In other words, success in language learning is, according to Gardner's theory (Gardner & Lambert, 1972), a function of the learner's positive attitudes towards the community of the target language. It should be noted that for families involved in immersion education the question of motivation for their children is not that of learning the minority language since this decision was made by the parents. Rather, it is about actively participating in the learning of the language and embracing the language as part of their lives both in school and in their future lives when they leave school (Robert, 2009).

Harris and Murtagh (1999) also show that attitude/motivation is related to pupils' achievement in the Irish language when parents are found to have a general positive attitude to Irish and to their child's learning of the language. However, their commitment to the language does not often translate into language use. This shows that attitudes do not always turn into behaviour.

A study of mixed language families in Wales (Jones & Morris, 2009), that is to say where only one parent is a Welsh speaker, showed how the parents' role and their language values were paramount to the young child's language practices. However, it also involved a certain degree of interaction in Welsh, the minority language, between parent and child by creating opportunities to use the minority language at home.

All of these studies therefore indicate that parents' influential attitudes together with parental encouragement have a very important role to play in the context of second language learning.

Another area of interest is the study of language attitudes among parents who do not have competence in the minority language but whose child is learning it in school as a second language. Packer and Campbell's study (1997) was based in Wales and focuses on parents' attitudes towards the Welsh language. Here it is reviewed in detail as it is of paramount importance to the current study.

Packer and Campbell's qualitative study conducted in the early 1990s in Wales explored parental attitudes to Welsh-medium education in a predominantly English-speaking area. Twenty four families whose children were in the final year of the Welsh-medium primary school were interviewed. Their views were then compared with the views of 19 parents whose children were in their first year of attendance at two English-medium primary schools. Important results from the twenty-one page long report on parental choice of Welsh-medium education are highlighted below.

A difference of motivation was first observed among participating parents who chose a Welsh-medium education for their child. Whereas Welsh speakers, who formed a minority, chose Welsh-medium education for their child because it seemed to be natural and reflected the family culture (integrative attitude), most English-speaking parents chose the Welsh-medium school because of its good reputation and also because it offered their children "a special opportunity to learn the language" (p. 5) (instrumental attitude). Both native speakers and non-Welsh speakers, however, highly valued the ethos and discipline of Welsh-medium schools, which may suggest that these factors were considered a priority in the process of choosing the right school (pp. 5-8). Both groups also attributed personal and professional advantages to such an education. Bilingualism for non-Welsh speakers and Welsh as a marker of identity for Welsh speakers were the most frequently stated advantages of a Welsh-medium education (pp. 5-6). Bilingualism was viewed by several participants as a way to acquire other languages easily and as an "aid to cultural openness" (p. 11). This was followed by career advantages resulting from being bilingual. Other advantages included culture and identity consciousness as well as discipline and the special atmosphere of the school i.e. enthusiastic and caring teachers, community spirit, smaller classes, etc., (pp. 6, 8 & 11). Very few disadvantages were mentioned. The most substantial disadvantage referred to the difficulty for children attending the Welsh-medium school to mix with local children due to the school's wide catchment area.

Parents' motivation was assessed as "very strong" since most participating parents had always considered a Welsh-medium education for their child (p. 6). In addition, the number of non-Welsh speakers who made an effort to learn the language to support their child's education is significant: "Only two families recorded no such attempt to learn Welsh" (p. 7). However, despite an effort to learn the language very few attained fluency. The main reasons given by the participants were work pressure and a lack of time.

When asked why people would send their children to Welsh-medium schools a majority stated the cultural and career advantages of being bilingual. The idea of being a natural choice for Welsh people to send their children to a Welsh-medium school applied for both Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speakers. Other reasons, although less prominent, included the quality of education in such schools, the elitist factor sometimes attributed to Welsh-medium schools—both socially and educationally—as well as the opportunity for the child to start school at an earlier age (age 3) than in English-medium schools. The conclusion can be made that a mix of instrumental and integrative attitudes were part of the motivation for parents to send their child to a Welsh-speaking school.

Language attitudes differed among participating parents whose child was going to an English-medium school. Most of those who sent their child to an English-medium school confirmed they were aware of the Welsh-medium education option. They also mentioned the concept of natural choice as the main reason to opt for Welsh-medium education. However, their final choice ruled out the Welsh-medium school because they did not think it was relevant to their life style or because they did not think they could support their child. The perceived requirement to learn Welsh may have deterred parents from enrolling their children in a Welsh-medium school (p. 13). Parental attitudes towards Welsh were divided between those who had a mild positive attitude and those who were indifferent. However, a majority expressed their wish to be able to speak the language. When specifically asked about the compulsory teaching of Welsh in school, a majority agreed that Welsh should be taught to all children in English-medium schools while a quarter of the interviewed parents did not want Welsh to be compulsory (p. 15).

When asked why people would send their children to a Welsh-medium school, some participating parents said it was because Welsh was the language spoken in the family, others stated “patriotism” and “a wish to revive the language”. Further reasons included the perception that Welsh-medium schools were very good schools and provided a better education while some comments were made about middle-class influence or “snobbery” (p. 14). Overall, participants believed that Welsh-medium schools were very good schools. Very few arguments against Welsh-medium education were articulated. They included the surge of nationalism, the importance of enhancing other foreign language rather than Welsh and the lack of contact with other children from the neighbourhood when attending a Welsh-medium school with a larger catchment area (p. 16).

By and large, Welsh-medium schools were regarded as good schools by both parent groups. The majority of participating parents were rather favourable to the teaching of Welsh as a subject in school regardless of their school affiliation. Whereas parents with a child in the Welsh-medium school under scrutiny positively identified with Welsh issues, parents of English-medium school children showed a

lower level of positive identification (p. 18). However, they expressed tolerance towards other parents' choice to provide a Welsh-medium education for their children.

While the report on parental attitudes to Welsh raised issues that are of importance to the immersion education context, which will be covered in the next chapter, it is worth noting that this small-scale study showed that a majority of participants valued Welsh as a living language and showed their support for state funding towards the promotion of Welsh and the provision of Welsh-medium education. The Welsh case is particularly interesting because it is in some ways similar to the Irish situation in terms of official status of the language, state support, educational policies, etc. As the analysis of language attitudes towards Irish below shows, the general public is very much in favour of state support and Irish language policies in the education sector. Positive attitudes to the minority language are indeed crucial for its maintenance (Baker, 1992; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006).

## 2.4 Irish language policy

Language policy reflects language ideology (Spolsky, 2004) and can be used to change certain attitudes (Spolsky, 2004; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006). Spolsky distinguishes three components in the language policy of a speech community: its language practices (language variety selection), language beliefs or ideology and efforts to modify or influence the language practice. The latter can take the form of legislation or planning and can occur at state level (clause in a constitution, law, official documents, etc.) as well as at the individual level (raising children through the minority language, choice of a dialect, etc.). Political organisation, however, is important in the formation and implementation of language policy. It is worth noting that the effect language policies have on language practices does not always succeed and cannot be predicted (Spolsky, 2004, p. 5).

Change in general attitude towards the Irish language was influenced by different language policies that were implemented by succeeding governments from the formation of the state in 1922 to today. The following section examines the various language policies and related public attitudes towards Irish as they gradually shifted from a conservative stance to restore Irish as the national language to a more bilingual approach (Ó Riagáin, 1997; Ó hIfearnáin, 2000; Ó Croidheáin, 2006).

Since Ireland's independence from British rule in 1922, the population's attitudes towards Irish have been shaped mainly by economic ups and downs as well as by the various governmental policies. Four distinct periods appear to stand out in the history of attitudes towards the Irish language as they correspond to four major phases of language policy (Ó Riagáin, 1988, 1997; Ó hIfearnáin, 2000; Watson, 2008; Murtagh, 2009):

- 1922-1948: language policy development
- 1948-1970/71: period of stagnation
- 1970s-1990s: *laissez faire* policy
- 1990s onwards: dual policy

It should be acknowledged that in 1922 political leadership was permeated with a nationalist ideology whereby the Irish language had been considered the basis for Irish unity and national identity in the fight for independence (Ó Croidheáin, 2006). The first phase in language policy therefore laid the foundations by focusing on language maintenance and language revival as a means to restore the Irish language which had been largely replaced by English. It was dominated by education language policy where the inclusion of Irish in the education system can be seen as “an attempt to influence society's evaluation of the language and attitudes towards it (O' Rourke, 2011, p. 75). Compulsion was the main element of language policy up until 1973 both inside and outside education (Kelly, 2002). The next phase has been labelled the period of stagnation and withdrawal from language policies (Ó Riagáin, 1997, p. 19; Ó hIfearnáin, 2000) as the government moved towards a policy that was more in line with

what was understood to be public demand (Ó Riagáin, 1997). This second phase marks a shift from a conservative ideology to a more liberal and social democratic ideology (Watson, 2008). The 1960s are considered a period of transition with the publication of several reports and research studies on educational issues and the growing interest of the general public in those issues which eventually led to the “curbing of compulsion” in the early 1970s (Kelly, 2002, p. 14). It is also around the 1960s that the government began to disengage from revival policies, establishing state agencies to deal with language policy (Ó hlfearnáin, 2000). Further economic and social changes in Irish society from the 1970s onwards marked a different position towards language policy that Ó Riagáin (1997, p. 23) describes as “benign neglect”. The last phase is characterised by a policy of maintenance of the language where it is presumed to exist (Ó Riagáin, 1997) and the abandonment of the national revivalist policy (Ó hlfearnáin, 2000). It is a reinforcement of the ideological shift according to which people have the right to certain choices (Watson, 2008).

### 2.4.1 The early phase of language policy: 1922-1948

After Independence, the Irish government defined the Irish language as the national language—although English was also recognised as an official language (Ó Riagáin, 1997). It then appeared in article 8 of the 1937 Constitution as the first official language, English being the second official language. The official status given to Irish as an important symbol of identity shows that cultural nationalism was part of state ideology from the outset (Ó Croidheáin, 2006, p. 170). Although the Irish language had been a thriving language up until the seventeenth century<sup>77</sup> its decline subsequent to political changes reduced the percentage of Irish-speakers to 19.2% in 1891 (Ó Riagáin, 1997, p. 5). Of these reported Irish-speakers only 2% lived in urban areas in the eastern part of the island while 80% of Irish speakers were located in the poor remote western counties where intergenerational transmission of the language was already rapidly diminishing (Ó hIfearnáin, 2000, p. 99). The number of Irish speakers was still low in 1926 when the first Census of Population after Independence was conducted. It reported that 19.3% of Irish people aged 3 years and over were Irish-speaking<sup>78</sup>. The government therefore had to plan accordingly and focused on the maintenance of the Irish language where it was still a community language. Irish-speaking areas were located in remote and poor areas along the West coast of Ireland. The maintenance plan which only concerned a minority (16% of the national population) therefore took the form of a regional economic programme (Ó Riagáin, 1997, p. 15). The new government, inspired by pre-independence nationalist ideas, aimed to revive the Irish language among the rest of the population who had been English-speaking for several generations. Leaders such as Douglas Hyde, former President of the Gaelic League or *Conradh na Gaeilge*<sup>79</sup>, famous for his inaugural speech “On the Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland” in 1892, were at the head of the Irish Free State. Their original goal to restore Irish as the main language of Ireland was a tremendous task that was mostly entrusted to the education system. It was decided that Irish would gradually replace English as a medium of instruction starting from the younger classes so as to progressively raise children's competence (Ó Riagáin, 1997; Kelly, 2002). The ultimate goal was to have Irish as the sole medium of education (Ó Riagáin, 1988). However, it should be noted that Irish language policy was set in a period when most Irish people had experienced language shift and considered bilingualism not possible and not desirable (Ó hIfearnáin, 2000, p. 99). Two language ideologies were competing at the time of independence and affected the Irish population's attitudes to Irish. Whereas the language

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77 See Hindley, 1990; Purdon, 1999; Ní Chartúir, 2002 for a general overview of the history of the Irish language.

78 See Table A1.1: Percentage of Irish speakers in Each Province, 1851-2006 in Appendix 1.

79 Conradh na Gaeilge was established in 1893. This institution with its different branches all over the island provided Irish-language classes and social activities such as traditional music, dancing, singing, etc. Conradh na Gaeilge is now a voluntary community organisation that both promotes the Irish language and campaigns to strengthen the rights of Irish-speakers.

had been advocated as the symbol of Irish ethnic identity (Tovey et al., 1989; Ó Croidheáin, 2006) negative views of the utility of Irish persisted from colonial times which translated into a perceived limited value of Irish as cultural capital (Ó Riagáin, 2008). Matters of urgent concern included the Irish-speaking areas and the maintenance of the Irish language, the education system as a means to achieve language shift, the use of Irish in the public service and the standardisation of the language.

As mentioned above, the most important aspect of Irish language policy was to be achieved through the education system. It was agreed that the Irish language would be taught as a subject or used as a medium of instruction for not less than one hour per day in all national schools where competent teachers could teach it (INTO, 1941; Kelly, 2002, p. 9). It was further recommended in 1925 that early total immersion<sup>80</sup> be practised in infant classes when teachers were able to teach through the medium of Irish. The number of primary schools teaching solely or partially through the medium of Irish reached 12.3% in 1940-1941 (Ó Riagáin, 1997, p. 16). As far as secondary education is concerned, Irish became an essential subject in the Intermediate examination in 1927.<sup>81</sup> However, this requirement did not concern a large number of students because education was mandatory for children aged 6 to 14 and only 8% of the second-level age group<sup>82</sup> had access to secondary education in 1927 (Ó Buachalla, 1988, p. 62). From 1934, after the election of Fianna Fáil, the use of Irish as a medium of instruction was extended to both primary and secondary schools. The policy also aimed to raise teachers' level of competency in the language (Ó Buachalla, 1988).

Public attitudes towards language policy as well as towards the teaching of Irish were neither available nor sought out by the government at the time. With regard to Irish in school “an early move to take account of the wishes of parents on the matter was quietly discontinued” (Ó Riagáin, 1997, p. 15; Kelly, 2002). In the 1930s Irish people started to doubt the revival policy of the Irish language; among them were teachers as they were the principal actors of the language revival campaign. Resentment against compulsory Irish in school was expressed among politicians and teachers who argued that it was not advantageous to the revival effort (Kelly, 2002).

Following the 1936 investigation of the effect of compulsory Irish carried out by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation<sup>83</sup> through a questionnaire distributed to teachers with Irish-medium teaching experience (INTO, 1941), concerns were raised about the negative impact immersion education had on pupils—as Macnamara (1966) was going to argue in his research study a few decades later, though this has since been refuted. Teachers were not opposed to the revival of the Irish language in schools but

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80 The introduction and use of Irish as the sole medium of instruction at an early stage in the child's education. Note that the terminology early total immersion was not used at the time.

81 The Intermediate examination—which was replaced by the Junior Certificate examination in 1992—is a state examination taken after three years' study in a secondary school.

82 The minimum school leaving age was raised to 15 in 1972 (Ó Buachalla, 1988, p. 79).

83 See Chapter 1, Section 1.5.2.



were rather more in favour of a bilingual education. The conclusion of the report highlighted the importance of alternating lessons through Irish and lessons through English during the school day so the pupils would not lose interest and would not think their home language was repressed because they could not use it: “To a certain extent life in school for [the pupil] is a life of repression, confusion and unhappiness” (INTO, 1941, p. 19). These ideas of repression and academic backwardness were also shared by parents. Complaints were made by parents about the subsequently perceived low standard of education; but such attitudes were not taken into consideration by the leaders of the Irish language revival (INTO, 1941).

The 1936 questionnaire therefore revealed much about attitudes towards the Irish revival and education through the Irish language. Over 77% of the respondents were of the opinion that Irish could be revived without using it as a medium of instruction but instead by teaching it as a subject (INTO, 1941, p. 58). The report advised in favour of making Irish the official language of the schools so that the school staff would communicate through Irish with other staff and pupils (INTO, 1941). The report also pinpointed the problems of qualification of the teaching staff and the quality and availability of text books in Irish that were also part of the failed attempt to produce a new generation of fluent Irish speakers:

*525 stated that as a result of official suggestion and contrary to their own judgement, they had taught subjects through the medium of Irish when the necessary conditions were not present—namely, teacher qualified and pupils competent to benefit by instruction. (p. 58)*

It was therefore the teachers' opinion that the haste into the revival of the language in the schools had resulted in the teaching of Irish by non-qualified teachers in a significant number of cases. The imposition on teachers by the government to teach Irish and teach through Irish before teachers had been fully trained is considered a weakness in the language policy. As a result, it created negative attitudes towards Irish, which also made the revival of Irish doubtful (Kelly, 2002). The unsuitability of text books was also the concern of 620 respondents (INTO, 1941) as they were too expensive, limited in choice, had no progressive difficulty, used a language too difficult for non-native speakers and lacked uniformity in spelling and grammar.

The INTO's report reflected teachers' attitudes towards immersion education through Irish—and to a certain extent represented parents' attitudes that existed in the mid-1930s. Although the Teachers' Organisation had always been in favour of the revival of the Irish language they reported their concern about the low standard of education among young children and the general negative attitude coming from it.

Irish language policy also concentrated on corpus planning. The standardisation of the language was necessary although problematic due to the existence of various dialects. The development of language varieties was originally caused by the settlement of large English-speaking groups from the seventeenth century onwards which gradually separated Irish-speaking areas from each other. Because there was practically no intermingling of the Irish-speaking people the language developed differently in each region leading to the variations in dialect of Ulster, Connaught and Munster Irish (Ní Chartúir, 2002, pp. 84-85). It was eventually agreed in the 1940s that linguistic norms should rely on the Irish spoken in the Gaeltacht areas (Ó Riagáin, 1997). The need for a standard Irish in schools and for legal documents led to the publication of *Litriú na Gaeilge: Lámhleabhar an Chaighdeáin Oifigiúil* (Irish orthography: the handbook of the official standard) in 1945 (Ní Chartiúr, 2002). This was followed in the 1950s by a guide to Irish grammar (*Gramadach na Gaeilge: Caighdeán*, 1953) and a new English-Irish dictionary (the de Bhaldraithe dictionary, 1959) while a new version of the Irish-English dictionary was only published in 1977 (Ó Riagáin, 1997, p. 22; H. Ó Murchú, 2008, pp. 121 & 124).

Other policies concerned with the Irish language included the economic development of the Irish-speaking areas. In 1926, the Gaeltacht Commission was appointed to assess the situation in the Irish-speaking heartland it reported economic and outward migration problems. In order to maintain the Irish language as a community language in those areas it was necessary to stabilise the economy and the population. As a result, this policy was mainly economic. The Gaeltacht policy was viewed as an essential part of the revival of the Irish language as it constituted a living resource for the rest of the country (Ó hIfearnáin, 2000). Efforts were also made to introduce the Irish language in the Gaeltacht as the school language and in the public service. The latter which also extended to the whole nation proved to be difficult to achieve as 60% of the labour force was employed in agriculture with 50% being self-employed (Ó Riagáin, 1997, p. 18). Furthermore, there were very few incentives for civil servants to use the Irish language. Although knowledge of Irish was required when entering the civil service from 1925, the language used by the hierarchy and the government was mainly English (Ó Riagáin, 1997; Ó hIfearnáin, 2000). The urgent need to form an Irish-speaking middle-class who would use Irish as the norm in the workplace failed. The Irish language, however, enjoyed a certain amount of popularity among those who could use Irish to get employment in the public sector. The language could then lead to social mobility by joining the elite (Ó Riagáin, 1997; Ó Croidheáin, 2006). But soon after the war years the realisation came that on the one hand emigration from the Gaeltacht areas was still increasing and on the other hand the education system had failed to produce Irish speakers outside the school (Ó Croidheáin, 2006).

### 2.4.2 The period of stagnation: 1948-1971

This period coincides with both the high point of total and partial immersion education in primary and secondary schools and its rapid decline. By 1955, only 25 primary schools out of 4,876 used English as the sole medium of instruction (Kelly, 2002, p. 57) while in 1941, 106 secondary schools taught entirely through Irish. However, twenty years later this number was halved to represent 15% of secondary-school students receiving an Irish-medium education in both Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht secondary schools (Ó Riagáin, 1997, p. 202). It appears difficult to pinpoint the real cause of this decline. The state's lack of support towards these schools may have led parents to distrust Irish-medium education; but it could also be that parents' reluctance to have their child actively taking part in the language revival forced the government to reconvert a large number of these schools into English-medium schools (Ó hIfearnáin, 2000). What is certain though is that the growing unpopularity of immersion education, the lack of effect on community language behaviour together with concerns about language teaching technique and syllabus led to a change in focus of policy by 1960. In effect, the government concentrated its efforts on the teaching of Irish as a subject in school rather than on the initial Irish-medium and bilingual programmes (Ó Riagáin, 1997). An opinion poll in 1964 showed that three quarters of the respondents were dissatisfied with compulsory Irish in state examinations (Ó Riagáin, 1993). It was largely believed that the position of Irish in school hindered children's progress, was associated with punishment and was ineffective in producing bilinguals who would use Irish in the community (CILAR, 1975, p. 29). Although this requirement remained until 1973, the opposition party, Fine Gael, was already campaigning in the 1961 General Election to abolish compulsory Irish in school (Kelly, 2002). This political campaign reflected a general dissatisfaction. The revival policy which had become “a divisive element in the concept of nationhood” (p. 141) was questioned during the election campaign. The government at the time was also concerned about the negative association of the term “compulsory” with the Irish language.

One of the most influential pieces of research in education dominating the late 1960s and the early 1970s was the study by John Macnamara (1966) on the effect of bilingualism on Irish primary-school pupils. While he based his assumptions on the association of bilingualism with academic retardation<sup>84</sup>, he came to the conclusion that bilingual children performed less well in problem arithmetic and written English compared to monolingual children. According to the norms of the two arithmetic tests given to pupils aged between 7 and 15 years, the retardation in problem arithmetic was estimated at 11 months of arithmetic age (i.e. the level children of this age group should have attained in arithmetic) and the difference in standard in written English was estimated at 17 months of English age (p. 136). Macnamara explained this low performance in both English and mathematics as being the

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84 Term used by Macnamara.

results of the amount of time spent on learning the Irish language at school, which was 42% over the first six years compared with 22% spent on English. Furthermore, he found that pupils whose first language was English did not acquire native-like competences in Irish with an estimated 16 months of Irish age difference; while native Irish-speakers attained lower level of performance in English than native speakers of English (ibid.). Although this study was reviewed and highly criticised more than a decade later (Cummins, 1978) it reflected at the time people's thought about immersion education retarding children's educational progress (Ó Riagáin, 1988).

In 1958, the Commission on the Restoration of the Irish Language published a report on the state of the Irish language. This publication led to the government's response in 1965 entitled *White Paper on the Restoration of the Irish Language* that is considered as the “formal beginning of Language Planning” (Ó Ciosáin, 1988). Gaeltacht boundaries were revised to better reflect the linguistic reality as some districts had gone through substantial population loss and language shift since the Gaeltacht had been defined in 1926 (Ó Riagáin, 1997). Because of drastic changes in the Irish economy and society with the transformation of Ireland to a more urban country, the government eventually recognised the importance of the English language internationally and in the domains of technology and economy. It was therefore the first time that the idea of promoting bilingualism in Ireland was acknowledged in an indirect way as the word “bilingualism” was never used in the Paper (Ó Ciosáin, 1988). The government realised that the task of producing a generation of fluent Irish speakers could not be left solely to the schools. Language planning was urgently needed (ibid.). Results from the Census of Population already showed in the 1960s that the language strategy had failed to maintain Irish in the Gaeltacht and that despite an increase in Irish speakers outside the Gaeltacht—thanks to the education system—Irish was still not used as a community language (Ó Riagáin, 1988). It is also at that time that policy-makers were more receptive to public demand and quickly abandoned immersion education due to its unpopularity (Ó Riagáin, 1997). This period marks the beginning of the state's withdrawal from its commitment to the Irish language “slowly detaching and distancing itself from leadership and prime responsibility for the language policy” (ibid., p. 22). In the 1970s the delegation of responsibilities for the promotion of the Irish language to state agencies started with the establishment of organisations such as Bord na Gaeilge, Údarás na Gaeltachta as well as the media with Raidió na Gaeltachta (Ó Ciosáin, 1988). The 1965 *White Paper* also urged language planners to conduct research on language attitudes among the population—such as the 1975 Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research (CILAR) Report—so as to prepare realistic language policies accordingly (ibid.). The government realised that the success of language policies depended on public support (Ó Riagáin, 1988; 1997).

### 2.4.3 The *laissez faire* language policy: 1970-1990

Subsequent to the phenomenon of urbanisation and the growth in the economy that took place in the 1960s (Ó Ciosáin, 1988; Ó Riagáin, 1997), further changes occurred in Irish society when Ireland joined the Common Market (also known as European Economic Community)—before it became the European Community and later the European Union—in 1973 as it integrated international capitalism (Ó hIfearnáin, 2000). However, the expansion of the Irish economy and the impact of external influences led to problems in terms of policy-making for the maintenance of the Irish language (Ó Riagáin, 1997).

The Irish-language requirement for the Civil Service was abandoned in 1973 due to its unpopularity among the general public. Furthermore, the requirement to pass Irish in the Leaving Certificate examination was abolished (Kelly, 2002). The expansion of third-level education resulted in the opening of new state universities, institutes of technology and other tertiary colleges in which Leaving Certificate Irish was not an entry requirement (Ó hIfearnáin, 2000, p. 106). Similarly, the state's weakening commitment to Irish can be seen in the establishment of Irish-medium schools from the 1970s as a response to pressure put on the government by groups of parents (Ó Riagáin, 1997). Although the government supported these schools—which were added to the school system to satisfy the public demand as opposed to the reconversion of existing schools into Irish-medium schools—little was done to strengthen the position of Irish in the rest of the state schools (ibid.).

In the 1980 *White Paper on Educational Development* the government acknowledged the failure to reintroduce Irish in Ireland through the education system as originally sought by early Irish governments: “The national aim is to restore Irish as a means of communication so that the population of the country will be truly bilingual. Although the educational system alone cannot achieve this aim, it obviously has an important role to play in the preservation of the language.” (*White Paper*, 1980, p. 108). The written word had been the main focus of the teaching of the Irish language in school since the origin of the Irish State (Kelly, 2002) despite the fact that the goals set by the first Irish Government was to revive Irish as spoken language. There was not enough spoken Irish in school which contributed to the failure of the revival effort (ibid.). More time was allocated to oral Irish from the late 1950s in primary schools. The first oral examination in the Irish language was introduced in 1960 in the Leaving Certificate. This was replicated in 1966 in the Intermediate Certificate examination. However, it is not until recently that the teaching of spoken Irish was given more prominence. The Ministerial Circular 0042/2007 announced that from 2010 the marks for the Irish oral examination in both Junior and Leaving Certificates would be increased from 20% and 25%

respectively to 40%.<sup>85</sup> This decision aims at encouraging the use of Irish as a means of communication in all the schools: “the intention of the increase in marks for oral assessment is to promote a significant shift in emphasis towards Irish as a spoken language, where students can communicate and interact in a spontaneous way, and where Irish is spoken every day in schools” (DES, 2007). It is also in line with students' demand for more time spent on Irish speaking activity in the classroom (Ní Riain, 2003).

Several attempts were made from the 1970s onwards to encourage the use of Irish outside of education. But despite the creation of Bord na Gaeilge in 1975<sup>86</sup>—a body in charge of the promotion of the Irish language in daily life through advice, information, language courses and translation services—the Irish population did not make more use of Irish in their day to day life (May, 2001). Further developments in the radio and television services occurred with the creation of an Irish language radio station, Raidió na Gaeltachta in 1971 and Teilifís na Gaeilge in 1996. They gradually replaced—although not entirely—Irish language programmes on mainstream radio stations and television channels (Ó Riagáin, 1997; 2008). Left without a clear language policy, state agencies promoting the Irish language seemed from the outset to be autonomous and entirely responsible for Irish language broadcasting (ibid.). The granting of licenses to the new private TV3 channel and local radio stations in the 1990s without the requirement to produce some Irish language programmes is a further example of the disengagement of the state from any language restoration policy (Ó hÍfearnáin, 2000). Although statements on language policy direction are rare and general (Ó Riagáin, 2008) it appears that the government's strategy is now to support the provision of Irish language services only in certain areas for a small bilingual community, whether it is through immersion education or through the Irish language media (Ó hÍfearnáin, 2000). Ó hÍfearnáin (2000) distinguishes this strategy as the marker of a fourth distinct period of language policy which is characterised by the redefinition of Irish as a minority language.

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85 See Appendix 4, Table A4.4 Changes to the Proportion of Marks for Oral Irish in the Certificate Examinations.

86 Bord na Gaeilge ceased to exist as such and became Foras na Gaeilge after the Good Friday Agreement (1998). Foras na Gaeilge coordinates the promotion of Irish across the border.

#### 2.4.4 The dual language policy: 1990s onwards

This phase involves what O'Reilly (1999) refers to as rights discourse and which perceives speaking Irish as a right. The 1990s mark the beginning of this dual policy where state support is given to the living linguistic minority while the Irish language is considered a heritage language at national level:

*This represents a transformation in the way the state regards the language. Until this period it was regarded as the language of everybody, and the fact that the majority did not speak it was seen as an anachronism and paradox that has to be redressed. After 20 years of incubation the state has now hatched a new understanding that Irish speakers are a cultural and linguistic minority, while the majority must still be able to learn that language as part of their heritage and carries sentimental and ceremonial value. (Ó hIfearnáin, 2000, p. 110)*

Public support for Irish already indicated a dual position towards Irish in the national language attitude surveys of 1973, 1983 and 1993 (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994). Respondents showed their support for the maintenance of the Irish language in the Gaeltacht areas and in the public domain. However, positive attitudes did not translate into language use (CILAR, 1975). Support for state policies was positive and it was largely perceived that the government was responsible for the promotion of the language. They further placed on the language a certain national cultural value by supporting the compulsory element of Irish language policy in education—provided it did not affect individuals' material opportunities directly or those of their children (Ó Riagáin, 1997, p. 191; 2008). A change in attitudes was observed in the 1983 national attitude survey following the abolition of compulsory Irish in the public sector state examination in 1973 (Ó Riagáin, 1988). Figures show an increase in favourable attitude to Irish in the schools (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984), which contrasts with pre-1970s attitudes to the compulsory Irish policy (CILAR, 1975). Despite public support for Irish language policy it seems unlikely that Irish people would be in favour of more radical policies to enhance bilingualism in Ireland (Ó Riagáin, 2008):

*although the majority of the Irish public would appear to espouse some form of bilingual objective, the evidence from surveys would suggest that many of this majority seek at best to simply maintain the status of Irish in the Gaeltacht, in artistic life and within the low levels of social bilingualism now pertaining. (p. 62)*

There is now an even more relaxed approach to the compulsory Irish policy in terms of the competence required in Irish for teachers to teach the language (Ó hIfearnáin, 2000). Current requirements include, among others, a compensation mechanism which may allow a primary school teacher to graduate without having achieved a pass mark in Irish methodology and in the case of appointment to secondary school, the abolition of Irish requirement (i.e. oral and written

examinations) for most teachers (H. Ó Murchú, 2008, PP. 174 & 178). There is also a more lenient approach for pupils to study Irish (Ó Riagáin, 2008). The percentage of students not taking the Irish paper in the Leaving Certificate examination increased from 0.3% in 1960 to 7.7% in 1980 (Ó Riagáin, 1997, p. 205), a trend which is still ongoing with 11.2% not taking the Irish paper in the year 2009-2010 (DES, 2010). Furthermore, the abolition of compulsory Irish for the Leaving Certificate is an ongoing issue as the current government announced during the 2011 election campaign that Irish would be made optional—although this change has yet to be implemented.

The role of the state in Irish language policy has been decreasing since the 1960s with the emphasis put on voluntary language organisations and the reluctance towards direct language policy within the private sector (Ó Croidheáin, 2006). It is from this period that Irish started to be regarded as “the language of a linguistic minority” and the speaking of the Irish language “a minority right rather than a national obligation” (Watson, 2008, p. 73). The 2003 Official Languages Act is an example of a recent shift to a neo-liberal ideology in which learning and speaking Irish is a rational choice made by individuals (ibid.). It also shows that language policy is further directed at the declining public sector (Ó Croidheáin, 2006). As the first piece of legislation to provide Irish people with statutory rights to use and receive services through the Irish language (e.g. right to use Irish in the Houses of the Oireachtas and before the courts, communicate with the state and public bodies through the medium of Irish) it only appears to focus on public bodies. Although there are still problems today in terms of compliance with the regulations, more and more individuals and language organisations use their rights and lodge complaints with the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga (An Coimisinéir Teanga, 2010)—an independent body in charge of monitoring compliance with Irish language rights. The availability of the Official Languages Act and its positive use by individuals indicates to a certain extent that language policy has an impact on language patterns (Ó Riagáin, 1997). However, results from the 2006 Census of Population show that there is still 58.1% of the population who said they could not speak Irish. Although the Census question “can you speak Irish?” may pose problems of interpretation from the respondents’ point of view, results show that the Irish language is not widely spoken on a regular basis outside education (CSO, 2007; 2012). The failure to revive the Irish language among the Irish population and restore it as a main community language may indicate that Irish language policy has always been determined by “those who do not actively speak it” (Ó hIfearnáin, 2000, p. 95). There is nonetheless a sense that the use of Irish is being normalised through the success of Irish-medium broadcasting (TG4 and radio stations such as Raidió na Gaeltachta, Raidió na Life, and the recent online Raidió Rí Rá for teenagers), Irish-medium education, Irish-medium services in the public sector following the 2003 Official Languages Act and the use of Irish as an official EU working language since January 2007.



The emphasis on bilingual language policy has recently been reaffirmed in the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language* (Government of Ireland, 2010), a document which has been referred to as “the most significant realignment of Irish language strategy since the foundation of the State” (Ó Giollagáin & Ó Curnáin, 2011, para 3). However, it is not official policy as it is mainly aspirational. Its objectives are to increase the number of daily Irish speakers nationwide—from 83,000 outside education in 2006 to 250,000 over twenty years (Government of Ireland, 2010, p. 9)—while continuing to support bilingual services in public domains and giving special linguistic support to Irish-speaking communities in the Gaeltacht so that the number of its daily speakers increases by 25% (ibid.). The plan is therefore twofold with a national bilingual policy and an Irish language maintenance policy within the Gaeltacht:

*The Government recognises the tremendous advantage to its citizens of fluency in English, the most widely used language in international affairs. The Government commits to ensuring that this advantage is retained through the development of a bilingual society, where as many people as possible can use Irish and English with equal ease and facility. However, the Government also recognises that the focus of policy in the Gaeltacht needs to be on maintaining the linguistic identity of the community in the Gaeltacht as a distinctive language region, rather than one of bilingualism. (ibid. p. 3)*

Results from the 2006 Census of Population indicate that around 2% speak Irish on a daily basis outside education. In contrast 12% speak Irish on a daily basis within the education system (Central Statistics Office, 2007, Table 30, p.61).<sup>87</sup> It appears from these results that the school are still the largest producers of bilinguals. As Ó Riagáin (2008) pointed out, the maintenance of home bilingualism in Ireland is due to language production by the school rather than language reproduction—that is to say language transmission within the community. While education is still a key instrument in the government's strategic plan it proposes to extend the use of Irish beyond the school environment. To this aim it must first focus on changing negative attitudes towards Irish usage into positive ones as well as increasing the provision of Irish-medium education. The latter is twofold and includes the expansion of immersion education through gaelscoileanna as well as the gradual introduction of partial immersion education in English-speaking schools where subjects other than Irish may be taught through Irish (Government of Ireland, 2010, p. 12). This reform in education also involves reviewing teaching qualification training courses. It is also proposed to raise awareness of the advantages of bilingualism and guide families wishing to raise their children bilingually. Special provision in the Gaeltacht areas would aim to support various domains of community life including education, community services, economic and business development, health services, and so on. However, there is very little provision to address the use of Irish at home in the Gaeltacht. Rather, the bilingual

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<sup>87</sup> See Table A5.1 Percentage of Daily Irish Speakers in 2006 in Appendix 5.

strategy seems to focus once again on institutions and second language learners and tends to undermine the urgency to support Irish in the diminishing Irish-speaking communities:

*this sectorial approach of the Strategy represents an anaemic response to serious issues of linguistic meltdown in the Gaeltacht. It appears to be a strategy towards a post-Gaeltacht Ireland; it is not a strategy for native Irish communities or their regeneration. (Ó Giollagáin & Ó Curnáin, 2011, para 8)*

Although changes in the curriculum have already been made since 2010 with the emphasis on spoken Irish at junior cycle (DES, 2007), the change in government after the launching of the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language* together with the lack of financial resources due to the present difficult economic situation may result in the review or even the abandonment of the plan.

To sum up, it has been shown that in the early years of the foundation of the Irish State the language policy was one of revival. While Irish was defined as the first official language the Constitution also recognised English as the second official language. It was therefore never intended to replace the English language with the Irish language (Ó Riagáin, 2008). Although Irish-speaking areas were clearly defined so that special measures could be taken to preserve the language as a community language, Irish language policy was aimed at the whole nation and sought to create a bilingual community (Ó Riagáin, 1997; 2008). However, the decision to entrust the schools with the tremendous task of converting the population into bilinguals without the appropriate resources led to the unpopularity of compulsory Irish and a general dissatisfaction with the education system. Although public attitudes were not consulted at the time the government soon realised the importance of public support for language policies. From the 1960s the government started to align its policies with the prevailing trend in public opinion while gradually delegating responsibilities to semi-state bodies. In the 1970s there was a shift from conservative policies for the restoration of Irish to a passive and nebulous bilingual language policy. Various language attitude surveys indicated that Irish people were in favour of state support and emphasised that the government was responsible for the promotion of the Irish language (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994). The public also made it clear that the Irish language defined and helped maintain national cultural identity (Ó Riagáin, 2008). Recent moves in language policy indicate that there is now a dual approach to Irish whereby it is a recognised minority language in existing Irish-speaking communities but is regarded as part of Irish cultural heritage for the vast majority (Ó hÍfearnáin, 2000). The ideal of creating a bilingual population has gradually been abandoned. The establishment of specialised Irish-language broadcasting programmes and Irish-medium schools shows that the state is now supporting existing bilingual communities, facilitating individual choice as opposed to implementing mainstream revival

language policies (Ó Riagáin, 1997; 2008). The most recent language strategy—although it is not an official language policy document—appears to show a commitment to a national bilingual language policy while putting in place special provision to address the linguistic minority living in Irish-speaking areas (Government of Ireland, 2010). While education is still a key instrument the importance of language transmission and linguistic support at community level has also been acknowledged. However, by concentrating too much on language policies for the linguistic minority there is a risk of moving completely away from remaining revival policies (Tovey et al., 1989).

## **2.5 Language attitudes in the Republic of Ireland**

Before examining language attitudes in the Republic of Ireland this introductory section describes how language attitudes can be useful in the context of language revival as it is the case in Ireland. Language attitudes have been given a valuable importance in the study of endangered languages in the past few decades. Along with the number of speakers of a particular language, the level of competency in that language, the degree of language use and attitudes towards a language are important factors for assessing language vitality (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006). UNESCO (2003) considers language attitudes as “a powerful force both for promotion and loss [of] languages” (p. 12). According to the authors of the UNESCO report, language attitudes are one of nine factors for assessing language vitality and endangerment along with intergenerational language transmission and number speakers—no one factor, however, can be used independently of another. “Attitudes towards the language, be they positive, indifferent, or negative, interact with governmental policy and societal pressures to result in increased or decreased language use in different domains.” (p. 15).

Language attitudes can exist at national level among the majority population, at community level among the minority and can also be assessed at governmental level especially through language policies. Each type of attitude has its own importance and can affect the language either positively or negatively (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006):

*The ways in which the government addresses issues of language policy can have an impact on a group's attitudes towards its own language. Local attitudes toward the local language are critical in language maintenance and revitalization; negative attitudes are often at least part of the motivation behind language shift. (p.12)*

Similarly, the assessment of the population's favourable or unfavourable attitudes is crucial as these attitudes impact on the success or failure of language preservation, no matter what the language policy is (Baker, 1992). If the population is not in favour of bilingual education, for example, the education policy aiming at bilingualism is very likely to fail as there will be no support from the community. As mentioned earlier, negative attitudes to Irish-medium instruction from teachers, parents and politicians partly caused the closure of immersion and bilingual schools in the 1960s which were at the root of the revival language policy. Baker (1992) sums up this point by saying that “language engineering can flourish or fail according to the attitudes of the community” (p. 21). Whereas censuses assess the 'health of the language', attitude surveys give valuable information on the current beliefs, preferences and desires of the population towards the endangered language. They can also indicate a change in attitudes and give some clues to the possible success of a policy (ibid.).

Various relevant attitudinal surveys carried out in the Republic of Ireland are examined here so as to give a detailed review of past and recent findings on attitudes to Irish. While the first section

reviews and compares different attitudinal surveys on general aspects of the Irish language, the second section focuses on Irish in the education context. But before proceeding to the survey review, it is important to set the linguistic context in Ireland.

### 2.5.1 The Irish linguistic situation: Census of the Population

Before national attitude surveys were carried out in Ireland, the main “linguistic barometer” that could reflect the impact of language policy was the Census of Population (Ó Riagáin, 1997, p. 19). The first such census to record the number of Irish speakers was the 1851 Census (Punch, 2008). The 1926 Census expanded the categories and until 1996 respondents had to write whether they could speak *Irish only*, *Irish and English* or *read but cannot speak Irish*. The Irish language question was substantially changed in 1996 as it no longer considered the category *speak Irish only* relevant. Rather, it placed its focus on the frequency of use of Irish for those able to speak the language. Respondents were no longer required to write the answer but tick the applicable boxes (ibid., p.45). The question on language competence and frequency of use that appeared in the 1996 and 2002 Census of the Population was further altered in 2006 so as to differentiate people using Irish in school only and people using the language outside of the school environment:

**Figure 2.1: Census of the Population.**

Question 12:
Can you speak Irish? (answer if aged 3 years or over)
<input type="checkbox"/> yes
<input type="checkbox"/> no
If yes, do you speak Irish? (tick the boxes that apply)
<input type="checkbox"/> daily, within the education system
<input type="checkbox"/> daily, outside the education system
<input type="checkbox"/> weekly
<input type="checkbox"/> less often
<input type="checkbox"/> never

Note. Source: CSO.<sup>88</sup>

The words in bold characters are part of the changes made for the 2006 Census.<sup>89</sup> The distinction between daily use inside and outside the school environment gives a better account of the number of daily Irish-speakers that the previous surveys failed to show. However, the two significant changes that were made in 1996 and 2006 represent a complete break in continuity in the collection of data since 1851 which proves problematic for maintaining data consistency (see Punch, 2008, pp. 49-50). The 2006 version is however regarded as “more meaningful” than the previous versions (ibid., p. 53), especially in terms of accuracy in the number of daily Irish speakers.

Whereas the 1851 Census reported that 29.1% of the population spoke Irish, the first census of the population (1926) carried out in Ireland after it gained its independence from Britain indicated that

<sup>88</sup> 2006 Census form ([http://cso.ie/census/documents/censusform\\_2006.pdf](http://cso.ie/census/documents/censusform_2006.pdf)).

<sup>89</sup> This question also appeared in the 2011 Census.

19.3% of Irish people aged 3 years and over could speak Irish.<sup>90</sup> Since then, the percentage of reported Irish-speakers has been increasing constantly to reach 40.8% in 2006 (CSO, 2007). Since 1996 it has been possible to differentiate daily Irish speakers from others who have the ability to speak Irish but do not use the language on a regular basis. The percentage of daily speakers in 2006 was 13.3% of the population, which represents a total of 32.5% of daily speakers among Irish speakers. It should be noticed that only 1.8% of the population reported daily use of Irish outside the education system, which corresponds to 4.4% of the Irish speaking population.<sup>91</sup>

In all censuses, the percentage of Irish-speakers largely represents second language speakers who learnt Irish in school (H. Ó Murchú, 2008) although this is not directly established in the census returns. The largest age group reporting ability in Irish is in fact the school age group (5-19 years old) which represents 51.4% of Irish speakers (CSO, 2007). Furthermore, this group accounts for 79.2% of daily Irish speakers.<sup>92</sup> Figures show that 12% of the population in 2006 said that they used Irish daily in the education system.<sup>93</sup> It should be noted that among the 72,148 daily speakers outside education only 22,500 live in the Gaeltacht. As data indicates, the education system generates most of the Irish speakers. But it also suggests that Irish is not transmitted in the home or used in the community (Ó Riagáin, 1997). This highlights the change in language use in the Gaeltacht where there has been a shift to a school generation of speakers as opposed to home generation of speakers outside the Gaeltacht (H. Ó Murchú, 2008, p.46). Furthermore, the lack of Irish-speaking social networks, facilities and incentives to use the Irish language in the community translates into a drop in the numbers of Irish speakers in older age cohorts—which correspond to people who have left school—who claim to use Irish daily (Ó Riagáin, 1997). It appears, however, that initiatives in towns with long-established institutional support to increase the number of Irish speakers bore fruit as they reported a higher daily use of Irish in 2006 (H. Ó Murchú, 2008).

Although the Census of Population is claimed to be “the most comprehensive source of data on Irish language ability and usage” (Punch, 2008, p. 43) there is a real sense that self-reporting in the census represent attitudinal or evaluative statements about the language and self-confidence or absence of confidence as opposed to real ability (H. Ó Murchú, 2008). Furthermore, questions in the Census are very limited as they do not take into account respondents' level of competence in Irish such as the quality of spoken Irish but also their competence in reading, writing, understanding, and so on.

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90 See Table A1.1: Percentage of Irish speakers in Each Province, 1851-2006 in Appendix 1.

91 See Table A.5.1: Percentage of Daily Irish Speakers in 2006 and Table A5. 2: Number of Daily Irish Speakers in 2006 in Appendix 5.

92 See Table A5.3: Daily Irish Speakers within the School Age Group in 2006 in Appendix 5

93 See Table A5.1: Percentage of Daily Irish Speakers in 2006 and Table A5.2: Number of Daily Irish Speakers in 2006 in Appendix 5.

Nor do they enquire about the use of Irish in defined contexts such as home, work, social networks, and the like. (ibid.).

What is certain, however, is that the overall increase in the percentage of people reporting ability in Irish throughout the years is mainly due to—besides a change in the census question—changes in education including a new Irish curriculum and the development of Irish-medium education as well as more positive attitudes to the language (ibid.).



### 2.5.2 General Irish language attitude surveys: 1973-2007/08

While only a few local surveys were conducted before the 1970s, no large population surveys had ever been carried out on people's attitudes towards, ability in and use of the Irish language. The first major research was undertaken at a critical time when language policy was believed to be out of alignment with general public opinion (Riagáin, 1988). In 1970, the Minister for Finance and the Gaeltacht established a committee, the Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research (CILAR, 1975) to report on:

- (1) Current attitudes towards the Irish language and towards efforts to restore it as a general means of communication;*
- (2) the extent to which the public would support policy development which seemed to offer a greater chance of achieving the aim of restoring Irish as a general means of communication in a significant range of language functions. (p. ii)*

The government at the time regarded the public's attitudes as valuable information to carry on the promotion of the Irish language. It is believed that the lack of public support for the early revival policy contributed to its failure (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994).

In 1983, a different body, Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann (ITÉ), also known as the Linguistic Institute of Ireland, took over and conducted a survey very similar to CILAR's using, for the most part, the same questions. Again in 1993 a second ITÉ survey was carried out so as to analyse and compare the trend in attitudes towards Irish over a twenty-year period. Since then, there has been no major follow-up national survey of its kind on attitudes to the Irish language. Mac Gréil and Rhatigan's (2009) attitude survey is the most recent national attitude survey but does not cover the same issues found in the CILAR and ITÉ's national surveys extensively.

The following section provides a review of major nationwide attitudinal surveys and includes the three national surveys listed above of 1973 ( $N=2,443$ ), 1983 ( $N=791$ ) and 1993 ( $N=1,000$ ), as well as the all-Ireland survey conducted in 2000 in both the Republic of Ireland ( $N=1,000$ ) and Northern Ireland ( $N=1,000$ ) (Ó Riagáin, 2007), Mac Gréil's national survey conducted in 1988/89 ( $N=1,000$ ) (Mac Gréil, 1996) and repeated (Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009) in 2007/08 ( $N=1,015$ ). Because of the extensive data collected in the national surveys, this section is organised under five categories replicated from the CILAR (1975) report. The latter examined six different domains of attitudes:

- attitudes to Irish as an ethnic symbol
- beliefs about the viability of Irish

- feelings of apathy about Irish and Irish agencies, and associated beliefs about the relevance and fate of the language. This mainly corresponds to the attitudes towards public and state support for Irish in the 1983 and 1993 surveys.
- attitudes towards the Gaeltacht
- attitudes to interpersonal or conversational use of Irish
- attitudes to Irish in school

Each of ITÉ surveys included all of these categories. Overall, the questions remained unchanged except for a few that were updated or amended—for example, the question of the importance of learning Irish over the learning of a European language which is examined in this chapter, was added in 1983 (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984; 1994). It should be noted that the review of attitudes to Irish in the school context is dealt with separately as it is essential to the background of the present study.

The all-Ireland survey of 2000 (Ó Riagáin, 2007) replicated some of the questions used in the three national surveys and addressed the issues of national identity, general attitudes to Irish, attitudes to state support for Irish and to Irish in school. Although its purpose was to compare attitudes between the populations of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, results concerning the population of the Republic were extracted and compared to other attitudinal surveys presented here. Mac Gréil and Rhatigan's (2009) study replicates a survey that was conducted in 1988/89 to observe the attitudinal trend among the Irish population over a nineteen-year period. Respondents aged 18 years and over were selected from a national random sample to be interviewed. The various questions asked to the informants addressed the following issues:

- aspirations for the Irish language
- attitudes towards Irish in school and now
- Irish as a symbolic basis of Irish unity—which goes beyond the question on ethnic identity asked in the surveys of 1973, 1983, 1993 as it embraces the idea of a common identity for both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, which was absent in the other surveys.
- attitudes to Irish-speakers

Other attitude surveys included in this review were carried out between the three national surveys of 1973, 1983, 1993 and the most recent one in 2007/08. They were either more specialised in certain domains of the Irish language (radio broadcasting) or targeted specific categories of the Irish population (the Irish National Teachers' Organisations [INTO], University College, Cork staff). A brief thematic review of these different surveys gives a broader context of attitudes towards the Irish language in contemporary Ireland. The study of the attitudes of University College, Cork (UCC) staff ( $N=551$ ) towards the Irish language (Ó Fathaigh & Ní Bhraoin, 1996) is included as it is set in the

education domain and shows more positive results than those found in the three national surveys of 1973, 1983 and 1993. The survey was conducted in 1993 but only was published in 1996, which enabled the researchers to compare their findings to the ITÉ national survey of the same year. The study used a certain number of questions from the CILAR and ITÉ surveys regarding Irish as a subject in school, as an ethnic symbol and as a viable language. Finally, the MORI Ireland survey (2004) of attitudes to Irish language broadcasting ( $N=1,203$ ) was included as a concrete and recent example of attitudes to public and state support for the language.

### 2.5.2.1 Attitudes to Irish as an ethnic symbol

Although public attitudes tend to view Irish as a symbol of ethnic identity, the relationship between language and identity is weakening (Ó Riagáin, 2007). As a matter of fact, the trend over the twenty-year-period between the first national attitudinal survey in 1973 and the 1993 survey showed lower support for Irish as an ethnic symbol in 1993.

**Table 2.2: Attitudes to Irish as an Ethnic Symbol, 1973-2000**

Statement	Year	Agree %	No opinion %	Disagree %
No real Irish person can be against the revival of Irish	1973	72	3	25
	1983	73	2	25
	1993	66	3	31
	*1993	44	10	46
Ireland would not really be Ireland without Irish-speaking people	1973	64	3	34
	1983	66	2	32
	1993	60	3	37
	*1993	47	7	46
	2000	41	n.a.	n.a.
Without Irish, Ireland would certainly lose its identity as a separate culture	1973	56	6	38
	1983	66	3	31
	*1984	*69	*n.a.	*n.a.
	1993	61	3	36
	*1993	63	2	35
To really understand Irish culture, one must know Irish	1973	58	6	36
	1983	57	2	41
	*1984	*n.a.	*n.a.	*66
	1993	46	3	51
	*1993	58	6	36
Using the Irish language would make Ireland more independent of England	2000	48	n.a.	n.a.
	1973	41	5	54
	1983	40	4	56
	1993	37	6	57

*Note.* Source: CILAR, 1975 (1973 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (1983 survey), 1994 (1993 survey); INTO, 1985(\*1984 survey); Ó Fathaigh & Ní Bhraoin, 1996 (\*1993 survey); Ó Riagáin, 2007 (2000 survey)

\* this survey only concerns a certain category of the Irish population which is made up of teaching staff only.

A majority of Irish people are still in favour of the revival of Irish although support has decreased through the years (66% in 1993). For instance, fewer people thought in 1993 that knowledge of the Irish language was essential to understand Irish culture: 51% disagreed with this statement in 1993 against 36% in 1973 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 19). Primary school teachers already indicated this sentiment in the INTO survey conducted in 1984 as they expressed an even stronger dissociation between language and identity (66%) than in the 1983 national survey (41%) or in following surveys.<sup>94</sup> However, the language was valued as a distinctive marker of cultural identity, especially by INTO teachers: 69% thought that Ireland would lose its cultural identity without Irish (INTO, 1985, p. 5) against 66% in the 1983 survey and 61% in 1993 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 19). Over half the UCC respondents also valued Irish as an important element of cultural identity (63%) and a necessary tool for understanding Irish culture (58%) (Ó Fathaigh & Ní Bhraoin, 1996, p.21). A question designed for the UCC staff survey further revealed that 86% of the respondents thought that “Irish is an important cultural asset” (ibid.).

It should be noted that the Irish language was still considered a strong ethnic marker in 1993—although it did not represent a majority of the sample population. Seventy years after Independence the Irish language was still regarded as a distinct feature of Irishness as a way to dissociate from Britishness. This view was shared by 37% of the public who agreed that *using the Irish language would make Ireland more independent of England* (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 19). Furthermore a substantial minority of the public (30%) surveyed in 2007/08 supported the idea that the Irish language and Irish culture could form a symbolic basis of common identity for the whole island of Ireland (Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009, pp. 87-89). Findings of the 2007/08 survey showed a positive change in the number of people who are in favour of “cultural solidarity” (ibid.) between people from different backgrounds (33% disagreed in 2007/08 compared with 57% in 1988/89). The 18 to 25 year-old respondents agreed most with the statement “a return to the Irish language and culture could provide a good basis for Irish Unity in the long term (even though it might present difficulties in the short term)” (pp. 87-100). However, respondents with third-level education and higher occupations were part of the groups that disagreed most, together with people living in the Dublin area. Mac Gréil and Rhatigan concluded with the hypothesis that “supporters of the Irish language may not see its potential as a good basis for Irish Unity” (p. 97).

Although the Irish language was not regarded as a true basis for a common Irish ethnic identity by a majority, 93.2% of respondents nonetheless showed their support for the language, according to the latest national attitudinal survey (Mac Gréil, 2009, p. 120) while a significant majority (78%) considered

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<sup>94</sup> It should be noted that the significant difference that exists between these results may be due to the difference in size of the surveys as well as the difference in the wording of the question.

themselves Irish before considering their local identity (from a county or a town) or their European identity (pp. 90-93).

It should be noted, as Dorian (1998) pointed out in the case of Scottish Gaelic,<sup>95</sup> that the continuity in the relationship between the Irish language and ethnic identity is problematic, as only a minority of Irish people actively use the Irish language. The percentage of Irish people agreeing with the statement that *Ireland would not really be Ireland without Irish-speaking people* decreased, accounting for 60% of the general population in 1993 and 44% of the UCC staff in the same year. But, although Irish has not been restored as a broad language of communication as previous language policies had intended, Irish people indicated in the relevant surveys that the Irish language still had an important ethnic dimension.

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95 See Chapter One, Section 1.3.3 Language as an identity marker.

### 2.5.2.2 Attitudes to the viability of Irish

It was observed in the CILAR report (1975) that despite the association between the Irish language and Irish national identity a generally pessimistic view of the language's future and its inappropriateness in modern life (p. 29) emerged in the survey. Although there has been a shift towards more positive attitudes no observable shift in language use has occurred (Ó Riagáin, 1997). It should be pointed out that the view of inappropriateness of the language in modern life has evolved considerably since 1973. The national surveys of 1973 and 1983, for example, were conducted in a different economic climate. The developments in recent years of Irish language terminology and technologies for a wide range of resources and entertainment (e.g. development of Irish-English dictionaries on line; the provision of an Irish language television channel [TG4] and various Irish language radio stations [Raidió na Life in Dublin, Raidió Rí Rá on line, etc.) have been influenced by favourable economic circumstances. Furthermore, the European Union has been working towards the protection of minority languages as well as supporting multilingualism since the 1990s (see Section 1.2). All these developments have marked a change in values and have had an impact on language attitudes.

The pessimistic view of 1973 and 1983 is characterised by a belief that the language would disappear unless something were done to prevent its loss. In addition it was found on both occasions that 78-79% agreed that *most people just don't care one way or the other about Irish*. This was confirmed by 68% of teachers in 1984 responding to the statement that “most people [were] not interested in the revival of Irish” (INTO, 1985, p. 5). But when figures are compared with the 1993 survey there is a significant drop to 66-65% sharing the same view (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 21). More people thought in 1993 (51% in the national survey and 56% in the UCC survey against 42-48% in 1983/84) that government policies could help revive Irish (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 21; Ó Fathaigh & Ní Bhraoin, 1996, p. 22). Furthermore, an increase of 12% on the previous years indicated that a majority of respondents did not agree that Irish was a dead language (66%). UCC staff also strongly disagreed with this statement (70%) (Ó Fathaigh & Ní Bhraoin, 1996, p. 22). This positive stance is in sharp contrast with the results from the 2000 survey which recorded that only 54% of respondents did not think Irish was a dead language (Ó Riagáin, 2007, p. 381). Although it looks like a major step back, it is worth noting that no decline in support for language policy was recorded then.

In the 1993 national survey a substantial minority (45%) thought that *Irish [could] be revived as a common means of communication* and 55% of respondents disagreed that *people [saw] all things associated with Irish as old-fashioned* against 46-49% in the previous surveys (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 21). However, only about a third of respondents thought Irish was *suitable for business and*

*science* in 1993 (ibid.). Similarly, despite UCC respondents showing more positive attitudes to the viability of Irish than the general public of the 1993 national survey, very few regarded the language as useful personally. The results that are outlined in Table 2.3 below show that a majority of UCC staff did not consider Irish to be a useful language (64%) on a day-to-day basis against 18% who thought Irish was either *extremely useful* or *very useful* (Ó Fathaigh & Ní Bhraoin, 1996, p. 21).

**Table 2.3: Attitudes Regarding the Usefulness of Irish, 1993**

How would you rate the usefulness of the Irish language in daily life?	Extremely Useful	Very Useful	Don't Know	Not Useful	Not at all Useful
	4%	14%	18%	47%	17%

*Note.* Source: Ó Fathaigh & Ní Bhraoin, 1996.

The question on public attitudes towards the future of Irish as a national language that appeared in the 1988/89 survey was replicated in the 1993, 2000 and 2007/08 national surveys. The most recent findings are very encouraging as 93% of the respondents showed support for the Irish language (Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009, p. 7), which is a stable positive disposition towards Irish when compared with the 94% recorded in 1988/89 (Mac Gréil, 1996, p.107). It seems that aspirations for Irish have not changed through the years as a large majority expressed their support for societal bilingualism. But the results of the 2000 survey showed otherwise, as a lower interest in the Irish language was recorded. This is mainly due to the rather high percentage of respondents who did not give their view as well as the drop in support for the preservation of Irish and its use as a principal language or as the main language (Ó Riagáin, 2007). However, Mac Gréil and Rhatigan's (2009) findings confirmed the positive stance found in 1988/89 and 1993. It should be noted that a majority of respondents in 2007/08 indicated that by supporting the preservation of Irish rather than the revival of Irish as a principal language, Irish was seen as an important marker of cultural identity as opposed to a marker of ethnic identity. Furthermore, the support for the maintenance of Irish in the Gaeltacht highlighted the different linguistic status of geographical areas in Ireland and could be regarded as support for the linguistic minority (see Ó hIfearnáin, 2000).



**Table 2.4: Aspirations for the Irish Language, 1988-2007**

Aspirations for the Irish language	1988/89 %	1993 %	2000 %	2007/08 %
Irish as the main language	4	5	0.8	4
Bilingual: Irish as principal language	5	8	2.9	5
Bilingual: English as principal language	34	33	40.5	33
Preserved in the Gaeltacht and revived for its cultural value as in music and arts	52	47	34.8	53
The Irish language should be discarded and forgotten	6	4	8.4	7
Don't know/don't care	-	3	12.5	-

*Note.* Source: Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994 (1993 survey); Ó Riagáin, 2007 (2000 survey); Mac Gréil, 1996 (1988/89 survey); Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009 (2007/08 survey).

A little over half of the respondents expressed their support for the preservation of the Irish language whereas a significant minority (40.3%) was in favour of the revival of Irish (Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009, p. 11). Further analysis showed that it is the younger groups (18 to 25 year old and 26 to 40 year old) living in urban areas—Dublin city and county Dublin being the strongest—and who had a third-level education and higher occupational status who supported the revival of the Irish language (*ibid.*, p. 9-22). As the next chapter shows, this description coincides with the focus group of gael scoil parents. It should be noted that a substantial minority (33%) in favour of revival preferred a bilingual Ireland with English as the main language.

Overall, the language attitude results were very positive as they remained high and constant despite social changes especially with the arrival of new ethnic minorities—migrant workers for the most part (Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009).

Finally, in terms of attitudes to the future of the Irish language it is worth noting that one of the most significant statistical changes in the national surveys concerns the decreasing number of people who thought that the European Economic Community—now the European Union—*would contribute greatly to the loss of Irish*. The proportion of respondents disagreeing with this statement went from 37% in 1973 and 42% in 1983 to 50% in 1993 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 21). Considering the present situation, with the recognition of Irish as the twenty-first official working language of the European Union in January 2007, one can imagine that this percentage would be even higher today and would add up to the strong public and state support shown in the national surveys. The European Commission language policy is one of multilingualism and can therefore enhance initiatives to secure the status of the Irish language.

**Table 2.5: Attitudes and Perceptions Regarding the Viability and Future of Irish, 1973-2000**

Statement	Year	Agree %	No opinion %	Disagree %
No matter what the government does, attempts to revive Irish are bound to fail	1973	45	9	46
	1983	48	10	42
	*1984	*n.a.	*n.a.	*48
	1993	41	8	51
	*1993	36	8	56
Irish can be revived as a common means of communication	1973	39	7	54
	1983	41	9	50
	1993	45	4	51
Most people just don't care one way or the other about Irish	1973	79	3	18
	1983	78	3	19
	*1984	*68	*n.a.	*n.a.
	1993	65	3	32
Most people see all things associated with Irish as too old-fashioned	1973	47	7	46
	1983	45	6	49
	1993	41	4	55
Irish is a dead language	1973	42	4	54
	1983	40	6	54
	1993	31	3	66
	*1993	24	6	70
	2000	n.a.	n.a.	54
If nothing is done about it, Irish will disappear in a generation or two	1973	71	5	24
	1983	70	5	25
	1993	66	5	29
The Irish language cannot be made suitable for business and science	1973	62	11	28
	1983	55	11	34
	1993	56	6	38
Being in the ECC/EC will contribute greatly to the loss of Irish	1973	55	8	37
	1983	46	12	42
	1993	42	8	50

*Note.* Source: CILAR, 1975 (1973 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (1983 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994 (1993 survey); INTO, 1985 (\*1984 survey); Ó Fathaigh & Ní Bhraoin, 1996 (\*1993 survey); Ó Riagáin, 2007 (2000 survey).

\* these surveys only concern a certain category of the Irish population which is made up of education staff only.

### 2.5.2.3 Attitudes to public and state support for Irish

There has always been a distinct majority of people who were in favour of state support for the promotion of the Irish language (see Table 2.6). It seems that Irish people either support or at least tolerate the promotion of Irish because they perceive a connection between the language and Irishness (Watson, 2008). Early state intervention since Independence largely contributed to the shift of unfavourable views of the utility of Irish into mixed positive and negative attitudes (Ó Riagáin, 2008). The percentage of supportive respondents increased noticeably between 1973 and 1993, which highlights the important role the government is expected to play in relation to Irish. Survey results also showed that Irish people generally accept that a budget be dedicated to the language, even if it means increasing expenditure. In 1993, for instance, 57% of respondents disagreed that *far less money should be spent on reviving Irish* (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 20). A similar percentage (60%) indicated that *what the government [did] about the Irish language [was] important to [them]* (ibid.). The important role of the government was further highlighted when 56% of respondents in 1993 disagreed with the fact that promoting Irish was not the government's job but that of voluntary organisations—although the government should support Irish language organisations according to 78% (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 21). The responsibility that the government should have towards the promotion of Irish was considered even more important by the surveyed primary school teachers (73%) in 1984 (INTO, 1985).

When considering expenditure, the improvement of the teaching of Irish in school was strongly supported by over two thirds of respondents who thought that by far it was the area that needed the greatest attention (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, pp. 20 & 33). The strong support for state policies and the emphasis put on the role of schools in teaching Irish may have been a public reaction to the pessimistic view of the language expressed in the statement *if nothing is done about it, Irish will disappear in a generation or two* that an overwhelming majority (66-71%) agreed with (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 21). But as the failure of revival policies showed the task of reviving Irish cannot be solely left to the schools. Nevertheless, it appears that the use of Irish in society is also encouraged as close to two thirds of respondents in 1993 thought there should be Irish-medium public services available for those who wished to avail of them. Furthermore, 69% of respondents expressed positive attitudes to second language Irish speakers when they agreed that *it is better for people to speak Irish badly than not at all*. But while all the right attitudes are there for a bilingual society to function, the level of commitment to using the Irish language at personal level—even *badly* as suggested in the survey statements—is, as shown further down, actually low.

**Table 2.6: Attitudes towards Public and State Support for Irish, 1973-2000**

Statement	Year	Agree %	No opinion %	Disagree %
Far less money should be spent reviving Irish, no matter what effect this has on the language	1973	46	6	48
	1983	38	10	52
	1993	34	9	57
What the government does about the Irish language is not important to me	1973	46	2	52
	1983	38	2	60
	1993	38	2	60
The Government should spend more money on improving methods of teaching Irish	1973	58	7	35
	1983	63	6	31
	1993	69	6	25
Irish speakers have the right to expect civil servants to be able to speak Irish with them	1973	71	7	22
	1983	80	3	17
	1993	72	6	22
	2000	68	n.a.	n.a.
It is far better for people to speak Irish badly than not at all	1973	69	5	26
	1983	78	5	17
	1993	69	5	26
The government should encourage and support Irish language organisations	1973	64	8	28
	1983	71	14	15
	1993	78	12	10
Promoting Irish should be the job of voluntary organisations, not the Government	1973	46	12	42
	1983	41	9	50
	*1984	*n.a.	*n.a.	*73
	1993	38	6	56
	2000	n.a.	n.a.	57

*Note.* Source: CILAR, 1975 (1973 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (1983 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994 (1993 survey); INTO, 1985 (\*1984 survey); Ó Riagáin, 2007 (2000 survey).

\* this survey only concerns a certain category of the Irish population which is made up of teaching staff only.

The review of a national survey on the usage and preferences of Irish language radio programmes (see Day, 2000 for a review on Irish language radio programmes) conducted in 2004 gives further insight into current public's attitudes towards state support for the promotion of Irish. Eleven years after the last ITÉ national attitudinal survey, respondents still indicated strong support for the promotion of Irish. While only 7% claimed that promoting Irish was not important, a majority (57%)

agreed that promoting the language was both important to them personally and to the Irish nation.<sup>96</sup> The study observed that respondents falling into that category were either from the Gaeltacht or believed that they had a good level of spoken Irish or had attended third-level education (MORI Ireland, 2004, p. 7). As regards the promotion of Irish language radio, more than three quarters of respondents agreed that the government should fully promote this, with most respondents suggesting that more funds should be made available or that more advertising should be carried out, especially among the young and in schools (p. 8). Again expenditure on the Irish language was strongly supported. Table 2.7 outlines the results. It is worth noting that the strongest support comes from the younger generation:

**Table 2.7: Attitudes towards the Promotion of Irish Language Radio Programming, 2004**

Irish language radio programming should be	15-34 years	35+ years	Total
promoted fully by the government (agree %)	84	76	79

*Note.* Source: MORI Ireland, 2004.

Although the 1993 national survey never enquired about state promotion of Irish language radio, it asked a similar question on the promotion of Irish TV programmes. Both radio and TV offer a passive use of Irish as the listener or viewer does not interact with the radio or TV. Therefore, a comparison may be drawn between the results of both surveys. To the question 'should any government encourage or support the use of Irish on TV' 75% of the respondents in 1993 thought it ought to be done (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 30). A decade later, it seems that the same proportion of the public still wanted the government to be responsible for the promotion of Irish in the media.

A generally positive attitude also emanated from the survey regarding the future of Irish language radio programming (see Table 2.8). A very large percentage of respondents (89%) thought that the main priority of Irish language radio should be to increase its audience by attracting new listeners; although keeping its existing listeners was also considered important to 73% of respondents (MORI Ireland, 2004, p. 20). More respondents (89%) thought that TG4—the Irish language TV channel—was a good model for the future of Irish language radio programming than those (70%) who thought that Raidió na Gaeltachta would be *the best place to develop the future of Irish language radio* (ibid.). The greatest attitudinal difference in relation to the future of Irish language radio lies between those who think that Irish language programmes should be broadcast on Irish language radio stations only (31%) and those who, by a majority (78%), believe that all radio stations should have programmes in Irish (ibid.). When comparing the results between listeners and non-listeners of Irish language radio programmes, existing listeners are more favourable to further programming development. However,

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<sup>96</sup> See Figure A6.1 Attitudes towards the Promotion of the Irish Language (2004) in Appendix 6.

non-listeners similarly expressed strong support with percentages rarely scoring below 74% (ibid.). Again, public attitudes seem to be in favour of societal bilingualism through state support whether or not the Irish language plays an active role in their lives.

**Table 2.8: Future of Irish Language Radio by Current Listenership, 2004**

Statement (agreement %)	Irish language radio listeners	Non-listeners of Irish language radio	Total
The main aim of Irish language radio should be to concentrate on keeping its existing listeners in the future	68	74	73
The main aim of Irish language radio should be to capture new listeners in the future	95	87	89
I would like to see an Irish language radio station just for the young people	78	74	75
I believe programming should be restricted to dedicated Irish language radio stations	20	35	31
I believe all radio stations should provide some Irish language programming	86	75	78
The example of TG4 is a good model for the future of Irish language radio programming	95	87	89
Raidió Na Gaeltachta is the best place to develop the future of Irish language radio	76	68	70

*Note.* Source: MORI Ireland, 2004.

#### 2.5.2.4 Attitudes to the Gaeltacht

Attitudes to language reflect attitudes regarding the users and the uses of language (Holmes, 2001). As previously seen, respondents in the three national attitude surveys expressed positive attitudes towards the Irish language as well as towards speakers of Irish regardless of their fluency (69% agreed in 1993 that *it is better for people to speak Irish badly than not at all*). A significant majority of participants in the 2007/08 survey further expressed a high esteem for the Irish Speaker. A longitudinal comparison showed that there was stability and consistency of positive attitudes towards the Irish Speaker (Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009, p. 103). Most respondents welcomed an Irish speaker in their family, which includes the Irish Speaker in Irish society as an “in-group” (ibid., pp. 100-107). This finding highlighted the “very high social standing of the Irish language” in today's Irish society (ibid., p. 118).

Although the Gaeltacht is regarded as an important environment for the Irish language respondents have over the years expressed their support towards a national policy rather than an exclusive policy in the officially recognised Irish-speaking areas. Respondents indicated in 1993 that policies aimed at the teaching of Irish to all children was more important (60%) than policies towards the maintenance of Irish in the Gaeltacht (14%) (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 33). Furthermore, 63% of respondents disagreed in 1993 with the statement *the government should support Irish in the Gaeltacht, but give up spending money on Irish elsewhere* compared with the 56-58% reported in the previous surveys (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 22). This attitude was confirmed when the sample population was asked how important the promotion of Irish would be *if the Gaeltacht were to suddenly disappear*. A majority said it would be *more important than ever* in each survey and a total of 66% in 1993 considered it would be as important or more important than ever, which is a substantial increase (12%) from 1973 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 23).

**Table 2.9: Policy Preferences if Gaeltacht Disappears, 1973-1993**

Statement	Year	Agree %	No opinion %	Disagree %
If the Gaeltacht dies out, Irish will die out also	1973	60	7	33
	1983	64	7	29
	1993	62	6	32
	*1993	54	9	37
Gaeltacht areas are dying out	1973	53	19	28
	1983	52	24	24
	1993	41	20	39

*Note.* Source: CILAR, 1975 (1973 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (1983 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994 (1993 survey).

Respondents therefore showed great support in 1993 towards a state policy in the entire country in spite of being conscious of the declining state of the Gaeltacht. As shown in Table 2.10 below, a majority of the surveyed population associated the death of the Gaeltacht with the death of the Irish language. It appears that this association wasn't as strong among third-level education staff in the same year although it still concerned a majority (Ó Fathaigh & Ní Bhraoin, 1996, p. 22). However, fewer and fewer people thought that the Gaeltacht was actually disappearing in 1993 with 39% disagreeing compared with 24-28% in the previous surveys (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 21).

**Table 2.10: Attitudes to the Irish Language in the Gaeltacht, 1973-1993**

If the Gaeltacht were to suddenly disappear, promoting Irish for the rest of the country would be:	1973 %	1983 %	1993 %
More important than ever	31	43	35
As important	23	24	31
Less important	19	19	13
No longer important	16	10	12
Was never important	11	4	8

*Note.* Source: CILAR, 1975 (1973 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (1983 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994 (1993 survey); Ó Fathaigh & Ní Bhraoin, 1996 (\*1993 survey).



### 2.5.2.5 Attitudes to interpersonal use of Irish

Two types of questions are reviewed in this section, one concerning respondents' ideal language preference (see Table 2.11) and the other concerning respondents' commitment to using Irish (see Table 2.12). Results indicate that a large majority was in favour of some form of bilingualism with a percentage of 75% in 1973, 82% in 1983 and 73% in 1993 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 9). In the context of an equally bilingual Ireland, a substantial majority preferred to use Irish and English equally. The enthusiasm at the beginning of the twentieth century about the Irish language revival movement is not visible any longer as only 9% of the surveyed population wished to speak Irish only in both 1973 and 1993 (ibid.). Yet, a consistent 20% said they would prefer to use at least more Irish than English against a quarter in favour of the use of English only (ibid.). However, this question referred to an ideal context and to preferences, which can be far from societal reality and actual linguistic behaviour.

**Table 2.11: Personal Inclination to Speak Irish in an Ideal, Fully Bilingual, Ireland, 1973-1993**

<b>If everyone in Ireland could speak Irish and English equally well, which would you prefer to speak?</b>	<b>1973 %</b>	<b>1983 %</b>	<b>1993 %</b>
English only	25	18	25
Less Irish than English	17	17	14
Irish and English equally	38	44	39
More Irish than English	11	9	11
Irish only	9	12	9
	100	100	100

*Note.* Source: CILAR, 1975 (1973 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (1983 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994 (1993 survey).

When compared with the results on aspirations for the Irish language (see Section 2.5.2.2 Attitudes to the viability of Irish) it is apparent that public attitudes support bilingualism. Furthermore, they tend to be in favour of maintenance rather than revival of Irish: “when taken in conjunction with the increase in those holding 'English only' options, it would appear that the balance is slowly slipping away from those holding the revival position as traditionally understood” (Ó Riagáin, 1997, p. 156).

The next question therefore sought to assess respondents' commitment to using Irish. Over the twenty-year period few statistical changes occurred. It seems, nevertheless, that respondents gained some self-confidence in their ability to speak Irish as more respondents were committed to using Irish spontaneously in 1993 (19% against 11-13% in 1973-1983) and more respondents said they would speak Irish if spoken to in Irish in 1983-1993 with 39-40% agreeing against 34% in 1973 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 10). When comparing the last figures to those of the INTO teachers survey on the

same question, it is clear that the greater the ability to speak the language the greater the commitment to responding in Irish as 93% of the teachers indicated (INTO, 1985, p. 5).

**Table 2.12: Attitudes to Interpersonal Use of Irish, 1973-1993**

Statement Agreeing	1973 %	1983 %	*1984 %	1993 %
I am committed to using Irish as much as I can	11	13	*28	19
I will always speak Irish if spoken to in Irish	34	40	*93	39
I wish I could use the Irish I know more often	41	43		45
I do not like to speak Irish with people who may know it better than I do	45	59	*40	45
I do not like to begin a conversation in Irish	51	69	*over half	57
I do not like people speaking Irish when others are present who do not know Irish	59	72	*n.a.	60
People in my circle just don't use Irish at all	64	80	*n.a.	77

*Note.* Source: CILAR, 1975 (1973 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (1983 survey); INTO, 1985 (\*1984 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994 (1993 survey).

\*: this survey only concerns a certain category of the Irish population which is made up of teaching staff only.

Positive attitudes towards personal use of Irish was recorded in 1993, which marks an improvement on the negativity recorded in 1983. However there were still 60% of respondents who agreed with the statement *I do not like people speaking Irish when others are present who do not know Irish* (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 10). This attitude may be caused by a desire to be polite and an inclination to use the common language which is English. Similar to the desire to be polite, strong feelings such as the fear of ridicule may override interpersonal commitment to using Irish (CILAR, 1975), which may explain the high proportion of respondents—fluctuating between 45% and 59% over the twenty-year period—who agreed with the statement *I do not like to speak Irish with people who may know it better than I do* (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 10). This stance was also observable among interviewed teachers in 1984 as 40% expressed the same attitude (INTO, 1985, p. 5).

It is worth noting that out of the seven statements constituting the section on attitudes to interpersonal use of Irish in the three national surveys only three statements were positively phrased. They received less support than the negatively phrased statements but tended to have slightly increased in numbers in 1993. As can be seen from Table 2.12 statements in relation to a context where the respondent may have felt at a disadvantage received more negative answers in 1983 than in 1973. However, figures reversed back to their initial state in 1993 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 10).

The biggest difference concerned the percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement *people in my circle just don't use Irish at all* which reached 77% in 1993 (ibid.). Respondents in general felt that Irish was no longer spoken around them. With such a high rate of respondents reporting the absence of Irish use in their social circles, it is difficult to envisage that 59% would actually use Irish extensively in a hypothetically fully bilingual Ireland.

Because of the similarity in the results of 1973 and 1993 it is interesting to look at the distribution of respondents on the degree of their personal commitment to using Irish that was presented in the 1975 report.

**Table 2.13: Degree of Commitment to the Conversational Use of Irish, 1973**

n=2,443				
(0) no commitment	(1-2) very low commitment	(3-4) low or medium commitment	(5-6) medium to high commitment	(7-8) very high commitment
42%	15%	15%	18%	10%

Note. Source: CILAR (1975).

The higher levels of commitment refer to the use of Irish made by respondents whereas the lower levels refer to their willingness to use Irish whenever they are given the chance. This table points out that a large majority is not committed to using Irish, even at a minimum level. The distribution of respondents committed to using Irish at a lower or higher level is probably related to the respondents' different levels of competence in spoken Irish. However, there are also social norms that prevail, such as politeness. Respondents with a very good ability in Irish do not always belong to the category of higher level of commitment. For instance, 70% of native speakers reported in 1973 that they "[didn't] like speaking Irish when others [were] present who [didn't] know Irish" (CILAR, 1975, p.38).

Despite a slight increase in the conversational commitment to using Irish between 1973 and 1993 the discrepancy that exists between attitudes to interpersonal use of the language and respondents' actual behaviour, that is to say their actual use of the language, was still present in the 1993 survey. Only 21% said they had used Irish since they left school and only 9% had used Irish a few days before the survey (Ó Riagáin & Ó Glasáin, 1994, p. 11). The various national surveys indicated however that the lack of commitment to using Irish is not always the result of poor or mediocre ability in the Irish language but also depends on constraining social norms (CILAR, 1975).

When considering the low percentage of respondents in 1993 who said used Irish after leaving school in conjunction with the Census data that show that a majority of Irish speakers is to be found in

the school age population<sup>97</sup> the prominence of the role of education in the use of Irish is as clear as can be. The study of attitudes to Irish in the special context of education is therefore crucial for planners and language policy makers.

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97 See Section 2.5.1 The Irish linguistic situation: Census of the Population.

### 2.5.3 Attitudes towards Irish in education

Attitudes towards Irish in education are given special attention here as it lays out the background of the present study which is set in a specific domain of the Irish education system. As shown previously, public attitudes to the teaching of Irish in school are positive. A majority of respondents (60%) in 1993 considered its development and improvement a priority for Irish language policies (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p.33). But even though public attitudes are positive on the surface it appears that on a personal level, respondents do not necessarily support policies that directly affect their own material opportunities (Ó Riagáin, 1997, 2008). In order to understand attitudes to Irish, the present section first examines general attitudes to learning Irish in school. It then focuses on attitudes towards the long-established compulsory Irish policy. Because the debate on the policy of compulsion has been at the forefront for generations on end, since it was initiated in the 1920s, it is important to concentrate on the attitudes of those who are directly concerned by this policy. It involves looking at parents' attitudes towards their child's learning of Irish in a direct as well as indirect manner through the level of praise and encouragement they give their child. It also includes pupils/students' own views of the Irish language. Attitudes to Irish in school will then be reviewed in relation to other subjects in school. Finally, this section will concentrate on attitudes towards Irish-medium schools from the general public before focusing on the group of interest which consists of gaelscoil parents.

Studies that are considered in this section range from national surveys to small-scale studies and cover approximately a thirty-year period of time. They are mostly reviewed in a thematic order although relevance of the data is also acknowledged according to the time period it is set in. The national surveys dealing with attitudes to Irish in education that are included here are the three language attitude surveys of 1973, 1983 and 1993 (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984; 1994), the 1988/89 (Mac Gréil, 1996) and the 2007/08 Irish language survey (Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009), all of which were reviewed in the previous section, and the Irish Marketing Surveys (1988). The latter is a survey on public attitudes towards Irish in school and is based on the interviews of 1,400 people aged 16 and over who were put into two different categories: the *parent* category including respondents who had children under 18 years of age and the *non-parent* category comprising respondents who had children over 18 years of age or had no children. Each category respectively accounted for 41% and 59% of the total sample. Three main questions were asked regarding the importance of children learning Irish, the preference for policy in secondary schools and the disposition towards Irish-medium schools. Other studies reviewed in this section include in the order of their appearance:

- attitudes to Irish in school among Cork University staff ( $N=551$ ) assessed in 1993 as part of an attitudinal survey on the Irish language (Ó Fathaigh & Ní Bhraoin, 1996)—this survey was also reviewed in the previous section.
- parental and pupils' attitudes towards Irish as a subject in school ( $N=198$ ) assessed in 1989 (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). The latter focused on the teaching and learning of Irish in twenty classes in different national schools in Ireland. It was funded by the Department of Education and carried out by Primary School Inspectors. It was carried out in 1989 with the aim of preparing a new curriculum. The main aim of the study was to describe the conditions under which spoken Irish was taught and learnt at sixth-class level. For the first time in the domain of education in Ireland information on attitudes of pupils and parents was collected. Parental attitudes were surveyed in seven classes which were located in the Dublin area. The results were published in 1999. The study investigated the degree of support parents provided their child in learning Irish. It included the analysis of parents' attitudes towards Irish, parents' attitudes towards their child learning Irish in school, the attitude parents try to encourage in their child regarding the learning of Irish in school as well as the frequency with which parents praise their child's achievements in different subjects including Irish. Another study (Harris et al., 2006) concerned with the national assessment of the achievement in the Irish language in Irish Speaking, Irish Listening and Irish Reading of sixth class pupils in primary schools in 2002 also examined parental attitudes to Irish ( $N=3,928$ ). A total of 219 schools participated in the study including 139 English-medium schools, 30 Irish-medium schools or *gaelscoileanna* and 50 *Gaeltacht* schools.<sup>98</sup> Both studies contained similar questions on general attitudes to Irish as well as attitudes regarding the teaching of Irish in school.
- the Market Research Bureau of Ireland (MRBI) study on public attitudes towards Irish ( $N=1,000$ ) conducted in 1985 (Ó Riagáin, 1986). This survey is very specific to the education environment but is comparable to other surveys as some questions from the 1983 ITÉ national survey were replicated.
- attitudes to the Irish language and specifically to Irish as a compulsory subject at Leaving Certificate level ( $N=1,000$ ) conducted in 2010 by Ipsos MRBI among people of 15 years of age and over (“61% in support”, 2011). The survey which included six questions was done by telephone and involved people from different regions and economic backgrounds.
- attitudes towards Irish among students attending a secondary school between the age of 16 and 18 years old, assessed in 1995 in five Irish-medium secondary schools and five English-

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<sup>98</sup> A total of 2,477 respondents in English-medium schools, 609 in Irish-medium schools (*gaelscoileanna*) and 575 in *Gaeltacht* schools completed the parent questionnaire.

medium secondary schools in Dublin ( $N=333$ ) (Kavanagh, 1999); among secondary school students from four different schools ( $N=120$ ) (Fitzpatrick, 1998); and more recently among first-year and sixth-year students from four English-medium secondary schools and one Irish-medium secondary school ( $N=203$ ) (Ní Riain, 2003)

- children's attitudes towards bilingualism in Ireland (Coady, 2001). This small-scale study was carried out in three primary schools in the West of Ireland ( $N=38$ ), 30 miles outside of a Gaeltacht area. One school was an Irish-medium school whereas the other two schools were English-medium schools and taught Irish as a subject. Children in fourth class ( $N=38$ ) were given a survey containing 12 questions on both social and personal value of bilingualism. They also took part in follow-up focus group interviews.
- parental attitudes towards Irish-medium schools. This study conducted in 1976 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979) is the first of its kind in the Irish-medium education sector. Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann (ITÉ) undertook the project to examine the impact Irish-medium primary schools had on the use of Irish within the families involved with these schools, social interaction through Irish among Irish-speaking families attending the school as well as the relation of Irish-medium primary schools to pre-school and secondary education through Irish. All the families with a child in an Irish-medium primary school for three or four years were selected to participate in the interview-based study ( $N=110$ ). The project took place in County Dublin and included the ten schools that were established at the time. One of the interests of the study was concerned with the attitudinal patterns existing among parents. Respondents—who were all mothers—were assessed on different attitudinal items regarding the Irish language, Irish-medium education and bringing up children through Irish at home. Another research study in the Irish-medium school sector was conducted in 1995 in seven primary schools ( $N=158$ ) as part of a MA thesis and focused on parental attitudes towards Irish-medium schools. This study is based on a self-administered questionnaire distributed to parents with a child in third and fourth class. Finally a study based on one Irish-medium primary school in County Kerry ( $N=34$ ) as part of a MA thesis (O' Connor, 2002) concentrated on the reasons why gaelscoil parents select an Irish-medium secondary education.

### 2.5.3.1 Attitudes to learning Irish in school

In each of the three national attitude surveys around 70% of the sample population expressed dissatisfaction with the teaching of Irish in school and 59% reported in 1993 that children resented having to learn it (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 24). However, when asked how they would feel if Irish was not taught in school anymore 76% in 1993 said they would feel sorry (see Table 2.14). While the percentage of respondents who said they would feel a *little sorry* remained the same, the *very sorry* category rose from 29% in 1973 to 36% in 1993 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 25). The percentage of respondent who had 'no particular feelings' remained the same (17-19%) while the number of respondents who said they would be *very glad* or a *little glad* about it was cut in half and only represented 7% of respondents in 1993. It should be noted that respondents from the UCC survey showed greater sympathy towards the language than the general public as over half the respondents said they would feel *very sorry* if most children stopped learning Irish in school. Attitudes towards the Irish language were more positive and less pessimistic among UCC staff than the national average from the 1993 survey in relation to Irish as an ethnic symbol, its viability and future and to learning Irish in school. These higher results may be explained by the higher level of competencies in Irish recorded among UCC staff and the higher levels of use (either passive or active) and exposure to the language than the general public (Ó Fathaigh & Ní Bhraoin, 1996).

**Table 2.14: Attitudes towards Children Learning Irish in School, 1973-1993**

How would you feel if most Irish children stopped doing Irish in school?	1973 %	1983 %	1993 %	1993 (UCC staff) %
Very glad about it	8	1	3	6
A little glad	6	4	4	4
No particular feelings	19	17	17	6
A little sorry	38	40	40	29
Very sorry	29	38	36	55

*Note.* Source: CILAR, 1975 (1973 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (1983 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994 (1993 survey); Ó Fathaigh & Ní Bhraoin, 1996 (1993 UCC staff survey).

It is common to hear adults say they did not like Irish when they were in school. However, this negative feeling tend to change after leaving school (CILAR, 1975, pp. 31-32, 95-96). A longitudinal comparison between three surveys which replicated the assessment of attitudes to Irish when the respondents were in school and at the time of the survey, illustrates a positive change in attitudes. Furthermore, the data outlined in the table below shows that attitudes to Irish both while in school



and after leaving school have generally improved over the years with more respondents *strongly in favour* of Irish and fewer opposed to it. However, there is still a significant minority who have *no particular feelings* towards it.

**Table 2.15: Attitudes towards Irish in School and Now, 1973-2007**

Attitude to Irish %	While in school			Now			Net change		
	A 1973	A 1988/89	A 2007/08	B 1973	B 1988/89	B 2007/08	(B-A) 1973	(B-A) 1988/89	(B-A) 2007/08
strongly in favour	13	18	21.8	19	19	25.5	+6	+1	+3.7
somewhat in favour	21	26	20.8	34	38	31.2	+13	+12	+10.4
no particular feelings	27	33	35.5	19	29	31.8	-8	-4	-3.7
somewhat opposed	19	13	11.6	14	9	5.8	-5	-4	-5.8
strongly opposed	10	10	10.3	9	6	5.7	-1	-4	-4.6

*Note.* Source: CILAR, 1975 (1973 survey); Mac Gréil, 1996 (1988/89 survey); Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009 (2007/08 survey).

While the number of respondents in 2007/08 who were already in favour of Irish in school rose, the proportion of those who changed their attitude from a negative one while in school to a positive one in their adult life is rather significant. Overall there has been an improvement of 33.1% on the school attitudes (Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009, p. 23). There has been a substantial positive change in attitude among people who had not completed second-level education; and the position of the respondents who had completed the Leaving Certificate or/and a third-level degree improved positively (Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009, pp. 26, 31-34). It should be noted that general attitudes either while in school or after leaving school have significantly improved since the first national survey in 1973 (CILAR, 1975).

One of the most significant differences between *while in school* and *now* was among the 41 to 55 year olds with a change of 57.5% increasing from 32.5% to 51.2% (Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009, pp. 26, 28). This group represents a parental age-cohort of school-going pupils and students. Therefore it is important that they express favourable attitudes towards Irish and their child's/children's learning of Irish so that they can positively influence the youngsters' attitudes. Further research showed that parents had a positive attitude to the language (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Harris et al., 2006). Their

favourable attitude to Irish was also consistent with their attitude to their child learning Irish in school. As Table 2.16 shows, parental attitudes to Irish as a school subject were even more positive. A difference of 12.6% in 1989 and 18.7% in 2002 appears between parents' general attitude and their school oriented attitude to Irish.

**Table 2.16: Parental Attitudes to Irish and to Irish Being Taught to their Child, 1989-2002**

Parental attitude %	General attitude to Irish		Attitude to child being taught Irish	
	1989	2002*	1989	2002*
strongly in favour	16.7	14.5	29.3	67.4
somewhat in favour	47.5	34.2	46	
no particular feelings	22.7	39.6	13.6	22.4
somewhat against it	9.1	11.2	7.1	5.5
strongly against it	2.5		2	
no response	1.5	0.5	2	0.7

*Note.* Source: Harris & Murtagh, 1999 (1989 survey); Harris et al., 2006 (2002 survey).

\* this represents parents from English-medium schools only.

Although favourable attitudes are still held by a majority, there seems to have been a drop in positive attitudes to Irish among parents between 1989 and 2002. While the number of parents opposed to Irish has remained the same, the number of parents with neutral feelings has increased. It should be noted, however, that the 2002 cohort does not include parents with children attending an Irish-medium school (both inside and outside the Gaeltacht). Had they been included, results would have been more positive.<sup>99</sup> The results obtained in 1989 in terms of general attitudes to Irish, that is 64.2% of parents in favour (either strongly or somewhat in favour) of the Irish language and 11.6% opposed to it are in line with the positive results found in other surveys such as the UCC staff survey (Ó Fathaigh & Ní Bhraoin, 1996, p.19) or Mac Gréil and Rhatigan's (2009, p. 22) where, respectively, 75% and 56.7% of respondents said they were *strongly/somewhat in favour* of the Irish language whereas 8% and 11.5% were *somewhat/strongly opposed*. Higher rates among the UCC staff respondents have already been accounted for on the grounds of higher level of competency in Irish and higher level of use of and exposure to Irish (Ó Fathaigh & Ní Bhraoin, 1996). These figures are more comparable to

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<sup>99</sup> Parents whose child attends an Irish-medium school outside the Gaeltacht hold the most favourable attitudes to Irish with 56.5% who said they were strongly in favour of Irish in 2002 compared with 46.7% of Gaeltacht school parents and 14.5% of parents of children attending an English-medium school (Harris et al., 2006, p. 137).

the percentage of Irish language teachers in English-medium schools who are favourable to Irish (87.6%) (Harris et al., 2006, p. 127).

As regards attitudes towards the teaching of Irish in school, although figures cannot be directly compared due to differences in the wording of the questions, the percentage of respondents who would feel *a little/very sorry if most Irish children stopped doing Irish in school* (76%) in the 1993 national survey (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 25) and (84%) in the UCC staff survey (Ó Fathaigh & Ní Bhraoin, 1996, p. 20) are also in line with parental attitudes to Irish being taught to their child. As for the respondents who would be *a little/very glad* if the teaching of Irish in school ended a total of 7% and 10% were found in the 1993 national survey and the 1993 UCC survey, respectively, which reflects the pattern found among parents. More recently, a report on the implementation of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum recorded positive parental attitudes towards the teaching and learning of Irish (DES Inspectorate, 2007a). Only a minority of parents questioned the learning of Irish when their child had difficulties with numeracy in mathematics and literacy in English. Similarly, community support for the promotion of Irish was reported by school principals although the support focused more on Irish culture than on the Irish language (ibid.).

Although parental attitude to Irish are generally positive, Harris and Murtagh (1999) noted that favourable attitudes expressed by parents did not necessarily translate into encouragement for the child to learn Irish at school or praise for the child's achievement in Irish. Table 2.17 below shows the different kinds of attitudes parents encourage in their child to regarding the learning of Irish. It seems that around two-thirds of respondents leave their children to have an opinion of their own whereas a significant minority (29.3%-35.5%) encourage them to regard the Irish language as important. Only a negligible proportion of respondents discourage their child *from taking Irish seriously* despite the fact that a higher percentage of parents (9.1%) claimed to have been unfavourable to the teaching of Irish in school (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 142-144).<sup>100</sup> It should be noted that there was an increase between 1989 and 2002 in the percentage of respondents who said they let their child know Irish is important accounting for 35.5% of the total sample.

**Table 2.17: Percentage Distribution of Parents according to the General Attitude towards Learning Irish they Try to Encourage in their Child, 1989-2002**

Attitude encouraged in child	1989 %	2002 %
I let my child know that Irish is very important	29.3	35.5
I leave it up to my child to develop his/her own attitude to Irish	69.2	66.2
I discourage my child from taking Irish seriously	1.0	0.7

<sup>100</sup> The percentage of parents participating in the 2002 study who said were not in favour of Irish being taught in primary schools remained unchanged (9.8%) (Harris et al., 2006, p. 142).

No response	0.5	0.6
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*Note.* Source: Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Harris et al., 2006.

The 1989 study also looked at pupils' attitudes to Irish. Overall, they proved to be quite positive. Although positive attitudes were correlated with achievement in Irish, the role parents play is also very important in determining children's attitude/motivation. Parental encouragement and use of Irish at home are in fact more important variables in determining pupils' attitude/motivation than socio-demographic factors (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 90). The lack of commitment to learning Irish, the anxiety pupils felt during Irish classes and the lack of enjoyment in learning the language for some are related to both home and school factors. The findings of the pupil survey are consistent with the rather lukewarm or sometimes absent parental support. A significant minority of pupils (20%-35%) did not think they had the active support and encouragement of their parents regarding the learning of Irish: 22.6% of children did not think that their parents tried to help them with Irish; 16.6% disagreed that their parents were proud of how much Irish they had learnt at school; and 35.3% did not think that their parents were usually *very interested in anything to do with* Irish (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 95). Overall, pupils and parents' answers in terms of parental support and encouragement in the learning of Irish were consistent. It seems that parental support does not depend entirely on parents' level of Irish. It is also influenced by their perception of the utility and importance of Irish, the lack of awareness of how to help their children with Irish and how important it is to give their child encouragement (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Harris et al., 2006).

As the review of the different surveys above has shown, there is a general view that Irish should be taught to all children. Between 3 and 5% of respondents in three different surveys (1985 MRBI survey; 1983 and 1993 national surveys) thought Irish should not be taught in school (Ó Riagáin, 1986, p. 8; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliaáin, 1994, p.25). Although this percentage has remained constant, public attitudes have often expressed a conflicting view when questioned about the compulsory element in the teaching of Irish. It appears that Irish people are only prepared to accept a minimal element of compulsion (Ó Riagáin, 1997). In 1973, over three quarters of respondents wanted all primary school children as well as secondary school students to study Irish (CILAR, 1975, p.60). However, 71% did not want Irish to be compulsory as a Leaving Certificate examination requirement (ibid.). Similarly, the 1988 IMS survey showed that respondents were opposed to the requirement to pass Irish in order to obtain the Leaving Certificate. Rather, a majority of respondents were satisfied with the regulation at the time—which is still enforced—that required all students to study Irish without having to pass an examination to obtain the Leaving Certificate. Furthermore, 71% of the total sample (parents and non parents alike) showed preference for a policy which required, at least, that all pupils study Irish to Leaving Certificate level.



**Table 2.18: Policy Preference regarding Irish in Secondary Schools, 1988**

Policy preference	Total %
1988 regulation: all pupils are required to study Irish, but do not need to pass an examination in Irish in order to obtain the Leaving Certificate	64
all pupils are required to study Irish and need to pass an examination in Irish in order to obtain the Leaving Certificate	7
pupils are not required to study Irish nor to pass examinations in Irish to obtain the Leaving Certificate	21
no opinion	8

*Note.* Source: IMS, 1988.

The 1993 ITÉ national survey also included a question on attitudes to the current policy of compulsory Irish in secondary schools. The results showed that 80% of the respondents supported the compulsory policy at Leaving Certificate level (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 28), which is a lot higher than in the 1988 survey. A MBRI survey in 2005 on behalf of Fine Gael, after they had issued a policy document stating that compulsory Irish should be abandoned at Leaving Certificate level, showed that 62% of respondents were in favour of Fine Gael's policy (as cited in Mac Murchaidh, 2008, pp. 214-215). However, it was mostly supported by the older generation. Fifty two per cent of the 18-25 age group agreed that Irish should remain compulsory (ibid.). Caution is however needed in dealing with data from this survey, as its results do not seem to match any other findings. A majority of secondary school students (57%) surveyed in a different study nonetheless indicated their disagreement with the National University of Ireland entry requirement to pass Irish in the Leaving Certificate (Ní Riain, 2003). The most recent survey on attitudes to compulsory Irish was conducted in 2010 by Ipsos MRBI in the period preceding the general election during which the compulsory Irish policy was questioned. Results show that 61% of the general public still support Irish as a compulsory subject in the Leaving Certificate (as cited in "61% in support", 2011, para. 6). It should be noted that 65% of the 15-24 age group think that Irish should remain compulsory at Leaving Certificate level (ibid.). Although a majority is still in favour of Irish as a compulsory subject, the actual number seems to be in decline. Rather, more respondents may consider making Irish an optional subject at Leaving Certificate level as the increase in support for optional Irish between the 1993 survey (15%) and the 2010 Ipsos MRBI survey

(26%) suggests (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 28; as cited in “61% in support”, 2011, para. 7). It nonetheless appears that the age group directly concerned by the Leaving Certificate examination or who have recently sat it are more favourable to compulsory Irish than any other age group in both MRBI surveys (Mac Murchaidh, 2008; “61% in support”, 2011). When a group of secondary school students were asked about the reasons for studying Irish if it was made optional, half of the respondents gave integrative motivations i.e. Irish as an internationally recognised language (24.7%), and Irish spoken in society (24.4%) (Ní Riain, 2003, p. 69). Although these results indicate strong support for and a genuine interest in learning Irish they also suggest that students with an instrumental motivation might not study Irish at all, which in this case represents half of the cohort.

The debate on compulsion has been ongoing since the early years of the state and it is argued it will continue until “the lobby promoting the abolition of the compulsory status of the language achieves its goal” (Mac Murchaidh, 2008, p.213). It is likely that attitudes to Irish as a compulsory subject have evolved following the demographic, societal and cultural changes that occurred during the economic boom of the late 1990s. More research is therefore needed to confirm this stance. The support for the teaching of Irish in school and the heated debate on its status as a compulsory subject is not the only conflicting aspect of public attitudes to Irish in school. In effect, attitudes to Irish seem to be less supportive when other subjects are considered.

### 2.5.3.2 Attitudes to Irish in relation to other subjects

MRBI survey figures show that the general public attitude in 1985 was more supportive of the view that the Irish language is an important subject at primary school (71%) than at secondary school level (64%) (Ó Riagáin, 1986, p. 9-10). It appears that while respondents showed support for Irish within the curriculum, they also wished to see other subjects included in the curriculum. These subjects were often considered more important than Irish for their child's education (Ó Riagáin, 1986, p.17). To be precise, the assessment of attitudes to the study of Irish and to other European languages in school shows that the majority of the respondents did not consider Irish to be a utilitarian language either in 1973 or 1993. Moreover, an increasing majority considered the teaching of other languages more important than Irish:

**Table 2.19: Importance of Continental Languages vis-à-vis Irish, 1973-1993**

Attitude Statement	Year	Agree %	No opinion %	Disagree %
Irish is less useful than any continental language	1973	79	3	18
	1983	78	3	19
	1993	81	2	17
It is more important that a child at school learn Irish than a foreign language	1973	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	1983	40	4	56
	1993	25	4	71

*Note.* Source: Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin (1994)

Around 80% of respondents thought Irish was less useful than a continental language. Knowledge of a continental language was associated in 1993 with job opportunities (76%), travelling (12%) and cultural value (6%) (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 35). The priority given to the learning of a European language was already clear in 1983 when more than half of the respondents showed their preference for learning a continental language over the Irish language. In 1993 there was an increase of 15% among respondents favouring a continental language over Irish reaching a total of 71% (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 37). This may be caused by the limited scope of careers available through Irish—because the language is confined to Ireland and to the public sector—and to the growing importance of the European Union and its wide range of job opportunities; although this should have changed as the European Union facilitated the creation of new jobs in the domain of translation after Irish was made an official European working language in 2007.



Similar views were expressed by primary school pupils despite 42% agreeing that they “love[d] learning Irish” (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 92). More pupils actually expressed a desire to learn a foreign language in school. The results showed that 60% of pupils in 19 of the 20 participating classes agreed that they “would like to learn a foreign language in school” whereas only 60% of pupils in 6 of the 20 classes said they “really enjoyed learning Irish” (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 94). However the researchers highlighted the fact that learning a foreign language was for the pupils at the time of the survey nothing but a hypothetical situation. The pupils' affective reaction to this situation contrasts with their actual experience of learning Irish. Further research in secondary schools showed students' preference for a foreign language course over an Irish course. This is mainly because Irish is perceived to be less useful in the long term (Fitzpatrick, 1998). Although secondary school students participating in a different study did not regard Irish as a dead language only a minority believed it could be revived as a common means of communication (Kavanagh, 1999, pp. 222-223). Further research showed that secondary school students considered Irish a strong marker of cultural identity (Fitzpatrick, 1998; Kavanagh, 1999; Ní Riain, 2003) but the same level of positive attitudes to Irish as a subject in school was absent (Ó Riagáin, 1988; Fitzpatrick, 1998; Kavanagh, 1999). The main reason given by respondents who said they did not enjoy learning Irish was however based on the perception that Irish is a difficult language (Ní Riain, 2003, pp. 78-79). The relevance of Irish in society was nonetheless questioned by secondary school respondents (Ní Riain, 2003) while some expressed the need to secure a place for Irish in the workplace and outside school in general so that they could have more opportunities to use the language (Fitzpatrick, 1998).

Another study focusing on attitudes towards bilingualism showed that students' attitudes to Irish in relation to other languages depend on the utility they believe Irish has (Coady, 2001). Coady's study therefore pinpoints the prevalence of the instrumental orientation among students who only learn Irish as a subject at school. Although they value bilingualism positively they seem to prefer European languages over the Irish language which is not considered as useful. The use of the language and positive attitudes towards it are therefore very dependent on each other. Coady observed that in general, students had positive attitudes towards bilingualism. However, those who were attending the participating Irish-medium school had the highest mean scores for the statements on societal value of bilingualism. The idea of being bilingual in both Irish and English did not have the same value for the Irish-medium school students as it did for those from English-medium schools. The first group of students considered Irish not only a useful medium of instruction at school but also a useful means of communication with native Irish speakers. In contrast, students who only learnt Irish as a subject, despite the school's proximity to the Gaeltacht, did not think that being bilingual in Irish was beneficial. They associated bilingualism with other European languages taught in school such as

French, Spanish or German because they saw some practicality in these languages. Here is an example recorded during Coady's field work that summarises the general attitude of the students who took part in the survey and who were attending an English-medium school:

*Because when you go to France, people speak French; in Spain people speak Spanish; in Italy people speak Italian, and in Germany, they speak German. But here in Ireland, people speak mostly English, and Irish is useless. (p. 13)*

Due to a major difference in language use, students from the English-medium school did not think the Irish language was useful. This example illustrates the concept of instrumental orientation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) as the students found little use for the Irish language either in school—compared with the extensive use of Irish as a medium of instruction in Irish-medium schools—or in society as in “in Ireland, people speak mostly English” (p.13). As theory on attitude showed, parent's attitudes are very influential on their children's (Baker, 1992, Böhner & Wänke, 2002). Parental attitudes therefore should not be overlooked when studying children's attitudes to Irish.

It has been shown that pupils/students' attitudes to L2 are influenced by their parents (Lambert et al., 1968; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). However, despite parents' general positive attitudes towards the Irish language their actual commitment to and involvement in their child's learning of Irish is less common than in other school subjects. This is partly due to factors such as lack of ability in Irish—44% of participating parents thought their lack of ability in Irish was an obstacle to helping their child (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 416); lack of use of Irish, and things of that nature, but is also due to parents' scepticism towards the importance of Irish in their child's future career. For those who use Irish at home and therefore express more positive views about the language, it is likely that their child will achieve a high level of Irish but also that he/she will have a very positive attitude towards Irish (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Kavanagh, 1999).

Respondents in 1989 (Harris & Murtagh, 1999) were found to praise their child for their achievement in Irish less often than for other compulsory subjects such as mathematics and English. For example, 30.2% said that they seldom praised their child in oral Irish as opposed to 3% in mathematics or 2.5% in English writing. As shown in Table 2.20, praise for achievement in Irish only came after categories such as English, Mathematics and Project Work. Over half the respondents said they often praised their child in various subjects whereas a minority did so in Irish. It should be noted, however, that the action of praising the child was revealed to be positively significant in terms of pupils' achievement in and pupils' attitude to Irish (p. 145).

**Table 2.20: Percentage Distribution of Parents according to the Frequency with which they Praise their Children's School Achievements in Different Subjects, 1989**

Subjects	Often %	Occasionally %	hardly ever %	no response %
English reading	64.6	29.3	5.1	1.0
Mathematics	68.7	26.8	3.0	1.5
English writing	61.1	32.8	2.5	3.5
Project work	59.1	28.8	6.6	5.6
Irish reading	41.4	32.8	20.2	5.6
Oral/spoken Irish	33.8	28.8	30.3	7.1
Irish writing	41.9	31.8	20.2	6.1

*Note.* Source: Harris & Murtagh, 1999.

Similar to the lack of praise children received for their achievement in Irish—in comparison to other subjects, the help children received in Irish homework at home was rather poor compared with the support given in other subjects. Just over one third of respondents (34.8%) said they usually helped their child with Irish, which is one of the lowest percentages among core school subjects after Mathematics (70.2%), English (47.5%) and History/Geography (37.9%) (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 151).<sup>101</sup> It appears that in 1993 the general public also considered science subjects to be more important than the Irish language (81%), which is even more than recorded in the previous national survey in 1983 (73%) (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 24). Mathematics was also considered the most important subject (50.7%) among secondary school students (Ní Riain, 2003, p. 82).

Furthermore, it seems that there has been a general decline in the view that it is important that children grow up learning Irish (57%) due to a growing number of undecided respondents—although this comparison is only indicative and must be considered with caution as it involves different survey methodologies and different cohorts.

**Table 2.21: Attitudes to the Importance of Knowing Irish for Children Growing Up, 1988-2010**

Attitude	1988	2000	2010
Important	68	70.6	57
Not important	31	29.4	23
Don't know	1	-	19

*Note.* Source: IMS, 1988; Ó Riagáin, 2007; Ipsos MRBI, 2010.

<sup>101</sup> See Table A6.1 Percentage Distribution of Parents according to the Various Subjects with which they Usually Help their Children, 1989 in Appendix 6.

As mentioned earlier, positive parental encouragement for the learning of Irish is very important as it influences pupils' achievement and pupils' attitudes towards Irish (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 143; Kavanagh, 1999). The lack of encouragement in relation to learning Irish and the lack of praise for achievement in Irish may be related to the importance parents give to the Irish language in terms of academic and career fulfilment. When asked about the importance of Irish in their child's future career a majority of respondents (65.7%) thought that Irish was either of little importance or not important at all for their child's future job whereas one third of respondents thought it was either very important or important (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 411).

Overall, both parental encouragement and praise turned out to impact significantly on children's achievement in and attitude to Irish. Socioeconomic variables and parents' fluency in Irish did not seem to have much impact on positive attitudes towards Irish. Greater use of Irish at home, however, significantly contributed to more positive attitudes towards Irish among pupils (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 163). Needless to say, greater use of Irish at home implies that parents have a good ability in Irish, that they have a positive attitude towards the language and are in favour of the teaching of Irish in school and therefore are more likely to praise their child often (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 164). A comparison between secondary school students from Irish-medium schools and from English-medium schools showed that parental encouragement for English-medium school students was a necessary factor in promoting achievement; more so than for Irish-medium school students who already were required to use Irish by the school (Kavanagh, 1999).

Although parents are usually in favour of Irish, support its teaching in school and would like it to remain on the curriculum, the next section indicates that most parents are content with its current position in education and are not prepared to see Irish become a medium of instruction. In contrast, Irish-medium education has become popular among a minority of parents who wish their children to be educated through Irish and become bilingual.

### 2.5.3.3 Attitudes to Irish-medium schools

This section first examines public attitudes towards Irish-medium schools and immersion education so as to establish the general context in which Irish-medium schools are growing in Ireland. Once the context has been established, it focuses on the group of interest to this study, through the review of studies involving parents with a child attending an Irish-medium primary school. This involves exploring parental attitudes towards both the Irish language and Irish-medium education and analysing parental motivations for selecting an Irish-medium school.

All three national attitude surveys (1973, 1983 and 1993) contained questions about the Irish-medium education sector. Schools teaching the entire curriculum through Irish were still operating in the 1970s—although their number had dropped dramatically since their heyday in the 1940s-50s.<sup>102</sup> Public attitudes showed tolerance towards those who had chosen such an education for their child. Overall, they supported state provision of Irish-medium schools but only a minority indicated a personal interest in it.

As outlined in Table 2.22 a steady 70% of respondents had always thought in the three national surveys that the government should provide Irish-medium schools wherever parents demanded them (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 27). However, a change occurred in 1993 when over half of the respondents disagreed with the fact that *children doing subjects through Irish don't do as well as those doing subjects through English* as opposed to 60% and 44% of the surveyed population who had thought so in the previous surveys (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 24). The significant number of respondents who thought in the 1970s that an education through the medium of Irish was inferior to one through the English language were surveyed in a context of general negative attitudes after the publication—which was one among many—of the teachers' report on the detrimental effect Irish-medium education had on pupils (INTO, 1941) and of MacNamara's study (1966) on the poor academic attainment of children attending Irish-medium schools. Yet, it should be noted that although the number of respondents who considered Irish-medium education on par with English-medium education increased in 1993, the proportion of respondents who were undecided also rose (20%). Furthermore, the percentage representing respondents who thought *children doing subjects through Irish don't do as well as those doing subjects through English* was still significant (27%) in 1993.

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<sup>102</sup> See Section 1.5.2 Ideology in education language policy; Section 2.4.2 The period of stagnation 1948-1971; Appendix 7, Table A7.1: Number and Percentage of Secondary Schools Teaching through the Medium of Irish (Gaeltacht included), 1930-2010.

**Table 2.22: Attitudes towards Irish-Medium Schools, 1973-1993**

Statement	Year	Agree %	No opinion %	Disagree %
The Government should provide all-Irish schools wherever the public want them	1973	70	6	23
	1983	67	5	28
	*1984	*68	*n.a.	*n.a.
	1993	70	5	25
Children doing subjects through Irish don't do as well as those doing subjects through English	1973	60	14	26
	1983	44	15	41
	1993	27	20	53

*Note.* Source: CILAR, 1975 (1973 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (1983 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994 (1993 survey); INTO, 1985 (1984 survey).

\*: this survey only concerns a certain category of the Irish population which is composed of teaching staff only.

Public attitudes towards Irish as a subject being the most suitable school language programme<sup>103</sup> for most children have also remained constant over the years. A comparison between the 1983, 1993 and 2000 national surveys (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 25; Ó Riagáin, 2007, p.387) shows that a majority of respondents believed that the teaching of Irish as a subject only was the most suitable programme for most children. It appears that support for partial immersion education is in decline. The proportion in favour of partial immersion education in every school has been halved since 1983 whereas the percentage of those in favour of monolingual English education with no teaching of Irish has doubled. Although the latter still represents a minority it is as important as the minority in favour of extending Irish-medium education to all primary schools (5%).<sup>104</sup>

103 School language programme refers here to the difference between English-medium education with or without Irish being taught as a compulsory subject, partial immersion education where some subjects are taught through the medium of Irish while others are taught through the medium of English and finally Irish-medium education where Irish is the sole medium of instruction.

104 Public attitudes towards the most suitable school language programme for most students in secondary schools in 1983 and 1993 was consistent with the public attitudes reported in relation to the primary school context which is represented in Table 2.23 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 25).

**Table 2.23: School Language Programme Considered Most Suitable for Most Children in Primary Schools, 1983-2000**

School language programme	1983 %	1993 %	2000 %
All English with no Irish	3	5	7.7
Irish as a subject only	72	69	71.1
Some subjects taught through Irish	21	17	9.6
All Irish with English as a subject	4	5	5.1
No opinion	-	4	6

*Note.* Source: Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (1983 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994 (1993 survey); Ó Riagáin, 2007 (2000 survey).

But while only 5% of respondents thought in 2000 that an education through the medium of Irish would be considered most suitable for most school children, close to a third of people surveyed in 1993 said they would send (or would have sent) their child to an Irish-medium primary school if one was located near their home (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 26). The proportion of respondents willing to send their child to an Irish-medium secondary school was smaller and represented almost a quarter of the surveyed population (*ibid.*). There is nevertheless a considerable difference between the percentage of respondents who believed Irish-medium education to be suitable for most children (5%) and the percentage of respondents who were personally interested in this type of education (30%). Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that the percentage of respondents who said they would send their child to an Irish-medium school increased slightly from 1983 to 1993 for both primary and secondary schools.

**Table 2.24: Public Attitudes towards Irish-Medium Schools, 1983-1993**

Would you send (or would you have sent) your children to an all-Irish school if it was located near your home?				
	Year	Yes	Don't know	No
<b>Primary (%)</b>	1983	24	9	67
	1988	20	12	68
	1993	30	11	59
<b>Secondary (%)</b>	1983	19	11	70
	1988	17	13	70
	1993	23	12	65

*Note.* Source: Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (1983 survey); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994 (1993 survey); IMS, 1988.

At the time of the 1993 national survey around 4% of school children attended an Irish-medium primary school whereas around 1% of students were enrolled in an Irish-medium secondary school.<sup>105</sup> Although hypothetical in nature, this question highlighted the potential demand for the provision of Irish-medium education since 30% of respondents expressed their wish to send their child to an Irish-medium school. The growth in Irish-medium school participation<sup>106</sup> in the past few decades indicates that there is still strong support for immersion education today. Further research is therefore needed to assess public attitudes towards sending their own children to an Irish-medium school now that more of these schools are available around the country.

Research studies that have concentrated on parental attitudes towards Irish within the Irish-medium education sector have all reported very positive attitudes to both the language and immersion education through Irish (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979; Harris, 1984; Ó Donnagáin, 1995; Hickey, 1997). Further analysis shows that parents who chose such an education for their child were already favourably disposed towards the Irish language before their child attended a *gaelscoil*. Besides, as the literature review below indicates, there is evidence that their exposure to Irish-medium schools influenced their attitudes in an even more positive manner.

The ITÉ research project conducted in 1976 in ten Irish-medium primary schools in Dublin and which involved interviewing mothers with a child attending the Irish-medium school for three or four years ( $N=110$ ), explored into detail parental attitudes towards the Irish language. Attitudes were measured by comparing the way respondents felt about Irish when they were at school, before their child went to an Irish-medium school (*gaelscoil*) and at the time of the interview, that is to say after three or four years of experience of Irish-medium education (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979, p. 35). Results showed that respondents' attitudes were already more favourable to Irish when at school (50%) than the national average (34%) as indicated in the 1973 national attitude survey. Just as had been observed at national level (CILAR, 1975, p.31), participating mothers reported a more positive disposition towards the language after they left school, which accounted for 76% of the cohort and contrasted sharply with the national average (53%). But it was also found that their attitudes towards Irish further developed into more positive attitudes when exposed to the Irish-medium education milieu with a total of 91% who said they were in favour of Irish. The attitudinal gap between the national sample and the *gaelscoil* cohort is even more striking when the percentages are broken down. Figures show an almost fourfold difference between general public respondents (19%) and *gaelscoil* respondents (72%) who said were strongly in favour of Irish. The change in attitude among families

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105 See Table A7.2: Percentage of Pupils Attending an Irish-Medium School, 1930-2010 in Appendix 7 and Table A4.1 Percentage of Students Attending an Irish-Medium Secondary School, 1930-2010 in Appendix 4.

106 See Section 1.5 Immersion education in the Republic of Ireland.



involved with Irish-medium schools is remarkable as it went from 45% to 72% for those who said were “strongly in favour” of Irish. Furthermore, the percentage of respondents who had no opinion dropped dramatically from 22% to 9%. It should be noted that no respondent was opposed to the language at that stage.

It seems that the national sample was also rather unfavourable (61%) to the way Irish was taught in schools in 1973 (CILAR, 1975, p. 31) as indicated in the table below which gives a comparative reading between the response of the general public in 1973 and the interviewed mothers in 1976. Exposure to immersion education may have contributed to the positive change in attitude among those who were opposed to or neutral in relation to the Irish language before their child attended the gaelscoil.

**Table 2.25: Comparative Reading of Attitudes towards Irish between the General Public (1973) and Gaelscoil Mothers (1976)**

Attitude	At school	Before child attended Gaelscoil		Now	
	1973 %	1976 %	1976 %	1973 %	1976 %
<b>Strongly in favour</b>	13	26	45	19	72
<b>Somewhat in favour</b>	21	24	31	34	19
<b>No particular feelings</b>	27	36	22	19	9
<b>Somewhat opposed</b>	19	8	1	14	-
<b>Strongly opposed</b>	10	6	1	9	-
<b>Don't know/NA</b>	10	-	-	5	-

*Note.* Source: Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979 (1976 survey); CILAR, 1975 (1973 survey).

More recently, other studies also recorded a high percentage of gaelscoil parents in favour of the Irish language—98% in 1995 and 92.4% in 2002—(Ó Donnagáin, 1995, p. 69; Harris et al., 2006, p.137). Again, no respondent was opposed to Irish. When compared with parents whose child attended an English-medium primary school the percentage of respondents who said they were very favourable towards Irish was four times higher among gaelscoil parents (Harris et al., 2006).<sup>107</sup>

Parental attitudes towards Irish-medium education were also positive among the gaelscoil cohort in 1976 as 89% of respondents were in favour of Irish-medium education. Respondents’ exposure to Irish-medium education proved to have contributed to a positive change in attitudes. There was an

<sup>107</sup> See Table A8.1: Percentage of Parents in Two Populations of Schools according to their General Attitude to Irish in 2002 in Appendix 8.

increase of positive attitudes from 35% in favour of Irish-medium education before the child's attendance at the gaelscoil to 67% for those strongly in favour of Irish-medium education (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979, p. 36).<sup>108</sup> There was also a drop in neutral opinions (6%). However, there were still 5% of respondents who were *somewhat opposed* to Irish-medium education while 22% were only *somewhat in favour* at the time of the survey. Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin (1979) suggested in their report that this negative feeling may be compensated for by the husbands' positive attitude towards Irish-medium education reported by their spouse or can be explained by the fact that some families did not consider the Irish language a priority when enrolling their child in a gaelscoil.

Although the direct question on attitudes towards Irish-medium education was not part of the 1995 survey conducted in seven Irish-medium primary schools, Ó Donnagáin reported details on attitudes towards Irish as the school language and on perceived advantages and disadvantages to Irish-medium education. Results showed that a majority of respondents supported Irish as the main language of instruction as 87% agreed that children should speak Irish in school at all times (p. 71). This figure is consistent with the percentage of respondents who did not see Irish as an obstacle in education (81%) and thought that the standard of education was either excellent (50%) or above average (37%). Furthermore 76% of respondents thought that the Irish language benefited their child's education while only 4% disagreed (pp. 74-76). Overall, respondents referred to two main advantages to Irish-medium education which were linguistic and cultural (63%) in nature. However, educational benefits were also mentioned and represented a significant 36% of the total answers.<sup>109</sup> Educational reasons appear to be an important criterion for school selection as 66% of the respondents in 1976 were found to have considered educational reasons in their selection of a gaelscoil while 36% chose a gaelscoil for educational reasons only (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979, p. 40). Gaelscoil parents' perception of gaelscoileanna as "good schools" was still significant in 1995 as respondents valued these schools for their provision of a good education (98%), which accounts for their good reputation (98%) (Ó Donnagáin, 1995, p. 77).

No major disadvantages to Irish-medium education were reported in 1995. However, just over half of the respondents expressed concerns, mainly about competency in the English language and difficulties posed by the Irish language either for the child or the parents (pp. 79-81).<sup>110</sup> It should be noted that despite reporting positive attitudes to Irish-medium education, neither of the studies reviewed here assessed parents' understanding of immersion education. As results below tend to show, most parents seem to consider an Irish-medium education for their child because of educational reasons. The Irish language is not always viewed as the main deciding factor therefore parents may

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108 See Table A8.2: Mothers' Attitudes towards their Child Having Irish-Medium Education, 1976 in Appendix 8.

109 See Table A8.3: Main Advantages to an Irish-Medium Education, 1995 in Appendix 8.

110 See Table A8.4: Main Disadvantages to an Irish-Medium Education, 1995 in Appendix 8.

overlook how being educated entirely through Irish can impact on their child's daily lives and on their role as parents. This involves dealing with two languages, something which parents may have never experienced themselves before and which may be challenging for parents with poor competency in Irish. As the research conducted for the current study shows in the following chapters, positive attitudes to Irish-medium education do not necessarily correlate with an acceptance of the early total immersion practice or with a full understanding of what immersion education entails.

Parental motivation for choosing an Irish-medium education for their child is paramount in the study of language attitudes in the Irish-medium education sector. As the review of previous studies shows below, the Irish language is not necessarily the most important factor in the selection of an Irish-medium school as other considerations come into play such as cultural value and educational benefits.

Although 72% of respondents expressed strong support for Irish in 1976 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Glasáin, 1979, p.35), the Irish language was not always regarded as the main factor in the selection of an Irish-medium school.<sup>111</sup> While 37% of respondents said their choice had been motivated by language reasons only, 27% had considered both language and educational reasons whereas 36% had regarded educational reasons as the sole deciding factor for sending their child to a *gaelscoil* (p. 40). It seems, for instance, that the pupil/teacher ratios were of greater significance to parents who had only based their choice on educational reasons than to other parents (p. 43). Furthermore, respondents themselves did not think other parents had thought of an Irish medium education for their child for linguistic reasons. Almost a third of respondents believed that “most parents do not have the Irish language as their primary concern in sending their children to [their] child's all-Irish school” (ibid.). Findings further indicated that families giving language reasons only for choosing a *gaelscoil* expressed a more favourable attitude towards bringing up their children through Irish (88%) than those giving non-language reasons only (44%) or those giving both types of reasons (70%) (pp. 40-41). Ó Riagáin and Ó Glasáin also observed that parents sending their child to a long-established *gaelscoil* were more likely to have only considered the Irish language as a reason to select an Irish-medium education. They seemed to know better what they wanted from these schools than parents who enrolled their child in a newer school (p. 47). Results show that although the proportion of families who had only thought of non-language reasons were found in both long-established Irish-medium schools and schools which opened in the 1970s, the number of parents with mixed reasons was greater in the post-1970 schools.<sup>112</sup> This observation appears to be in line with the reasons given by parents involved in the

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111 See Table A8.5: Reasons for Deciding on an Irish-Medium Education, 1976 in Appendix 8.

112 See Table A8.6: School Attended by Reasons Given for Choosing Irish-Medium Education, 1976 in Appendix 8.

newer generation of Irish-medium schools surveyed in 1995 which saw an increase of 69 primary schools (outside the Gaeltacht) in the period between the two surveys.<sup>113</sup> To a lesser extent, this pattern also applies to Irish-medium pre-schools (naíonraí) although pre-schooling remains optional and might not involve the same deciding factors (Hickey, 1997, 1999), notably due to its fee-paying nature up until 2010. Findings in the 1995 survey indicate that respondents reported mixed reasons for sending their child to a gaelscoil.<sup>114</sup> Although it is not clear how many respondents considered both language reasons and educational reasons at the same time when deciding on an Irish-medium education, a larger proportion thought of educational reasons first (56%). While 44% of respondents considered language and culture to be the most important reasons to send their child to a gaelscoil, respondents' second preference ranked the linguistic and cultural factors at 10% and 15% respectively. It therefore confirmed the value placed on educational criteria, as 51% of respondents also selected educational reasons as their second preference choice (32% for the high standard of teaching and 19% for the good name of the school). The third choice response offered a mixed preference between educational reasons (34%) and language and cultural reasons (27%) although still showing a preference for educational reasons (Ó Donnagáin, 1995, p. 85-87). When the three preferences were examined together it was found that 41% of the respondents had sent their child to an Irish-medium school for educational reasons while 35% considered language and cultural reasons first. It should be noted that as many as 12% selected a gaelscoil for their child because of the small classes (p. 88). Although both studies cannot be compared directly, results from 1995—which are reinforced by the results from the current study—may be indicative of a change in gaelscoil participants with more parents giving educational reasons great importance in their decision to send their child to a gaelscoil.

Although the Irish language as a medium of instruction was viewed as either very important or somewhat important for 95% of the respondents in 1995, it was not the primary concern to 60% of them (Ó Donnagáin, 1995, pp. 89-90). But even though respondents generally tended to place more importance on education than on the Irish language per se, they showed that they preferred “a good education through Irish” (57%) rather than “a good education” (41%), therefore granting educational and cultural reasons equal importance (Ó Donnagáin, 1995, p. 90).

The analysis of parental motivation for selecting a secondary school seems to show a direct link between parents' decision to send their child to an Irish-medium primary school based on language reasons and the selection of an Irish-medium secondary school. While a significant number of parents may be satisfied with an Irish-medium education at primary school level alone (Ó Riagáin & Ó Glasáin, 1979, p. 45) it appears that parents selecting an Irish-medium secondary education for their child are

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113 See Table A4.3: Number and Percentage of Primary Schools Teaching through the Medium of Irish, 1930-2010 in Appendix 4.

114 See Table A8.7: Main Reasons for Deciding on an Irish-Medium Education, 1995 in Appendix 8.

more likely to have an interest in the language objectives. The percentage of respondents in 1976 who did not think of an Irish-medium education for their child at secondary level (53%) largely represented respondents who had selected an Irish-medium primary school for non-language reasons only. There were 37% of respondents who had chosen an Irish-medium primary school for language reasons only but who did not think their child would attend an Irish-medium secondary school. Similarly, 43% of respondents who had mixed reasons and 68% of respondents motivated by non-language reasons only did not choose an Irish-medium secondary school (*ibid.*). More recent research (O'Connor, 2002) on parents' motivation for sending their child to an Irish-medium secondary school indicated however that parents mostly considered educational reasons. Safety and well-being of the child seemed the most important reasons. Academic considerations in terms of achievement and university entry were also found to be an important deciding factor as opposed to language reasons (p. 73). It should be pointed out, however, that the number of question items on language considerations in O'Connor's study was smaller than for academic considerations. It did not contain reasons such as home bilingualism, interest in the Irish language, natural continuation of education through Irish, and so on.

Since educational reasons seem to play such an important part in parents' decision to send their child to a *gaelscoil*—language reasons aside—attending an Irish-medium school may be interpreted, according to Bourdieu's (1991) theory, in terms of cultural capital. His theory presupposes that languages are always spoken in a particular market or social field which include the economic market, the political market, the religious market, and so forth. In the linguistic market, for instance, linguistic competence functions as linguistic capital. Capital is understood in terms of possession that enables individuals in society who are seen in constant competition, to maintain or improve their social position. There are therefore different types of capital such as economic capital (money, property, etc.), cultural capital (knowledge, skills, educational qualifications, etc.) or even symbolic capital (prestige, honour, status, etc.) which have different values in the various markets. While a language may have a low value in one market it can be highly valued in another. Ó Riagáin (1997) gives the example of the knowledge of Irish being a form of symbolic capital in the cultural market although it is devoid of economic value in the economic market. But it must also be understood that the different types of capital are convertible, which means for instance that educational qualifications can be used to acquire economic or symbolic capital in the labour market (*ibid.*, p.39). Although knowledge of the Irish language offers limited career opportunities in the internal labour market a certain number of respondents in 1995 were found to value the benefit of bilingualism in terms of general knowledge and intellectual skills (Ó Donnagáin, p. 74). It is therefore important to investigate further—as the current study has attempted to do—to examine if this form of cultural capital is sought by a majority of *gaelscoil* parents and whether Irish in this instance is valued for itself (integrative orientation) or as

any other additional languages learnt in school which would give their child the opportunity to become bilingual (instrumental orientation).

There is a perception often expressed in the media, for example, that parents' selection of a *gaelscoil* is instrumental. As the next section will show, Irish-medium schools have often been associated with social elitism (McWilliams, 2005; Carey, 2008; Holmquist, 2008) thus regarding parents' motivation for choosing a *gaelscoil* as opportunistic and utilitarian rather than reflecting a genuine interest in the Irish language. Although competent Irish speakers could be argued to have greater social mobility, especially within the public sector (Ó Riagáin, 1988), economic changes from the 1960s forced the situation to change notably with the abolition of Irish as a state examination requirement in 1973. The impression of social elitism may derive from studies that have identified positive associations between social background, educational level, ability to speak Irish and attitudes towards Irish (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin, 1988, 1997, 2007). Results from the 2006 Census of Population also show that a majority of the Irish population represented in the two highest social class categories (CSO, 2007, Table 12, p. 43) and the highest educational qualification category (*ibid.*, Table 14, p. 44) reported ability to speak Irish. However, there is some evidence that a varied range of social groups are represented in Irish-medium schools (Mac Murchaidh, 2008) and that school selection among *gaelscoil* parents is not based on social grounds, at least at secondary level (O' Connor, 2002).

It can be inferred from the highly positive attitudes to the Irish language that *gaelscoil* parents are committed to participating in the maintenance of the Irish language by sending their child to an Irish-medium school so that the Irish language can be transmitted to this generation. However, they do not seem prepared to sacrifice their child's education for the language, which explains the emphasis put on educational reasons. Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin speak of "reluctant bilinguals" (1979, p. 54) when referring to parents who gave mixed reasons for sending their child to a *gaelscoil*. Furthermore, despite an increase of home use of the language due to *gaelscoil* attendance (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979; Ó Donnagáin, 1995) only a minority reported regular use of Irish at home (Ó Donnagáin, 1995, pp. 68-69). As observed at national level, parents tend to rely on the school to transmit the Irish language to children (Kelly, 2002) as it requires a level of competence in Irish to be able to do so. By choosing an Irish-medium school, parents may express an aspiration to transmit the Irish language as they are not actively contributing to its maintenance by using it. As McCabe (1978) suggested, "perhaps, the selection of the school was a manifestation of the parental attitude, something a parent could do more easily than learn and use the Irish language" (p. 53).

Although around 70% of respondents in the 1976 survey were strongly in favour of both the Irish language and Irish-medium education (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979, pp. 35-36), the number of families

supporting home bilingualism was significantly smaller.<sup>115</sup> Only 38% felt the same about bringing up their own children through Irish. It should be noted that families who support home bilingualism are likely to have high abilities in Irish (p. 37). However, as figures show, not all families intended to introduce Irish in the home when they selected a gaelscoil. A quarter of respondents still had no opinion or were opposed to it despite their child attending the school for already three or four years. Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin concluded that “for a large number of families, possibly the majority, the decision to send a child or children to an all-Irish school does not necessarily imply a strong commitment to simultaneously establishing an Irish-speaking home” (ibid.). This shows that despite positive attitudes towards the Irish language and Irish-medium education and good intentions to use Irish more, it is difficult to predict respondents' behaviour. Parents who strongly support Irish do not necessarily use the language themselves even if they wished to do so: 91% of respondents stated in 1995 that they would like to use more Irish at home (Ó Donnagáin, 1995, p. 70). Rather, it was commonly found that respondents encouraged their child to use Irish at home in a “positive non-direct way” (p. 69) by praising their child when he/she spoke in Irish (24%) or by responding in Irish (72%). A further 76% of parents would encourage their child to use Irish outside school (p. 70) although it is not clear how it is done or how frequently it happens. There is nonetheless evidence that attendance at the gaelscoil increases home use of the Irish language (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979).<sup>116</sup>

If home bilingualism is not the ultimate motivation behind most parents' choice for an Irish-medium education, one may wonder what the learning of a second language which has no apparent function within the group of gaelscoil families can bring to them. Although the gaelscoil either facilitates the creation of social Irish-speaking networks, acting as a stimulus among bilinguals, or extends those networks (pp. 119-120) the Irish language cannot be considered an identity marker of the gaelscoil family group since Irish is not the main language used between parents or between children outside the school environment. Despite the reported increase in home use of Irish, this group tends to be mostly constituted of English speakers rather than active bilinguals.<sup>117</sup> While the relationship between the Irish language and Irish identity was evident among gaelscoil parents in Northern Ireland (Maguire, 1991), this question has not been thoroughly investigated among gaelscoil parents in the Republic of Ireland. However, this association has been made several times by parents who participated in the current study.

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115 See Table A8. Attitudes to Bringing up One's Own Children through Irish at Home, 1976 in Appendix 8.

116 This was also found among naíonra parents (Hickey, 1997).

117 Only 13% of respondents of the 1976 survey fell into the category high home use of Irish before gaelscoil attendance (p. 49).

While gaelscoil parents form a homogeneous group in favour of the Irish language, other groups in Irish society react differently to the language and to state support for it. In the context of Irish-medium schools, it can lead to negative labelling of gaelscoil parent groups, for example. Although various language attitudes have been reviewed in this chapter, further examination of attitudes to Irish will be undertaken in the next section so as to highlight current issues that permeate the daily lives of Irish citizens and that were not or could not be addressed in former attitudinal surveys. The use of print media is a reasonable way to reflect the public debate and strong-held views on the question of Irish that preceded and succeeded the fieldwork of the present study.



## 2.6 Current attitudes to Irish expressed in print media

This section focuses mainly on print media as it plays a significant role in Irish people's daily lives. It mostly looks at newspaper articles and letters to the editor. Newspapers are widely read on a daily basis by all age and social groups of the population. A study from the Joint National Readership Survey (JNRS)<sup>118</sup> estimated that 87.8% of the Irish population aged 15 and over were regular newspaper readers in 2008-09, which was slightly more than the previous year (86.2%). All the various age categories and social classes are represented among the newspaper readership.

**Table 2.26: Readership Estimate of any Newspapers Classified by Age and Social Class, 2008/09**

Age categories	Total	Social class	Total
15-18	81	A/B	88.7
19-24	85	C1	88.9
25-34	82	C2	87.7
35-44	88.9	D/E	83.2
45-54	91.1	F50+	97.9
55-64	92.8	F50-	96.1
65+	92.4		

Note. Source: (Joint National Readership Survey, 2009).

Those figures show a high percentage of readership across all age groups and social class categories. However, these percentages include all sorts of reading sources such as daily and Sunday newspapers as well as daily and weekly magazines which target different readerships.

The majority of newspapers which regularly publish articles about the Irish language are for the most part daily national newspapers. The average readership of daily newspapers for 2008-09 was 58.4% of the population (JNRS, 2009). When looking at the main daily national newspapers one can observe that two of the top three newspapers in terms of readership—*The Irish Independent* and *The Irish Times*—are newspapers which regularly feature items on the Irish language. The third newspaper that would regularly include articles on the Irish language is *The Irish Examiner* which comes in fifth place.

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118 The data is demographically weighted to the adult population of the Republic of Ireland aged 15 or over, based on a combination of projections from the CSO (which draws on demographic data from the 2006 Census) and ongoing Quarterly Household National Surveys.

**Table 2.27: Readership Estimate of the Three Main Daily Newspapers Regularly Dealing with the Irish Language Issue, Classified by Age and Social Class, 2008**

Daily newspaper	Total %	Age categories %								Social class %					
		15-18	19-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+		A/B	C1	C2	D/E	F50+	F50-
Irish Independent	15.7	6.2	10.3	12.8	15.4	19.1	19.6	21.9		22.9	19.6	12.2	7.4	30.4	19.8
Irish Times	10.3	3.9	8	8	10.4	12.5	12.9	13.9		30.2	15.6	4.3	2.5	2.8	3
Irish Examiner	6	3.7	3.2	4.2	5.1	7.9	9	8.1		8.9	5.8	4.8	4.7	10	6.7

Note. Source: JNRS, 2009.

The table above shows that *The Irish Independent*, *The Irish Times* and *The Irish Examiner* have a larger readership among the age groups of 35 years old and over. Readership seems to increase steadily as it gets older. The social class factor seems more complex as it varies from one newspaper to the other. It is however possible to observe that the lower middle class i.e. C2 and D/E represent the lowest figure of the total readership. Readership for the three newspapers mostly includes readers from both upper/middle classes (A/B, C1) and lower class (F50). The lower class (F50+) has the largest representation of readership for both *The Irish Independent* (30.4%) and *The Irish Examiner* (10%) ahead of the upper class (22.9% and 8.9% respectively) and middle class (19.6% and 5.8% respectively). While both *The Irish Independent* and *The Irish Examiner* have rather socially mixed readership, *The Irish Times* seems to have more of an upper/middle class readership.

These three daily newspapers constitute the main source of reference used in this section. As illustrated in the table their readership is not homogeneous in terms of age brackets and social categories. Although a high proportion of people aged 35 and over make up the majority of readers, there is a substantial amount of young readers too aged 15 and over. As for social class, both upper and lower classes are largely represented while the middle class is also present but with a lower percentage. It appears therefore that the general public are fairly represented and widely addressed by these newspapers. Newspapers were selected for this analysis because they are part of the daily lives of 87.8% Irish people (JNRS, 2009). Although the media also include the radio, television and the Internet, daily newspapers are not limited to or specialised in the topic of the Irish language contrary to certain websites, radio stations or TV channel that would target Irish friendly readers/listeners/audience. The different views and attitudes to Irish emanating from the newspaper articles and letters to the editor can be both positive and negative. The study of newspaper articles seems therefore to offer a more balanced representation of existing attitudes towards the Irish language which target a diversified readership. It should be noted, however, that mass media does not

have a considerable effect on public attitudes in terms of change in language attitudes (Baker, 1992, p. 110).

It seems that certain topics dealing with the Irish language are recurrent. They include the debates on Irish as a marker of identity, societal bilingualism, state support and more specifically expenditure on the language, the utility of Irish, Irish as a compulsory subject in school and Irish-medium schools and immersion education.

As seen in Chapter One, the Irish language has a role as an identity marker because of its official status as the first language of Ireland and its presence in the curriculum as a compulsory subject (Moffatt, 2008). The policy of teaching Irish in school has been widely supported by those who define Irish as “part of our heritage and part of what we are” (Ó Cionfhaola, 2011, para. 3). As Safran (1999) observed, there are three main attitudes to a people's ethnonational language. Although the instrumental view of learning Irish and actively using it to reaffirm one's identity only applies to a minority, what he refers to as the expressive view seems to be the most commonly expressed in print media. The latter entails learning Irish and legitimising the language through its officialisation in various domains (institutions, broadcasting, culture, etc.). Irish citizens changing their names into the Irish form—although they do not speak Irish (MacGabhann, 2007)—is one example. Irish is sometimes emphasised as an important identity marker in a context of globalisation as it makes Irish people culturally different (Coleman, 2007; Mac Aodháin *et al.*, 2007) and helps them connect with the past (Ó Cionfhaola, 2011). It further appears that Irish people value their language when travelling or living abroad as it functions as a secret language that cannot be understood by the broad English-speaking population (Masterson, 2011). The use of Irish in this situation reinforces the sense of Irish identity (Mac Aodháin *et al.*, 2007) and is viewed as a distinct and unique marker. Finally, there is the view of those who are indifferent to the language and consider other customs to be just as suitable identity markers, and language revival and maintenance policies as irrelevant to the affirmation of the ethnonational identity. In their case, the language is mainly regarded as obsolete and useless both at national and international levels (“We don't need”, 2008). Furthermore, this view emphasises the fact that Irish identity can be embraced without the language: “just because we speak English, and not an archaic language of the last millennium, it does not mean we forget our culture at all. It simply means that our culture has adapted to the modern world” (“We don't need”, 2008, para. 3).

At the extreme end of the spectrum, there is another attitude that originates from a monolingual language ideology that considers Irish as an inferior language, whose maintenance is costly and that regards its speakers as extremists. This view clearly rejects societal bilingualism. Several letters to the editor (Ó Donnchú, 2011; O Riain, 2011; Pelow, 2011) defend Irish-speakers' right to have access to services and facilities through the medium of Irish and denounce the imposition of the English

language on the Irish-speaking community. They further reject the association that is often made between ordinary Irish-speakers defending their rights and language “fanatics” (Doody, 2011, para. 3). A comment posted online in response to the view that the Irish-speaking minority are trying to impose the Irish language on the English-speaking majority illustrates this relation of power between the two languages:

Comment:

*The reason why the Irish language will never be spoken by the majority lies in the fact that these lunatics have hijacked the language and tried to shove it down our throats. As a result they’ve turned so many people off it forever. (Dermot D., 2011)*

Response:

*No, the reason why the Irish language will never be spoken by the majority is because people like you force people like me to speak English. Why is it that people like you seem to think it’s fair to force others to speak your language while wishing to deny others the ability to speak their own language? (...) At the end of the day the “lunatics” in the Irish-speaking community want to be able to speak their own language and use it on a daily basis in their own country whose first official language is Irish. The “lunatics” in the English-speaking community want to dictate to those Irish speakers how, and in what medium, they communicate. (Ó Dálaigh, 2011)*

This exchange on an online forum is a recurrent example of existing opposing attitudes to Irish. Although compulsory Irish is highly criticised by some—particularly in the education and public sectors as it is regarded as a deterrent to the language—Irish speakers often reverse the compulsory element argument to point out that the imposition of the English language is what threatens the vitality of the Irish language. It appears that each party considers the other responsible for the scant presence of Irish as a wide community language. This situation can also result in negative attitudes towards certain members of the Irish-speaking community who play an important role in the maintenance of the language. Irish language activists are sometimes perceived as “fanatical Gaeilgeoirs” who because of their “do-as-we-say, Stasi-like compulsion (...) choked off a love for the language in the first place” (Ginty, 2011, para. 3). It is clear that some regard the maintenance of the language as “reminiscent of a colonial attitude” by imposing a minority language on the language majority (Kennedy, 2008, para 3). Baker warns against expressions of separatism and highlights the importance of friendship between monolinguals and bilinguals as a channel of language attitude change (1992, p. 108) that would benefit the minority language.

Other forms of resistance to societal bilingualism are more subtle. They question, for example, the relevance of the presence of the Irish language in certain domains because, according to them, all Irish speakers can understand the English language. It is commonly claimed by non supporters of the Irish language that funds allocated to the Irish language, especially in terms of translation of legal documents should be spent on other sector of the economy (Doody, 2011). Although Irish speakers

acknowledge they are a linguistic minority they also highlight their rights to Irish language services in an officially bilingual state (Ó Donnchú, 2011). But it appears that the bilingual status of Ireland is rejected by some who do not, for example, tolerate systematic translation of documents and signs because, according to them, everybody in Ireland understands and speaks English:

*it is definitely extreme to insist that the vast majority of citizens receive documentation and correspondence half of which is in a language that they do not understand, just to appease the minority who, while understanding the main language of this State fluently, have a desire to be mollycoddled by instantly seeing the same message in their language of choice (Carroll, 2007, para 3).*

A similar argument on the non-necessity of translating official documents into Irish can nonetheless be found among supporters of the Irish language who believe that Irish-speakers themselves would not understand such complex documents, loaded with neologisms (McCrea, 2007). The usefulness of the Irish language and the amount of state funding allocated to it is a common issue of disagreement. It should be noted, however, that national surveys indicated that up until 1993 a majority of Irish people were in favour of government spending towards the promotion of the Irish language (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994). However, disagreement with the way funds are spent has also been voiced by language supporters who would rather prioritise practical aspects of life at national level rather than targeting minorities locally (Mac an Phríora, June 2007) and would rather concentrate on an efficient promotion of the language among the youth rather than translating official documents “that will never be read by anyone but the translators themselves” (McCrea, 2007, para. 4). Others have also denounced the 'snobbish' attitudes and tokenism of Irish language lobbies (Breathnach, 2007). Whereas public surveys indicate a general positive attitude towards the Irish language (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1993; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009) a rather negative attitude to the way the government deals with the promotion and maintenance of the Irish language is depicted in the newspapers. Several letters to the editor refer to the neglect and hypocrisy of the government towards Irish through the downgrading of its status (Coleman, 2007; Mac Aodháin et al., 2007). This sense of hypocrisy is visible when it comes to translating general positive attitudes into action. Titley (2006) argues that decision makers tend to find excuses that prevent any further language developments from happening. Others, on the other hand, accuse politicians of dishonesty in their attempts to promote what appears to them as a dead language (Myers, 2007). There is also a negative attitude to the extensive use of Irish in names of institutions, government agencies as well as the Irish version of pupils' names in the Irish class, for it is seen as mere tokenism which artificially keep the language alive (Grade, 2007). Overall, these views seem to point to the relaxed approach to Irish the government has adopted since the 1970s according to which the state is now supporting existing

bilingual communities, facilitating individual choice as opposed to implementing mainstream revival language policies (Ó Riagáin, 1997; 2008).

When considering attitudes towards Irish outside Ireland, it seems that the language is getting positive support whether it is through the teaching of Irish in third-level education in the United-States or the United-Kingdom (Flynn, May 2007), the interest of foreign students in learning Irish (Killick, 2007; Mac Aodháin *et al.*, 2007; Murray, 2011) or the existence of Gaeltacht areas outside Ireland such as in Canada (O'Driscoll, 2007). These examples are further manifestations of integrative orientation among the international community. The delivery of Irish words by important figures such as American President Obama and Queen Elizabeth II during their visits to Ireland in 2011 may be seen as tokenism but it reinforces the association between the Irish language and the Irish nationality from an outsider's point of view, and recognises the status of the language.

In addition to international support, there seems to be a new trend in the promotion of the Irish language in Ireland which aims 'to make it cool' to speak Irish. Not only does this initiative come from Irish language broadcasters with the diversification of television and radio programmes which now target teenagers (Hogan, 2007), but also from young people who want to see a change in behaviour (Walshe, February 2007). Ideas to encourage Irish people to converse in Irish include wearing a badge representing their willingness to speak Irish regardless of their competence in the language. The extensive media coverage of the American-born comedian Des Bishop who learnt Irish in the Gaeltacht over eleven months in 2007 illustrates this attempt at making Irish a modern fun language (Baker, 2008; Kelly, 2008; Murray, 2008). Although the quality of the language he uses in terms of grammatical and lexical correctness has been questioned by some (Uí Bhriain, 2008) his position as a media figure can be influential in terms of attitude change. Imitation of a model's attitudes can positively affect language status and value (Baker, 1992). The success of his learning Irish as an adult and the use of the language he makes in diverse domains of life are important to establish positive attitudes. However, the context in which he learnt the language is different from the context in which most Irish people learn the language. While he deliberately chose to learn Irish as an adult in an immersion context, most Irish children are required to learn Irish as a school subject.

As a matter of fact, the compulsory element of Irish in the school curriculum is one of the most important aspects of Irish language policy (Kelly, 2002). As various attitude surveys indicate, a majority of the Irish population is in favour of this policy (Ó Riagáin & Ó Glasáin, 1994; "61% in support", 2011). However, it does not constitute an absolute majority. In effect, there is a long history of attitudes in favour of and against the compulsory Irish policy in education (Kelly, 2002). The perception that teachers force pupils to learn Irish in a repressive manner is very much alive and is thought to contribute to negative attitudes where Irish is concerned ("We don't need", 2008). But negative

attitudes to Irish in school are also believed to be unfair as it is not more unpleasant to learn Irish than it is to learn other compulsory subjects (Coleman, 2007). The large number of letters to the editor in reaction to the topic of compulsory Irish shows how divided the population is in an area that directly concerns their children's future. As Ó Riagáin (1997, 2008) pointed out the general population supports measures to promote Irish as long as it does not affect their own material opportunities. The amalgamation of two secondary schools into one Irish-medium school in Dingle in 2007 is a case in point. This situation resulted in mixed views from parents who, as a result of the amalgamation, had to send their child who had been attending a school where the curriculum was taught through English, to an Irish-medium secondary school. The decision to amalgamate the schools into one Irish-medium school was based on the fact that Dingle is located in a Gaeltacht area. The reaction of some parents opposing the total immersion policy in the new school was perceived as disrespectful of the language policy in the Gaeltacht and as a suggestion that Irish-medium education is inferior (Warren, 2007).

Further attitudes to Irish in school are expressed in the debate on compulsory Irish. Supporters of compulsion claim that freedom to choose to study a language at school should not be granted to children as it would result in a dramatic drop in numbers of those learning a second language (Gallagher, 2006; Spillane, 2006; Ó Snodaigh, 2007). By contrast, those in favour of the abolition of compulsory Irish believe it would result in more enthusiasm and enjoyment in learning Irish (Flynn, 2006; Bielenberg, March 2007). Research has shown, however, that learners' motivation was not affected by factors such as language choice or compulsory language learning (Inbar et al., 2001; Dörnyei et al., 2006). Rather, the simple fact of being actively engaged in the learning of a second language enhances language attitudes and motivation. But regardless of the policy adopted—i.e. compulsory or optional—it is important that a reward be in place for adults to use the Irish language once they leave school (Baker, 1992). This can be done through employment prospects that require the use of Irish. While both parties differ in their views of the position of Irish in education, they still show positive attitudes to the language and do not object to its teaching. A third group appears to be opposed to the presence of Irish on the curriculum. For example, they blame the time spent on teaching Irish for poor results in other subjects, such as maths, in the Leaving Certificate examination.

Although anecdotes often refer to the negative attitude towards Irish in the school and the fact that it is badly taught in school, figures show (Ó Riagáin & Ó Glasáin, 1994, p. 25; Ó Riagáin, 2007, p. 387) that a great majority of Irish people support the teaching of Irish in school as a subject (69% in 1993 and 71% in 2000) or the use of Irish as a medium of instruction (18% in favour of partial immersion, 4% in favour of total immersion at secondary level in 1993). The recently reiterated debate on making Irish optional for the Leaving Certificate has led news reports to emphasise students' wish to abolish compulsory Irish (Holland, 2011). However, research has shown that students do not

necessarily hold negative attitudes towards Irish but simply wish to see changes in the curriculum (Ní Riain, 2003). More recently, students have been reported to support the teaching of Irish by requesting curriculum changes which would include the use of Irish as a medium of instruction in some subjects (Donnelly, 2007 February). It has been shown that the use of Irish as a medium of instruction fosters an integrative orientation to learning Irish as students perceive Irish to be a useful means of communication (Coady, 2001). Furthermore, students taught through Irish have a better disposition to societal bilingualism. Irish as a medium of instruction is mostly used in Irish-medium schools.

Attitudes towards Irish-medium schools and their participants are an important aspect of attitudes to the Irish language and is central to this study. It appears that some individuals who are not involved with Irish-medium schools perceive gaelscoil families as extremists or as snobs and elitists (Walshe, March 2007; Holden, 2007; English, 2011). Various reasons fuel this suggestion and include the perception that parents choose an Irish-medium education because gaelscoileanna have good educational records and increase their children's chances of attaining high-points third-level courses.<sup>119</sup> The economist David McWilliams (2005) similarly associates the popularity of Irish-medium education with a socio-economic phenomenon rather than a cultural linguistic one. Holmquist (2008) has qualified Irish as the language of 'educational apartheid' by allowing students extra marks in the Leaving Certificate examination if they answer the paper in Irish. This practice puts students attending an Irish-medium school at an advantage and seems, according to Holmquist, to be a valid reason to attend such schools as it increases students' chance to get on the university course of their choice.<sup>120</sup> The suggestion made that this apartheid is based on social class was developed by Carey (2008) who believes parents' decision to send their child to an Irish-medium schools is motivated by social selectiveness rather than a love for the Irish language: "it's a class issue. Whether the motivating force is middle-class liberalism or heartfelt nationalist ideology, you won't find too many immigrants and local ruffians at the Gaelscoil" (para. 4). Surprisingly, it seems that the middle classes are also accused of being at an advantage when looking for their child to be exempt from the teaching of Irish in English-medium schools (Flynn, August 2007). This is due to the fact that they can have their child's learning difficulties assessed privately and therefore more rapidly than assessed by state psychologists. The association of the middle classes with the Irish language depicted in the print media is therefore based on selectiveness and self-interest whereby Irish is either considered an instrument or a barrier to education and future career opportunities. According to this view, parents' motivation for sending their child to an Irish-medium school is purely instrumental. Baker notes that negative attitudes held

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119 Matriculation is based on a system of points reflecting students' Leaving Certificate performance in six subjects including English, Mathematics and Irish. If demand exceeds supply for a university course, places are offered to students with the highest points. See [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie)

120 Entry to university in Ireland is based on a system of points obtained in the Leaving Certificate examination.



by the majority group—in this case non-participants in the Irish-medium sector—may be a reaction to the fear that the minority language group—i.e. gaelscoil participants—is given privileges (1992, p. 100).

The argument based on social class motivation for selecting an Irish-medium school is refuted by supporters of Irish-medium education who point to the inclusive policy gaelscoileanna have on linguistic, cultural, religious and social grounds and which accommodate children from various social backgrounds as well as racial backgrounds (Ó Liatháin, 30 November 2007). Another point that is commonly made is based on the free choice parents have to send their child to an Irish-medium school, again emphasising the idea of inclusiveness (Ó Broin, 2007). Other arguments tend to explain that the popularity of Irish-medium schools comes from the high standard of education they are believed to provide: “Parents who send their children to Irish medium schools do so not because of any notion of exclusivity, but for the very simple reason that it is an excellent guarantee of a first-class education” (Ó Liatháin, 30 November 2007, para. 4) Although the latter argument aims to emphasise the educational benefits of immersion education, it also refers to a utilitarian view of the language. Furthermore, it highlights the complexity of school selection with all the different factors at play when parents decide to send their child to a gaelscoil.

Although the extensive coverage of the discord between the Department of Education and gaelscoileanna on the question of total immersion<sup>121</sup> emphasised the need for further research, it opened a public debate on immersion education. Supporters of total immersion point at the natural approach and efficiency of such a programme (Coleman, 2007; Ó Broin, 2007; Sinha, 2007) and refer to the way English-speakers learnt their own language, that is to say by being immersed in it (O'Sullivan, 2007). Sceptics, on the other hand, mention the need for gaelscoileanna to be inclusive and to consider teaching English in infant classes in the interest of children with learning difficulties and children from foreign countries (O'Shea, 2007). Other arguments include the triviality of the disagreement on the introduction of the teaching of English for thirty minutes every day from junior infants. According to them, this practice will not affect pupils' learning of the Irish language since Irish is the main language of communication in those schools (Mac an Phríora, November 2007). It has also been argued that the position adopted by the umbrella organisation Gaelscoileanna is in fact an attempt to fight against the unrelenting spread of English hegemony: “to hold back the tide of what they perceive as creeping Anglicisation in the last true bastion of the Gael” (“Army strength”, 2007, para 2). This argument is reminiscent of the monolingual ideology discussed earlier that considers Irish to be on the verge of extinction (Kennedy, 2008) and as such not to be imposed on the language majority.

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121 See Chapter One.

Several letters to the editor have indicated the bias of articles which give an unfair and inaccurate picture of the Irish language (Mac Amhlaoibh, 2007; Ó Liatháin, 8 November 2007). A number of articles related to Irish-medium schools have often referred to the same terminology which includes key words such as “row” and “controversy” (Guidera, 2007; Donnelly, 2008; English, 2011). But there are also positive articles that highlight the popularity of the *gaelscoileanna* and their success in producing fluent Irish speakers (Bielenberg, February 2007; Ó Duibhir, 2007). Individuals involved with Irish-medium schools have reported on a pioneering attitude that exists among *gaelscoil* families. According to them, a new community has grown around the school which is different from the traditional Irish language community (O’Dwyer, 2007). Baker (1992) notes that it is this experience of success that can bring about positive attitudes towards the language. Understanding *gaelscoil* parents’ motivations, attitudes and linguistic behaviour is therefore important in a context where the position of Irish in the curriculum is once again being questioned.

The review of newspaper articles and letters to the editor give an insight into current attitudes towards the Irish language. Although the views that are exposed do not necessarily represent the views of a majority—as opinion pieces and letters to the editor tend towards polemic—they reflect the challenges facing language maintenance. Despite the same issues being debated over and over again from one generation to the next (Mac Murchaidh, 2008)—i.e. role of Irish in today’s society, compulsory Irish in school, etc.,—the Irish language is still getting support from the general public (Ó Riagáin, 2008; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009). While strong-held views both on the part of those who wish to see the language prosper and those who wish to see it die lead the debate, journalists also report on foreign nationals learning the language, individual initiatives to promote the language and the success of Irish-medium schools.

## 2.7 Conclusion

Attitudes to the Irish language have changed considerably since the beginning of the twentieth century. Historical factors such as Ireland's independence and the establishment of a new state led to a shift in language ideology. The discredited native language under British rule became a symbol of unity and ethnicity that strengthened nationalist ideology (Ó Croidheáin, 2006). After independence nationalist leaders pursued the ideal of a return to an Irish-speaking Ireland by making Irish language policy a national priority. While a regional economic plan was put in place to maintain the position of Irish as the community language in Irish-speaking areas, the Irish language revival policy mainly concentrated on the education system. The national language policy aimed to increase the number of Irish speakers in society so that Irish could regain its position as a main language. It involved the gradual introduction of the Irish language as a medium of instruction in school to eventually make Irish the sole language in education. However, the emphasis on the school and the lack of facilities to encourage the use of Irish outside school is one of the reasons why the revival policy failed. From an early stage, knowledge and competence in Irish were required to access civil service jobs. As a result, the Irish language became associated with social mobility; although the value Irish was accorded on the economic market did not spread to all sectors of the economy (Ó Riagáin, 1997). The conservative ideology of the first two decades after independence was challenged by the growing unpopularity of immersion education, the policy's failure to reproduce language use in the wider community, as well as economic hardship. A shift to a more liberal and social democratic ideology occurred in the 1950s (Watson, 2008) which resulted in the closing down of bilingual schools and in a dramatic drop in the number of immersion schools. The Irish government adopted a further lenient attitude towards Irish compulsion from the 1970s gradually moving from a revival policy to a bilingual policy. These changes were accompanied by a realisation that public support was essential to the success of Irish language policy. The first large sociological study on language attitudes that was conducted in 1973 showed that despite unpopular language programmes in school Irish people were very much in favour of state support and regarded Irish as a symbol of ethnic identity (CILAR, 1975). Support for Irish is still strong today due to the link the language has with the concept of Irishness (Watson, 2008). However, the relationship between language and identity is weakening (Ó Riagáin, 2007). This relationship is in fact problematic as most people in Ireland do not speak Irish. Rather, younger generation tend to regard Irish as a marker of cultural identity (Fitzpatrick, 1998; Kavanagh, 1999; Ní Riain, 2003).

No decline in support for language policy has been recorded. There is still a large majority in favour of state support at national level in addition to support for regional planning in the Gaeltacht. Education is considered one of the most important remits of language policy. Although the policy of compulsory Irish is questioned by some, the general public seems to be in favour of its continuation (as

cited in “61% in support”, 2011), provided that it does not become an obstacle to their material opportunities (Ó Riagáin, 1997, 2008). This is particularly true when other school subjects are taken into account. Despite improvement in attitudes to Irish as a modern means of communication, the utility of the language is often questioned and the study of other subjects is considered more important than the study of Irish (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994; Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Coady, 2001). By contrast, the instrumental orientation attributed to Irish in terms of academic requirement and career opportunities tends to be more diffused in Irish-medium schools where pupils regard Irish as useful tool of communication within the school and beyond, as it enables them to interact with Irish native speakers (Coady, 2001). Students attending English-medium schools have however expressed the wish to see changes in the curriculum which would make the teaching of Irish as a community language more relevant (Ní Riain, 2003). They have also emphasised the need to secure a place for Irish outside the school and in the labour market (Fitzpatrick, 1998).

As attitudinal surveys show (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, Ó Riagáin, 2007, Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009) the general public supports societal bilingualism. But despite the increase in the number of Irish people reporting speaking abilities in the language (CSO, 2007), the low use of Irish made in society poses a major problem to societal bilingualism. The production of bilinguals in Ireland comes mainly from the school rather than from the home (H. Ó Murchú, 2008; Ó Riagáin, 2008). It was already observed in the 1970s that the low commitment to using Irish was not necessarily related to poor ability in Irish. Rather, low use of Irish seems to be caused by social constraints such as politeness, fear, ridicule, and the like (CILAR, 1975). There is therefore a need for a change in attitudes towards the use of interpersonal use of Irish at community level if the government wants to achieve its target of 250,000 daily Irish speakers outside education by 2030 (Government of Ireland, 2010). A very successful example of an increased usage of Irish both at home and in social networks is associated with families involved with Irish-medium schools (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979). Because the government has adopted a more liberal approach to the Irish language, more emphasis is put on the rational choices individuals make regarding Irish (Watson, 2008). There is no longer any national obligation; rather, the government supports existing bilingual communities (Ó Riagáin, 1997, 2008). It is therefore crucial to investigate the creation of these new bilingual communities built around the *gaelscoil* as potential centres of language reproduction. Although it has been observed that attitudes to Irish tend to improve after leaving school, parents whose child attends an Irish-medium school have expressed further positive attitudes to Irish due to the *gaelscoil* experience (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979). Parents in English-medium schools have shown positive attitudes to their child being taught Irish in school. However, they also have indicated that they let their children form their own attitude to Irish (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Harris et al., 2006). By contrast, children attending a *gaelscoil* seem to

get more support and encouragement to use Irish from both the school and their parents (Kavanagh, 1999).

Gaelscoil parents, however, have been described as middle class with an instrumental orientation. According to some, the main motive behind parents' decision to provide their child with an Irish-medium education is to gain bonus points in the Leaving Certificate and increase their chance of entry to the university of their choice (McWilliams, 2005; Carey, 2008; Holmquist, 2008). Following this reasoning, the increasing popularity of Irish-medium education appears to be precarious as the new government proposed during the 2011 election campaign that Irish would be made optional for the Leaving Certificate.

The next chapter which presents the results of the research study on parental attitudes to Irish attempts to respond to the questions of motivation for selecting an Irish-medium school and of language use.

**PART II**

**PARENTS' ATTITUDES TO IRISH AND IRISH-MEDIUM  
EDUCATION IN TEN IRISH-MEDIUM SCHOOLS IN COUNTY  
DUBLIN: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS**

## III- Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

The role of education in language planning is very important in the context of language revitalisation and language maintenance (Fishman, 1991). Language policy in Ireland has relied heavily on the education system since the foundation of the state in 1922 to increase the number of Irish speakers in society (Ó Riagáin, 1997; Kelly, 2002; Ó Riagáin, 2008; Government of Ireland, 2010). But despite generally favourable attitudes to the Irish language (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1993; Ó Riagáin, 2007; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009) and a significant percentage of Irish citizens reporting ability to speak Irish, low usage is made in society of Irish (CSO, 2007). Yet, minority language maintenance is not sustainable if the language is not used in the community and transmitted within the home (Fishman, 1991; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006). As Nettle and Romaine (2000) point out:

*Although control over the language of the workplace, government, and education may be ultimate goals of language revival and maintenance efforts, they should not be the first priorities. Without safeguards for language use at home sufficient to ensure transmission, attempts to prop the language up outside the home will be like blowing air into a punctured tire. It will be impossible to achieve a steady state based on the incoming air due to the continual losses resulting from the unmended puncture.*  
(p. 178).

Because the production of competent bilinguals tends to depend on the schools rather than on the home (H. Ó Murchú, 2008; Ó Riagáin, 2008) the difficulty lies in encouraging societal bilingualism. As already shown, most Irish people do not seem to use the Irish language once they leave school (CILAR, 1975). Furthermore, as seen in the previous chapter, parents and children alike tend to have an instrumental attitude towards Irish whereby the learning of other languages such as French, Spanish, German, appears more relevant to future education, career and life prospects (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1993; Coady, 2001). For some students, Irish is a compulsory subject in school which does not have any utility outside school (Ní Riain, 2003). However, this view does not seem to be shared by children involved in Irish-medium schools where Irish is the main language of communication within the school (Coady, 2001) and is likely to be used outside school though social networking (Murtagh, 2007). The language policy of the Irish-medium education sector seems to have a positive influence on the attitude its participants have towards the language. While pupils/students attending Irish-medium schools have a more integrative orientation (Kavanagh, 1999; Coady, 2001) similar positive attitudes to Irish were recorded among parents after their children had started attending such a school (Ó Riagáin

& Ó Gliasáin, 1979). Parental attitudes are very important as they contribute to the formation of their children's attitudes (Baker, 1992; Bohner & Wänke, 2002). In addition, it has been shown that the experience of Irish-medium education enhances parents' use of Irish at home (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979; Owens, 1992; Hickey, 1997, 1999) as well as their use of Irish in social networks (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979). However, the latter findings date from the early years of the gaelscoileanna growth. A small number of studies on early immersion in pre-schools have since focused on parents' involvement in Irish-medium education and how it impacts on home life (Owens, 1992; Hickey, 1997; 1999).

Parental attitudes to Irish, motivation for selecting Irish immersion education and the potential increased use of Irish in the home environment are important areas to examine in the context of growth in the immersion education sector, and to a certain extent, in relation to the recent formulation of a national strategic language plan according to which the number of daily Irish speakers is to increase by 25% over a twenty-year period (Government of Ireland, 2010).<sup>122</sup> Immersion education is an important aspect of this strategy as it produces fluent Irish speakers. Overall, children taught through the medium of Irish outperform their peers who are learning Irish as a subject (Harris et al., 2006). But while the popularity of Irish-medium education is still on the rise,<sup>123</sup> Ireland faces a situation where the possibility of making Irish optional for the Leaving Certificate is more real than ever. It is therefore important to investigate parental attitudes to Irish and Irish-medium education as well as parental motivation behind the choice of the immersion system in order to assess the sustainability of gaelscoileanna. As a few studies showed (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979; Ó Donnagáin, 1995; Hickey, 1997, 1999), parents' reasons for sending their child to an immersion school are not solely based on language reasons. Educational considerations also come into play. It has been suggested that gaelscoil parents have an instrumental orientation towards Irish in terms of bonus points in the Leaving Certificate and better opportunities of getting into the university of their choice.<sup>124</sup> Although these are mere allegations, it nonetheless suggests that parental motivation could potentially change if the status of the Irish language changes within the education system.

It should be noted, however, that the opening of Irish-medium schools has been a parent-led initiative since the 1970s (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979; Harris, 1984; Ó Riagáin, 1997) after supporters of the Irish language became concerned about the declining standard of Irish in school and in society (Hickey, 1999). The establishment of Gaelscoileanna Teoranta in 1973—supporting communities

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122 Several public meetings were organised in the Republic of Ireland in 2007 regarding the draft of a twenty-year strategic plan for the Irish language. A survey was also available on the Internet. An international research team coordinated by Fiontar, DCU was also consulted; see (Ó Flatharta et al., 2009).

123 See Appendix 4, Table A4.3: Number and Percentage of Primary Schools Teaching through the Medium of Irish 1930-2010 and Appendix 7, Table A7.1: Number and Percentage of Secondary Schools Teaching through the Medium of Irish 1930-2010.

124 See (McWilliams, 2005) and newspaper opinion pieces (Carey, 2008; Holmquist, 2008).



interested in opening new Irish-medium schools—resulted from a high demand in this sector of education. The organisation has been very active up until recently, especially during the Celtic Tiger years, with an increasing demand for new schools.<sup>125</sup> The cohort of parents who apply to open a new school is not limited to fluent Irish-speakers. It includes English-speaking families with a very favourable attitude to the Irish language; some of whom have expressed a commitment to raising their children through the medium of Irish.<sup>126</sup> In the context of the opening of a new *gaelscoil*, parents who are part of the Founding Committee together with parents present for the first year of the school's existence are usually highly motivated and involved (Maguire, 1991). Once the school has been established for several years, however, parents' motivation and commitment may be different from those of the founding parents'. The cohort of parents who took part in the present study does not belong to the category of parents who took part in the foundation of a *gaelscoil*. As a matter of fact, the eleven participating schools include long-established schools from before the 1970s while the most recently opened school of them all was ten years old at the time of the survey. Participating parents therefore opted for an Irish-medium school that was already set up when they decided to send their child to it.

In spite of a significant growth in the past forty years in the number of schools providing instruction solely through the medium of Irish, very few studies have focused on the success of this sector of education. Research concerned with Irish-medium education has mainly concentrated on academic and linguistic achievement such as pupils' level of Irish and English (Macnamara, 1966; Harris, 1984; Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Harris et al., 2006) and pupils' level of literacy (Ó Laoire & Harris, 2006; NCCA, 2007). Some of these studies briefly refer to parents' support and attitudes towards the Irish language (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Harris et al., 2006). Apart from a small study on parental attitudes towards Irish-medium schools (Ó Donnagáin, 1995)<sup>127</sup> and research on Irish-medium pre-schools (Hickey, 1997; 1999) there has been relatively little interest in parents' attitudes towards the Irish language and towards Irish medium education since 1976 when the most extensive research in this field was conducted (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979). The latter study examined parents' motivation behind the choice of an immersion education and the effect of immersion attendance on parents' use of Irish both in the home and outside the home.<sup>128</sup> Yet, this study dates from the beginning of the “*gaelscoileanna boom*”. The rationale for the current study is therefore the lack of research in recent years in the Irish-medium school sector in relation to parents' motivations for selecting immersion

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125 Personal notes from an interview with Bláthnaid Ní Ghréacháin, Chief Executive (March 2007)

126 *Comhluadar*, for example, is a voluntary organisation that supports parents who wish to raise their children through Irish. Established in 1993, it started off in Dublin with 8 families. In 2007 it had over 560 members with 150 families for Dublin alone (personal notes from an interview with Feargal Ó Cuilinn, Director, (05/04/07)).

127 See literature review in Section 2.5.3.3 Attitudes to Irish-medium schools.

128 See literature review in Section 2.5.3.3 Attitudes to Irish-medium schools.

education for their child, the socio-economic as well as educational background of the families involved, their attitudes towards the language as well as the impact Irish-medium education has on parents' use of Irish in the home.

This chapter reviews the methodology adopted to conduct the research study on gaelscoil parents' attitudes to Irish and Irish-medium education. This is followed by two chapters which give a presentation and discussion of the findings. Chapter Four deals with quantitative data obtained from a self-administered questionnaire<sup>129</sup> distributed to parents whereas Chapter Five only includes qualitative data from interviews with teachers and follow-up interviews with parents. In this chapter the rationale for the research together with the aims and objectives of the study are outlined. This is followed by the description of how the fieldwork was conducted, how questionnaire and the interview questions were designed, the report on the response rate and the description of the tools and procedure used.

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129 A self-administered questionnaire does not require the presence of the researcher to read and answer the questions.

### **3.2 Research rationale, aims and objectives**

Irish-medium schools are scattered around the country. For those that were established since the late 1970s, their existence is due to community demand. The Dublin region—also known as Dublin Area which includes Dublin city and its surroundings—is a very interesting location as it is the cradle of the *gaelscoileanna* movement which started in the 1970s when a few families who wanted to raise their children through the medium of Irish expressed their concern about the teaching of Irish in school (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979; Harris 1984, Ó Riagáin, 1997; Hickey, 1999). Since then, more *gaelscoileanna* have opened, which makes the Dublin Area the area with the greatest concentration of Irish-medium schools in Ireland with 31 primary schools and 8 secondary schools in 2010.<sup>130</sup> This significant number of schools is due mostly to the fact that one fourth of the population of Ireland resides in the Dublin Area.<sup>131</sup> The historical context of Irish-medium schools together with the demographical numbers and diversity of people living in Dublin make the Dublin region an interesting region to investigate. This area includes long-established and newly established schools and still has a great deal of potential as parents continue to seek the opening of new schools.<sup>132</sup> Dublin is also a place of diversity where Irish-speaking families, English-speaking families, bilingual Irish/English families, parents with mixed nationalities and foreign national families can be found within the Irish-medium school sector. It also should be noted that it is located in Leinster, the province that has seen the largest increase in population reporting speaking ability in Irish since the foundation of the State.<sup>133</sup> The Dublin Area, therefore, gives the most comprehensive picture of the Irish-medium education sector in an urban area with its combination of old/new schools and its demographic concentration and diversity.

This research study aims to assess parents' attitudes towards the Irish language and towards Irish-medium education. In contrast with other language attitudes surveys carried out in Ireland this study focuses on parents whose child is enrolled in an Irish-medium primary school only. The main objectives are:

- to assess parents' general attitudes to the Irish language and compare them to the attitudes of the general public found in the national surveys conducted in 1973, 1983, 1993, 1988/89 and

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130 See Appendix 4, Table A4.2: Number of Irish-Medium Schools in the Republic of Ireland, 2010/2011.

131 The 2006 Census of the Population counted 1,187,176 inhabitants in the Dublin Area whereas a total of 4,239,848 people was reported for the whole Republic of Ireland. See <http://www.cso.ie/statistics/popofeachprovcountycity2006.htm>

132 See example of Tyrrelstown in Section 1.5.3, four primary schools are due to open in 2012 and 2013 while two secondary schools are due to open in 2014 ([www.gaelscoileanna.ie](http://www.gaelscoileanna.ie))

133 See Appendix 1, Table A1.1: Percentage of Irish speakers in Each Province, 1851-2006.

2007/08 (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1993; Mac Gréil, 1996; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009)

- to assess parents' motivations for choosing an Irish-medium education for their child and to compare them with earlier findings dating from the beginning of the gael scoileanna movement (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979)
- to assess parents' understanding of and attitudes towards immersion education
- to assess parents' attitudes towards Irish in relation to variables such as social class, specific school attended and language ability
- to compare attitudes and, to a certain extent, self-reported language use both at home and outside the home, between parents whose child is in Senior Infants and parents whose child is in Sixth Class
- to examine the impact that immersion education has on daily lives through self-reports on language use in the home as well as outside the home

The choice of instruments to collect data was influenced by the objectives described above. As earlier research studies showed, gael scoil parents express positive attitudes to the Irish language (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979; Ó Donnagáin, 1995; Kavanagh, 1999; Harris et al., 2006). The principal aim of this study is to reaffirm these attitudes as well as understand further parents' motivation for selecting a gael scoil. This study uses the direct method to collect the data that is presented below. This method consists of a self-administered quantitative questionnaire. O' Rourke (2011) highlights the difference between the indirect method and the direct method in language attitude research:

*The methodological approach is however ultimately determined by the objectives of the research. When the aim is to find out about deep-seated prejudices towards a language then indirect measures of language attitudes are required to access individuals' inner feelings. On the other hand, when the aim is to understand the level of support for a language among members of a society then an analysis of language beliefs and behavioural intentions through questionnaires or interviews may be more appropriate.*  
(p. 28)

Advantages of the questionnaire include its low cost, reduction in bias (that may result from the interaction between interviewer and participant) the time participants have to consider their answers, anonymity (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000) and uniformity of the answers for easier analysis (Henerson et al., 1987). The questionnaire also gives the possibility of increasing the number of participants without being time consuming and "because sampling procedures are used, the findings can be generated to a larger population beyond that of the sample surveyed" (O' Rourke, 2011, p. 27). In addition, extra information may be gathered on age, gender, social class etc. The measurement of

attitudes to Irish through the means of closed-ended questions<sup>134</sup> was used in the various national surveys that were reviewed in the previous chapter (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994; Mac Gréil, 1996; Ó Riagáin, 2007; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009). The use of a questionnaire in this study was therefore useful when comparing statistical results between gaelscoil parents' attitudes and the general public's attitudes as revealed in those studies.

Nevertheless, there are disadvantages associated with this method which include problems with low response rate and with the impossibility of probing beyond the given answer (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000). Closed-ended question do not enable respondents to give any additional remarks or explanations (Oppenheim, 1992). As a consequence, the questions may be biased if the proposed categories are not exhaustive (*ibid.*). In order to avoid this problem, open-ended questions were added to the questionnaire wherever it was felt that the proposed categories were too restrictive. Finally, contrary to the indirect methods such as matched-guise tests<sup>135</sup> which guarantee no risk of giving socially desired responses, questionnaires encounter problems of self-reporting in terms of accuracy (Henerson et al., 1987). However, the latter problem may be addressed by checking these self-reports through additional measurements. The collection of qualitative data was also part of the fieldwork. The addition of follow-up interviews to the main study gave more in-depth qualitative information whereas the teachers interviews served a slightly different purpose as it added another angle to the study. Teachers' responses represent a second opinion on the matter of parental language attitudes as they are in a good position to know parents' attitudes towards immersion education and towards the Irish language. Their input can also be considered an outsider's view on parental language attitudes as the teachers were not asked to participate in the study as parents of a child attending a gaelscoil. The combination of both quantitative and qualitative data collection is also a way to respond to the limitation of one method or the other (Punch, 1998). While quantitative data are usually associated with objectivity and quantity enabling the generalisation of results to a larger population, the collection of qualitative data is less structured, limited in numbers and deals with opinions rather than numbers (Hammersley, 1992). However, Hammersley (1992) explains that this dichotomy is simplistic and that accuracy is more important than the issue of precision requiring quantification. Rather, the nature of the research question is paramount and the choice of methodologies should be pragmatic according to the research problem (Hammersley, 1992; Silverman, 2010).

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134 "A closed question is one in which the respondents are offered a choice of alternative replies" (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 112). In a written questionnaire, respondents may be asked to tick, underline or circle their chosen answers. These questions may be dichotomous (yes/no; male/female; etc.), multiple choice or rating scales.

135 See Chapter Two, Section 2.3.1.

*We are not faced, then, with a stark choice between words and numbers, or even between precise and imprecise data; but rather with a range from more to less precise data. Furthermore, our decisions about what level of precision is appropriate in relation to any particular claim should depend on the nature of what we are trying to describe, on the likely accuracy of our descriptions, on our purposes, and on the resources available to us; not on ideological commitment to one methodological paradigm or another.*  
(Hammersley, 1992, p. 163).

### 3.3 Design of the parents' questionnaire

The principal research instrument of this study, as previously mentioned, is the self-administered questionnaire that was distributed to parents within the schools participating in the research project. It comprised 51 questions and took the form of a booklet to make it more pleasant to read through (See Appendix 9). It also included a letter of information outlining the reason for this survey, emphasising the voluntary and confidential aspects of the study as well as explaining the use of the information given by the respondents for statistical analysis. The letter of information was followed by a consent form that parents had to sign if they decided to participate in the study. The consent form was divided into two parts: one to be kept by the respondent for personal record and the other to remain attached to the booklet. This declaration of consent is in fact a summary of the main points of the cover letter outlining the subject and conditions of the study that participants are asked to read and acknowledge, namely voluntary participation, confidentiality of personal information given and anonymity of the respondents in the publication of the study results. Parents who returned the questionnaire to the school did so of their own free will and therefore showed their willingness to participate in the study.

The questionnaire was designed so as to get an overview of parents' language attitudes. Over thirty years have passed since the most comprehensive study on Irish-medium primary schools in Dublin (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979). It is therefore important to reconsider the general context in which the gael scoileanna movement is evolving. This questionnaire is not a continuation of Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin's work but has been inspired by some of the questions which the interviewees were originally asked in 1976.

The exploratory questionnaire used in the current research is mainly concerned with quantitative data although some questions require respondents to elaborate. Most questions are closed-ended questions and require the respondents to tick boxes, for example:

**Figure 3.1: Example of a Closed Ended Question.**

Q23	“What kind of attitude towards Irish do you try to encourage in your child? (tick (v) all that apply)”	
a.	I let my child know that Irish is important	<input type="checkbox"/>
b.	I let my child develop his/her own attitude to Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>
c.	I discourage my child from taking Irish too seriously	<input type="checkbox"/>

As mentioned above, some questions collect both quantitative and qualitative information by asking respondents to elaborate or write a few comments, for instance:

**Figure 3.2: Example of both Quantitative and Qualitative Question**

Q6 "Do you think that learning through the Irish language benefits your child educationally?"

a. no ☐

why? \_\_\_\_\_

b. don't know ☐

c. yes ☐

why? \_\_\_\_\_

This open-ended question enables the respondents to give more in-depth details. It would have been difficult to categorise possible answers to this question as the number of possibilities is quite large. If only a few categories had been given for the respondent to tick, it would have probably been limited and, in this case, biased. One of the disadvantages of a questionnaire (Oppenheim, 1992, pp.113-116; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000) is the imposition of ready-made answers upon the participants who may not always feel they are represented in the different response categories. The addition of blank space for personal comments is a way to compensate for this limitation and encourage spontaneity and expressiveness. Most closed-ended questions in this survey are multiple-choice questions. Not only does this technique allow for straightforward answers but it also collects as much information as possible. It is also both easy and quick for respondents to complete.

Although the questionnaire has 51 questions, respondent do not have to answer all the questions as some questions are designed as a funnelling device for subsequent questions. This technique relies on a filter question which only appears to be relevant to a subgroup. It is followed by a contingency question, which is a closed-ended question aimed at this subgroup (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000). Subgroups vary and depend, for example, on a respondent's personal situation as some questions only address parents with a child in Senior Infants or parents with a child in Sixth Class, while others are based on respondents' self-reported level of understanding and speaking Irish. The following is an example of a filter question:

**Figure 3.3: Example of Filter Question**

**Q24 "Do you socialise through Irish with families involved with the gaelscoil? (tick (v) one answer)**

a. never (proceed to question 26) ☐



b.	seldom	<input type="checkbox"/>
c.	occasionally	<input type="checkbox"/>
d.	often	<input type="checkbox"/>
e.	most of the time	<input type="checkbox"/>

Another feature of the questionnaire is that a few questions require both the answers of the respondent and of his/her partner/spouse. These questions appear in the section where respondents are required to assess their ability to understand and speak Irish (*no Irish/the odd word/a few simple sentences/parts of conversations/most conversations/native speaker ability*). They are also used in the section replicating the attitudinal items from the national surveys on general attitudes to the Irish language (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1993; Mac Gréil, 1996) and in the section on personal information. It is important to survey both parents/guardians when the circumstances allow it so as to have a more accurate overview of the environment in which children are brought up; whether it is in an environment in favour of Irish, indifferent to the language or mixed.

The design of the exploratory questionnaire was influenced by different research studies carried out in Ireland. Although a series of interviews took place in 1976 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979) targeting mothers whose child was in a gaelscoil in Dublin, little interest had been expressed since the 1990s in investigating parental language attitude in Irish-medium primary schools. It was therefore important to fully re-assess parents' attitudes towards Irish and its use as a medium of instruction. Although the focus of this study differs from O Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin's (1979), a few questions from the 1976 survey were used for the purpose of this research. One study conducted in 1995 focusing on parental attitudes to Irish-medium schools (Ó Donnagáin, 1995) and research on Irish-medium pre-schools (Hickey, 1997; 1999) were also consulted during the designing of the questionnaire. The other influential pieces of research that helped in constructing the questionnaire were the various national surveys on language attitudes in Ireland which took place between 1973 and 2007/08 (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984, Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994; Mac Gréil, 1996; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009). Finally, informal pilot interviews were conducted with four volunteer mothers from two different Irish-medium schools located in County Dublin in the early stages. Two interviews took place; one involved only one mother while the other took the form of a debate between three mothers. The questions asked during these interviews were very broad to avoid influencing and manipulating participants' response. The informal pilot interviews aimed at identifying preconceived ideas, relevant remarks or concerns and adjusting the questionnaire to take account of them.

The questionnaire comprises five parts:

- The gaelscoil and you
- Irish at home

- Irish and your social life
- General attitudes towards the Irish language
- Personal information

As mentioned earlier on the questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter which briefly explained the purpose of the questionnaire, the research study conditions (voluntary participation, no risks or benefits to the respondents) and ensured the respondents that their personal details and answers will be dealt with in confidentiality.

## 1. The gaelscoil and you

This section comprises 14 questions, two of which are contingency questions that can only be answered by a subset of respondents, i.e. either by parents whose child is in Senior Infants (Q5) or parents whose child is in Sixth Class (Q8). This section deals mainly with:

- parents' motivations to send their child to an Irish-medium primary school (Q1, Q2, Q3)

*Q1: Why did you choose to send your child to an Irish-medium school? (gaelscoil)*

*Q2: Did you always think that your child(ren) would go to a gaelscoil?*

*Q3: If the answer to question 2 is no, what/who influenced your decision?*

- their attitudes towards immersion education (Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q14)

*Q4: How important is it to you that your child receives his/her education through the medium of Irish?*

*Q5: How do you feel about your child learning through the medium of Irish?*

*Q6: Do you think that learning through the Irish language benefits your child educationally?*

*Q7: Do you think there are disadvantages to an Irish-medium education?*

*Q8: Do you think Irish-medium schools (gaelscoileanna) neglect the teaching of English?*

*Q9: When should the teaching of English be introduced?*

*Q14: Here are some statements about Irish and the gaelscoil. Please say whether you agree or disagree with these statements (6 items)*

- parents' commitment to immersion education through pre-school attendance and post-primary school choices (Q10 and Q11)—i.e. English-medium or Irish-medium instruction

*Q10: Did your child attend an Irish-medium pre-school/naíonra?*

*Q11: Have you enrolled or do you plan to enrol your child in an Irish-medium secondary school?*

- parents' language use on the school premises with school staff and other parents (Q12 and Q13).

*Q12: What language is usually used by you and your spouse/partner with the following people on the school premises: principal; teachers; other staff; parents?*

*Q13: If you do not use Irish much/at all with the different people you usually meet on the school premises, is it because: (list of 7 items)*

Questions focusing on the reasons for choosing an Irish-medium education were mainly inspired by Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin's survey (1979). The different categories suggested in questions 1 and 3 such as *pupil-teacher ratios*, accessibility of the school, *school's educational records*, *school's reputation* and *good grounding in Irish for secondary school* were replicated from the 1976 survey<sup>136</sup> while the categories of accessibility, general school reputation, child already bilingual/native speaker, parent

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<sup>136</sup> See Appendix C, question 20, p. 6 of the 1976 survey (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979).

attended all-Irish school and school recommended by a friend are mentioned in Hickey's (1997) survey on Irish-medium pre-schools.<sup>137</sup> More categories were added following the set of informal interviews organised with the four gaelscoil mothers. They deal with the importance of and advantages associated with being bilingual, the education and career opportunities that Irish can offer, and the gaelscoil as an alternative choice in some areas where English-medium schools are highly populated with migrant children and where as a result, the standard of education is perceived to be lower. Similarly, the proposed reasons for attending or not attending an Irish-medium secondary school in question 11 were designed according to the interviewed mothers' preferences for and concerns about their children's future.

The questions which deal with the importance of receiving an education through Irish and with the advantages and disadvantages of such an education (questions 4 to 8) were replicated from Ó Donnagáin's study (1995).<sup>138</sup> The use of open-ended questions was given preference to avoid bias as the range of response categories would have been too restrictive.

Question 9 was designed following the controversy over the ministerial circular 0044/2007.<sup>139</sup> In 2007 the Minister for Education and Science imposed the introduction of the teaching of English in Irish-medium primary schools from the second term of Junior Infants. This question enables respondents to select what they think is the best time to introduce the teaching of English according to the four different models recommended in the 2006 National Council for Curriculum and Assessment report (Ó Laoire & Harris, 2006). Assessing parents' attitudes to the introduction of English literacy in Irish-medium primary schools is paramount as gaelscoileanna are now obliged to comply with parents' wishes to introduce English at an early stage if they so request. This practice is in sharp contrast with the findings of a study conducted in Irish-medium schools in Dublin where parents' wishes were found to have little influence on the teaching of reading in a majority of participating schools (Ní Bhaoill & Ó Duibhir, 2004).

Questions 12 and 13 address the issue of language use at school whether it is used during school event, at meetings or as part of a simple routine such as dropping off or collecting the child from school. The gaelscoil is an Irish-language environment where children are required to speak Irish to teachers, to the principal and also to each other. However, this language rule only applies to pupils. It is therefore interesting to know whether or not parents make an effort to use as much Irish as they can when in contact with the gaelscoil. Question 12 proposes four different categories of language possibilities that parents would use with the main people they meet at the school on a daily basis: *Irish only*, *more Irish than English*, *more English than Irish* and *English only*. Question 13 brings additional

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137 See Parents' Questionnaire in Appendix, question 11, p. 2 (Hickey, 1997).

138 See questions 23, 24, 25 and 28 pp. 110-111 (Ó Donnagáin, 1995).

139 See Chapter, Section 1.5.3 Immersion education in Irish-medium schools.

data on the reasons why respondents would not use *Irish only* or *more Irish than English* with the various categories of people met at the school. Although it was anticipated that most people would answer that it is because their Irish is not good enough, others fluent in the language may not use much Irish with some people for other reasons. Therefore, the different reasons proposed target parents with low proficiency in Irish (i.e. *your Irish is not good enough, you do not have Irish at all, you do not like speaking Irish*) or little self-confidence (i.e. *you do not feel confident using [Irish] with people who are fluent in Irish*), and also parents with a very good level of Irish who would not be able to use Irish with other parents due, for example, to the difference in ability to converse in Irish (i.e. *it is easier to switch to English to carry on complex conversations or Irish only leads to superficial conversations*).

The statements that respondents are asked to consider in question 14 are mainly based on input from the four mothers who participated in the informal pilot interviews; but they also partly rely on general opinions mostly found in newspapers. They deal with the quality of Irish taught in gaelscoileanna and spoken by children, the future of the language and with gaelscoil families. This question was designed to record respondents' views on topics that affect them directly. For instance, it is interesting to survey parents who are part of the Irish-medium school environment on the question of social elitism that is sometimes associated with gaelscoileanna (McWilliams, 2005; Carey, 2008; Holmquist, 2008).

## 2. Irish at home

Respondents had a minimum of five questions and a maximum of nine questions to answer in this section, depending on whether they use Irish at home at all (Q15 and Q16), or whether they have a child in sixth class (Q17), or on how much Irish they understand and speak (Q21). This section enquired about:

- the use that is made at home of Irish: who speaks Irish, in which situation and how often?

*Q15: How often is Irish used between self and spouse/partner; self and child(ren); spouse/partner and child(ren); children with each other?*

*Q16: When and how often is Irish used by either parent with the child? (list of 8 situations)*

- parents' commitment to using and learning Irish:

*Q17: If you were to compare your level of commitment to using Irish with your child when he/she was in Senior Infants with now, would you say there has been no change, an increase or a decrease?*

*Q22: Have you ever attended adult Irish classes?*

- the encouragement parents give their child to use it at home:

*Q18: Do you encourage your child to use more Irish at home through different activities?*

*Q19: If your child speaks Irish, do you praise him/her, answer in Irish or answer in English?*

*Q23: What kind of attitude towards Irish do you try to encourage in your child? (3 statements)*

- respondents' and their partner/spouse's self-assessment of their ability in Irish and the reason(s) for their low level of Irish, if so reported:

*Q20: Rate your ability to speak and understand Irish (8 items)*

*Q21: If you know only "a few simple sentences" in Irish is this because you have no interest in learning more (...), you did not have the opportunity to learn it well, you do not have the courage to learn Irish or other reason?*

Questions 15 and 16 address parents who use some Irish at home. Respondents who do not speak Irish at home are asked to proceed to the following question. Questions 15 and 16 deal with the frequency of use of Irish with certain members of the family as well as in specific daily situations. The different categories proposed are found in the 1976 survey (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979, Appendix C, p.11) as well as in the more recent parents' survey in a naónra setting (Hickey, 1997, Appendix p.7). An additional category *other* enables respondents to add to the list of contexts in which Irish is used at home. With regard to the frequency terminology used in both questions the model used in the three national surveys of 1973, 1983 and 1983 (CLÁR, 1975, Ó Riagáin, 1984, Ó Riagáin, 1994, p. 13, Table 14) also present in Harris et al.'s survey (2006, p. 139) was preferred over the terminology used in the

1976 parents' survey<sup>140</sup> or Hickey's parents' questionnaire<sup>141</sup>. The use of a five-level frequency rating was thought to be more suitable than a four-level one such as in Hickey's questionnaire. The first category of the present questionnaire reads *most of the time* rather than *always/all the time* for the environment in which the respondents live is set in an English-speaking area. Therefore, respondents are likely to use both languages rather than Irish only. It was also thought that it would be more accurate to insert the category *seldom* between *occasionally* and *never*—absent from Hickey's survey—as there can be a gap between these two notions of frequency.

Question 17 addresses parents with a child in Sixth Class only and is an attempt to assess their commitment to using Irish with their child. The question focuses on the change—or lack thereof—that occurred between the time the child started school and the time when he/she was preparing for secondary school. Maguire's study (1991) showed that parents with a child in an Irish-medium primary school are highly motivated and committed to using and learning the language to assist and encourage their child. However, the context of Maguire's study differs from the present situation as it was set in Northern Ireland where Irish is a minority language that was not at the time officially recognised. It also had strong political significance and different motivations were recorded as a result. That study focuses on the first Irish-medium primary school established in Belfast in 1971. Parents themselves were the initiators of the establishment of the school as opposed to the focus group of the present study. Although the Department of Education in Northern Ireland started to grant-aid to a few schools to provide Irish-medium education from 1984, it is only in 1998 that the Northern Irish Department of Education had a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education (Steele, 2003). This contrasts with state support that has been available in the Republic of Ireland since the beginning of the parent-led initiative to open Irish-medium schools. In the case of Irish-medium schools in the Republic of Ireland, parents are likely to support their child in their education and commit themselves to learning or even using some Irish at the beginning of primary schooling. The hypothesis of personal commitment is put to the test in question 22 where respondents are asked whether they had ever attended adult Irish classes either before or after their child's enrolment in the *gaelscoil*. It is nonetheless difficult to know whether or not the same level of motivation and commitment remain throughout all the years of their child's primary education. Children are likely to get more confident and independent as they become more fluent in Irish. Parents may therefore adjust differently according to their child's educational achievement. Question 17 explores the evolution of respondents' commitment to Irish—*no change, increase, decrease*—and enquires about the reasons why it

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140 See Appendix C, question 36, p. 11 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Glasáin, 1979): All the time, Most of the time, 50/50, Some of the time, Odd phrases, Never.

141 See Appendix p.7, question 28 (Hickey, 1997): Always, Regularly, Sometimes, Never, Not applicable or Always/Mostly, Regularly, Occasionally, Never.

changed—or not. The added comments may therefore help understand more about parents' commitment to using Irish during an approximate eight-year period, from Infants Classes to Sixth Class.

Questions 18 and 19 look at a different way of conveying positive attitudes to the child through encouragement and praise (Harris et al., 2006). Positive parental encouragement to learn Irish is very important as it influences pupils' attitudes towards Irish (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 143). These two questions are asked regardless of respondents' level of Irish. Rather, they concentrate on the possibilities the child is given to use Irish outside the school environment. This is a different way to survey parents' attitudes towards the language by relying on their overt behaviour towards Irish and by enquiring about the role the language is allowed to play at home in the child's daily routine.

Question 20 was designed to be similar to Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin's (1979) question on ability to speak and understand Irish<sup>142</sup>. It is based on respondents' self-report of their level of Irish and the use of Irish they make at home as well as outside the home. The different categories referring to a level of Irish—*no Irish, the odd word, a few simple sentences, parts of conversations, most conversations, native speaker ability, and don't know*—were replicated from different language surveys (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979, Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994). The category *not applicable/never learnt Irish in school* was added after the pilot questionnaires were analysed as a significant number of non-Irish nationals were reported: 4 respondents out of 28 reported that they or their spouse/partner were not Irish and therefore never learnt the language in school.

This question has a dual purpose as it asks for the level of Irish each parent has in speaking and understanding the language and also assesses the progress made in understanding and speaking Irish—if any was made—from before the child's enrolment in the gaelscoil to the present day. Contrary to the question found in the 1976 survey (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979, Appendix C, p. 64) question 20 does not go back in time and ask for the respondents' ability to understand and speak Irish before they met with their spouse/partner. Rather, it concentrates on the level of Irish respondents had prior to enrolment so as to compare with their level of Irish after their child's first year in school. For respondents with a child in Sixth Class, the level of Irish they had when their child started school (Infants Class) can be compared with the level achieved as their child reaches the end of primary schooling. Because of its complexity question 20 takes the form of a table with boxes to tick. This layout simplifies the reading for respondents and shortens the number of questions that would otherwise be required.

A further question (Q21) was added for those without a good command of the language—i.e. for respondents describing themselves as speaking *no Irish* or who would only know *the odd word* or *a few simple sentences*. Question 21 gives respondents the opportunity to elaborate on their lack of

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142 See Appendix C, question 64, p. 19 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979).



proficiency in Irish either by ticking the response categories or by giving another reason. The data obtained from this question may help differentiate between those who did not have the chance to learn Irish well and those who are not really interested in the language itself per se. The different reasons given can reveal different attitudes towards the Irish language.

Question 22, as mentioned above, assesses respondents' commitment to the language and more particularly their commitment to learning Irish. The combination of closed and open-ended question makes it possible to differentiate between respondents who would attend classes to “brush up” on their Irish and those who would look for more in-depth classes to learn Irish from scratch. The added comments can also make the distinction between respondents who did not attend classes because they had already good skills in Irish and those who had no interest in learning the language; although results show that this distinction is too reductive. Other reasons given by respondents for not attending classes included lack of time or unsuitability of the time Irish classes were held, which makes it difficult to evaluate respondents' commitment to learning Irish in such a situation.

Finally, question 23 focuses on the attitude towards Irish that respondents try to encourage in their child. This question replicated questions from two surveys on Irish in English-medium primary schools, *gaelscoileanna* and *Gaeltacht* primary schools (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, pp. 142-144; Harris, 2006, p. 145).

### 3. Irish and your social life

This section comprises four questions and deals with the use of Irish outside the school and the home. It enquired about

- the use made of Irish with other families from the school:

*Q24: Do you socialise through Irish with families involved in the gaelscoil?*

*Q25: What language is used when you meet these families?*

- The use made of Irish at cultural events:

*Q26: Do you go to any activities where Irish is used? (list of 6 items)*

- the child's use of Irish in leisure activities outside school hours:

*Q27: Does your child participate in activities through Irish outside both the school premises and the home?*

Question 24 looks at the possibility parents have of establishing a relationship with other families from the school through the medium of Irish. As Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin's (1979) study shows social networks through the medium of Irish can be created or facilitated by the gaelscoil. Respondents are therefore required to give the frequency with which they socialise with other families through Irish. The same five-level frequency scale is used throughout the survey—namely *most of the time, often, occasionally, seldom, never*. Respondents who do not converse through Irish with other parents are asked to proceed to the following question. Respondents who use Irish with their peers are also asked to give an estimate number of families they socialise with through Irish. Question 25 goes into more detail as it asks respondents to specify how much Irish is used when they converse with other families—*Irish only, more Irish than English, more English than Irish*. The purpose of both questions is to try to find out whether or not an Irish-speaking or at least bilingual community exists because of the school or is facilitated by the school. It also helps identify respondents committed to using some Irish outside the home in a social context.

Question 26, replicated from the 1993 ITÉ survey (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, p. 16, Table 19), assesses how often respondents attend events or frequent clubs where at least some Irish is used. This question gives the opportunity to further enquire about attitudes and commitment to Irish by identifying respondents who are exposed to the Irish language in contexts of leisure and entertainment. Yet, the answers given depend on the availability of such activities/events. Furthermore, the replication of this question made possible a statistical comparison between the gaelscoil cohort and the general public in relation to their attendance at or participation in Irish-medium events and activities.

Question 27 concentrates on the child's social life through Irish. Respondents are asked to name the various activities the child attends through Irish outside school hours. This question may not, however, truly reflect respondents' commitment to Irish depending on the cost and the availability of such activities in their living area. It nonetheless gives some information on the use some families make of Irish-medium sports and leisure.

#### 4. General attitudes towards the Irish language

Apart from question 30 and 37, the remaining 8 questions were replicated from the 1993 and 2008/09 national surveys (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009) so as to facilitate a comparison between the attitudinal trend of the general public and the gaelscoil parents. They take the form of a matrix question, which is a method of organising a large set of rating questions that have the same response categories (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000, p. 237). Question 30 is an open-ended question which aims to clarify the difference that might exist between the respondents' attitudes to Irish while in school and their attitudes now:

*Q30: If there has been a change in the way you feel about Irish between your school years and now, please give reasons why.*

As for question 37 it focuses on attitudes towards bilingualism in the Republic of Ireland. The corresponding statements come mostly from Baker's (1992, p.141) survey of teenagers' attitudes towards bilingualism in Wales.

Questions 28 and 29 were replicated from Mac Gréil and Rhatigan's (2009) language surveys (p. 22, Table 24) and focus on the evolution of attitudes towards Irish from respondents' school days when Irish was taught as a compulsory subject to adulthood where Irish has been freely chosen to be the medium of education of their child. Attitudes are likely to change due to the difference in age, life experience, and so on. Although it is very important to see how attitudes can change in the same individual it is also useful to understand the cause of such change if indeed there has been any. This element was missing from Mac Gréil and Rhatigan's (2009) study but was included in the present study through the use of an open-ended question. Question 30 asks respondents who would have reported different attitudes towards Irish in question 28 (attitude to Irish when in school) and in question 29 (current attitude to Irish) to give the reasons why such change came about. The qualitative data obtained from this question has been sorted out by categories, which helps shed some light on change in attitudes towards Irish among participating parents whose child attend a gaelscoil.

The whole section on general attitudes which mostly includes questions replicated from the national survey of 1993 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994) requires, for the most part, ticking the box *agree*, *no opinion* or *disagree* for each statement that is given. These categories may seem simplistic and limited in that there is no intermediate choice or nuances between *agree* and *no opinion* which is rather neutral, and between *disagree* and *no opinion*. Other surveys sometimes include response categories such as *strongly in favour*, *somewhat in favour* or *strongly opposed* and *somewhat opposed*—as used in question 28, 29 and 43. Although they provide the respondents with more choice and accuracy in their answers, the response categories used in the current study allow direct

comparison with the three national surveys. Another disadvantage to replicating statements from the national surveys is that they are based on the 1973 CILAR survey which was set in a different context. As a result a few statements may appear dated—for instance, *the Irish language cannot be made suitable for business and science or being in the European Union*<sup>143</sup> *contributes greatly to the loss of Irish* (Q36). It is nonetheless interesting to see how attitudes have evolved especially since Irish was made an official working language of the European Union in January 2007.

Questions 31 and 32 were replicated from the 1993 ITÉ survey (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 9, Table 7 & p. 23 Table 25). They both differ from the other questions as they ask the respondents to imagine themselves in a different linguistic situation from today's reality. Their responses must, however, be regarded as an aspiration for the language. Although the idea of an equally bilingual Ireland is hypothetical (Q31) respondents can freely express their feelings without having to think of their actual level of Irish. There is no contradiction in saying they would prefer Irish as the sole language of Ireland while they reported poor skills in Irish. Similarly, question 32 deals with respondents' aspiration for Irish language policy in a hypothetical Ireland devoid of core Irish-speaking areas (Gaeltacht). Although these situations are different from the current linguistic situation in Ireland, responses can still shed some light on attitudes and support towards the Irish language.

Question 33 differs from the other questions as it refers to respondents' personal commitment to using Irish (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 10, Table 9). With the exception of the following statement: *I feel sorry for people who cannot speak both English and Irish* found in question 37e, these are the only statements in which the personal pronoun “I” is used. While the other attitude statements deal with facts or situations for which respondents are not responsible—for instance government's promotion of the language, Gaeltacht dying out, etc.—this section measures respondents' personal input to the support for the Irish language. However, it implies that respondents are able to converse in Irish. That is why two additional statements from Baker's survey (1992, p. 141)—*I like hearing Irish* and *I like speaking Irish*—were included in this question so that respondents who are not fluent in Irish could express themselves on the matter of interpersonal commitment to Irish.

Questions 34 to 37 use general statements and address different issues.<sup>144</sup> Question 34 refers to Irish as a symbol of Irish identity and culture (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 19, Table 21).

One statement was not included from the original national survey: “Using the Irish language would make Ireland more independent of England”. This statement seemed irrelevant as Ireland has firmly established its economic and political independence over the past 35 years. While Ireland is closely

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143 The original survey used the term EEC/EC. It has been replaced by *the European Union*.

144 See Chapter Two on the literature review of Irish language attitude surveys, Section 2.5.2 General Irish language attitude surveys 1973-2007/08.

linked to England for trade for example, it is also dependent on and influenced by other countries at different levels such as the media or pop culture. Question 35 deals with the government's promotion of Irish, specifically funding, provision of Irish-medium schools, support for voluntary language organisations, etc., (ibid., p. 20, Table 22). Question 36 addresses the issue of the viability of the language (ibid., p. 21, Table 23). The statements *j* (*Irish is less useful than any continental language*) and *k* (*it is more important that a child at school learn Irish than a foreign language*) belong to a different section in the original survey (ibid., p. 37, Table 43) but were included in this question since they also deal with the viability of Irish in comparison with foreign languages. The last statement *Irish is difficult to learn* was replicated from Baker's survey of young teenagers' attitudes to bilingualism in Wales (1992, p. 141) and relates to the perceived difficulty of learning the Irish language. It is linked to a certain extent to the viability of Irish. If most respondents agree that Irish is a difficult language to learn it is unlikely that its future is secure as a majority of people will feel discouraged and will not try to learn Irish. Question 37 concentrates on attitudes towards bilingualism. These statements were replicated from a 25-item-attitude-to-bilingualism scale (Baker, 1992, p. 80) and were designed so that they would be impartial towards both languages. Instead of setting one language against the other—e.g. *Irish is for the elite*—these statements imply the idea of “co-existence” between the two languages. Furthermore, these statements avoid any suggestion of a preference for one language over the other that could lead to separatism—e.g. “all people in Ireland should speak Irish and English”.

## 5. Personal information

Respondents were required to answer another 14 questions about their gender (Q38), their age (Q39), their educational qualifications (Q40 and Q41), the role of the Irish language in their childhood (Q42, Q43, Q44) and in their present daily life (Q45 and Q48), their personal circumstances (Q46), their occupation (Q47) as well as the distance of the gaelscoil from their home (Q49 and Q50).

Q42: Was Irish spoken in your home when you were a child?

Q43: If your answer is never, were your parents strongly in favour of Irish, somewhat in favour, no particular feeling, somewhat opposed or strongly opposed?

Q44: Who spoke Irish in the home?

Q45: Is there currently another language spoken in the house apart from English and Irish?

Q48: Do you use Irish in your job? (list of 6 items)

These are closed-ended questions that can be answered rapidly. The last question is an open-ended question that is optional and allows respondents to express their own feelings and thoughts on the issues of the Irish language and Irish-medium schools:

Q51: Are there any important issues you would like to raise that you feel have not been covered in this survey?

The section on personal information therefore gathers useful information about both the respondents and their spouse/partner, which is essential to create age groups, socio-economic groups, etc., for the statistical analysis and interpretation of the data (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000). In fact, research on attitudes to a specific language is commonly concerned with differences between groups of individuals that are defined according to criteria such as gender, age, language background, etc., (Baker, 1992, p. 30).

The current study presents data on respondents' gender, marital status, age, social class and education qualifications. Question 41 focuses on the educational background of the respondents and differentiates between those who did not get an education through the medium of Irish and those who had at some stage an education through Irish either in pre-school, at primary, secondary and/or third level. Questions 42, 43 and 44 concentrate on the use of Irish and on attitudes to Irish at home when the respondents and their spouses/partners were children. Question 42 is a filter question that examines home use of Irish. It is designed the same way as question 24 that is to say with a five-level frequency scale ranging from most of the time to never. Questions 43 and 44 are contingency questions. While question 43 addresses the subgroup who reported no use of Irish at home while they were children, question 44 is aimed at the subgroup who did report some use of Irish. Question 43 asks the first subgroup to report their parents' general attitude towards Irish. It is very similar to

questions 28 and 29 giving a five-level scale of attitude degrees from *strongly in favour* to *strongly opposed*. The second subgroup is asked to specify who used Irish at home (Q44). The response categories in question 44 concern potential interlocutors within the family structure. The information collected from these questions can help organise groups in which the respondents were brought up in contact with Irish or according to which respondents were brought up in an environment with positive/neutral/negative attitudes towards the Irish language.

The last few questions gather complementary information. Question 45 explores the existence of multilingual homes where the use of a third language is encouraged along with English and Irish. Question 46 enquires about the number of children in the family, the type of school they attend (Irish-medium or English-medium school) as well as the class they are in. Question 46 takes the form of a table as it seeks to elicit several pieces of information that would require more space if asked separately. An example of how to complete the table is given. The table facilitates the respondents' reading and understanding of the question. It also makes it easier to read responses as it clearly indicates whether or not respondents chose an Irish-medium education for all their children at all the different levels of education (pre-school, primary school, secondary school). Question 48 deals with the use of Irish at work as a way to assess respondents' use of Irish outside their child's education. The first two response categories measure the amount of Irish used for those who would use Irish regularly i.e. *more Irish than English* and *more English than Irish* whereas the following categories measure the frequency with which the Irish language is used i.e. *occasionally*, *seldom*, and *never*. The category *not applicable* mainly refers to people who are unemployed. Question 49 examines the time spent travelling to school (in minutes). This gives an idea on how far respondents need to travel to go to the gaelscoil as there are fewer Irish-medium schools available around Dublin than English-medium schools. Distance can be a discouraging factor for some depending on the school's location, or a bonus for others who live nearby and might never have considered an Irish-medium education for their child otherwise.



### **3.4 Research fieldwork: selection of schools, questionnaire administration and response rate**

This section first presents the various criteria used to select the participating schools and respondents for the study. It then moves on to the different steps that were necessary to conduct the study which include the pilot questionnaire, the amendments to the questionnaire, contacting the schools, distribution and collection of the questionnaires. Finally, a report is given on the response rate

In the school year 2008-2009 there were 31 Irish-medium primary schools in County Dublin.<sup>145</sup> However, due to the criteria for the selection of participants it was important to include schools which catered for education from Infant Class to Sixth Class.<sup>146</sup> As mentioned previously, this study focuses on parents whose child is in Senior Infant Class (second and last year of pre-primary education) and/or in Sixth Class (last year of primary education). Some of the schools in the Dublin Area were not established long enough to include Sixth Class. This is due to the fact that each new gaelscoil starts off with Infant Classes and gradually establishes higher classes as the pupils progress through primary education. Primary schools in Ireland usually have eight levels: two years of non-compulsory pre-primary school (Junior Infants and Senior Infants), first, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth class. Therefore, all the schools that opened after 2000 were ruled out for this study. This reduced the total number of schools to 27.

One school was selected for the pilot study that took place in June 2009. It was chosen mainly for practical reasons as it was located near the researcher's home at the time. The principal was contacted via telephone and it was agreed that the questionnaire would be distributed to parents of both Senior Infants and Sixth Class. The other 26 schools were contacted by post. A letter was sent to each of these schools outlining the study to the school principals to seek their consent to participate in the study.<sup>147</sup> Although the letters were sent late during the school term (end of June) they proved to be very helpful when schools were contacted again via telephone mid-September to solicit their participation. By July 2009 two school principals had declined the request due to the impossibility of accommodating the research study. The list of potential participating schools was reduced to 24.

It was originally thought that surveying parents from ten gaelscoileanna—that is to say a third of the total number in Co. Dublin—was a reasonable number to enable the study to be representative of the gaelscoileanna in Dublin. In order to get an accurate picture of the families involved with urban Irish-medium schools, it was necessary to embrace differences such as geographical location, size and date of foundation of the schools as well as social class of the area. These criteria helped with contacting the schools in an orderly manner from the most relevant schools to the least. The majority

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145 [www.gaelcoileanna.ie](http://www.gaelcoileanna.ie) / [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

146 See Appendix 4, Figure A4.1: Education System in Ireland.

147 See Appendix 10: Letter to School Principals, June 2009.

of the principals contacted via telephone agreed to take part in the study. Four schools were not able to participate due to whole school evaluation, the relocation of the school just a few weeks after the school year resumed and due to the unavailability of the principal at such a busy time of the year. One school principal declined consent as there was no Irish version of the questionnaire. The principal insisted on the provision of bilingual documents to the families involved in this long-established gaelscoil. Although it was originally thought that a bilingual version of the questionnaire would be provided the final version only included an English version. This was mainly due to the researcher's poor level of Irish and the limited budget available to cover the costs of translation.

The eleven schools—pilot school included—that were selected for the study give a comprehensive representation of urban gaelscoileanna in terms of date of foundation, geographical location, school size and social class:

**Figure 3.4: Selection of Schools by Foundation Date**

<i>Date of foundation</i> <sup>148</sup>		
long-established (pre-1980s <sup>149</sup> )	interim established (1980s)	recently-established (post-1990)
3	4	4

**Figure 3.5: Selection of Schools by Location**

<i>Geographical location</i>			
North Dublin	West Dublin	City centre and inner city <sup>150</sup>	South Dublin
3	3	3	2
<i>School size</i>			
One stream (a)		Two streams (b)	
8		3	

(a) school that has eight classes from Junior Infants to Sixth Class (see Appendix 4, Figure 4.1)

(b) school that has some or all of its classes duplicated as a result of demand and subsequent policy decision

<i>Estimated social class of area</i> <sup>151</sup>		
Upper/middle class	Socially mixed	Working class
1	6	4

148 See Appendix 11, Table A11.1: General Description of Participating Gaelscoileanna, September/October 2009.

149 Schools which opened in 1975 are part of the long-established group as they were part of the first gaelscoileanna in Dublin. Although they were classified differently in Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin's (1979) research study they are now over thirty years old.

150 This category includes the districts part of Dublin County Council that are the closest to the city centre. See map in Appendix 11, Figure A11.1.

151 Based on the information collected from the participating schools.

Each parent whose child was either in Senior Infant Class or in Sixth Class in September 2009 in the selected gaelscoileanna was potentially considered a respondent. Questionnaires were distributed to every child in Senior Infants and Sixth Class. Parents' participation was voluntary therefore it was not possible to know the number of actual participants before they returned the questionnaires to their school. The rationale for the selection of senior infants and sixth class parents is to give an overview of parents' language attitudes in the gaelscoil milieu. These two classes represent the early years and the end of primary schooling respectively. As Murphy's (2002) research study on parental involvement in early childhood education in an Irish-medium primary school seems to indicate, infant classes followed by Fifth and Sixth Classes are deemed the most important classes in the primary school sector (pp. 116-117). Twenty-four parents whose child was in Junior Infants were asked to rate classes in order of importance, which resulted in a majority of parents attributing the highest importance to infant classes and another significant proportion of parents highly valuing the final two years in primary school (ibid.).

From a different perspective, parents' attitudes and commitment to Irish may differ according to the class their child is in. Parents with a child just starting school may show more interest in Irish and active support than parents whose child is about to go to secondary school. Parents with a child in Sixth Class may feel they do not have to be as much committed as before seeing that their child is more confident and more fluent in Irish. Others may have chosen an English-medium secondary school for the following year therefore the emphasis on the Irish language may be less. On the other hand, some parents may have maintained a high level of interest in and commitment to Irish as they have more children following on in smaller classes. When all these elements are taken into account it seems that Senior Infants and Sixth Class are likely to embrace the various possible attitudes and commitments to Irish in the gaelscoil milieu. This study does not focus on the first year or on the last year of primary schooling only. Rather, it attempts to encompass all the attitudes found in the Irish-medium school environment. Because the fieldwork took place early during the school year (28<sup>th</sup> September: first day of distribution of the questionnaires-15<sup>th</sup> October: last day of collection) it was important to survey parents who were already familiar with the Irish-medium school but who were at the same time new to the Irish-medium experience. Parents whose child was in Junior Infants were therefore ruled out as they were thought, for the most part, to be new to the Irish-medium school system. On the other hand, it was also useful to survey parents whose child was in his/her last year of primary schooling so as to give a full picture of parents' experience of the gaelscoil. It must be noted that participating parents of a child in Senior Infants who had older children in the gaelscoil were included in the study. They were distinguished from participating parents of a child in Senior Infants

who had no older children attending an Irish-medium school ( $n=74$ ) when the data analysed related to parents' experience of Irish-medium education.

A few months before the questionnaire was distributed to the participating schools, a pilot study was conducted in one gaelscoil. The pilot questionnaire was distributed in May 2009 to 28 senior-infant pupils and 30 sixth-class pupils in the gaelscoil that has been coded G0. Respondents were given a week to complete the questionnaire. A total of 28 completed booklets were returned to the school: 10 in Senior Infants and 18 in Sixth Class. However, two families who returned one questionnaire each had both a child in Senior Infants and in Sixth Class. It was then decided to count only one questionnaire per family. The youngest child was ruled out as the original idea to include senior infants was to represent parents who were new to the gaelscoil experience. In addition, two pupils in senior infants were ruled out as they had a sibling in the same class. It was unnecessary to count twice the same respondent. After taking these facts into consideration the overall response rate was 52.8% with 43.5% of returned questionnaire in Senior Infants and 60% in Sixth Class.

Overall, the majority of respondents answered all the questions. A small number—about four respondents—omitted ticking the boxes for their spouse/partner. This may be due to the absence of the spouse/partner or that the spouse/partner could not be consulted at the time when the survey was completed. Another four respondents skipped a few questions. This probably depends on various factors such as possible distraction, lack of time, lack of interest in the question, etc. Finally, two respondents omitted answering two to three whole pages in the middle of the booklet. However, their surveys were taken into account for the statistical analysis.

Very few critical comments were made regarding the questionnaire itself. One respondent praised the quality of the survey while another expressed her discomfort with certain terms (underlined below) used in some of the statements of the section “General attitudes towards the Irish language”. She thought that the following statements were “loaded” (her expression):

**Figure 3.6: Critical Comments.**

34a.	no <u>real</u> Irish person can be against the revival of Irish
<i>She added “don’t like this word” and as a result did not tick the corresponding response box—agree, no opinion or disagree.</i>	
37e.	I <u>feel sorry</u> for people who cannot speak both English and Irish
37f.	people <u>know more</u> if they speak both English and Irish
37h.	all people in Ireland <u>should</u> speak Irish and English

Despite these remarks none of the above were altered as they replicated questions from other attitude surveys (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 19, Table 21; Baker, 1992, p. 80). Had one of them been altered the comparison of results between the present survey and the national surveys would be irrelevant as the statements would no longer be the same.

Overall respondents did not encounter any major problems in completing the questionnaire as the majority of questionnaires were returned fully completed. The consent form was signed by most respondents (26 out of 28). However, 15 of them did not keep their copy and left it attached to the booklet. Each respondent was asked to date and sign two copies of the consent form appearing on the same page of the booklet.<sup>152</sup> They were expected to cut out the second half of the page following the discontinuous line so that they could keep a copy of the declaration of consent for their own record. A solution to this problem would have been to provide a pre-cut page that respondents would simply need to tear off. However, this would have been costly. In addition, this study does not involve vulnerable participants nor is it harmful to the respondents,<sup>153</sup> therefore the signature of the consent form is not a criterion to include or exclude participants.

The first modification made to the questionnaire was to remove the second half of the instructions originally given in question 1 (underlined): *tick all that apply, circle the most important reason*. Although this would have revealed an interesting piece of information, it appeared to be too confusing for respondents. Just over half of the respondents circled the most important reason for choosing a gaelscoil. Question 1 asked respondents to give all the reasons for their child's enrolment in a gaelscoil

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<sup>152</sup> See Appendix 9.

<sup>153</sup> Vulnerable Groups are categories of people who are not legally able to provide informed consent due to age or incompetence—this includes children, people with a mental impairment, people with a language difficulty, incarcerated people, etc. Consent must therefore be obtained from a legally authorised person. (Human Research Ethics Committee, 2008c).

by ticking boxes. By the time they finished ticking the different boxes they may have forgotten about the second instruction. However, it was thought that the lack of this information would be compensated for by questions 2, 3 and 4 in which respondents were asked to elaborate on the basis of their decision and the importance of having their child educated through the medium of Irish. The second question that needed to be altered was question 9 where respondents were asked their opinion about the right time to introduce the teaching of English in Infant Classes—*the first term of Junior Infants, the second term of Junior Infants, the first term of Senior Infants, the second term of Senior Infants*. Three respondents did not feel the proposed categories represented their opinion as they annotated the following comments: “don’t know”, “not sure” and “not qualified to say”. Therefore, a fifth category *don't know* was added.

Similarly, another category was added to the table in question 20 where respondents are asked to self-assess their ability to understand and speak Irish. This category is entitled *not applicable/never learnt Irish in school*. This makes it possible to differentiate between respondents who have *no Irish* because they did not have the opportunity to learn it well or because they have no interest in it and respondents who are either foreigners or were educated outside the Republic of Ireland and therefore never learnt the Irish language at school. Five respondents reported that they or their spouse/partner had *no Irish*. However, due to other information given in different questions it was found that four of them had *no Irish* because they were foreign nationals. Only one parent had been educated in Ireland and was reported to speak *no Irish*. Question 20 was therefore altered to reflect the various reasons why respondents had no knowledge of Irish. Question 28 which focuses on attitudes to Irish while at school, did not have a *not applicable* category, which turned out to be a problem for those who never learnt Irish in school. Therefore, the new version of the questionnaire contains a *not applicable* category. Similarly a *not applicable* category was added to question 43 to cater for non-nationals. This question deals with the attitude of the respondent's parents towards Irish. The last modification concerns question 46. The layout of the question was changed into a table to make it easier to read and complete for the respondent but also to make it easier to transfer the information to the electronic database. The previous version was the following:

**Figure 3.7: Modification of Question 46**

46. Do you have any other children?

a. no ☐ (proceed to question 49)

b. yes ☐

please, specify which class they are in and tick whether they attend an Irish-medium school or English-medium school:

child 1: class: \_\_\_\_\_ Irish-medium school ☐ English-medium school ☐

child 2: class: \_\_\_\_\_ Irish-medium school ☐ English-medium school ☐

child 3: class: \_\_\_\_\_ Irish-medium school ☐ English-medium school ☐

child 4: class: \_\_\_\_\_ Irish-medium school ☐ English-medium school ☐

When giving the name of the class/year of their other children a few respondents forgot to specify if the children were in primary or secondary level. Others omitted either to give the name of the class or to tick the box of the medium through which their children were educated in school. The new question requires the name of the class/year, ticks in the cell *primary/ secondary* and in the cell *Irish/ English* for the medium of education.

The pilot questionnaire was collected and analysed in early June 2009. As mentioned above, respondents who participated in the pilot study did not seem to have any difficulties understanding the questions or problems with completing the questionnaire. Although a few changes were made, there was no major alteration to the survey. As mentioned earlier, subsequent to the pilot study, a letter of information<sup>154</sup> was sent to 26 gaelscoileanna located in county Dublin at the end of June. This letter was addressed to the principals of each school and explained the purpose of the research. It also requested an interview with the principal so as to know more about the school itself (ethos, enrolment policy, number of pupils enrolled, etc.), the permission to distribute the questionnaire to parents of senior infants and sixth class pupils at the principal's convenience and the permission to interview two teachers so as to obtain another perspective on parents' attitudes towards Irish. Only two schools out of 26 gave a negative response. The remaining 24 gaelscoileanna were reviewed according to their geographical location, their size<sup>155</sup>, an estimation of the social background of the area in which they

<sup>154</sup> See Appendix 10: Letter to School Principals.

<sup>155</sup> Information obtained from the Department of Education for the year 2008-2009.

were located, as well as their date of establishment so as to represent a diversity of schools. A total of 10 schools were selected to participate in the study. The exact number of questionnaire booklets required for the study fieldwork was only known towards the end of September after talking to all the principals by phone. However, it was originally estimated that there would be around 60 pupils per school—a maximum of 30 pupils in Senior Infants and 30 pupils in Sixth Class—hence the need for approximately 600 booklets. One booklet was given per child. But in some cases it meant that two booklets were given to the same family as they had several children in the targeted classes. But as explained later, only one booklet was validated, that being the booklet returned by the sixth class child.

The distribution of the surveys began as soon as the school principals had agreed to take part in the study and the booklets had been printed. Two days were necessary for the distribution of the questionnaires because of the travelling distance between all of the selected schools—which are scattered around the county of Dublin—and due to the restriction of their opening times—from 9 am to 2.30 pm. One school out of the 10 received the questionnaire a week after the others as the school principal's decision to take part in the study was delayed. Although the terms of distribution were not always discussed with the principals, most principals entrusted the teachers of Senior Infants and Sixth Class with giving each pupil a booklet. Some teachers even added a note to encourage parents to return the questionnaires. One principal personally insisted on returning the booklet completed or not. Overall, school principals were very helpful and tried to seek parents' participation. Respondents were given between eight and nine days to complete the questionnaire. Similar to the time of distribution, two days were necessary to collect the questionnaires from the schools. The questionnaires from the tenth school were collected a week after the others so that respondents were left with the same amount of time to complete the surveys. Additional information on enrolment criteria was sought in each school. Nine schools provided a copy of their enrolment policy.<sup>156</sup>

A total of 668 booklets were distributed across the eleven participating schools—pilot school included—while 223 completed questionnaires were returned to the schools. It must be noted that due to the sample size this study remains limited in terms of generalisation to other parents from other gael scoileanna. The overall response rate to the parents' questionnaire was 34.5% with a 36.3% response in Senior Infants and 32% in Sixth Class. Although scientists do not agree on a standard for a minimum response rate, the response rate for self-administered questionnaires is typically between 20% and 40% (Frankfort-Nachimias & Nachimias, 2000, pp. 207 & 213). The response rate varies from one school to the other from as low as 12.2% and as high as 56.4%. Yet, it is difficult to account for such a gap between each school as different factors may have influenced the results—i.e. parents'

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156 See Appendix 11, Table A11.2.



willingness to complete the questionnaire, parents' interest in completing the questionnaire, teachers' and principals' availability as well as involvement in and commitment to the distribution and collection process, etc. The tables below give more details on the initial number of targeted parents per school and the actual number of parents who returned the questionnaire. For confidentiality reasons each school has been given a code which has been chosen randomly.<sup>157</sup> The pilot school was given the code G0 while the other schools were coded G1, G2, G3, etc.

The number of pupils per class does not necessarily correspond to the number of potential participants. There were a few cases where some pupils had a sibling in the same class or in the other class targeted for this study. However, most respondents with either two children in the same class or one child in each class returned only one booklet. It was decided that each respondent would be represented only once in the study. Consequently, when two siblings were found in the same class one pupil was taken out of the total number of pupils in the corresponding class. As for siblings in both Senior Infant Class and Sixth Class, the younger child was ruled out, which means that the total number of pupils in senior infants was decreased accordingly. The information on siblings was based on question 46 where respondents were asked whether they had other children. If they did, they were required to put the type of school they attended—English or Irish-medium school—and to write the class they were in at the time of the survey. It is very important to differentiate between the total number of pupils per class in each school and the total number of pupils considered valid for this study. The number of pupils per class given by the schools corresponds to the number of questionnaires distributed to the gaelscoileanna. However, this number sometimes includes the same respondents twice. As each respondent was counted only once it is important to readjust the total number of potential participants according to the information obtained from the returned questionnaires. The difference in the number of questionnaires distributed and the number of eligible respondents is illustrated in Table 3.1 below.

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<sup>157</sup> While a general description of participating schools is given in Appendix 11, Table A11.1, the names of the schools are coded so as to guarantee respondents' anonymity. Note that the list of schools was made available to the examiners.

**Table 3.1: Total Number of Eligible Respondents per Class in Each School**

Gaelscoil code	Senior Infants		Sixth Class		Senior Infants & Sixth Class	
	Total number of questionnaires distributed	Total number of eligible respondents	Total number of questionnaires distributed	Total number of eligible respondents	Total number of questionnaires distributed	Total number of eligible respondents
G0	28	23	30	30	58	53
G1	60	56	43	42	103	98
G2	29	29	22	22	51	51
G3	25	25	16	16	41	41
G4	51	49	21	21	72	70
G5	24	23	18	18	42	41
G6	30	29	30	30	60	59
G7	62	60	32	32	94	92
G8	20	20	8	8	28	28
G9	32	29	30	30	62	59
G10	31	29	26	26	57	55
Total	392	372	276	275	668	647

Table 3.1 shows that 20 pupils out of 392 were ruled out in Senior Infants as they had either a sibling in the same class or in Sixth Class. Only one pupil in Sixth Class had a sibling in the same class out of 276 pupils. Therefore, despite 668 booklets were distributed in the schools only 647 families were eligible participants in the study. As mentioned earlier on, it was difficult to predict how many parents would take part in the study. Once in possession of the questionnaire, parents were free to decide whether they would bring the questionnaire completed back to the school or not. This table also reveals that there is a larger number of senior infants than sixth class pupils. In the case of three schools (G1, G4 and G7) they have become two-stream in the past few years. However, it has not been long enough to open two Sixth Classes as the number of pupils has only started increasing from the smaller classes upwards. Higher classes open gradually depending on the demand and whether or not the number of pupils from infant classes remains constant.

**Table 3.2: Return Response per Class in Each School**

Gaelscoil code	Senior Infants		Sixth Class		Senior Infants & Sixth Class	
	Total number of eligible respondents	Total number of questionnaires returned	Total number of eligible respondents	Total number of questionnaires returned	Total number of eligible respondents	Total number of questionnaires returned
G0	23	10	30	18	53	28
G1	56	25	42	24	98	49
G2	29	6	22	3	51	9
G3	25	12	16	2	41	14
G4	49	13	21	10	70	23
G5	23	5	18	-	41	5
G6	29	13	30	5	59	18
G7	60	17	32	1	92	18
G8	20	5	8	-	28	5
G9	29	12	30	11	59	23
G10	29	17	26	14	55	31
Total	372	135	275	88	647	223

Table 3.2 shows that the response return across the eleven participating schools was uneven. Two schools (G5 and G8) got no returns from sixth class parents and one of them got only one questionnaire back out of 32 (G7). Despite the difference in sizes between some of the schools the gap between return response rates still prevails from one school to another.

**Table 3.3: Response Rate per Class in Each School**

Gaelscoil code	Total of questionnaires returned in Senior Infants %	Total of questionnaires returned in Sixth Class %	Total of questionnaires returned per school %
G0	43.5	60	<u>52.8</u>
G1	44.6	57.1	<u>50</u>
G2	20.7	13.6	17.6
G3	48	12.5	34.1
G4	26.5	47.6	32.9
G5	21.7	-	12.2
G6	44.8	16.7	30.5
G7	28.3	3.1	19.6
G8	25	-	17.9
G9	41.4	36.7	<u>39</u>
G10	58.6	53.8	<u>56.4</u>
Total	36.3	32	34.5

An average of 34.5% respondents completed the questionnaires. Only four schools got a return response higher than the average—see underscored results in the table above. Within the same school the response rate between senior infants and sixth class can differ dramatically, for example G3 has a 35.5% difference rate between Senior Infants and Sixth Class and G6 has a 28.1% difference rate. These difference rates are extremely high when compared with G10 which only has a difference rate of 4.8%. Although it is difficult to determine the reasons why the response rate from the pilot study was higher than the average response rate, it is assumed that meeting with the teachers concerned by the study before the distribution of the survey would have been helpful and may have increased the final response rate. Likewise, a reminder sent to parents and an extension of the deadline may have had resulted in a higher return of questionnaires in certain schools. It must be noted that although response rate does not seem to be related to the geographical area in which the school is located or the school was founded, the schools located in South Dublin<sup>158</sup> recorded the lowest response rate while the oldest schools recorded the highest response rate. The low return of questionnaires seems, however, to coincide with the estimated social class of the school area. With the exception of one

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158 See Figure A11.1: Dublin Districts in Appendix 11.

school, gaelscoileanna located in affluent to socially mixed areas had a higher response rate than gaelscoileanna located in more working class areas. As a result of the low return of questionnaires in working class areas, it appeared difficult to analyse the data according to the respondents' social class.

### **3.5 Follow-up interviews: aim, design, procedure and response rate**

The second part of the research fieldwork consisted of gathering qualitative data. The data collected during interviews come from two main sources:

- teachers involved in the distribution and collection of the questionnaires in Senior Infants and Sixth Class
- parents who completed the questionnaire and agreed to participate in a follow-up interview.

Questions in both sets of interviews were mostly pre-established open-ended questions.

The aim of the teachers' interviews was to get a different perspective on parents' attitudes to the Irish language. Teachers had both an insider's view since they belong to the Irish-medium education sector and are in regular contact with parents; and an outsider's view as they did not participate in the study as parents. All teachers were asked about parents' motivations for sending their child to an Irish-medium primary school, parents' understanding of and attitudes to immersion education and parents' commitment to and use of the Irish language.<sup>159</sup> Senior infant teachers were asked an extra question dealing with parental concerns about total immersion, while sixth class teachers were asked a further six questions about parents' motivations for sending their child to an Irish-medium secondary school as opposed to an English-medium secondary school, parental attitude change at the end of primary schooling and about the level of competence in Irish acquired by sixth class pupils.

Senior infant teachers and sixth class teachers from the ten participating schools<sup>160</sup> were approached for an interview. A letter was sent to all the school principals in January 2010 reminding them of the second stage of the fieldwork and requesting permission to interview both senior infants and sixth class teachers. Twenty-one teachers out of 24 took part in the interviews, that is 12 senior infant teachers out of 13 and 9 sixth class teachers out of 11. One school did not participate in teachers interviews. The interviews took place between January 2010 and April 2010. The duration of the interviews varied from interview to interview and ranged from 10 minutes to one hour. However, most interviews lasted about 20 minutes. While these interviews added a different angle to the study, teachers' views on parents' attitudes remained broad and should be regarded as an overview. Comparisons with parents' attitudes were made whenever possible although results can only be suggestive of an attitudinal pattern.

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<sup>159</sup> See teachers' interview questions in Appendix 12.

<sup>160</sup> The pilot school was not included in the second stage of the fieldwork as the questionnaire had been distributed during the previous school year. Respondents would not have had their child in Senior Infants and Sixth Class any longer.

Once the teachers' interviews were completed, parents who had completed the questionnaire and had expressed willingness in partaking in a follow-up interview were contacted.<sup>161</sup> The last question in the questionnaire asked respondents if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Of the 195 respondents who completed the questionnaire 81 agreed to a follow-up interview, which corresponds to 41.5%. These figures do not include the pilot school in spite of a good response rate for the follow-up interview—6 out of 10 in Senior Infants and 8 out of 18 in Sixth Class. This school was discarded for the follow-up interviews mainly because the study had been conducted the year before, which meant that the questionnaire was not fresh in parents' minds any longer. In addition, all sixth class pupils had moved to secondary school. Therefore the situation in which these respondents were in 2010 was likely to be different from the situation of the rest of the respondents. As for Senior Infants, the idea of surveying parents relatively new to the Irish-medium school system would have been slightly altered if interviewed a year later.

**Table 3.4: Total of Respondents Agreeing to Participate in a Follow-Up Interview**

Gaelscoil code	Volunteers <sup>162</sup> in	Volunteers in	Total
	Senior Infants	Sixth Class	
G1	10 (40%)	8 (33.3%)	18 (36.7%)
G2	2 (33.3%)	-	2 (33.3%)
G3	5 (41.7%)	-	5 (35.7%)
G4	7 (53.8%)	5 (50%)	12 (52.2%)
G5	2 (40%)	-	2 (40%)
G6	5 (38.5%)	1 (20%)	6 (33.3%)
G7	9 (52.9%)	1 (100%)	10 (55.5%)
G8	2 (40%)	-	2 (40%)
G9	4 (33.3%)	4 (36.4%)	8 (34.8%)

161 Contact was mostly made via telephone while a few interview participants were contacted via post and email, depending on the contact details they provided in the questionnaire.

162 For easier reading the respondents who agreed to participate in a follow-up interview will be referred to as "volunteers" in tables.

G10	7 (41.2%)	9 (64.3%)	16 (51.6%)
Total	53 (42.4%)	28 (40%)	81 (41.5%)

Overall, the rate of respondents agreeing to participate in a follow-up interview was positive with an average of 41.5%. Three schools got a positive return response of over half the total sample population (G4, G7 and G10). When comparing the response rate of the first part of the study involving the completion of the questionnaire with the response rate of the follow-up interviews, only school G10 had consistent response rates, with 56.4% of questionnaires returned and 51.6% of respondents agreeing to participate in a follow-up interview. Schools G4 and G7 got significantly lower results for the first part of the study—32.9% and 19.6% respectively—than for the follow-up part with 52.2% of respondents agreeing to participate in a follow-up interview in G4 and 55.5% in G7. G1 and G9 which had the higher results—along with G10—in the first part of the study with 50% and 39% of respondents respectively, did not perform as well in the second part with just over a third of respondents who agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. Whereas G2, G3 and G6 got similar results for the questionnaire and the follow-up interview parts, G5 and G8 showed a great interest in follow-up interviews—40% of respondents agreed—compared with the low response rate for completing the questionnaire—12.2% and 17.9% respectively.

To sum up, the response rate of the follow-up interviews was different from the response rate obtained from the questionnaire. Some of the schools that performed well in the first part of the study in terms of return response did not necessarily have a majority of respondents who were willing to participate in a follow-up interview whereas other schools that did not get many questionnaires back seemed to include more respondents willing to participate in both parts of the study.

Due to logistical reasons—availability of interview participants<sup>163</sup> and time restrictions—it was not possible to interview the 81 respondents who agreed to participate in the follow-up interviews. It was decided that 40 follow-up interviews would be conducted to include participants from each school. The selection of interview participants was based on the information given in the questionnaire in relation to their ability to speak Irish, social class, use of Irish at home and general interest in the Irish language. It was intended to include a diversity of backgrounds and, when possible,

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<sup>163</sup> Respondents who took part in the follow-up interviews are referred to as interview participants so that a distinction can be made between the questionnaire sample population and the follow-up interview sample population on the one hand, and between respondents who agreed to participate in the interviews (referred to as volunteers in the tables above) and respondents who actually took part in the interviews (interview participants).



to interview as many respondents of a senior infants class child as respondents of a sixth class child. The table below outlines the difficulties encountered when attempting to interview an equal number of respondents in each class and in each school. This is mainly due to the low response rate in some schools, especially among the sixth class cohort.

**Table 3.5: Distribution of Interview Participants per Class in Each School**

Gaelscoil code	Senior Infants	Sixth Class	Total
G1	4	4	8
G2	2	-	2
G3	3	-	3
G4	3	3	6
G5	1	-	1
G6	2	-	2
G7	4	1	5
G8	1	-	1
G9	4	3	7
G10	2	3	5
Total	26	14	40

Interview participants were contacted from mid-April through to the end of May 2010. Interviews were usually arranged one week beforehand at the interview participants' convenience. Follow-up interviews were conducted from the end of April to mid-June in either the interview participants' home or work place or in a quiet public space such as a public library or café. The interview duration ranged from 30 minutes to one hour. Each interview included a set of 19 open-ended questions. The questions were designed after results from the questionnaire had been analysed. The main issues covered relate to parental motivation for selecting a gaelscoil, attitudes to immersion education, use of Irish, encouragement and commitment to the Irish language, aspiration for the language, attitudes to state support and attitudes to the association between gaelscoil and elitism.<sup>164</sup>

Questions 1 to 3 are concerned with parental motivation for selecting an Irish-medium school. They focus on the importance given to Irish identity as a deciding factor after a significant number of respondents commented in the questionnaire on the strong association between the Irish language and Irish identity. Question 4 deals with the hypothetical situation in which Irish would be made optional at secondary level. Interview participants are asked to reconsider their choice of primary school assuming the non-compulsory status of the language in education. This question examines to a

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<sup>164</sup> See Figure A13.1: Parents' Follow-up Interview Questions in Appendix 13.

certain extent parental motivation, whether it is instrumental in which case an Irish-medium education is no longer needed for their child, or integrative which means that the non-compulsory element should not affect their choice of a gaelscoil. This question was designed after findings showed that almost all respondents had chosen a gaelscoil for both language and educational reasons, which made it difficult to distinguish between those with a genuine interest in the Irish language and those who chose a gaelscoil for practical reasons. Question 5 assesses parental attitudes to immersion education, and more particularly to the expansion of such education to all schools in Ireland. Question 6 addresses the issue of the introduction of literacy in the English language. Although most respondents did not have any concern about their child being educated through Irish, a significant number did not support early total immersion. Consistency and reasons behind this choice were subsequently sought in the follow-up interviews. Since very few respondents expressed concerns about their child's education being entirely through Irish, question 7 investigates the reasons why interview participants felt confident.

The follow-up interviews are also concerned with the impact of Irish-medium education on the gaelscoil families' daily lives, mainly in terms of attitudes to language use. Questions 8 and 9 explore interview participants' use of the Irish language on the school premises. Questions 10 and 11 deal with parental encouragement and attitudes to their child's participation in Irish-medium extra-curricular activities. Questions 12, 13 and 14 are an attempt to examine the message parents convey to their child regarding the role of the Irish language outside school. While questions 12 and 14 are about the attitudes participants think their child has towards Irish, question 13 enquires directly into interview participants' discourse on the role and status of Irish to their children. Question 15 examines interview participants' future commitment to Irish when their child attends secondary school while question 16 further investigates social networks through Irish among gaelscoil parents.

Question 17 was added to the follow-up interview questions due to the relatively recent media coverage on gaelscoileanna and its association with social and educational elitism (McWilliams, 2005; Carey, 2008; Holmquist, 2008). The qualitative nature of the interviews makes it possible to capture participants' views on public attitudes towards gaelscoil parents and Irish-medium schools. Finally, questions 18 and 19 further explore interview participants' reasons for aspiring to societal bilingualism and for preferring state support for the promotion of the Irish language.

Due to the voluntary element of the follow-up interviews, participants were self-selected. Although interview participants were carefully chosen according to numerous variables as described earlier, they were selected from a pool of respondents who had already voluntarily taken part in the questionnaire. It is likely that gaelscoil parents who returned the questionnaire already expressed an

interest in the Irish language. As findings show below (Section 5.4.2), interview participants were, for example, more favourably disposed to early total immersion than a significant number of respondents.

### **3.6 Data processing**

After the questionnaires were collected, all the data was coded and entered on Microsoft Office Access 2007 Database. The creation of the database required the expertise of a software engineer. Contact with the engineer was made after the questionnaire had been designed. The database was created to match the layout of the questionnaire. Due to the complex question configuration in the questionnaire some cross-tabulations and cross-references between subgroups and different variables were not conducted. The data in the database could have been retrieved more easily had it been stored in a different way; but this would have required modifications to the layout of the questionnaire.

Both sets of interviews were recorded on an MP3 player after participants were briefed on confidentiality and data protection. Interview participants were also given a consent form.<sup>165</sup> Two copies were signed by both the interview participant and the researcher, one of which was kept by the participants for their own records. The information letter and declaration form included with the questionnaire as well as the consent form signed before each follow-up interview took place were written according to the UCD Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) guidelines. Informed consent is a way to show respect for individuals' right to self-determination as well as shifting part of the responsibility to the participants for any negative experience during the research study (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000, p. 73). It is the researcher's duty to inform the participants about the purpose of the research, research procedures, potential risks and benefits, alternatives to participation, level of confidentiality, freedom of withdrawal without penalty and to offer to answer any queries concerning the research (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000; HREC, 2008a). The informed consent document which includes an information letter and a declaration form, once signed, corresponds to a confirmation that participants understand what is involved in the study. The current study does not involve vulnerable groups—that is to say categories of people who are not legally able to provide informed consent due to age or incompetence (HREC, 2008c)—and has no known risks or benefits for the participants.

Although the present study contains identifying data such as dates of birth, living areas, names and contact details of respondents who agreed to participate in the follow-up interviews that could be traced back to specific individuals, the use of coded information ensures anonymity in the questionnaire database (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000; HREC, 2008b). All the interviews were transcribed in an electronic file. Each teacher interviewed was given a code so that their anonymity was respected. Similarly, parents interviewed kept the code they had been ascribed in the database. Further safeguards include the use of a secure locked file cabinet for the hard copies and the use of

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165 See Appendix 13, Figure A13.2.

passwords to control access to electronic data and MP3 recordings (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000). Participants were also ensured that identifying information would not be used in any report on the research.

### **3.7 Presentation of findings**

The following chapters outline the results of the current study. As mentioned earlier, the fieldwork was carried out in 11 Irish-medium primary schools in County Dublin between the end of September 2009 and June 2010. Chapter 4 first examines the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires distributed in 14 Senior Infant classes and 12 Sixth-Class classes. Chapter 5 then moves on to the analysis of the qualitative data collected during two sets of interviews involving 21 teachers and 40 parents who completed the questionnaire and agreed to take part in follow-up interviews. Finally, principal findings are discussed for both quantitative and qualitative approaches and where possible are related to findings of previous research on attitudes to Irish. The presentation of the study results is based on descriptive statistics which include frequency and percentage distributions. In both chapters the data is presented in a set pattern. It comprises an introductory sentence or paragraph giving the context for the questions or themes examined in each sub-section and highlighting the main results. This is followed by the description and the display of the results which are then compared with other data and other studies when applicable. Results are further discussed at the end of each section.

## IV- Parents questionnaire: quantitative data

The presentation of the quantitative data from the questionnaires is organised thematically. First, respondents are presented in terms of their gender, age, marital status, highest educational qualifications and social class. Second, an overview is given of their general attitudes to the Irish language in comparison to the results of national attitudinal surveys, before narrowing the focus down to their attitudes to Irish in the school context. Third, parents' motivations for sending their child to a gaelscoil are investigated and are further explored by looking at respondents' views on advantages and disadvantages to Irish-medium education and at their motivations for and commitment to further immersion education. Finally, respondents' use of the Irish language is examined through self-reporting their ability to understand and speak Irish. The frequency with which respondents said they used Irish on the school grounds, in the home, as well as outside the home as part of their social lives is also taken into account.

### 4.1 Background information

Although it is not known whether the 223 respondents completed the form together with their spouse/partner or whether they answered the questions on their own and filled in the spouse/partner section on their behalf, most respondents who completed the *self* category in the questionnaire were women (85.7% ( $n=191$ ) of respondents said they were female against 14.3% ( $n=32$ ) who were male).

Most participating parents (80%,  $n=326$ ) were between 35 and 50 years of age.<sup>166</sup>

A large majority of respondents (89.7%) indicated that they were married or living in a partnership whereas 3.6% were separated or divorced at the time of the survey. Another 6.3% represented single mothers. One mother was a widow (0.4%).

A majority of respondents (62.3%) said they had third-level qualifications whereas 22.6% said the Leaving Certificate was their highest educational qualification. Another 6.1% left secondary school after obtaining their Junior Certificate. The high proportion of respondents with third-level education among parents choosing Irish immersion education was also found in Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliaáin's research (1979) as well as among Irish-medium pre-school parents (Hickey, 1997).

Table 4.1 gives more details on respondents' highest educational qualifications. The "self" category represents the parent who is known to have completed the questionnaire. Spouses/partners' educational qualifications are also included when applicable.

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166 Of a 95.3% valid response including both *self* and *spouse/partner*.



**Table 4.1: Respondents' Highest Educational Qualifications**

<b>Educational qualifications</b>	<b>Self (N=223) %</b>	<b>Spouse/partner (N=201)<sup>167</sup> %</b>	<b>Total (N=424) %</b>
Third-level	67.2	56.7	62.3
Leaving Certificate	19.3	26.3	22.6
Junior Certificate	7.2	5	6.1
Other	5.4	5	5.2
No response	0.9	7	3.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Respondents who completed the questionnaire (*self*) were slightly better qualified than their spouse/partner.

The results of the social class analysis is on par with other studies on bilingual education in an additive context carried out in Canada (Cummins, 1976; Hakuta, 1986; McLaughlin, 1984; Baker & Hornberger, 2001; Morton & Harper, 2007), in the Basque country (Lasagabaster, 2000), and in Wales (Khleif, 1974; Packer & Campbell, 1997). These studies show that participants in immersion education tend to be middle class.

In the present study, respondents were asked to give their occupation along with their spouse/partner's. The official Census of the Population classification established by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) was used to analyse the social class of the sample population. It consists of seven categories:

- Professional workers
- Managerial and technical
- Non-manual
- Skilled manual
- Semi-skilled
- Unskilled

All others gainfully occupied and unknown

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<sup>167</sup> This total takes into account that one mother was a widow, 14 mothers were single parents and 8 mothers were separated/divorced at the time of the survey. However, one single mother completed the spouse/partner section as she believed he played an important role in her child's life and therefore had to be represented.

Accordingly social class ranks occupations by the level of skill required on a social class scale ranging from 1 (highest) to 7 (lowest). This scale combines occupations into six groups by occupation and employment status (...). A residual category *all others gainfully occupied and unknown* is used where no precise allocation is possible.<sup>168</sup>

Based on the CSO classification, respondents who described themselves as “home maker” or “housewife” as well as “student” were classified according to the social class group of their spouse/partner on whom they were deemed to be dependent. As for those who were single-parents or separated/divorced unless an occupation was specified they were included in the “unknown” category; this involved six respondents.

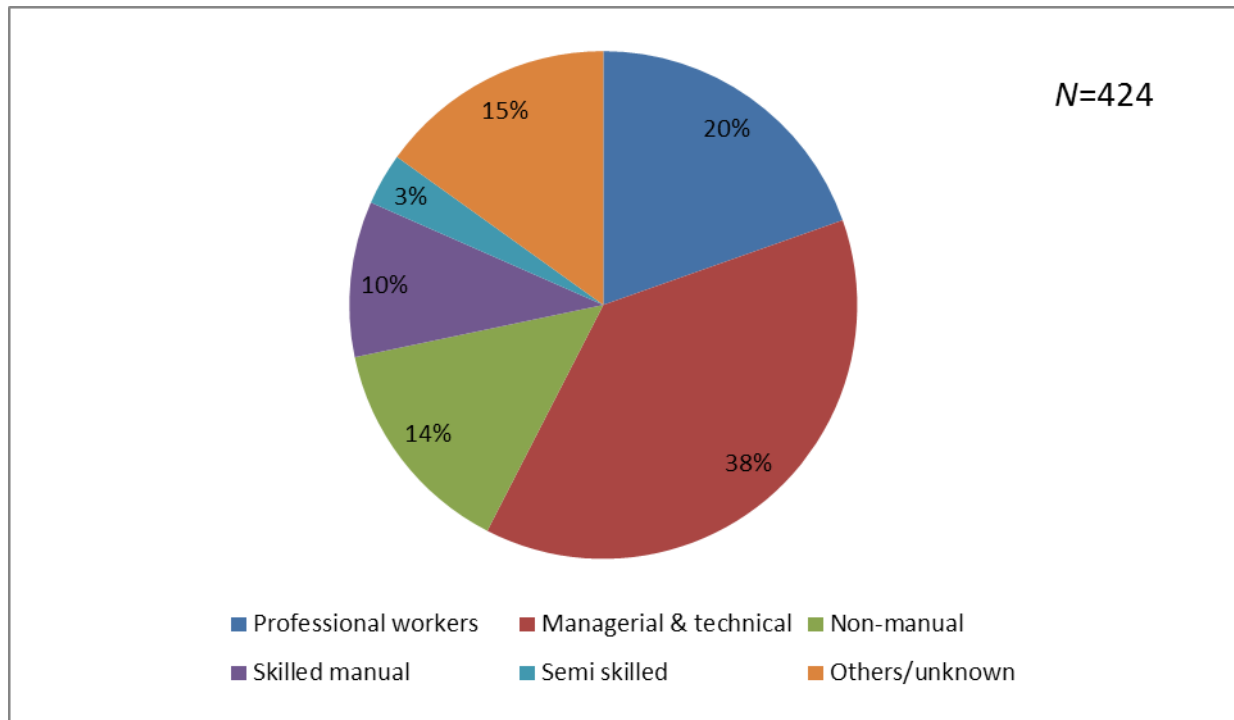
Unemployed persons were also assigned to the *unknown* category as no information on their previous employment was provided in the questionnaire. Furthermore, all respondents describing their occupation as *unemployed* were separated/divorced or, in the case of one respondent did not complete her spouse/partner section; consequently they could not be classified to their spouse/partner's social class group.

Figure 4.1 illustrates the classification of the total sample population ( $N=424$ )—*self* and *spouse/partner* when applicable—according to the social class they belong to, based on their occupations. The sixth category of the CSO social class scale *unskilled* is not represented here as no respondent was found to belong to this category.

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168 Census of the Population 2006, Volume 8 Occupations, Appendix 2 Definitions,  
[http://cso.ie/census/census2006results/volume\\_8/appendix\\_2-7\\_definitions.pdf](http://cso.ie/census/census2006results/volume_8/appendix_2-7_definitions.pdf)

**Figure 4.1: Classification of the Respondents according to their Social Class**



A significant majority (38%,  $n=161$ ) belong to the second highest social class category while the highest social class group ranks second (19.6%,  $n=83$ ). These two categories alone represent over half the surveyed population. A further 14.1% ( $n=60$ ) are part of the non-manual social class group whereas the skilled manual and semi-skilled groups represent 10% ( $n=42$ ) and 3.3% ( $n=14$ ) of the respondents respectively. A further 15.1% ( $n=64$ ) could not be ranked in this classification—mostly because of incomplete or unavailable data.

One can conclude that the sample population of this survey mostly comes from a middle-class background. Furthermore, gaelscoil parents are more likely to work in the professional or managerial sector than the general population,<sup>169</sup> which is consistent with other studies carried out in Ireland (Hickey, 1997; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979).

<sup>169</sup> See Table A14.1: Social Classification of the Respondents Compared with the General Population in Appendix 14.

## **4.2 General attitudes towards the Irish language**

As shown in the research on Irish-medium education in Ireland, parents have a good disposition towards the language (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979; Maguire, 1991; Ó Donnagáin, 1995; Hickey, 1997; Mooney, 2009). Although it was expected that parents taking part in this study would show positive attitudes to the Irish language, it is important to situate their attitudinal response in a wider context, that is, in comparison to the attitudes of the general public. This section deals with parents' attitudes towards the Irish language. More specifically, it focuses on five attitudinal items which comprise attitudes to interpersonal use of Irish, attitudes towards bilingualism, attitudes to Irish as an ethnic symbol, attitudes towards public and state support for Irish, attitudes and perceptions regarding the viability and future of Irish. This part also establishes a comparison between the results of questionnaire respondents' attitudes to Irish<sup>170</sup> and the results of the three national surveys on attitudes to the Irish language conducted in 1973, 1983 and 1993 (CLÁR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984; 1994) and from which the five groups of attitudinal items stem. The second part examines parents' attitudes to Irish in the school context that is, their attitudes to Irish as gaelscoil parents, as well as their own assessment of the change or lack of change in attitude to Irish from their school days to the present.

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170 This section dealing with general attitudes to Irish includes respondents' response as well as their partner's when applicable.

#### 4.2.1 Overview of parents' attitude to the Irish language

Overall, respondents showed a very positive disposition towards the Irish language in terms of hearing it spoken (93%,  $n=349$ ), speaking it (75%,  $n=275$ ) and learning it as 51.5% ( $n=184$ ) said it was not difficult to learn. The following table illustrates the results in more detail:

**Table 4.2: Parents' Disposition towards the Irish Language**

Statement	Agree %	No opinion %	Disagree %	Total
I like hearing Irish spoken	93.1	5.9	1	$N=375$
I like speaking Irish	74.9	18.8	6.3	$N=367$
Irish is difficult to learn	39	9.5	51.5	$N=357$

It was expected that parents whose child attends an Irish-medium school would score higher than the national average in terms of interpersonal use of Irish as they are more likely to use Irish on a daily basis. This is due to their regular contact with the language through homework, school events, meetings, etc. By and large, respondents showed a stronger commitment to the use of the Irish language as well as more confidence in speaking it than the national average. Table A14.2 in Appendix 14 compares the results of the three national surveys with those of the questionnaire.

In relation to interpersonal use of Irish, over two-thirds of questionnaire respondents are predisposed to use Irish as much as they can. A further 80% expressed a wish to use Irish more often than they usually do. This contrasts with the three national surveys where between 41% and 45% of people were interested in using Irish more often while very few showed a commitment to using Irish at all (19% in 1993) despite a slight increase along the years. When examining people's confidence in using Irish questionnaire respondents once again scored higher, although a significant number of respondents still thought it was rather intimidating to speak Irish with a fluent Irish speaker (41.4%). This was confirmed by teachers in the interviews. In the situation of parent-teacher meetings, for instance, parents were reported to lack confidence in using Irish when speaking to the teacher.<sup>171</sup> One can also observe that questionnaire respondents appear to exhibit greater tolerance of the use of Irish in a conversation regardless of the level of Irish of the people present (46.3% against 60% in 1993). This may result from parents' experience with the Irish-only language school rule, which makes speaking Irish among English-speakers more acceptable. Finally, figures show that even though respondents are by far more committed to using Irish than the national average it seems that the

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<sup>171</sup> See Section 5.7 Parents' use of Irish.

opportunity they have to do so depends very much on the gaelscoil as just over half the respondents said nobody in their circle used Irish. Respondents' attitudes to their interpersonal use of Irish are therefore very much embedded in the Irish-medium school environment.

In order to further assess their attitudes to Irish respondents were asked to consider the Irish language in a wider context. The next attitudinal items examine respondents' support for bilingualism in the Republic of Ireland (See Table 4.3).

Respondents were given the same question that appeared in the national surveys (Ó Riagáin & Ó Glasáin, 1994) which focused on attitudes to bilingualism. To the question *If everyone in Ireland could speak Irish and English equally well, which would you prefer to speak* just under 50% of questionnaire respondents gave Irish a more predominant role than English which contrasts with the 20-21% found in the national surveys in favour of more *Irish than English* and *Irish only*. The percentage of respondents in favour of balanced bilingualism—i.e. Irish and English equally—was similar across the four surveys ranging between 38% and 44%.

**Table 4.3: Language Choice in a Hypothetical Fully Bilingual Ireland (1973, 1983, 1993, 2009)**

Language choice	1973 %	1983 %	1993 %	2009 % (N=396)
English only	25	18	25	2.3
Less Irish than English	17	17	14	4.3
Irish and English equally	38	44	39	44.2
More Irish than English	11	9	11	34.8
Irish only	9	12	9	14.4

More recent studies also show preference for a bilingual future with the English language given a more important role. While over half the population of the Republic of Ireland surveyed in 2000 as part of the all-Ireland survey showed support for societal bilingualism 40.5% were in favour of English as the principal language (Ó Riagáin, 2007, p. 383). The Mac Gréil and Rhatigan's (2009) survey showed that 38% of the participants supported bilingualism in the Republic of Ireland although 33% indicated they would prefer to see English as the principal<sup>172</sup> language against 5% in favour of Irish as the principal language.

Finally, it appears from the results above that parents with a child attending an Irish-medium school are more likely to speak *more Irish than English* than the national average in the hypothetical

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<sup>172</sup> Term used by Mac Gréil (2009, p. 7).

case of a fully bilingual Ireland. However, this remains a hypothesis and does not reflect on how much Irish respondents currently speak.

Another set of attitudinal items on bilingualism that were not in the national surveys, were included in the questionnaire. The overall response revealed that respondents were strongly in favour of bilingualism in Ireland. Yet, they did not seem to want to impose this language choice upon others as the percentage agreeing that *all people in Ireland should speak Irish and English* (56.8%,  $n=204$ ) was much lower than the percentage supporting the idea that both languages can live together (97.8%,  $n=357$ ) and that it is important to speak them both (84.6%,  $n=307$ ). The finding that respondents value the importance of being able to speak both Irish and English was reinforced as 80.3% ( $n=290$ ) disagreed that to speak one language in Ireland is all that is needed and 80.4% ( $n=291$ ) rejected the idea that speaking two languages was difficult. A further 94.5% ( $n=344$ ) claimed that young children had no difficulties in learning two languages at the same time. Despite their support for bilingualism a majority of respondents (44.7%,  $n=160$ ) did not feel sorry for people who could not speak both national languages. A further 50.4% ( $n=181$ ) disagreed that bilingual people had an advantage over monolinguals. Although the phrase “know more” borrowed from the national surveys (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984, 1994) may have been interpreted in different ways, it has been argued that bilinguals see the world differently (Athanasopoulos, Damjanovic, Krajciová, & Sasaki, 2010). According to Athanasopoulos and associates, being able to speak two languages or more leads to a different way of thinking and gives bilinguals an insight in their own as well as other cultures. It also enables them to understand their own language better. However, it is not possible to know whether or not respondents interpreted the phrase *know more* in the same way. Table 4.4 outlines the results described above:

**Table 4.4: Attitudes towards Bilingualism**

Statement	Agree %	No opinion %	Disagree %	Total
It is important to be able to speak English and Irish	84.6	8	7.4	N=363
To speak one language in Ireland is all that is needed	11.9	7.8	80.3	N=361
Speaking both Irish and English helps to get a job	59.6	17.7	22.7	N=356
Speaking two languages is not difficult	80.4	8.3	11.3	N=362
I feel sorry for people who cannot speak both English and Irish	20.9	34.4	44.7	N=358
People know more if they speak both English and Irish	28.1	21.5	50.4	N=359
Young children learn to speak Irish and English at the same time with ease	94.5	3	2.5	N=364
All people in Ireland should speak Irish and English	56.8	17.8	25.4	N=359
Both the Irish and English languages can live together in Ireland	97.8	2.2	-	N=365

Respondents therefore showed through these attitudinal items that they value the importance of societal bilingualism.

The next set of attitudinal items examines why Irish is important to respondents despite their living in an English-speaking environment. The results of the first national survey on attitudes to the Irish language (CILAR, 1975) showed that Irish people valued Irish as an ethnic identity factor as well as a cultural one. Although there was a slight decline in the 1993 survey a majority of Irish people still regarded the Irish language as an important ethnic symbol (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, pp. 18-19). The results of the current study which are outlined in Table A14.3 in Appendix 14 show that an overwhelming majority value Irish as an ethnic and cultural symbol (70-75%). These figures are therefore above the national average (60-61% in 1993). Gaelscoil parents however do not think that being able to speak and understand Irish is an asset to fully understanding Irish culture (52.7%), which is consistent with the 1993 national survey results. It is also reminiscent of what was observed among Irish people in Northern Ireland in relation to ethnic identity. O'Reilly explains that “many believe that the Irish people cannot be truly Irish without their language” but that most people in West Belfast who



are English-speaking are “potentially resentful of any suggestion that they are not Irish for not being competent or native speakers of the indigenous language” (1999, pp. 26 & 194).

As part of the general assessment of language attitudes respondents were asked about their views on state language promotion and language policies. As users of the state Irish-medium schools *gaelscoil* parents were expected to be in favour of policies for the promotion and maintenance of the Irish language. Respondents did express stronger support than the national average towards the promotion of Irish at national level. Table A14.A in Appendix 14 outlines the results.

Questionnaire respondents form a homogeneous group in favour of public spending towards the promotion and maintenance of Irish (86.6%,  $n=317$ ). This is consistent with the finding in Packer and Campbell's 1990-1993 study that Welsh-medium school parents unanimously disagreed that the government spent too much money promoting the Welsh language (Packer & Campbell, 1997, p. 18). Questionnaire respondents expressed a personal interest in state language support (87.1%,  $n=317$ ) and indicated it should come from the government rather than voluntary bodies (78%,  $n=290$ ). They believed that the government was responsible for the promotion of Irish and did not think it should be left to voluntary organisations.<sup>173</sup> This perception was also observed throughout the three national surveys with a substantial increase recorded in 1993 (56%). Questionnaire respondents nonetheless value the role of Irish language organisations as they thought that the government should encourage and support them (93.4%,  $n=352$ ). Furthermore, on the topic of language promotion, respondents seemed to encourage the use of Irish among people regardless of the quality and accuracy of the language spoken (83.5%,  $n=308$ ). One result stood out, however, as it showed lower support than in the previous national surveys. This relates to the right to public service through the medium of Irish (56% in favour of it in 2009 against 72% in 1993). It is surprising seeing that this right was recognised by the Official Languages Act in 2003. The gap between agreeing respondents of 1993 and 2009 may partly be explained by the significant number of respondents who did not have an opinion in 2009 (18% against 6% in 1993). Although it does not make up an overwhelming majority, questionnaire respondents thought Irish should be used in the public service when requested.

As regard language viability, questionnaire respondents expressed a very positive attitude towards the present and future state of the Irish language, which contrasts with the national average results—despite the fact that respondents in 1993 held a less pessimistic view of the future of Irish than their predecessors. Table A14.5 in Appendix 14 outlines the results and draws comparisons between the present study and the previous national surveys.

Overall, questionnaire respondents were more positive in their general attitude to the Irish language as only 41.7% agreed that *people just don't care one way or the other about Irish* against 65%

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<sup>173</sup> This belief was also put forward during the follow-up interviews (see Section 5.9.1).

in 1993. As expected, most respondents did not think Irish was a dead language (91.5%,  $n=323$ ). An overwhelming majority even rejected the idea of failure in relation to the revival of the Irish language (83.7%,  $n=308$ ). A further 62.5% ( $n=227$ ) believed it could be revived as a means of communication and 61.1% ( $n=223$ ) thought Irish was a suitable language for business and science against 38% in 1993. When questioned about the Gaeltacht areas—in other words the heartland of the Irish language—only a third of respondents believed they were on the verge of disappearing. They seemed confident that in the case of the Gaeltacht dying out Irish would survive (55.8%,  $n=197$ ). This finding sharply contrasts with the results from 1993 where only 32% did not think Irish would die out if the Gaeltacht were to disappear. This may be due to parents' confidence in the Irish-medium education sector to promote the Irish language outside the Gaeltacht as they have already witnessed how quickly their children learn how to speak Irish fluently. However, respondents also value the importance of the Gaeltacht to promote the language. According to 96.2% its disappearance would make the promotion of Irish as or more important than ever compared with two thirds in the national survey of 1993.<sup>174</sup>

Questionnaire respondents were also asked about their attitudes to Irish vis-à-vis other foreign languages in the school context. Again, they were supportive of the teaching of Irish in school.<sup>175</sup> The general public in 1973, 1983 and 1993 agreed that Irish was less useful than other European languages (78-81%). This discourse is still very much alive and is part of the debate on the status of Irish.<sup>176</sup> Questionnaire respondents who agreed with this argument constitute a minority (33%,  $n=116$ ). Respondents were divided however over the statement that it is more important that a child at school learn Irish than a foreign language. While one fifth of respondents ( $n=75$ ) were uncertain, 41.5% ( $n=149$ ) agreed that learning Irish is more important than learning a foreign language (against 25% in 1993).

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174 See Table A14.6: Attitude to the Promotion of Irish if the Gaeltacht Disappears (1973, 1983, 1993, 2009) in Appendix 14.

175 See Table A14.7 Attitude to Irish as Opposed to Other Foreign Languages (1973, 1983, 1993, 2009) in Appendix 14.

176 See Section 2.6 in Chapter Two.

#### 4.2.2 Parents' attitudes to Irish in a school context

Because this study is set in an education context, parental attitudes to Irish in relation to the school were further explored. This includes attitudes towards current issues regarding Irish-medium education as well as attitude change towards Irish from respondents' school years to the present.

As insiders and participants in Irish-medium education respondents were presented with statements on the Irish language and Irish-medium schools. The first three statements relate to the debate on the acceptability of linguistic changes that inevitably take place in the process of revival and evolution of a language. It revolves around changes in pronunciation, grammar and syntax caused by language contact between Irish and English. O'Reilly gives a very good example of the situation when she writes about the Irish language in Northern Ireland: "I have heard people say that Belfast Irish is 'better' or more 'pure' than the Irish spoken in the Gaeltacht, which many feel is heavily 'contaminated' with English loan words and syntax" (1999, p. 28). Although this would not be a main stream view the perception of language contamination could also apply to the Irish spoken in the gaelscoil. Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with issues that are often raised in the media for instance, or in casual conversations and that give a direct depiction of gaelscoil parents.

Overall, respondents acknowledged that the Irish their child learn and speak is different from the language that is used in the Gaeltacht.<sup>177</sup> They also agreed that such linguistic changes are necessary for Irish to thrive. Respondents massively rejected negative statements on parental attitudes to Irish and social elitism. Table 4.5 illustrates respondents' answers:

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<sup>177</sup> It must be noted that respondents may not have been familiar with the numerous Gaeltacht varieties. These results are therefore only suggestive as the assessment of varieties of Irish is a rather more complex issue.

**Table 4.5: Parents' Attitudes to Irish in the Gaelscoil Context**

Statement	Agree %	No opinion %	Disagree %	Total
The Irish taught in Irish-medium schools in Dublin is different from the Irish spoken in the Gaeltacht	41.3	34	24.7	N=218
Irish people need to accept changes in the Irish language grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc. if they want the language to continue to live	59.9	21.7	18.4	N=217
The Irish language spoken by young people is influenced by the English language	56.1	27.6	16.3	N=214
Most families involved in Irish-medium schools do not care about the Irish language	7.9	9.8	82.3	N=215
Irish-medium education is for the middle classes	5.7	7.5	86.8	N=212
The gaelscoil has opened your mind about the Irish language	75.5	14.8	9.7	N=216

Respondents agreed with the fact that the Irish taught in urban Irish-medium schools is different from the language spoken in the Gaeltacht (41.3%,  $n=90$ ) and that children's Irish is influenced by the English language (56.1%,  $n=120$ ). They also believed that Irish people had to accept changes in the language so that its viability could be sustained (59.9%,  $n=130$ ). It should be noticed that a large number of respondents did not have any opinion on these three matters. This sharply contrasts with the response obtained in the last three statements which directly concern parents involved in Irish-medium schools. Most respondents disagreed that Irish-medium schools are exclusively for a social élite (86.8%,  $n=184$ ). They also rejected the idea that parents involved in Irish-medium education do not care about the Irish language (82.3%,  $n=177$ ). Finally, 75.5% ( $n=163$ ) of respondents said that the gaelscoil experience had enabled them to see the Irish language differently and in a more positive way.

The idea of the gaelscoil experience changing parents' attitude towards the Irish language was also alluded to by respondents themselves. When questioned about the change in their attitude to Irish between their school years and the present time a majority<sup>178</sup> referred to bad experiences with the language or claimed that Irish was not efficiently taught in school. Here are a few quotations illustrating their point: "Irish was taught in a very boring manner, not interesting, just beaten into you" (RP67); "It was so unpleasantly taught in school that no incentive was offered to like it" (RA621); "Irish

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178 114 respondents out of 223 commented on the change in their own attitudes to Irish, 53.5% of whom referred to the gaelscoil experience as a direct or indirect trigger to this change (see Appendix 15, Table A15.1). The second most stated reason was a better appreciation of the Irish heritage and language throughout the years (23.7%). These results are exclusive and do not total 100%.

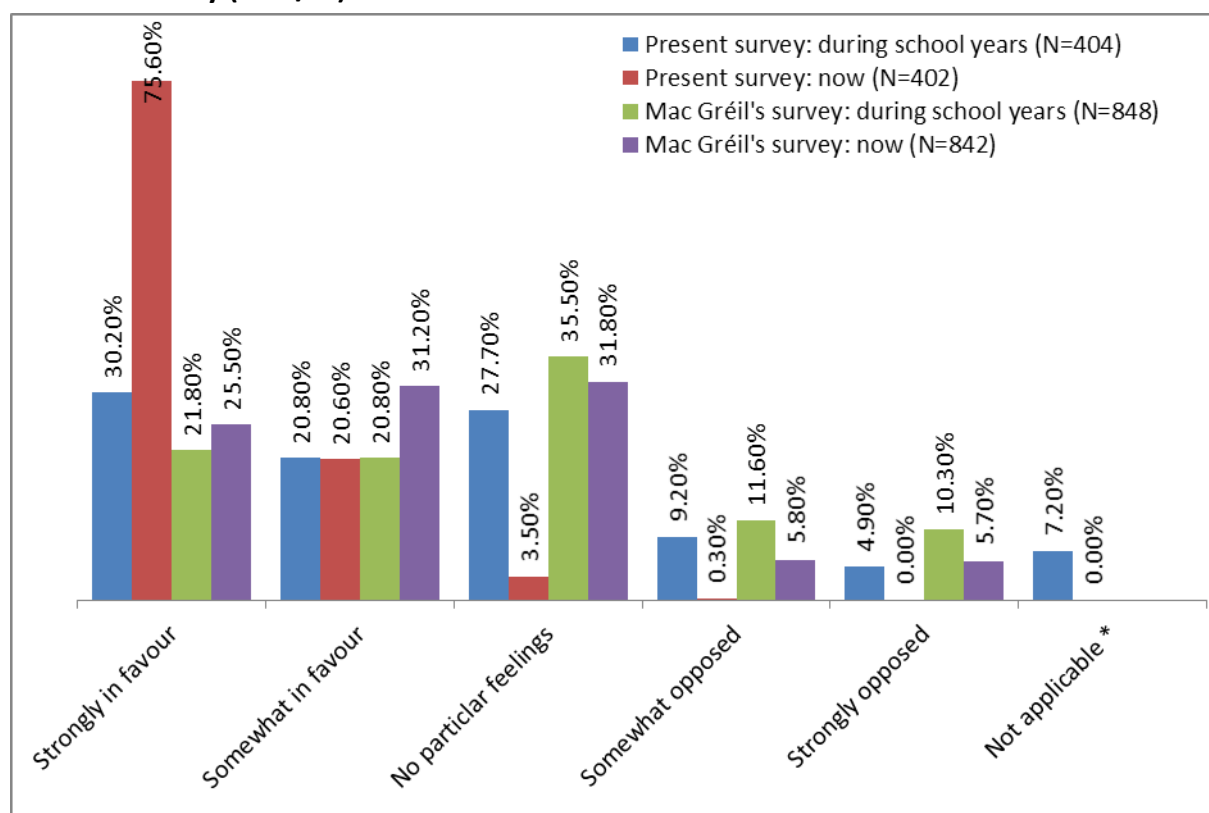
in a gaelscoil is taught through encouragement and not fear” (RD25). Having their child attending a gaelscoil impacted on their attitude to Irish. Some respondents explained the change in their attitude simply by “the way [Irish] is taught in gaelscoileanna” (RK26) or “from watching children learn and speaking Irish” (RJ68). Another parent confessed: “My daughter speaks it and I want to communicate with her” (RE23).

A comparison with the findings of Mac Gréil and Rhatigan's national survey (2009)<sup>179</sup> shows that 51% of questionnaire respondents expressed a positive attitude to Irish during their school years against 42.6% in Mac Gréil and Rhatigan's national survey. A further difference was also found among respondents who claimed they were strongly opposed to Irish while in school as 4.9% of gaelscoil parents expressed this attitude against 10.3% in the national survey (Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009, p. 22). Respondents participating in this study appear to have had a slightly better disposition to the Irish language while in school than the national average. When viewing the results of both cohorts in relation to their present attitude to the language the difference is even more striking: 75.6% of questionnaire respondents *strongly in favour* of Irish against 25.5% in Mac Gréil's survey. It seems that the gaelscoil experience may account for this gap. While there had been an increase of 14.1 percentage points of those in favour of Irish from school years to the time of the national survey in 2007/08 the total of questionnaire respondents in favour of Irish increased by 45.2% to reach 96.2%. These results which include the attitudes of both *self* and *spouse/partner* are outlined in Figure 4.2:

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179 Mac Gréil and Rhatigan's survey was carried out in 2007/08 and was based on a national random sample.

**Figure 4.2: Change in Attitudes to the Irish Language: Comparative Reading of Mac Gréil's National Survey (2007/08)**



*Note.* \*Mac Gréil and Rhatigan's findings only include the Irish-born sample. The present study did not make this distinction and allowed for parents to tick the *not applicable* box in case they did not attend a school in which Irish was taught whether because they were non-Irish nationals, or they lived abroad or were exempt from learning Irish.

Although a general positive attitude to Irish among gaelscoil respondents was expected it is interesting to see that they did not always have such a positive view. Even though respondents were generally affected by a positive change in attitudes to Irish it appears that parents who completed the questionnaire (i.e. *self*) expressed a more positive attitude to Irish than their spouse/partner. A total of 84.2% of “self” respondents declared they were *strongly in favour* of Irish against 65% of spouses/partners while as few as 0.5% of *self* respondents had *no particular feelings* towards Irish, compared to 7.2% of spouses/partners.<sup>180</sup> As mentioned earlier, a majority of respondents (75.5%,  $n=163$ ) explained that this change in attitudes was due to the gaelscoil experience which threw a different light on the language. This could be related to the theory on attitude formation and change where Fishbein and Ajzen explain that “we learn to like (or have favourable attitudes toward) objects we associate with ‘good’ things” (1975, p 217). This way, respondents with a neutral attitude to Irish

<sup>180</sup> See Figure 15.1: Respondents' Change in Attitude towards the Irish Language from School Years to the Present in Appendix 15.

may have changed their view after considering the positive effect of Irish-medium education on their child, for example.

## Conclusion

According to this study's findings, parents whose child attends an Irish-medium school have a positive disposition towards the Irish language. They seem more committed to using the language at a personal level than average Irish people—although their use of Irish is likely to be limited to the school environment. Respondents acknowledged the advantage of speaking both Irish and English and rejected the preconceived idea that learning Irish is difficult. It is therefore not surprising that they indicated they were in favour of societal bilingualism. Yet, it is by no means a reflection of their linguistic behaviour as parents' commitment to the Irish language does not often translate into language use (Harris & Murtagh, 1999).

Parental positive attitudes towards a second language are nonetheless influential in terms of their child's own attitudes to the language (Baker, 1992; Böhner & Wänke, 2002). They can influence an integrative attitude towards the target language (Lambert et al., 1968; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Robert, 2009). Results show that questionnaire respondents hold a more positive image of the viability of the language than the general public. They also suggest that respondents believe that in the event of the Gaeltacht disappearing it will continue to be used as a medium of communication. While this attitude is likely to be nurtured through their involvement with the Irish-medium education sector it supports the school ethos in educating children about the societal value of bilingualism where Irish is seen as a useful means of communication both in school and with native Irish speakers (Coady, 2001). The fact that respondents were found to give more importance to the teaching of Irish in school than to other foreign languages is a further indication of their support for Irish. Although reasons for choosing an Irish-medium education are examined in the following section it can already be assumed that if the teaching of Irish is perceived to be more important than the teaching of other languages it is likely to be linked to the association made between the Irish language and Irish national identity.

While respondents' positive attitude to Irish was above the national average (Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009), it should be noted that their attitude to Irish while they were at school was not dissimilar to the national average. It appears that for a large number of respondents the *gaelscoil* experience had either a total or further positive impact on their attitude to the Irish language. This finding indicates the positive impact immersion education can have on the community involved with Irish-medium schools and contrasts with the negative comments on the teaching of Irish as a subject collected during the fieldwork. Although families who selected an Irish-medium school may already be part of a self-selected group with a natural positive disposition towards the language, it must not be

forgotten that the selection of such a school also takes into account factors such as the availability of other schools in the area or the patronage of the school which has diversified somewhat in the past few years. In order to discuss this further, it is first important to analyse parent's motivations for sending their child to a gaelscoil.



### ***4.3 Irish-medium schools and education through Irish***

This section deals with parents' attitudes towards Irish-medium education. It first explores the reasons respondents had for sending their child to a gaelscoil and compares the results with findings from previous studies conducted in Irish-medium primary schools. Secondly, this section examines respondents' degree of satisfaction with Irish medium education and whether they believe there are advantages or disadvantages to such an education. Finally, respondents' overall motivation and commitment to having their child educated through Irish is discussed by analysing previous attendance at an Irish-medium pre-school or naíonra as well as future decisions about secondary education.

#### 4.3.1 Reasons for choosing a gaelscoil

Unlike Pádraig Ó Riagáin and Mícheál Ó Gliaáin's research study based on Irish-medium primary schools in Dublin in 1976/77 it is not possible to distinguish different groups of parents according to the nature of the reasons why they chose a gaelscoil for their offspring. Almost all respondents who participated in the current study based their school choice on both the Irish language and its inherent cultural values as well as on educational factors they perceived as an advantage to their child's education.

In the current study, respondents were asked to indicate from a list of thirteen items the reasons why they decided to send their child to a gaelscoil. Respondents typically gave several reasons as shown in Table 4.6. Shaded rows indicate language reasons only as opposed to mixed or non-language reasons. Note that because they are exclusive the percentages do not total 100%.

**Table 4.6: Parents' Reasons for Choosing a Gaelscoil for their Child**

	Reasons for choosing a gaelscoil	% (N=223)
1	Bilingualism	84.8
2	Awareness of Irish identity and Irish heritage	82.1
3	Reputation of the school	65
4	A good grounding in Irish before secondary school	56
5	School's educational record	44
6	Location of the school	35.4
7	Better educational and career opportunities	22
8	Recommended by family/friends	19.3
9	Pupil-teacher ratios	17
10	Respondent or respondent's spouse/partner attended a gaelscoil	15.7
11	Irish spoken at home	13.9
12	To avoid local national schools (possible lower standard of English)	11.7
13	Other <sup>181</sup>	9.4

It is clear that an overwhelming majority of respondents chose an Irish-medium school for language (shaded rows in the table above) and cultural reasons. However, they also considered the school's reputation, educational record and location. By contrast, Pádraig Ó Riagáin and Mícheál Ó Gliaáin found that respondents who answered the question “what were the main arguments used in

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181 A full list of individual reasons is provided in Appendix 16, Table A16.1.

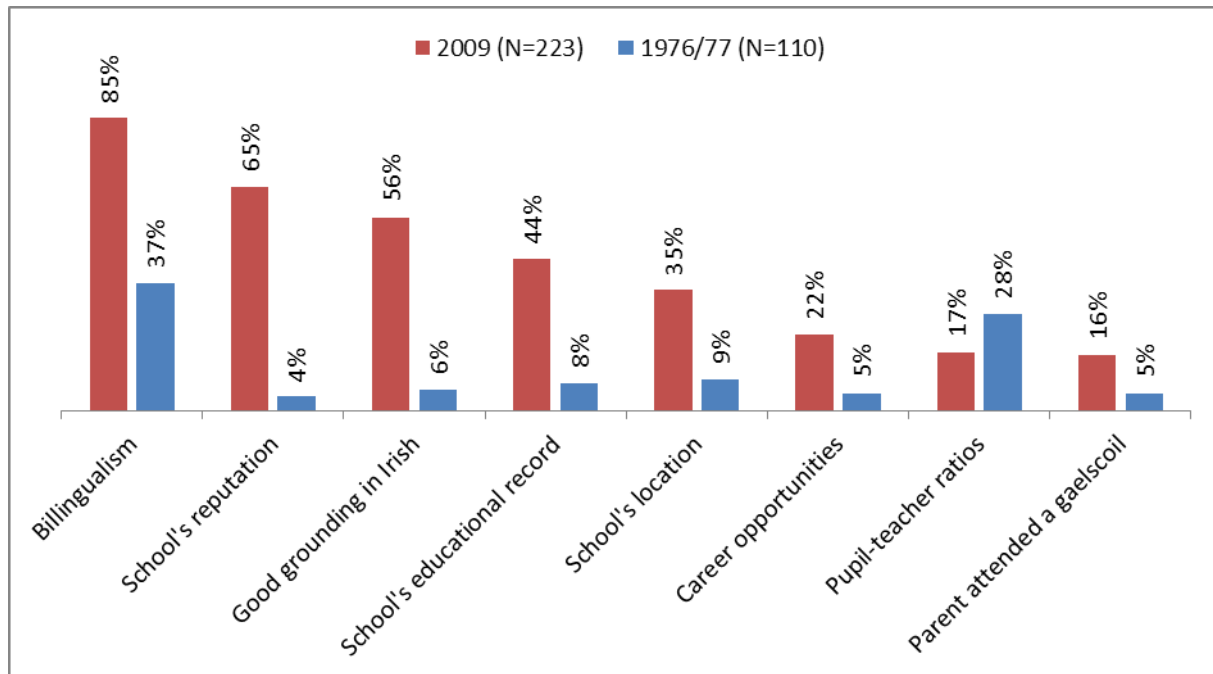
the course of deciding on an all-Irish education for your child”—to which respondents could give several reasons—fell into three groups:<sup>182</sup>

- language reasons only: 37%
- non-language reasons only: 27%
- both language and non-language reasons: 36%

In this study, respondents gave at least one language/cultural reason and one non-language reason—except for 4.9% who gave educational and practical reasons only. This difference may be due to the fact that in the 1976/77 survey participants were asked to supply the reasons for choosing an Irish-medium education whereas in the present questionnaire they were given a list of reasons to choose from—with the possibility of adding further reasons. The availability of a list of reasons may have helped respondents to give a more detailed assessment of their decision to send their child to an Irish-medium school.

The chart in Figure 4.3 compares responses from both studies, focusing only on reasons that appeared in both studies.<sup>183</sup>

**Figure 4.3: Comparative Reading of Parents’ Reasons for Choosing a Gaelscoil in 2009 and 1976/77**



<sup>182</sup> The terminology defining the three groups was used by Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin (1979).

<sup>183</sup> See (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979, p. 39).

When viewing these figures one must bear in mind that respondents participating in the present study gave an average of five reasons each,<sup>184</sup> whereas the majority of 1976/77 respondents (55%) gave only one argument with 29% giving two, 13% giving three and 3% giving four (Ó Riagáin & Ó Glasáin, 1979, p. 39). While bilingualism was and still is the predominant reason for selecting an Irish-medium education, it seems that its importance has increased over the years. A potential explanation lies in parents' growing interest in results of research on bilingualism and bilingual education in relation to the rather common fear of children under performing when attending an immersion programme. Their interest in bilingualism could also derive from the promotion of multilingualism by the European Commission<sup>185</sup> and could partly result from the impact caused by the Celtic Tiger years bringing social changes to Ireland. Changes also include increased immigration and the resulting multilingual communities. It should be noticed that some respondents showed a great interest in multilingualism as 15.7% said that another language was spoken at home beside English and Irish; either because one parent is a foreign national or because parents value and encourage the learning of other European languages at an early age.

The second most common reason in the 1976/1977 study (28%) was that Irish-medium schools benefited at the time from small classes. Although 17% of parents chose this argument in the 2009 questionnaire it represented one of the lowest ranked reasons in the current study. This is probably due to the fact that *gaelscoileanna* have become so popular that the number of pupils per class reaches the national average in most schools. Among the eleven participating schools, five had between 30 and 32 pupils per class at Senior Infant level—of these, two schools had two Senior Infant classes of more than 30 pupils each. Four schools had between 30 and 32 pupils in Sixth Class.

The school's reputation (64% in 2009 against 4% in 1976/77), its educational record (44% against 8%) and its location (35% against 9%) seem to be given much more consideration when selecting a *gaelscoil* nowadays than in the late 1970s. The percentage given for the school's location in the present study (35%) seems high compared with other study results. This may be due to the fact that parents were asked to choose as many relevant reasons as possible and this may have been a secondary reason for a certain number of respondents. Knowing that the school would be close to their home must have been an incentive in the decision-making process in terms of practicality although more important motives existed. Also, it should be noticed that three participating schools only take children living in the local area as part of their enrolment policy. Although the schools'

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184 5.4% gave one reason; 7.6% gave two reasons; 12.1% gave three reasons; 19.3% gave four reasons; 22.5% gave five reasons; 13% gave six reasons; 13.4% gave seven reasons; 4.5% gave eight reasons; 1.3% gave nine reasons; 0.5% gave ten reasons; 0.5% gave eleven reasons.

185 The European Commission promotes multilingualism by "encouraging all citizens to learn and speak more languages, in order to improve natural understanding and communication."

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/eu-language-policy/doc99\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/eu-language-policy/doc99_en.htm)

enrolment criteria may not have interfered with parents' motives it is worth differentiating between respondents whose school makes it a requirement to live nearby and respondents from other schools. Only 15.2% of respondents whose school does not require their living in the area chose the location of the school as a reason for sending their child to a gaelscoil. Finally, as would be expected, the number of parents who had attended a gaelscoil themselves is greater today (16%) than over three decades ago (5%).

The results of the questionnaire show consistency with the results found in more recent studies on parental attitudes to Irish. By and large, these studies tend to show that parents generally favour the Irish language and Irish culture when deciding to send their child to a gaelscoil. However, they also consider educational reasons. In Ó Donnagáin (1995) parents in seven schools ( $N=158$ ) were asked to give their main reason for selecting a gaelscoil for their child. The results showed that 44% of parents sent their child to an Irish-medium school for language and cultural reasons, while 38% chose it because of its good reputation and high academic standard (1995, pp. 85-86). Another 10% referred to the small classes while 3% mentioned the location of the school (Ibid.).

Finally, a study carried out in a Welsh-medium primary school between 1990 and 1993—which involved interviewing 24 parents—showed similar results in so far as bilingualism was perceived by parents as a predominant advantage. Their choice of a Welsh-medium school was also based on Welsh as an identity and cultural marker as well as on the good reputation of the school (Packer & Campbell, 1997).

Although this analysis does not include the same cohort and the same surveying conditions as previous studies, a change can nonetheless be seen among gaelscoil parents. While the importance of bilingualism and of learning about Irish culture and Irish identity is still a very strong factor among over 80% of respondents, parents also seem to be looking for high quality education. Indeed, there is not a single respondent who justified their choice by language reasons only. By contrast, only a tiny minority selected a gaelscoil for strategic reasons only. The choice of an Irish-medium school is therefore a more complex decision than mere “love for the language” or school reputation.

Once one goes into the subject in greater depth one can distinguish two groups of respondents with different motives. The first group includes respondents who had always considered an Irish-medium education for their child and whose choice was mostly language-oriented. The second group is comprised of respondents who thought of an Irish-medium education relatively more recently and whose decision was mainly spurred by educational reasons.

The percentage of respondents who always considered an education through Irish for their child is 51.1% ( $n=114$ ). All respondents gave one or several reasons why they had always thought of sending their child to a gaelscoil. Table 4.7 lists reasons which were stated by more than three respondents.

**Table 4.7: Reasons Why Parents Had Always Considered an Irish-Medium Education for their Child**

Reason	Total (%) N=114
Parent/relatives attended a gaelscoil and were very satisfied	24
Importance of knowing national language and culture for identity reasons	19
Bilingualism	10
To have good Irish unlike parents (bad experience/disappointment in mainstream school <sup>186</sup> )	8
Parent's interest in/love for Irish	7
Awareness of Irish culture/heritage	7
Parent's wish (not specified)	7
Better education in a gaelscoil	6
Irish spoken at home	5
Parent would have liked to have attended a gaelscoil	3

*Note.* These are exclusive and do not total 100% as some respondents gave more than one reason.

The most common reason found among the 51% ( $n=114$ ) of respondents who had always thought of an Irish-medium education for their child was that they had attended a gaelscoil themselves and wished their child would experience the same education (24%,  $n=27$ ). Two respondents indicated respectively: “I attended a gaelscoil and now have a positive attitude towards Irish which I want to pass on” (RP26), “I went to a gaelscoil myself and I see an Irish-medium education as integral to my family's ethos” (RJ24). A significant number of respondents (19%,  $n=22$ ) regarded the gaelscoil as the best place to teach children about their cultural roots and identity which they thought an important part of a child's education. Comments such as quoted below were recurrent throughout the questionnaires: “I wanted them to speak their country's language and understand its heritage” (RA211); “the Irish language and culture are very important to our identity” (RA614); “I think they should learn their national language properly” (RK65); “to keep the Irish language alive and to keep their Irish identity” (RK68); “I had always wanted my children to speak Irish, our own language” (RF26); “I wanted them to be fluent in their native language and be aware of their heritage” (RF27).

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186 The use of “mainstream” to refer to English-medium education reflects parents’ perception that Irish-medium schools are uncommon. They regard bilingual education as a separate education programme that is only available in a small number of schools in Ireland.

Most of the remaining reasons mentioned were language-related and therefore in favour of Irish, except for 6% ( $n=7$ ) of respondents who had always thought of sending their child to a gaelscoil because they believed it provided a better education than English-medium schools.

For those who did not always think of an Irish-medium education for their child the most important reasons that influenced their choice are as follows:

**Table 4.8: Reasons that Influenced Parents' Decision over an Irish-Medium Education for their Child**

Reason	Total (%) N=109
Bilingualism	60.5
Recommended by relatives/friends	40.4
Growing number and success of gaelscoileanna	36.7
The opening of a gaelscoil close to home	13.8
Other	27.5

*Note.* These are exclusive and do not total 100% as some respondents gave more than one reason.

The awareness of bilingualism and its potential benefits seems to be by far the most influential factor that motivated parents to send their child to an Irish-medium school (60.5%,  $n=66$ ). Other respondents were attracted to the gaelscoil experience by word of mouth (40.4%,  $n=44$ ) or by simply witnessing the successful growth in the Irish-medium education sector (36.7%,  $n=40$ ). Finally, some families considered an Irish-medium education after a gaelscoil had been established in their area (13.8%,  $n=15$ ). If we were to add to this group the number of parents who said in the category *other* that the location of the school influenced their choice the total rate of respondents who would have chosen the gaelscoil because of its location would be 19.2% ( $n=21$ ).

Table 4.9 outlines some of the reasons that respondents wrote themselves in the *other* category and that were stated by more than one respondent.

**Table 4.9: Further Reasons that Influenced Parents in the Selection of an Irish-Medium School**

Reason	Total (%) N=30
Location of the school	20
Reputation of the school	17
Atmosphere of the school (community spirit, teachers' commitment	10
Dissatisfaction with standard of education in other local schools	10
Importance of Irish culture/heritage in education	7

Smaller classes	7
Place offered in the gaelscoil	7

The factors listed in the table above were suggested by respondents themselves, in addition to the list of reasons provided in the questionnaire. They are not necessarily the only reason that influenced respondents' choice. These are non-language reasons and focus on educational and practical aspects of the gaelscoil with the exception of two respondents (7%) who mentioned cultural reasons. The recurrent factors of the school's reputation and convenient location were once again the most frequently cited.<sup>187</sup>

It should be noted that respondents who had always thought of sending their child to an Irish-medium school seemed to have better ability in Irish than those who thought of a gaelscoil at a later stage.<sup>188</sup>

In spite of a significant difference in respondents' motives for sending their child to a gaelscoil—based on language or educational factors depending on whether or not they had always thought of doing so—respondents who considered an education through the medium of Irish for their child valued the importance of the language. Respondents indicated how important it was for their child to learn through Irish as it allowed them to embrace their Irish identity.

Of a 98.2% valid response, 85% ( $n=186$ ) of respondents stated it was either important or very important that their child received an education through Irish. This is in line with Ó Donnagáin's findings (1995) where 95% of his gaelscoil parent cohort indicated the same response. The chart in Figure 4.4 shows respondents' position towards the Irish language in more detail:

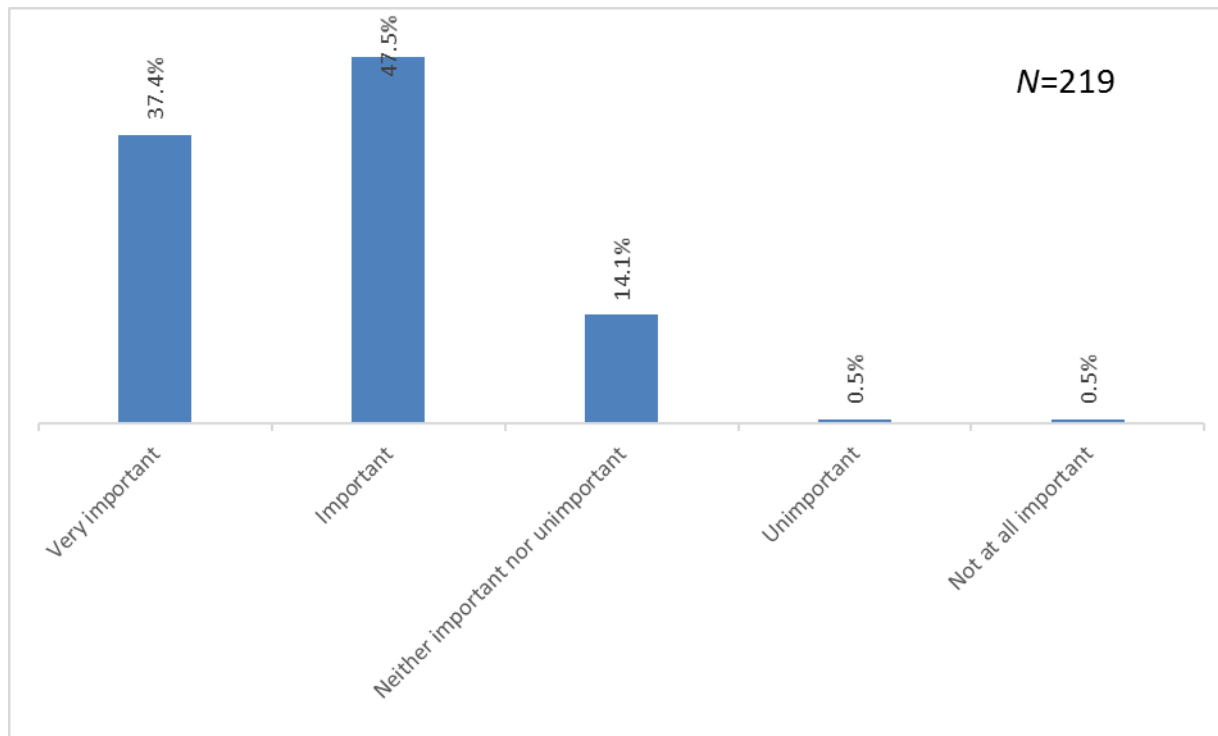
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187 The following are examples of the comments left by some respondents in the questionnaire in relation to the location of the school: “the gaelscoil is close to home with a good reputation” (RA214), “The gaelscoil is close to where we live now” (RA218), “school close to home and happy of the opportunity” (RA613).

188 70.5% of the cohort who reported to have high ability in Irish ( $n=78$ ) had always thought of an Irish-medium education for their child.



**Figure 4.4: Parents' Views on How Important it is that their Child Receives an Education through Irish**



Although most respondents (85%) stated that it was important that their child received an education through Irish, 37.5% ( $n=82$ ) thought it was very important. A further 14% ( $n=32$ ) admitted that the medium of instruction did not matter to them.

Respondents were invited to elaborate on their views,<sup>189</sup> which 32% ( $n=70$ ) of them did. The main arguments that emerged among respondents who thought it was very important that their child received an education through Irish ( $n=30$ ) were based on Irish being an identity marker (50%,  $n=15$ ) and on total immersion enabling the child to speak Irish naturally (23%,  $n=7$ ).<sup>190</sup> The following sample quotations from the questionnaires illustrate these two key arguments: “They are Irish. The most important thing of their identity is their native language.” (RP24); “To become immersed in his native language and culture, to speak Irish naturally, to follow on the way we live at home.” (RD24); “It will give the child a deep sense of their heritage and their unique identity in the modern world.” (RK210).<sup>191</sup>

<sup>189</sup> See Appendix 16, Table A16.2 for a full list of statements justifying respondents' views.

<sup>190</sup> These two percentages are exclusive and therefore cannot be added to total 100%.

<sup>191</sup> Note that these respondents are not native-speakers of Irish. The first one reported middle ability while the other two said they had high ability in the language. See Section 4.4.1 Ability in Irish for a definition on language ability groups.

Respondents who expressed themselves on the reasons why they thought it was “important” that their child learnt through the medium of Irish ( $n=30$ ) also referred to the Irish heritage (27%,  $n=8$ ) and Irish identity (20%,  $n=6$ ) as crucial parts of their child's education.<sup>192</sup> A further 17% ( $n=5$ ) emphasised the importance of being aware of the national language as well as being fluent in it: “I think it's important that every person know their national language and can communicate in this medium” (RK28), “I believe that as Irish citizens it is a duty to be able to converse in our native tongues” (RD61). Finally, some respondents also referred to the advantages of being bilingual in terms of academic performance (17%,  $n=5$ ) and language skills (13%,  $n=4$ ): “I have read that bilingual student perform better generally” (RJ23); “I feel by being taught through Irish gives each child an advantage to learn other languages” (RP612). By contrast, the minority of respondents who expressed indifference ( $n=9$ ) or no interest ( $n=1$ ) in Irish as the medium of instruction mostly said that a quality education mattered most: “Education is important regardless of what language it is taught in” (RH23). In some cases they confessed that Irish was an advantage and therefore showed that it was not their priority: “I just wanted a good school. Irish was a benefit” (RD210), “I feel it is an advantage for my child and I am pleased that she's making more of Irish than we did at school. However, if we had not lived near a good gaelscoil she would have gone to an English-speaking school” (RG28).

While this section has shown that parents' motivation for sending their child to an Irish-medium school were indicative of their attitude towards Irish, the next section focuses on parents' attitudes to Irish-medium education now that their child is attending a gaelscoil.

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192 The following are further quotations illustrating the importance of learning Irish according to these respondents: “our kids now are aware of their Irish identity, they have pride in their language” (RP61), “so that they are able to speak in their native tongue and are proud of their Irish heritage” (RP22), “I believe my children should have an appreciation of their historical background and culture” (RA624), “because it is important to promote and keep alive our Irish language and heritage” (RF29).

#### 4.3.2 Advantages and disadvantages to Irish-medium education

Respondents were first asked a series of questions about their personal view on Irish-medium education and the advantages and disadvantages for their child. Two sets of questions were then asked depending on the class the respondents' child attended. Parents of senior infant children were questioned on their level of confidence regarding immersion education while parents of sixth class children were asked whether or not the teaching of English was neglected as a result of immersion education. Finally, all respondents were surveyed on the policy of early total immersion. Respondents were satisfied overall with Irish-medium education as it benefited their child in terms of language skills. Very few saw any disadvantages with such an education. The results presented below reflect the trend observed in another study in seven Irish-medium primary schools where 76% of interviewed parents said that the Irish language benefited their child's education (Ó Donnagáin, 1995, p. 74).

Of a 96% valid response in the current study, 89.7% ( $n=192$ ) indicated that learning through the medium of Irish benefited their child educationally as compared to 2.8% ( $n=6$ ). The remaining 7.5% ( $n=16$ ) had no opinion. Although it is a small percentage it is interesting to see that one quarter of these respondents were parents of a sixth class pupil. After seven years of experience with Irish-medium education these four respondents were still unsure as to whether this type of education benefited their child.

Respondents who believed in the advantages immersion education offers gave various reasons. The most frequently stated reasons were put into categories that are listed in Table 4.10 below.

**Table 4.10: Parents' Arguments Supporting the View that Irish-Medium Education Benefits Children Educationally**

Argument	Total (%) <sup>193</sup> N=192
Makes it easier to learn more languages	37
Early bilingualism benefits cognitive thinking, brain development	23
Gives child good language skills at an early age	9
Gives child more opportunities in life (education/career)	6
Child won't struggle with Irish at secondary level and will get extra points in the Leaving Certificate	6
Makes child aware of his/her heritage	5.5
Makes child's education more challenging	5

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193 These are exclusive and do not total 100% as some respondents gave more than one reason.

Overall respondents had heard or read about immersion education and mentioned benefits such as a capability for learning other languages much easier and quicker (37%,  $n=71$ ) as well as the development of general language skills (9%,  $n=18$ ). They also gave examples of scientific advancements that showed early bilingualism enhanced cognitive thinking (23%,  $n=45$ ). As one respondent put it “bilingual education has a proven record of improved educational outcomes” (RJ212).

When looking at Ó Donnagáin's study (1995, pp. 74-75) one can observe that very few parents (4%) disagreed with the fact that Irish-medium education benefited their child educationally, which is also the case here. A larger number of respondents agreed in the present study (89.7% as compared to 76% in 1995), probably because fewer respondents were unsure of the impact of Irish-medium education on their child. Indeed 20% of respondents in the 1995 study said they did not know whether the Irish language benefited their child educationally against 7.5% in 2009. It is also interesting to see that similar explanations why Irish would benefit their child educationally were given in both studies:

- easier to learn other languages
- expands child's intellect
- gives children an advantage in education (examinations, university)
- awareness of Irish identity and culture

Respondents who disagreed with the idea that bilingual education gives children an advantage (2.8%,  $n=6$ ) mainly argued that there was no difference between a bilingual education and a monolingual one. Only one of them stated that other school subjects were compromised because they were taught through the medium of Irish, that is to say the child's second language.

When questioned about any disadvantages associated with Irish-medium education, 62.7% ( $n=133$ )—of a 95% valid response—thought there was none against 25.5% ( $n=55$ ) who thought that there were. A further 11.8% ( $n=25$ ) of respondents indicated they did not know or were not sure about the negative impact—if any—such an education could have as a majority of them had a child in senior infant class. As one interviewed parent put it “At first we were afraid their English would suffer but that has proven not to be the case” (RG26). Respondents who thought Irish-medium education had disadvantages were encouraged to give more details about their own point of view. All respondents left a comment in the space provided. Table 4.11 lists the most frequently stated arguments accounting for disadvantages to Irish-medium education.<sup>194</sup>

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194 See Table A16.3 in Appendix 16 for a complete list of disadvantages to Irish-medium education.

**Table 4.11: Disadvantages to an Irish-Medium Education**

Argument	Total (%) <sup>195</sup> N=54
English may/does suffer	30
Difficult/technical vocabulary in various subjects not covered in English (history, geography, science, mathematics). Irish version of songs etc. not known in English	17
It is more difficult for children with learning problems (difficulty with language, maths or dyslexia)	15
Child slower to learn how to read in English (short term problem)	9
Difficult transition from Irish-medium secondary school to university	7
Because gaelscoileanna are Irish-language oriented it is hard for parents who have no Irish in relation to homework, parental involvement, etc.	7
Lower level in subjects such as maths and history and geography. The medium of instruction makes them more challenging	7
Lack of school books/adequate materials (primary and secondary levels)	5

Respondents seemed to be mostly concerned about their child's level of English (writing and reading skills). They also expressed concerns about their child being at a disadvantage by not having and the relevant terms in English (47%,  $n=25$ ). A certain group of respondents thought Irish-medium education put certain children prone to learning difficulties or dyslexia at a disadvantage (15%,  $n=8$ ). Some parents even suggested that Irish as a medium of instruction was at the root of their child's learning difficulties in certain subjects (7%,  $n=4$ ). A certain number of respondents, however, argued that some disadvantages were merely short-term and were due to the natural process of early total immersion (9%,  $n=5$ ). It should be noted that a few respondents raised the topic of the lack of adequate learning materials in the Irish language (5%,  $n=3$ ). Finally, only a minority of respondents said they felt excluded because of their poor level of Irish (7%,  $n=4$ ).

Ó Donnagáin (1995, pp. 79-81) found that 53% of his cohort saw some disadvantages to Irish-medium schools, which contrasts sharply with the present findings (25.5%). Although the percentage of respondents who thought there were disadvantages is half that of 1995, the explanations given by parents in both studies are very similar. The most frequently stated disadvantages in both studies referred to the fear that their child's English may suffer and the difficulty with English terminology once moving to an English-medium secondary school and to university. Other concerns such as the

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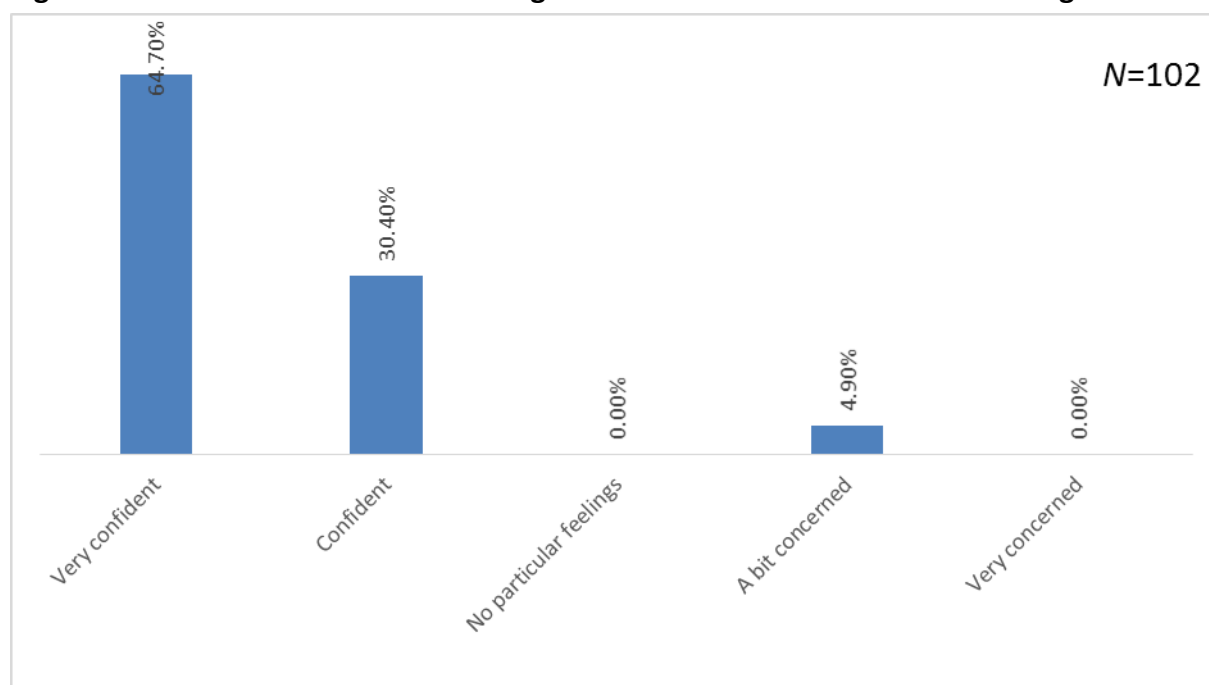
<sup>195</sup> These are exclusive and do not total 100% as some respondents gave more than one reason.

inability of parents to assist with homework, Irish-medium schools' poor resources and the problems encountered by children with learning difficulties were also mentioned in both studies.

Since parents participating in this study had children just starting as well as finishing primary school it was not clear whether they would have the same views on Irish-medium education depending on the class level their child attended at the time of the survey. Findings presented below show that while senior infant parents expressed confidence in the immersion system sixth class parents reinforced this viewpoint by rejecting the idea that the teaching of English was neglected in Irish-medium schools. These results are consistent with previous findings that parents did not believe that Irish hindered their child educationally (Ó Donnagáin, 1995, p. 75).

Respondents with a child in Senior Infants were asked how they felt about their child learning through the medium of Irish. The return rate for this question was a 75.5% valid response. Figure 4.5 shows respondents' position towards Irish as a medium of instruction based on a confidence scale ranging from *very confident* to *very concerned* with which parents were presented in the questionnaire.

**Figure 4.5: Senior Infant Parents' Feelings towards their Child's Education through Irish**



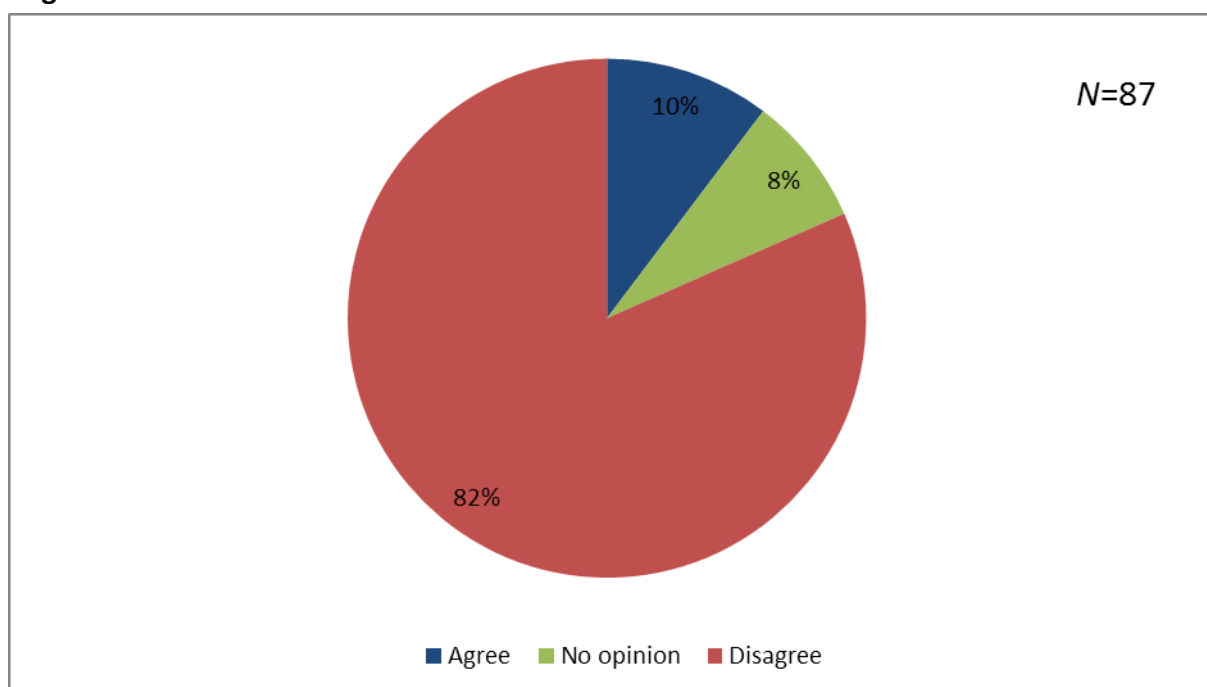
Ninety-five per cent of respondents ( $n=97$ ) said they were confident in their child's education through Irish, a majority of whom indicated they were *very confident* (64.7%,  $n=66$ ). A minority admitted they were *a bit concerned* (4.9%,  $n=5$ ). Three reasons why the latter group had concerns

about their child's education emerged from their comments.<sup>196</sup> They include the fear that the child's level of English reading and writing may be lower than average ( $n=3$ ) and that the child's level of comprehension in the classroom may be at risk, i.e. difficulties in understanding the teacher ( $n=2$ ). Finally, one respondent expressed concerns about not being able to help the child through his/her education because of a poor command of Irish.

Again, the issue of the child's level of English was the main concern here for respondents of a child in Senior Infants. It should be noted, however, that four respondents out of the five who expressed some concern about their child's education did not have any other children in the Irish-medium school system. Therefore, they may simply have been nervous about this new experience. This was also suggested by senior infant teachers throughout the interviews when explaining that such concerns were usually common among new parents and never lasted for very long. In addition, these respondents did not seem to be familiar with the bilingual experience as none of them reported a high ability to speak Irish, hence their feeling of apprehension.

Since participating sixth-class parents had experienced Irish-medium education for a longer period than some senior infant parents they were questioned about their view of the teaching of English in the gaelscoil. The return rate for this question was a 98.9% valid response. The chart in Figure 4.6 shows sixth-class parents' answers to the question "do you think Irish-medium schools (gaelscoileanna) neglect the teaching of English?"

**Figure 4.6: Sixth-Class Parents' View on Irish-Medium Schools Neglecting the Teaching of English**



<sup>196</sup> One respondent gave two reasons.

A great majority of respondents (81.6%,  $n=71$ ) rejected the idea that Irish-medium schools neglect the teaching of English. Whereas 8% ( $n=7$ ) had no opinion on this topic, 10% ( $n=9$ ) of respondents actually thought the quality of English-language teaching was not up to the standard. The nine respondents who were unhappy with the teaching of English all gave a reason each why they felt this way. Their answers were organised into categories and are listed in Table 4.12 below:

**Table 4.12: Sixth Class Parents' Arguments for the Neglected Teaching of English in the Gaelscoil**

Argument	Total N=9
Lower proficiency in the English language than peers attending an English-medium secondary school	3
Lack of English essays/story writing	2
Too much emphasis put on the Irish language at the expense of other subjects	2
Less enjoyment of English due to emphasis on the Irish language	1
Difficulties encountered in English (subject) when moving to an English-medium secondary school	1

Whereas two respondents addressed the contents of the curriculum in the English subject indicating there was a lack of English story writing others referred to a more general problem based on language proficiency. Four respondents expressed their concerns about their child being less proficient in English or having difficulties adjusting when moving to an English-medium secondary school. Although some respondents may have older children who experienced difficulties in the English language others based their argument on anecdotal evidence. For instance, one interviewed parent said: "I've heard stories of children going to secondary schools, and not doing as well as other kids in English class." (RP617). Finally, three respondents thought Irish was too prevailing. They felt that the English language—and for one respondent other subjects such as geography—was not given the same attention. It appears here that respondents were somehow questioning the immersion education system in their statements. However one of them acknowledged that the greater emphasis on Irish was understandable.

It should be noted that a third of those respondents indicated that their child would go to an Irish-medium secondary school therefore it cannot be assumed that all of them were unsatisfied with Irish-medium education. Indeed five of the respondents used terms such as "slightly", "a little", "perhaps" to refer to the neglected approach to the teaching of English in their gaelscoil. In addition, eight

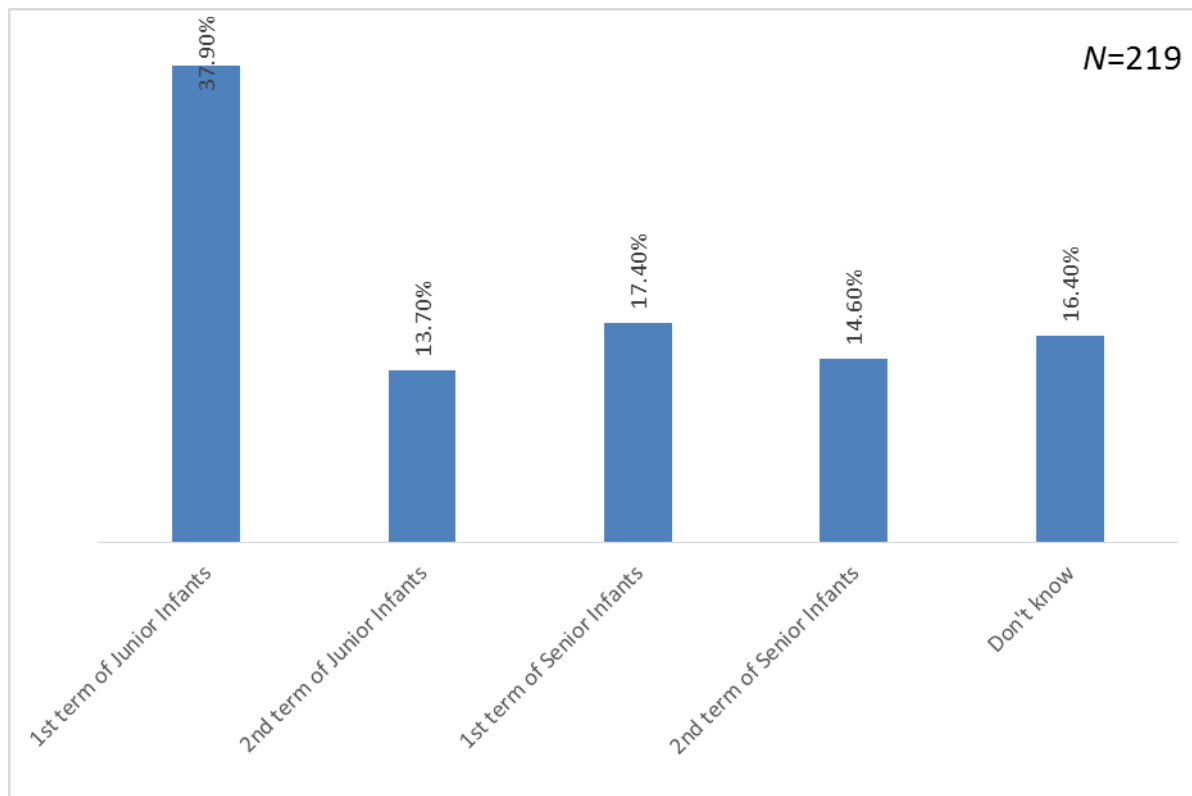


respondents out of nine agreed that learning through Irish benefited their child educationally (question 6 in the questionnaire). The ninth respondent did not answer this question when completing the questionnaire.

Both groups of respondents appeared to be overall satisfied with their child's education through Irish which is indicative of positive attitudes towards Irish-medium education. Yet, as shown below, the percentage of respondents supporting early total immersion is lower in comparison with the level of satisfaction with such practice.

Two schools among the eleven participating schools indicated they introduced the teaching of English reading before Irish reading. The other gaelscoileanna delay English reading until the first term of Senior Infants and sometimes until the second term of Senior Infants. Due to a divergence between the schools in terms of starting point for the teaching of English, respondents were asked when they thought it was best to introduce the teaching of English. The introduction of the teaching of English from the first term of Junior Infants (37.9%,  $n=83$ ) was the most chosen out of the proposed four school terms. This represents a significant minority of respondents who seemed to have a different view from the early total immersion policy practised in most participating schools. The chart in Figure 4.7 outlines the results. The horizontal axis shows the five categories respondents were presented with in the questionnaire. Each category represents a school term in the first two years of primary schooling.

**Figure 4.7: Parents' Views on the Best Time to Introduce the Teaching of English**



Over half the respondents ( $n=113$ ) indicated that the teaching of English should be introduced in the first year of primary schooling whereas just under a third of parents ( $n=70$ ) believed the second year was best. Although 45.7% ( $n=100$ ) were in favour of early total immersion to varying degrees (that is to say the delayed introduction of English to the second term of Junior Infants or to Senior Infants) it does not constitute a large majority. It is however in line with other findings where 43% ( $n=123$ ) of gaelscoil parents believed that total immersion and beginning the teaching of reading in Irish were important factors in the teaching of reading in Irish-medium schools (NCCA, 2007, p. 20). By contrast, a significant minority (37.9%,  $n=83$ ) voted for the introduction of the teaching of English in the very first term of Junior Infant Class. This result is reminiscent of the 2006 National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) consultation paper that showed that 39% of parents ( $n=123$ ) indicated that English and Irish reading should begin at the same time while a further 8% thought English reading should be introduced first (NCCA, 2007, p. 21). Although some schools introduce the teaching of English earlier than others the present results show that a significant number of respondents appeared to disagree with early total immersion. This matter was further investigated and a similar question was added in the follow-up interviews. However the findings of the interviews were not representative of the present results as nearly all interview participants (80%) disagreed with the introduction of the teaching of English in the first term of Junior Infants.<sup>197</sup>

It must be noted that 42% ( $n=35$ ) of the respondents supporting the introduction of the teaching of English from the first term of Junior Infants had a child in Sixth Class and therefore were accustomed to the Irish-medium schooling system. As seen earlier only 10% of respondents ( $n=9$ ) with a child in Sixth Class believed that the teaching of English was neglected. It is therefore unlikely those respondents—who represent 40% of the total sixth-class parent cohort—selected the first term of Junior Infants because they believed that their child's level of English was not proficient. Due to the overall satisfaction with the Irish-medium education system that was expressed throughout the questionnaires one can assume that some parents may not have always been aware of their school's practice in relation to the introduction of the teaching of English. Although it is not true for all of the participating schools, three schools teach the English language at an early stage. This practice was largely supported in the questionnaire as more than half the respondents in these three schools indicated they preferred to see English being taught from the first year of primary schooling (57% in G0; 72.2% in G6; 60% in G8). Once respondents from the two schools where the teaching of English reading is introduced before Irish reading were identified, there were still 23.3% ( $n=51$ ) of respondents

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<sup>197</sup> See Section 1.5.3 in Chapter One.

who disagreed with the early total immersion practised in their respective schools regardless of their child's class level. Although this figure includes new parents with no experience of immersion education (35.3%,  $n=18$ ) who may feel nervous about early total immersion, only four respondents (7.8%) indicated some degree of dissatisfaction with immersion education in relation to children's level of English. It is probable that the rest (56.9%,  $n=29$ ) may not have been aware of the literacy practice of their school. It can therefore be assumed that while some respondents may have been opposed to the introduction of the teaching of Irish reading before English reading in the other schools, others may have thought English was taught from an early stage, which would explain the discrepancy between the school's practice and respondents' preference regarding the introduction of the teaching of English.

A cross-tabulation analysis was carried out between respondents who showed a preference for the introduction of the teaching of English from the first term of Junior Infants and their own ability in Irish. The results show that respondents who reported low ability in Irish favoured the introduction of the teaching of English from the first term of Junior Infants most, which represents 50% of the "low ability" group ( $n=20$ ).<sup>198</sup> A significant minority of the "middle ability" group (41%,  $n=30$ ) also indicated their preference for early English teaching. By contrast, less than a third of the "high ability" group (27%,  $n=21$ ) shared this opinion.<sup>199</sup> One may assume that respondents with higher ability in Irish had more experience of bilingualism and therefore were less concerned about early total immersion impacting on their child's command of the English language as previously reported above by respondents. Only a tiny minority of respondents belonging to the high ability group who had themselves attended an Irish-medium school as a child (9.6%,  $n=8$ ) indicated they would prefer English to be introduced from the first term of Junior Infants.

Although respondents' ability in Irish may impact on what they believe is the right time to introduce the teaching of English in the early years of primary schooling, their preferences do not always coincide with the practice in their school. The absence of guidelines for gaelscoileanna on introducing literacy in English and Irish (DES, 1999) results in the discrepancy between school practices and parents' preferences.

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198 The low ability group includes respondents who reported they had *the odd word* and *a few simple sentences*; the middle ability group stands for *parts of conversations* while the high ability group includes *most conversations* and *native speaker ability*.

199 It has to be noted that a certain number of respondents who answered this question (5.5%) omitted to give a self-report on their own ability in Irish and therefore could not be included in this cross tabulation.

### 4.3.3 Parents' commitment to Irish-medium education

Respondents were asked about previous attendance at an Irish-medium pre-school or naíonra as well as future decisions about secondary education, as a means to further assess their commitment to Irish-medium education.

Respondents were evenly divided between those who had sent their child to an Irish-medium pre-school so that their child could immerse himself/herself in the language, and those who had not sent their child to such a pre-school mainly because there was none in their living area.

Of a 96.4% valid response results show that 50.7% ( $n=109$ ) respondents said they had sent their child to a naíonra whereas 49.3% ( $n=106$ ) had not done so. A total of 59% ( $n=127$ ) gave details for the reasons why they had or had not sent their child to a naíonra.<sup>200</sup> The most frequently stated reason among respondents who did send their child to a naíonra refers to the importance of becoming familiar with the Irish language before starting primary school (70%,  $n=33$ ). A significant number of respondents also mentioned the importance of meeting future classmates (19%,  $n=9$ ) while other talked about the advantage it had in order to get a place in the gaelscoil (17%,  $n=8$ ) as most schools recommend naíonra attendance (or give priority to children who attended a naíonra) as part of their enrolment criteria (7 schools out of 9 participating schools which provided their enrolment criteria). It should be noted that a large majority of respondents who sent their child to a naíonra come from a gaelscoil that considers pre-school attendance as an enrolment criterion (at least 68.8%,  $n=75$  as two schools did not provide their enrolment criteria). As for parents who had not sent their child to a naíonra, they mostly explained that this was due to the non-availability of such pre-schools in their living area (34%,  $n=27$ ). This is surprising as ten of the eleven participating schools are located near one or several Irish-medium pre-schools, according to Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta, the voluntary all-Ireland organisation supporting Irish-medium pre-school education.<sup>201</sup> Although there may have been no naíonra a few years ago near two of the participating schools, it only accounts for a small number of respondents with a child in Sixth Class (9.4%,  $n=10$ ). It also appears that pre-school attendance varies from one gaelscoil to the other. Between 90% and 100% of respondents from two participating schools said their child attended a naíonra whereas only 9% from another school said their child did. For 52% of the latter the main reason was that there was no naíonra in their living area. Yet, two naíonraí are located in this particular area although it is not beside the gaelscoil. Some respondents may prefer to choose proximity over the Irish language experience at pre-school level. For others it may simply be a lack of information as at least 10% ( $n=8$ ) of those who did not send their child to a

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200 Percentages are based on the number of respondents who elaborated on the question of naíonra attendance whether they chose to send their child to a naíonra ( $n=47$ ) or not ( $n=80$ ).

201 [www.naionra.ie](http://www.naionra.ie)

naíonra acknowledged that they were not aware of the availability of an Irish-medium pre-school in their living area. A significant number of respondents also raised the issue of the naíonra's unsuitable operating hours for full-time workers (19%,  $n=15$ ). This particular point was made by Hickey in her study on naíonraí (1997) when she observed that half of the children involved in Irish-medium pre-schools came from homes where both parents were working outside the home either full-time or part-time. She commented: "It would be most unfortunate if naíonraí (...) were to exclude the children of some working parents because of practical problems such as difficulties with their hours of operation." (1997, p. 170). It seems that more than a decade later this is still an issue for some working parents. Some respondents raised another practical problem claiming that their child did not attend a naíonra because they could not get a place (9%,  $n=7$ ). A further 10% ( $n=8$ ) preferred a Montessori pre-school to a naíonra.

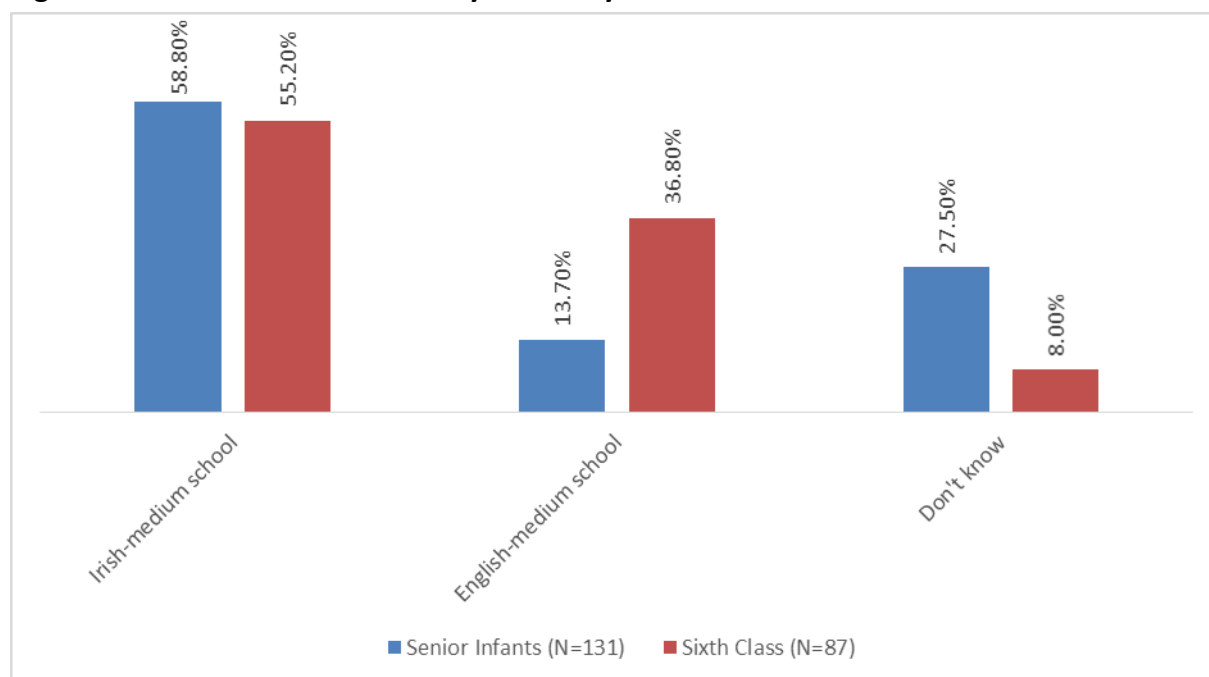
Since attending a pre-school is not mandatory in Ireland parents' decision to send their child to a naíonra can only partly reveal some form of commitment to Irish-medium education. However, it is possible to get an overview of their commitment by analysing their choice of secondary school, especially among sixth class parents. Most respondents selected an Irish-medium secondary school for their child, regardless of their child's class level at the time of the survey. The main reasons justifying their choice were based on their commitment to Irish-medium education as well as on their child's wish to continue secondary education through Irish.

A majority of respondents (57.3%,  $n=125$ )—of a 97.8% valid response—said they had selected an Irish-medium secondary school for their child. One fifth of respondents ( $n=43$ ) were still undecided at the time of the survey. However, the latter mainly represents respondents with a child in Senior Infants. When comparing respondents' choice according to the class their child attends one can observe that just under 60% chose an Irish-medium secondary school in each cohort.<sup>202</sup> The major difference comes from the high number of undecided parents at Senior Infant level. It is understandable that they may not have selected a secondary school as their child is only starting primary school. By contrast, 8% of respondents ( $n=7$ ) with a child in Sixth Class had still no idea at the time of the survey whether or not their child would continue his/her education through the medium of Irish. The chart in Figure 4.8 below illustrates the results of respondents' secondary school choice in percentages.

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<sup>202</sup> See Table A16.4: Secondary School Choice among Senior Infant Parents and Table A16.5: Secondary School Choice among Sixth Class Parents in Appendix 16.

**Figure 4.8: Selection of a Secondary School by Senior Infant Parents and Sixth Class Parents**



Respondents were given a list of reasons for selecting a secondary school. The tables below show respondents' response. Different reasons were picked from the list therefore the percentages given in the table do not total 100%.

**Table 4.13: Reasons for Choosing an Irish-Medium Secondary School**

Reason	Total % (N=125)
Next logical step in child's education	88
Child wants to	42.4
The Irish language is part of the family's daily life	32
Irish is more and more important for a wide range of careers	20
Other	10.4

For an overwhelming majority (88%,  $n=110$ ) going to an Irish-medium secondary school is the next logical step in their child's education. Children's opinion also seems to play an important role in parents' decision making as 42.4% ( $n=53$ ) said they chose an Irish-medium secondary school because their child wanted to continue through Irish, and probably attend the same school as his/her friends. The third main reason concerns just under a third of the cohort ( $n=40$ ) and is based on the importance

the Irish language has in their lives. This reason was stated mostly by respondents who are fluent in Irish, have native speaker ability or are native speakers (67.5%,  $n=27$ ).

These results were cross-tabulated with respondents' self-report on their ability to speak Irish. All three categories, that is to say low ability, middle ability and high ability were equally represented, each counting more than half of their respective total population.<sup>203</sup> Respondents who chose an Irish-medium secondary for their child therefore did so independently of their own level of Irish.

Three main reasons were put forward by the 23% of respondents ( $n=50$ ) who did not select an Irish-medium secondary school for their child. The first one is concerned with the non-availability of an Irish-medium secondary school in the respondents' living area (42%,  $n=21$ ). Respondents who chose this reason came mainly from two of the eleven participating schools. While it seemed fair for 57% of respondents ( $n=12$ ) who would have had to travel before getting to the nearest Irish-medium secondary school, the remaining 43% ( $n=9$ ) stood out. All nine respondents come from the same school which is a feeder school to an Irish-medium secondary school which is at a reasonable distance from the gaelscoil. Respondents must therefore have a different understanding of the word "area" and must refer to a walking distance from their home. It should also be noted that English-medium secondary schools can be found closer to this gaelscoil, which must have been a more convenient choice for them. The second reason (38%,  $n=19$ ) deals with parents' fear that their low ability in Irish may interfere with their child's education in the sense that they will not be able to help him/her if necessary;<sup>204</sup> whereas a further 22% ( $n=11$ ) thought that secondary education would be too challenging for their child. When added together, these two reasons account for the most frequently stated reason that secondary schooling through the medium of Irish is challenging. The third main reason not to select an Irish-medium secondary school is based on the fact that the respondent's child has acquired enough fluency in the Irish language and can therefore continue their education through the medium of English (34%,  $n=17$ ). Table 4.14 outlines the results.

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203 The categories were organised according to respondents' self report. Respondents who said they could speak *the odd word or a few simple sentences* were included in the low ability category. The middle category represents respondents who can speak *parts of conversations* in Irish while the high ability includes respondents who can speak *most conversations* or have *native-speaker ability* in Irish.

204 60% of these respondents ( $n=25$ ) were parents of a sixth class pupil. Although they expressed some concern in relation to their ability in Irish being too low to be able to help their child through Irish 24% had reported middle ability in Irish while 16% said they could speak *most conversations* in Irish.

**Table 4.14: Reasons for Not Choosing an Irish-Medium Secondary School**

Reason	Total % (N=50)
None in the area	42
Parents have not enough Irish and will not be able to help their child with his/her studies	38
Child has enough Irish and can continue in an English-medium secondary school	34
Too challenging for the child	22
Child does not want to	18
Irish-medium secondary schools do not have adequate resources in Irish	4
Other	24

When comparing respondents' initial reasons for sending their child to a gaelscoil with their choice of secondary school one can observe that 76% ( $n=38$ ) of respondents who selected an English-medium secondary school (which represents 17% of the total sample) seemed mostly to have strategic educational reasons for sending their child to an Irish-medium primary school. This result was established by looking at the number of respondents who thought that to get *a good grounding in Irish*<sup>205</sup> before going to an English-medium school was a reason to choose a gaelscoil. It is possible that those respondents thought of how beneficial it would be for their child to be fluent in Irish for future examinations at secondary level. Some questionnaire respondents used this as an example of how Irish could benefit their child's education: "[it gives] higher points if the exam is done in Irish" (RP68), "it will ensure a good mark at Leaving Certificate" (RK612). Although these comments were made by respondents who chose an Irish-medium secondary school for their child it is very likely that this idea was shared by other respondents who opted for an English-medium secondary school.

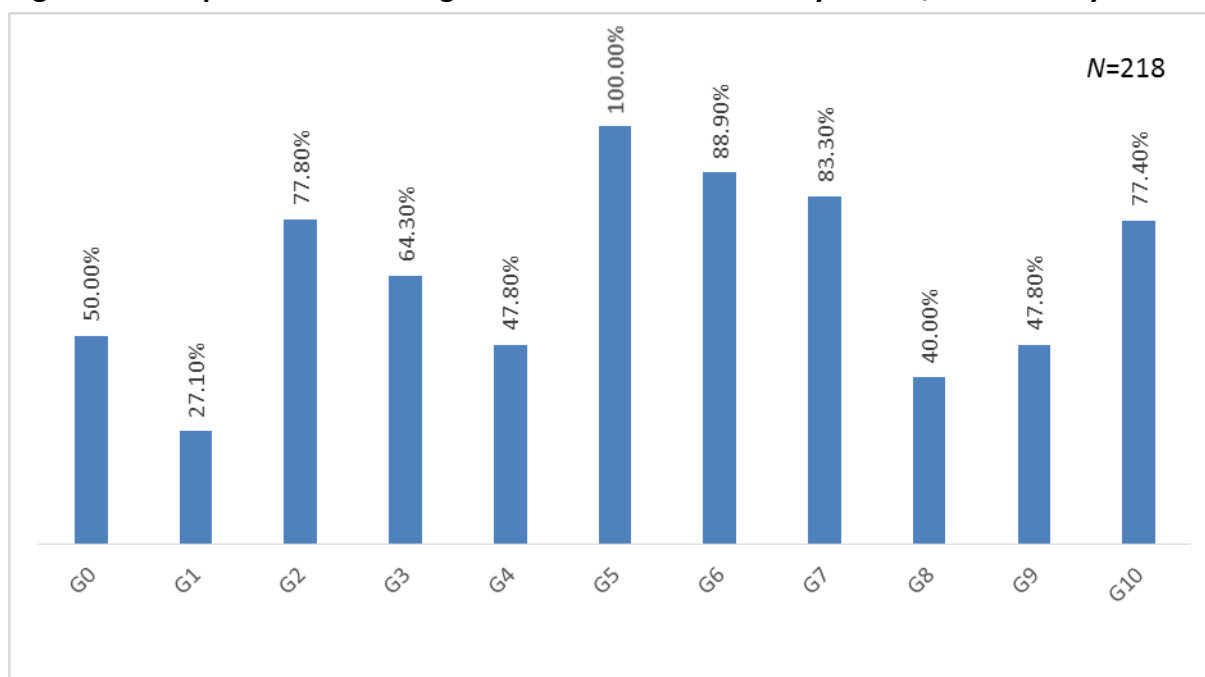
It should be noted that the number of respondents who selected an Irish-medium secondary school for their child varies from one school to the other. Out of eleven schools only four had less than 50% respondents interested in an education through the medium of Irish at secondary level. One school scored as low as 27.1%. By contrast, four schools had over three quarters of the families involved ready to send their child to an Irish-medium secondary school. The chart in Figure 4.9 shows the percentage of respondents who chose an Irish-medium education for their child at secondary level per school.

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205 See question 1, answer e in the questionnaire in Appendix 9.



**Figure 4.9: Respondents Selecting an Irish-Medium Secondary School, Classified by School**



## Conclusion

The analysis of parents' motivation for sending their child to an Irish-medium primary school shows the complexity of the school selection process. While the Irish language is an important factor, educational reasons are also highly valued. It must be noted that the selection of a gaelscoil is done from an array of schools depending on the area. Other factors such as school patronage and the increasing provision of multi-denominational schools where no particular religion is taught during school hours were not mentioned in the current study. Yet, they may also be part of parents' reasons for selecting an Irish-medium school when the latter provides an alternative to the Catholic ethos that exists in a majority of schools in Ireland.

It is clear from the current figures that bilingualism is the top reason for choosing an Irish-medium school. By and large, respondents thought that Irish-medium education benefits their child educationally, mostly because it enables children to learn other languages with ease, while also enhancing cognitive development. While multilingualism is promoted by the European commission, Irish society has gone through socio-demographic changes, notably with immigration from the 1990s which increased the number of multilingual communities on the island. Bilingualism in these immersion schools is tightly linked with Irish culture and identity. Although it is not clear whether parents would still choose an Irish-medium school had they have the choice between Irish-medium education and immersion education in another language, a majority of respondents indicated that they selected such school for cultural identity reasons.

Despite the small number of bilingual families attending the participating schools, very few parents had concerns regarding their child's education and proficiency in both Irish and English. The fear that respondents had about their child's command of the English language emerged among a minority of respondents who were either new to the immersion education experience or had their child registered in an English-medium secondary school and therefore focused more on the English language. It was nonetheless found that a significant minority of respondents seemed to favour the early introduction of the teaching of English as part of the curriculum as opposed to an early total immersion education with the complete exclusion of English. This was specifically true among respondents with low to middle ability in Irish. Although none of the participating schools were affected this could pose a threat to the early immersion system in place in most Irish-medium primary schools in Ireland. Indeed, following the withdrawal in January 2010 of the controversial Ministerial Circular 0044/2007 which put an end to early total immersion,<sup>206</sup> the Department of Education announced that English could be delayed up to the end of the first term of Senior Infants (Walshe, 21 January 2010). However, the school must comply with parents' demand if they request to have the teaching of English introduced early in Junior Infants.

Results indicate that the vast majority of gaelscoil parents participating in the current study are truly committed to Irish-medium education. Half of them had sent their child to an Irish-medium pre-school and a significant number of those who had not done so indicated they would have had there been—or had they known there was—such a facility closer to their home. Although the cost of pre-schooling was not frequently stated as a reason for not sending children to a naíonra, the number of children attending a naíonra is likely to increase following the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme launched in 2010 which provides a free year of pre-school for children aged 3 years. Because pre-school is not compulsory it is perhaps through their choice of secondary school that respondents really showed how committed they were to Irish-medium education. Although it may still have been early for some to decide which school their child would go to, over half the respondents chose an Irish-medium secondary school. Results from the current study appear to be above average as figures show that the percentage of children attending an Irish-medium secondary school nationally is 2.2% as opposed to 5.9% attending an Irish-medium primary school.<sup>207</sup> This may be due to the fact that 10 counties out of 26 do not have any Irish-medium secondary schools.

It appeared to most that the selection of an Irish-medium secondary school was natural and provided continuity in their child's education. By contrast, a minority of respondents who opted for an English-

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206 See 1.5.3 in Chapter One.

207 Statistics for the 2011/2012 school year retrieved from [www.gaelscoileanna.ie/about/statistics/?lang=en](http://www.gaelscoileanna.ie/about/statistics/?lang=en)

medium secondary school seemed, for the most part, to have originally chosen an Irish-medium primary school mainly for educational reasons.

#### ***4.4 Irish language competence and use***

Since respondents, as well as being committed to Irish-medium education, were revealed to be more committed to using Irish than the national average<sup>208</sup> an analysis of their language competence and use was carried out. This section examines respondents' ability to understand and speak Irish together with the frequency with which they use it in an attempt to see whether their attitudes and self-reported behaviour towards Irish coincide.

Although the focus of this study was mainly on language attitudes, various questions aimed to see whether respondents' positive attitudes could predict actual use of the Irish language that is, whether Irish was spoken on the school grounds, at home or while socialising. The first part sets the linguistic context by examining respondents' self-report on their ability to understand and speak the Irish language. Respondents' educational and family background in terms of language exposure is also taken into account. The second part focuses on the encouragement parents give their child to use the Irish language outside the gaelscoil. Finally respondents' use of the Irish language in key environments such as the school, the home and social circles is analysed.

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208 See Section 4.2 General attitudes towards the Irish language.

#### 4.4.1 Competence in Irish

Respondents were asked to self-report their ability to understand Irish on the one hand and speak Irish on the other hand at different points in time. These include before the child attended the gaelscoil, while the child attended Senior Infant Class and for those with an older child while the child, attended Sixth Class. Respondents were also asked to give their spouse/partner's abilities in Irish when applicable.

Although language ability is self-reported gaelscoil respondents are revealed to have better ability in Irish than respondents who participated in the national language attitude surveys of 1993 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994), 2000 (Ó Riagáin, 2007) and 2007/08 (Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009). This is consistent with Kavanagh's (1999, pp. 238-241) study on attitudes to Irish among secondary level students where a strong correlation was found between parents' high ability in Irish and the decision to send their child to an Irish-medium school. Gaelscoil respondents were also likely to have better ability in Irish than the national average as they chose to have their child educated through the medium of Irish, which implies daily exposure to the language while doing the homework, for instance. For some—as we shall see further—this decision may even have encouraged them to attend Irish language classes so that they could assist their child through his/her education.

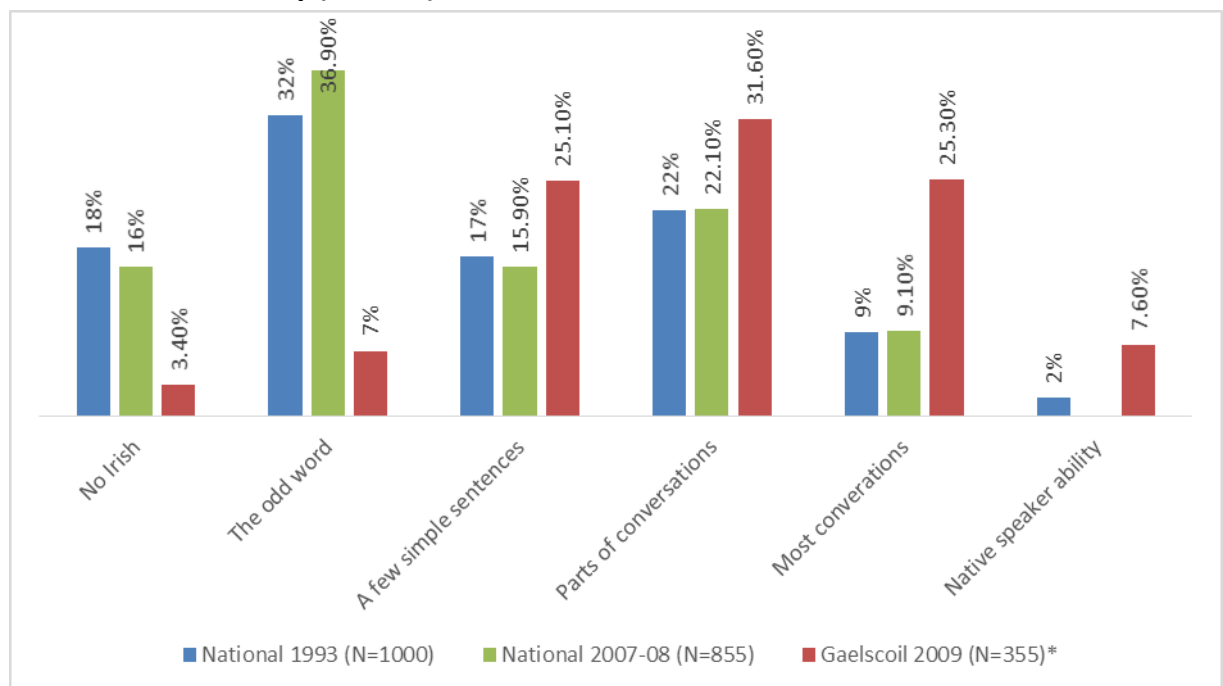
The graph in Figure 4.10 compares the results from the questionnaire with those from the national surveys.<sup>209</sup> The gaelscoil cohort reported higher competence in the Irish language than the national average with only 3.4% reporting they had no Irish against 18% of the national sample in 1993 and 16% in 2007/08. A further 56.9% claimed to be able to speak either *parts of conversations* or *most conversations* against 31% of the national sample in 1993 and 31.2% in 2007/08.<sup>210</sup>

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209 The levels of competence in Irish were labelled differently in Mac Gréil's survey of 2007/08. The category *none* was changed to *no Irish*, *only a little* became *the odd word*, *not so fluent* was changed to *a few simple sentences*, *middling* became *parts of conversations* and *very fluent/fluent* was changed to *most conversations*. The last category must have included a small percentage of native speakers but could not be extracted for the purpose of this comparative reading. The categories used in this graph are similar to those found in the national survey of 1993 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 5).

210 Note that results found in the 2000 survey (Ó Riagáin, 2007, pp. 378-379) for the sample population of the Republic of Ireland ( $N=1,000$ ) were in line with other national surveys despite the fact that respondents indicated better ability in Irish with 10.3% who said had *no Irish*, 27.9% could speak *the odd word*, 46.9% had partial ability in Irish (*a few simple sentences*, *parts of conversations*) while 14.6% had high ability in Irish (*most conversations* or *native speaker ability*).

**Figure 4.10: Ability in Irish: Comparative Reading of ITÉ National Survey (1993) and Mac Gréil's National Survey (2007/08)**



The total number of respondents (self and spouse/partners) is 424. Respondents who did not answer this question or ticked “not applicable” were discarded for comparative purposes with the two national surveys.

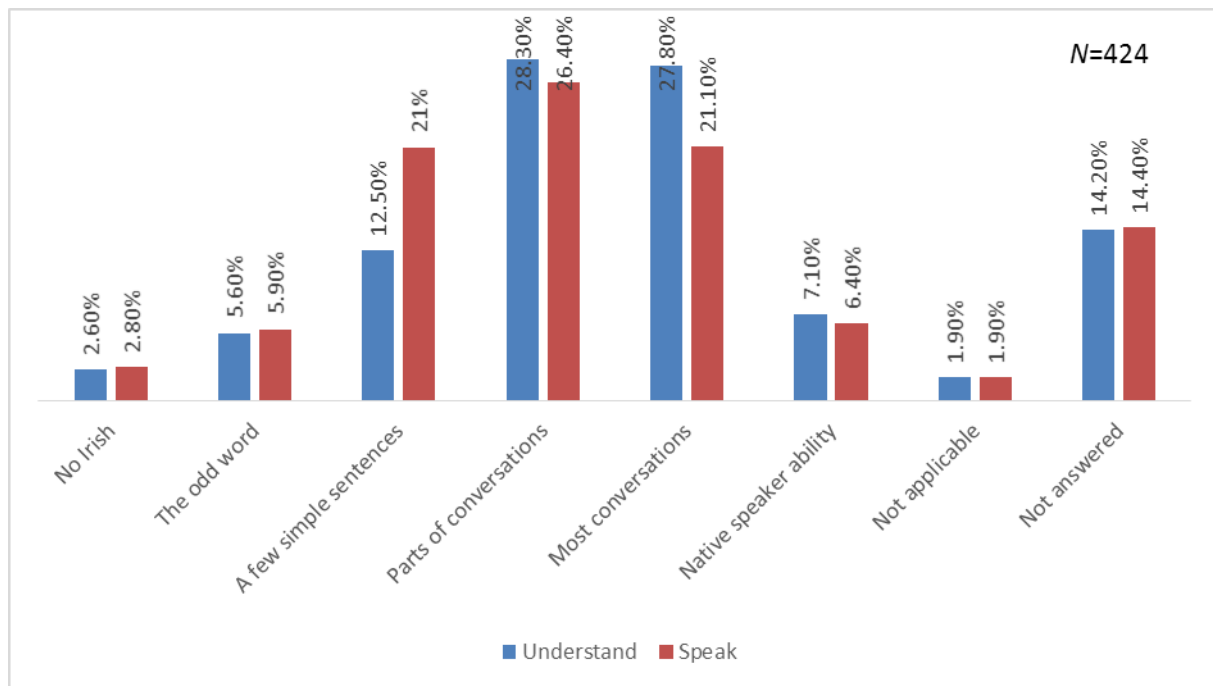
At the time of the survey ( $N=424$ ), very few parents claimed to have “no Irish” (2.8%,  $n=12$ ). Those who said they could speak Irish are evenly spread out into three categories:

- low ability: 26.9% ( $n=114$ , this percentage includes *the odd word* and *a few simple sentences*)
- middle ability: 26.4% ( $n=112$ , this percentage stands for *parts of conversations*)
- high ability: 27.6% ( $n=117$ , this percentage includes *most conversations* and *native speaker ability*)

The remaining 16.2% ( $n=69$ ) include respondents who omitted to self-report.

Figure 4.11 shows that respondents reported slightly better understanding ability in Irish than speaking ability.

**Figure 4.11: Respondents' Ability to Understand and Speak Irish**

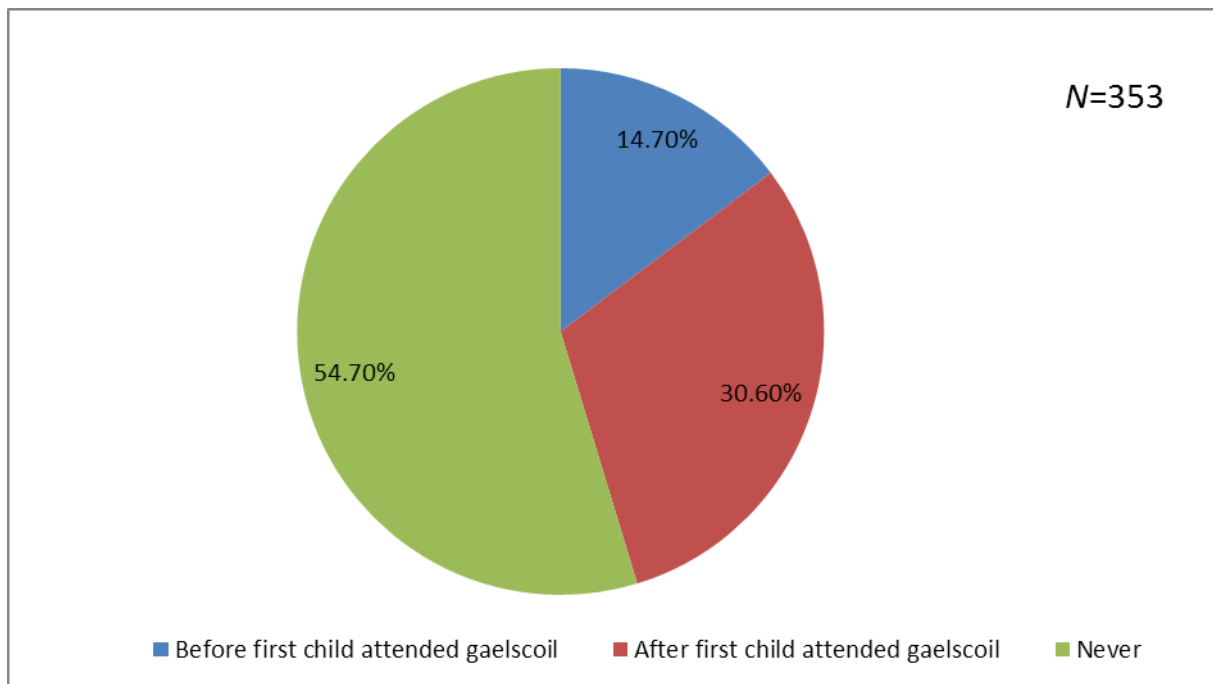


It must be noted that respondents who completed the questionnaire under the category *self* had better ability in Irish than their *spouse/partner*.

Although respondents showed they had greater ability in Irish than the national average, a significant number attended Irish language classes in order to familiarise themselves again with the language or to improve their own level of Irish. Just under half the sample population<sup>211</sup> ( $n=161$ )—which includes spouse/partner when applicable—said they attended adult Irish classes; two-thirds of whom ( $n=108$ ) attended after their child started school. The chart in Figure 4.12 outlines the results in percentages.

<sup>211</sup> Of an 83.2% valid response ( $n=353$ ).

**Figure 4.12: Parents' Adult Irish Class Attendance**



Respondents who said they attended or had attended adult Irish classes mostly did so in the gaelscoil when this service was available. Others mostly attended classes organised by their local adult education centre or by an Irish language organisation. It is unlikely that they attended these classes to increase their chance of school entry as only two schools seem to look at parents' ability in Irish as an enrolment criterion. One school also assesses parents' interest in the language. However, there was no evidence showing that more respondents involved in these three schools had attended adult Irish classes than in the other schools. As expected, respondents who attended or had attended an Irish class ( $n=161$ ) mostly reported low and middle abilities in Irish at the time their child started school. Whereas 5.6% ( $n=9$ ) had *no Irish* 41% ( $n=66$ ) reported a low ability, 31.7% ( $n=51$ ) could speak *parts of conversations* (i.e. middle ability) and 10.5% ( $n=17$ ) had a high ability in Irish.<sup>212</sup>

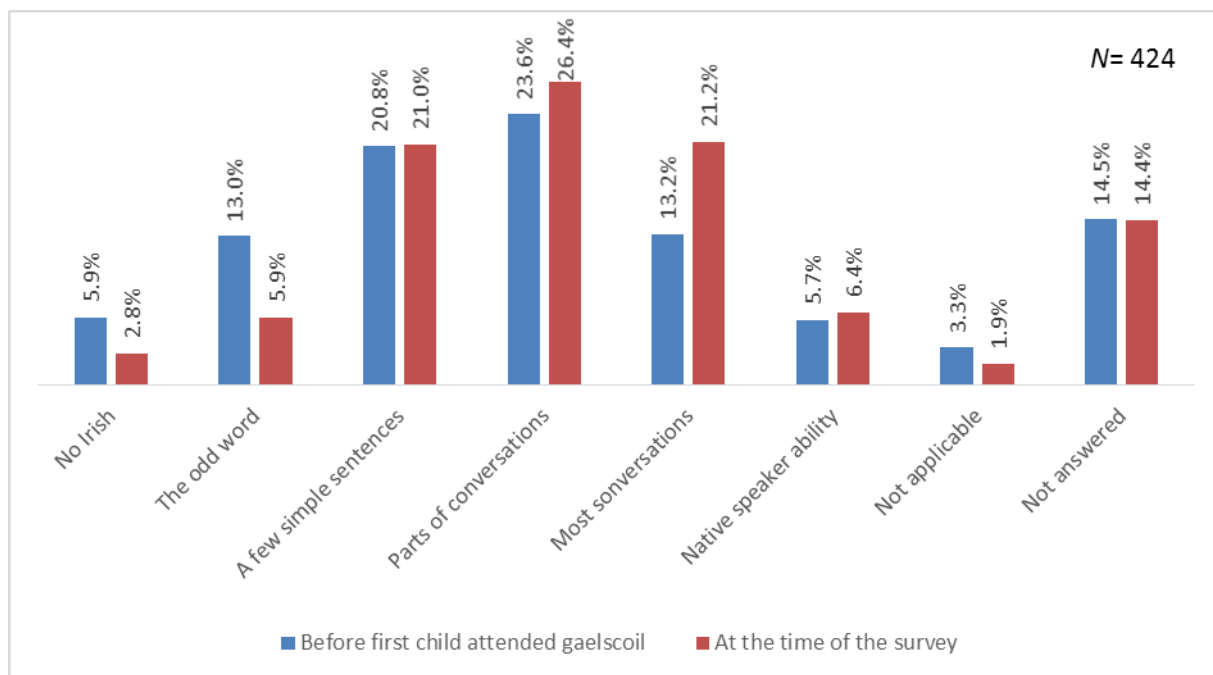
Forty-three per cent of respondents ( $n=83$ ) who never attended an adult Irish class explained why they never did. The two most frequently stated reasons referred to lack of time (37.3%,  $n=31$ ) and to the fact that Irish classes were not necessary as parents had sufficient Irish (34.9%,  $n=29$ ). Others explained that the time and day the classes were held interfered with family life and other pastimes (18.1%,  $n=15$ ). A further 13.3% ( $n=11$ ) said they were planning to attend such classes in the near future in order to know more Irish and be able to help with the homework.

<sup>212</sup> 11.2% ( $n=18$ ) omitted to self-report their ability to speak Irish in the questionnaire.



Whether respondents attended adult Irish language classes or learnt more Irish with their child when helping with homework, findings show a general improvement in respondents' level of Irish between the time before their child started school and the time of the survey. This is true across the board as the rate of respondents who had no Irish or knew very little of the language fell 11.6 points to 10.6% ( $n=45$  for the categories *no Irish*, *the odd word* and the category *not applicable* which refers to people who never learnt Irish in school). Furthermore, the category *most conversations* nearly doubled with over one fifth of the sample population ( $n=90$ ) who said had a high ability to speak Irish at the time of the survey. The graph in Figure 4.13 below outlines the results in percentages.

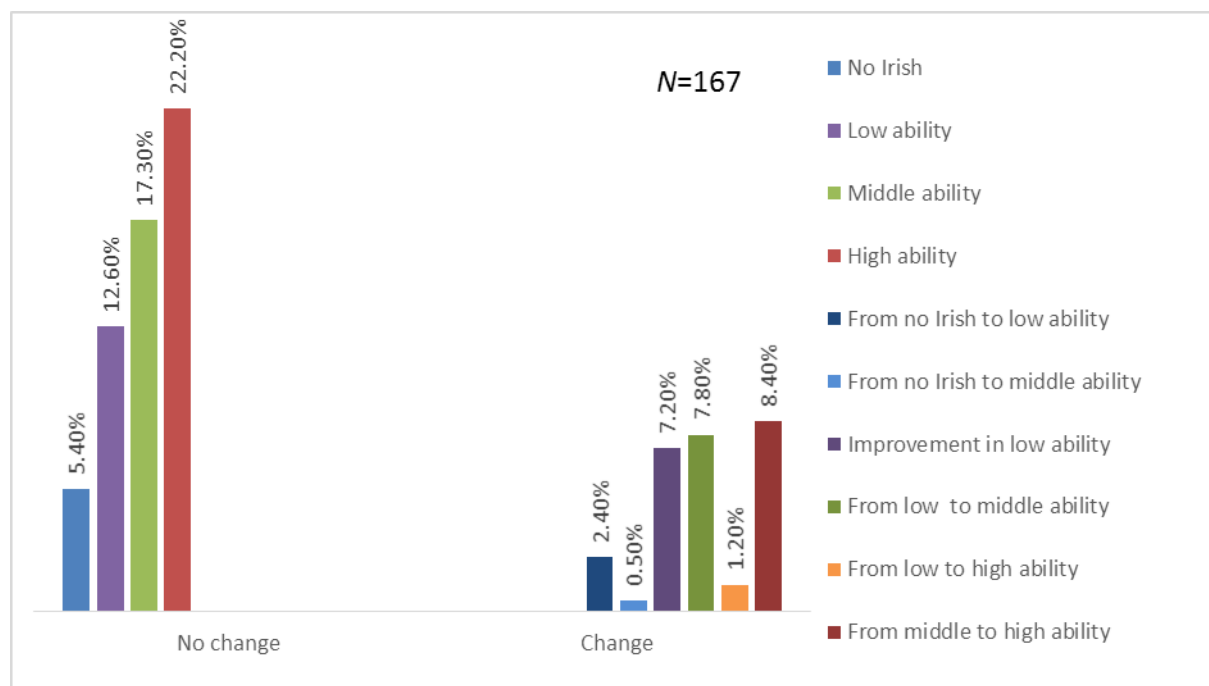
**Figure 4.13: Comparative Reading of Respondents' Ability to Speak Irish between the Time their First Child Started School and the Present Time**



The language-ability self-report of respondents with a child in Sixth Class ( $n=167$ ) was further examined. The assessment of their ability to speak Irish over the years, from the time their child started school to the time of the survey, eight years later, could be suggestive of the impact the gael scoil experience had on their linguistic competence. Because it is self-assessed the following results only represent respondents' perceptions of the progress they made in terms of speaking Irish. While the majority of respondents (57.5%,  $n=96$ ) did not indicate any changes in their ability to speak Irish for the whole duration of their child's attendance at the gael scoil, 27.5% ( $n=46$ ) thought their language skills had improved. It should be noted that among the 96 respondents who indicated no change, 37 (22.2%) claimed to have had high abilities in Irish from the start. Therefore, it was found

that 35.3% ( $n=59$ ) of respondents did not make—or at least did not think they made—any improvement in their conversation skills in Irish. No respondent said their ability to speak Irish had deteriorated. Figure 4.14 outlines the results in detail:

**Figure 4.14: Comparative Reading of Respondents' Ability to Speak Irish between the Time their First Child Attended the Gaelscoil and the Time their Child Reached Sixth Class**



Overall, a significant number of respondents (35.3%,  $n=59$ ) did not seem to find any incentives in their child's education through Irish to improve their own level of Irish. Most of them (49.1%,  $n=29$ ) reported middle ability to speak Irish. Those who mentioned a change in their linguistic competence (27.5%,  $n=46$ ) were found to have progressed upward from both low ability (32.6%,  $n=15$ ) and middle ability (30.4%,  $n=14$ ) groups. A further 26.1% ( $n=12$ ) indicated an improvement within the low ability group from being able to speak the odd words to a few simple sentences. Although the impact of the gaelscoil experience on parental language competence remained limited it nonetheless concerned over a third of respondents when omitting fluent respondents from consideration.

Change in respondents' ability in Irish seems to occur early during the first two years of the gaelscoil experience. The percentage of respondents with a child in Senior Infants as their oldest child in the Irish-medium educational system who reported a change (24.3%,  $n=18$ ) is close to the result from respondents in the sixth class group. This may be because most respondents who reported some change after one year had low ability in Irish at the outset (66.7%,  $n=12$ ). Being in contact with the Irish

language on a regular basis by checking on their child's school day and discussing it with him/her or attending adult Irish classes may therefore enhance respondents' level of Irish quite rapidly.

As shown earlier respondents expressed positive attitudes towards the Irish language and reported higher abilities in Irish than the national average. One could therefore assume that respondents were in contact with the Irish language themselves while growing up or at least were exposed to positive attitudes. However, figures reveal otherwise as a majority of respondents were brought up in a rather neutral background. Of a 90% valid response ( $n=382$ ) only 12.6% respondents ( $n=48$ , self and spouse/partner included) received an education through the medium of Irish. Furthermore, only 9.2% ( $n=38$ )—of a 97% valid response ( $n=411$ )—said Irish was spoken at home *most of the time* or *often* while they were growing up. In this case Irish was mostly spoken between the respondent and his/her parents rather than between the respondent's parents themselves. By contrast, 61.1% respondents ( $n=251$ ) said Irish was never spoken at home. When questioned about their parents' attitudes to Irish only a quarter ( $n=64$ ) had positive attitudes while 57.4% ( $n=144$ ) had *no particular feelings* towards Irish. This shows that a great majority of respondents were not exposed to the Irish language in a way that could account for their higher ability in Irish. However, the absence of negative attitudes in their home while growing up may to a certain extent account for their good disposition towards the language.

#### 4.4.2 Parents' encouragement regarding their child's use of Irish

Following their decision to send their child to an Irish-medium school, respondents were likely to positively encourage their child to embrace the Irish language in various domains. Their attitudes to Irish were further assessed by examining the encouragement they give their child to use Irish outside the school. Findings show that respondents generally highlighted the importance of the Irish language to their child either directly or indirectly by encouraging their child to use Irish through fun activities.

Firstly, respondents were asked what kind of general attitude to Irish they encouraged in their child. Of a 97.8% valid response ( $n=218$ ) 24.3% ( $n=53$ ) said they *let their child develop his/her own attitude*, 56.9% ( $n=124$ ) said they *let their child know that Irish was important* while 18.8% ( $n=41$ ) chose both. No respondent said they *discouraged their child from taking Irish too seriously*. These results are consistent with Harris' findings (Harris et al., 2006, p.145) in the sense that no gaelscoil parent would discourage their child from taking Irish seriously, and that a majority would tell their child that Irish is important. Respondents' positive attitude towards their child's learning Irish was further displayed as 75.1% ( $n=166$ ) respondents—of a 99.1% valid response ( $n=221$ )—said they praised their child when he/she spoke Irish and 86.9% ( $n=192$ ) said they answered in Irish when addressed in Irish. Parents' attitude to their child addressing them in Irish also turned out to be positive in Ó Donnagáin's study in which 96% of his cohort said they would either praise their child, or respond in Irish or both (Ó Donnagáin, 1995, p. 69).

Respondents were then asked whether they encouraged their child to engage in recreational activities that are not organised in their school but are through the medium of Irish. Of a 98.2% valid response ( $n=219$ ), 30.1% ( $n=66$ ) said they did. The activities mostly involved Irish sports (Gaelic football, Irish dancing, etc.), music and Youth Club. This low figure is probably due to the lack of Irish-medium activities available for children living in the Dublin Area. In addition, most children already attend extra-curricular activities organised by their school. It must be noted that sports are not usually through the medium of Irish outside school. Respondents may have referred to activities facilitated by their school outside the school grounds or may have included activities during which a few words of Irish are used. The most frequently chosen recreational activity in the home environment was watching the Irish language channel TG4 ( $n=133$ , 63.6% of a 93.7% ( $n=209$ ) valid response). A further 51.2% ( $n=107$ ) said their child read or was told stories in the Irish language while 20.1% ( $n=42$ ) were reported to play games through Irish.

Similar results were found in a Welsh study (Packer & Campbell, 1997) where most children attending a Welsh-medium primary school would watch the Welsh language channel and would read Welsh language books at home. However, because their living area is English-speaking recreational

activities outside the home environment are provided by the Welsh-medium school, leaving the task of supporting language enrichment to the school (Packer & Campbell, 1997, p. 9).

#### **4.4.3 Parents' use of Irish**

For parents who made the decision to send their child to an Irish-medium school it is understood that they will have to use the Irish language at some stage during their child's schooling. One common example of Irish usage would be to help with homework. Choosing an Irish-medium school over an English-medium school also implies that parents acknowledge and respect the school ethos according to which the Irish language is the main language used in the school. Although Irish-medium schools address parents bilingually parents are encouraged to support the school language rule and use whatever Irish they have while on the school premises. Furthermore, they are also encouraged to use Irish at home with their child. A few questions in the survey aimed to assess parents' response to the school's encouragement to use Irish. This section first focuses on the use of Irish respondents make on the school grounds. It then turns to the use of Irish made at home and finally it examines the role of Irish in respondents' social life.

Respondents were asked to self-report both their and their spouse/partner's use of Irish—when the latter was applicable—when speaking to various interlocutors on the school premises. The interlocutors were the school principal, the teachers, other members of the school staff and parents. Whereas respondents who speak English only represent a minority the majority said they used both Irish and English. Yet, more respondents use more English than Irish with the four groups of interlocutors. It appears that respondents fluent in Irish would use Irish only with the principal rather than the teachers with whom they would use more Irish than English. Conversation between parents seems to be mostly carried out through English. Overall, respondents who completed the questionnaire and who reported higher abilities in Irish than their spouse/partner were also the parents who used most Irish with the different interlocutors. Table 4.15 outlines the results for both respondents and their spouse/partner.

**Table 4.15: Respondents' Use of Irish on the School Premises**

<b>COMBINED ANSWERS (%)</b>	<b>Principal (N=404)</b>	<b>Teachers (N=406)</b>	<b>Other staff (N=389)</b>	<b>Parents (N=407)</b>
Irish only	16.1	13.6	11.6	1.2
More Irish than English	21.3	23.6	20.3	5.7
More English than Irish	38.4	39.4	38.8	36.8
English only	24.2	23.4	29.3	56.3

<b>SELF (%)</b>	<b>Principal (N=221)</b>	<b>Teachers (N=222)</b>	<b>Other staff (N=211)</b>	<b>Parents (N=222)</b>
Irish only	20.4	17.1	13.7	1.4
More Irish than English	28	31.6	27	5.4
More English than Irish	41.2	42.3	44.6	46.4
English only	10.4	9	14.7	46.8

Around 35.5% respondents said they used *Irish only* or *more Irish than English* with each of the groups representing the school staff (principal, teachers, and other staff), while an average of 39% used *more English than Irish* with them. Therefore, a majority of respondents would generally communicate bilingually with school staff. This pattern, however, is not reproduced with the parent group. The percentage of respondents who said used *English only* with other parents (56.3%,  $n=229$ ) is twice as high as the percentage of respondents using *English only* with school staff. It can be assumed that staff's fluency in Irish and the institution they represent are an incentive for parents to use more Irish. It should be noted that 36.8% ( $n=150$ ) would actually make an effort to use some Irish when talking to other parents.

Respondents who self-reported low usage of Irish on the school premises (69.6%,  $n=295$ ) were invited to elaborate on this matter. They were presented with a list of reasons accounting for a poor use of Irish, three of which were repeatedly chosen.<sup>213</sup> Respondents mainly believed their Irish was not good enough to carry a conversation (56.6%,  $n=167$ ). They also thought English was easier to use, especially when the conversation was complex (45.1%,  $n=133$ ). Finally 43% ( $n=127$ ) said that they were not confident using Irish with other people who were fluent in Irish. The latter percentage shows consistency with the 41.4% ( $n=152$ ) of respondents who agreed with the statement *I do not like to speak Irish with people who may know it better than I do*.<sup>214</sup> The reasons accounting for respondents'

213 The following percentages are exclusive and do not total 100%.

214 See Table A14.2: Attitudes to Interpersonal Use of Irish (1973, 1983, 1993, 2009) in Appendix 14.

greater use of English on the school premises are dealt with in further detail in the discussion of the follow-up interviews.

The results above were cross-tabulated with respondents' self-reported ability to speak Irish. As expected, respondents who said had no Irish explained they did not use Irish on the school premises because they could not speak the language. It appears that a majority of respondents with low ability in Irish said their Irish was not good enough to use when visiting the school. Respondents belonging to the middle ability group largely expressed a lack of confidence in speaking Irish with other people. Finally, people with high ability in Irish who reported low usage of the language on the school grounds mainly said they preferred to switch to English when carrying on complex conversations.

While it is not clear how many respondents do not use Irish at home, a total of 81.2% ( $n=181$ ) said they used Irish in the confine of their home. Table 4.16 displays the frequency with which Irish is used by different interlocutors within the home. Again respondents who completed the questionnaire appear to use Irish more frequently at home than their spouse/partner. The language is mostly used between the respondent and his/her child.

**Table 4.16: Frequency of Irish Use at Home**

	<b>Most of the time %</b>	<b>Often %</b>	<b>Occasionally %</b>	<b>Seldom %</b>	<b>N/A %</b>
Respondent and spouse/partner ( $N=177$ )	0.6	7.9	23.2	41.8	26.5
Respondent and child(ren) ( $N=178$ )	4.5	57.3	29.2	7.9	1.1
Spouse/partner and child(ren) ( $N=174$ )	0.6	21.8	31.6	28.2	17.8
Children with each other ( $N=176$ )	0.6	25	34.1	27.3	13

Table 4.16 highlights the fact that these families live in an English-speaking area and are English-speaking themselves, hence the low percentage of regular Irish use between parents. It should be noticed that respondents who said they were using Irish *often* or *occasionally* with their spouse/partner were mostly respondents with high ability in Irish (60.7%,  $n=34$ ). Note that respondents with high ability in Irish did not exclusively indicate they frequently used Irish at home.

One third ( $n=25$ ) of the high ability group said they seldom spoke Irish with their spouse/partner.<sup>215</sup> Nearly two-thirds of respondents ( $n=102$ ) claimed to speak Irish with their child on a regular basis while one fifth ( $n=38$ ) said their spouse/partner did so. Just under one third said they ( $n=52$ ) and/or their spouse/partner ( $n=55$ ) used Irish *occasionally* with their child. There is therefore a commitment from at least one of the two parents to using Irish at home with their child regardless of their ability in Irish.<sup>216</sup> The frequent use of Irish between siblings was reported by nearly 60% of respondents ( $n=105$ ). It should be noted that these families would have more than one child attending an Irish-medium school. A majority of respondents (66.9%,  $n=101$ ) who had more than one child reported that at least one parent spoke Irish *most of the time* or *often* with their children at home. Furthermore, 53.6% ( $n=81$ ) of these respondents indicated that their children used Irish with each other either *most of the time/often* (23.8%,  $n=36$ ) or *occasionally* (29.8%,  $n=45$ ). By contrast, only 2% of respondents ( $n=3$ ) who reported rarely using Irish with their child said their children used Irish regularly between themselves. In other words, families who said they often used Irish between parent and child tend to have reported a fairly regular use of Irish between siblings. Therefore it appears that parents' commitment to using Irish with their children is likely to further encourage children to speak Irish with each other and establish some kind of Irish-speaking environment in the home.

Table 4.17 outlines the circumstances in which Irish is used at home by either parent as well as the frequency with which the activities are conducted through Irish. By and large, activities that are school-related are those where Irish is most frequently used. Other routine activities such as mealtimes or household chores were reported to be done through Irish *occasionally*.

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215 See Table A17.1: Frequency of Irish Usage at Home between both Parents according to "Self" Respondents' Ability in Irish in Appendix 17.

216 See Table A17.2: Frequency of Irish Usage at Home between "Self" Respondent and his/her Child according to "Self" Respondents' Ability in Irish in Appendix 17.



**Table 4.17: Circumstances and Frequency of Irish Use at Home**

	<b>Most of the time %</b>	<b>Often %</b>	<b>Occasionally %</b>	<b>Seldom %</b>	<b>Never %</b>
Helping with homework (N=180)	49.4	31.7	15.6	3.3	-
At mealtimes (N=181)	9.4	32	44.2	9.9	4.5
reading/telling stories (N=173)	4	22	38.7	24.9	10.4
While watching television (N=173)	2.3	14.4	33.5	30.1	19.7
While listening to the radio (N=171)	2.9	5.8	24.6	34.5	32.2
Doing housework or gardening (N=171)	3.5	19.3	40.4	22.2	14.6
Discussing school day with child (N=179)	21.8	34.1	33	6.7	4.5

No respondent said they *never* used Irish while helping with homework. What is more, close to half the respondents ( $n=89$ ) declared they used Irish *most of the time* while doing the homework. A further 56% ( $n=100$ ) said they discussed the school day with their child through Irish on a regular basis. There is therefore evidence that the Irish-medium school directly impacts on respondents' use of Irish with their child at home. But this goes even further for some families as a significant minority reported to use Irish during mealtimes on a regular basis (41.4%,  $n=75$ ) while 44.2% ( $n=80$ ) used it *occasionally*. Some 40.4% ( $n=69$ ) also extended the occasional use of Irish to routine household chores. More passive activities such as reading children's stories (38.7%,  $n=67$ ) or watching Irish-medium television programmes (33.5%,  $n=58$ ) were also reported to be occasionally part of family life.

These findings seem to be consistent with what Hickey (1997) had observed among 1,807 Irish-medium pre-school (naíonra) parents, that is, the increase of Irish use at home after their child had started to attend the naíonra. The regular and occasional use of Irish made during certain daily activities was even higher among gaelscoil families participating in this study. Those activities include mealtimes (67% regular or occasional use among naíonra parents against 76.2% among gaelscoil respondents), reading stories (52% against 60.7%), doing housework or gardening (51% against 59.7%) and helping with homework (46% against 47.3% bearing in mind that 49.4% used Irish most of the time for this activity). Although they are two different studies the comparison between them is nonetheless indicative of a commitment to using Irish at home; a use that increases as the child progresses from pre-school to primary school. Respondents with a child in Sixth Class also suggested that their

commitment to using Irish with their child had, for the most part (55.2%,  $n=48$ ), increased from the time their child started school to the end of primary schooling. Just under a third of respondents ( $n=28$ ) thought their commitment to using Irish had remained the same throughout the years while 12.6% ( $n=11$ ) admitted it had decreased. The reasons given for this decrease were mainly based on the child's preference for English ( $n=5$ ), on the fact that the child needs less help with Irish as he/she is more fluent ( $n=4$ ), and on parents' lack of commitment to the language ( $n=2$ ).

However, it should be noted that while the use of Irish at home appears to increase from pre-school to primary school this study shows that it is slightly lower among respondents with a child in Sixth Class than those with a child in Senior Infants. This is true for school-related activities/topics. As seen above, the majority of respondents (81.1%,  $n=146$ ) generally use Irish regularly when helping with the homework (i.e. most of the time/often). When distributed across the Senior Infants and Sixth Class groups one can observe that a higher percentage of respondents with a child in Senior Infants (85.6%,  $n=97$  against 71.6%,  $n=48$  among sixth class parents) regularly use Irish while helping with homework. Furthermore, one quarter of respondents ( $n=17$ ) with a child in Sixth Class said they only used the language *occasionally* (against 10.6% ( $n=12$ ) of senior infant parents). Similarly, the occasional use of Irish when discussing the child's day at school was the most predominant frequency among participating sixth-class parents (44.6%,  $n=29$ ) whereas senior-infants parents indicated a more regular use of Irish with their child (62.3% ( $n=71$ ) use Irish *most of the time* or *often* against 43.1% ( $n=28$ ) of sixth-class parents). As mentioned above by a few respondents, parents may feel their child has reached a satisfactory level of fluency and therefore may make less use of Irish, although this is mere speculation.

The frequency with which Irish is used for daily activities in the house is also slightly less regular among respondents with a child in Sixth Class. For instance, 46.5% ( $n=54$ ) of respondents with a child in Senior Infants said they used Irish at mealtimes *most of the time* or *often* whereas only 35.4% ( $n=23$ ) in the Sixth Class group reported the same frequency of use. Similarly, 26.1% ( $n=29$ ) of respondents with a child in Senior Infants said they used Irish regularly (most of the time/often) while doing house chores against 18.3% ( $n=11$ ) in the Sixth Class group. Note that respondents' ability in Irish is also an important factor. More respondents with high ability in Irish reported regular use of the language in the home than any other ability groups did. However, the difference between both Senior Infant and Sixth Class groups is still noticeable among the high ability group: 62.8% ( $n=27$ ) of respondents in the senior infants group reported regular use of Irish at mealtimes while 38.5% ( $n=15$ ) use it with their child while doing housework. The corresponding percentages for the Sixth Class group are 43.7% ( $n=14$ ) and 26.7% ( $n=8$ ) respectively.

Despite half the respondents with a child in Sixth Class reporting an increase in their commitment to using Irish the regular use of Irish in the home was found to be higher among participating senior infant parents. Their commitment to using Irish may have not translated into more regular use in daily activities in the home.

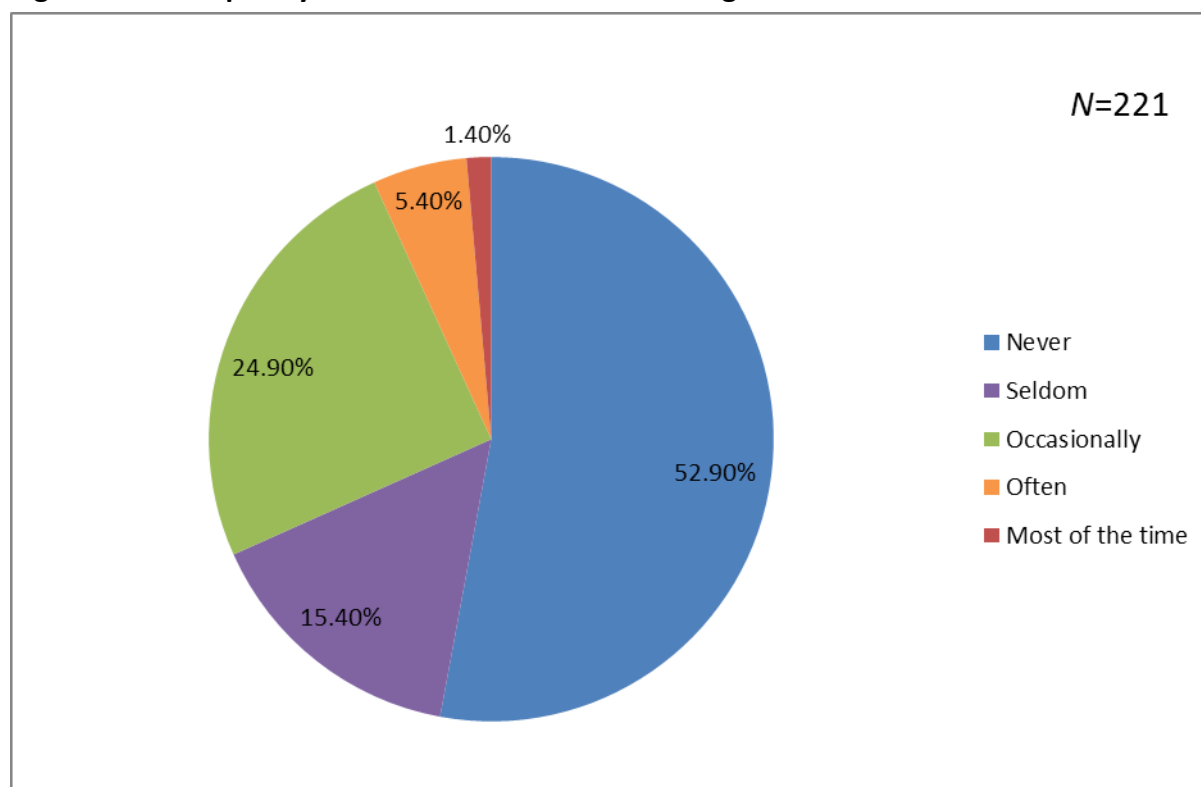
When asked whether Irish was part of their social life, a minority of respondents gave a positive answer. The valid response for the questions on attendance at Irish-medium leisure events varies between 69% and 87%. The most popular social activities through Irish among respondents are Irish music sessions/concerts and sports events (42.8% ( $n=83$ ) going *often* or *sometimes*). This contrasts with the percentage of respondents reporting that they attended language associations (12.3%,  $n=19$ ) or private parties<sup>217</sup> (11.6%,  $n=18$ ). Yet, the rate of respondents going to all of these Irish-medium social events is far greater among gaelscoil respondents than the national average, two-to-threefold for music and sport events and as high as tenfold for language associations and private parties. This general low attendance at Irish-medium cultural events may also be due to their poor availability in respondents' living areas.

Due to the central role the Irish-medium school plays in the lives of the families involved respondents were questioned about their relationship with other parents from the school. More specifically, respondents were asked whether they socialised through Irish with other gaelscoil families. Of a 99% valid response ( $n=221$ ), a majority (52.9,  $n=117$ ) said they did not. This is in line with the results found in Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin's study (1979, p. 101) in the late 1970s when 61% of respondents reported that they never used Irish with other families. A further 15.4% ( $n=34$ ) reported that they almost never used it. Over one fifth ( $n=55$ ) said they were using the Irish language *occasionally* with other parents while a small minority said they used it *often* or *most of the time* (6.8%,  $n=15$ ).

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217 Phrase used in the ITÉ national surveys (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984; 1994) referring to Irish-medium social gatherings.

**Figure 4.15: Frequency of Irish Use between Socialising Gaelscoil Parents**



The results illustrated in Figure 4.15 were cross-tabulated with respondents' ability to speak Irish. When looking at the three categories of ability in Irish<sup>218</sup> respondents with low ability in Irish represented only 7.7% ( $n=8$ ) of the cohort who said they socialised with other gaelscoil parents through the medium of Irish. Furthermore they were found to use Irish *seldom* with other parents. Respondents belonging to the middle ability group—representing 33.7% ( $n=35$ ) of the cohort—mostly use Irish *seldom* and *occasionally* equally with other gaelscoil parents; whereas a majority of parents who reported a high ability in Irish—representing 48.1% ( $n=50$ ) of the cohort—use it *occasionally*. Therefore, it appears that the frequency with which Irish is used between gaelscoil parents depends on their ability to speak Irish. The more fluent respondents are in Irish the more often they are likely to use it.

Of a 96% valid response ( $n=100$ ), respondents who claimed that they socialised with other parents through Irish mostly said they used *more English than Irish* (73%,  $n=73$ ) while just over a quarter ( $n=26$ ) spoke *more Irish than English*. Therefore, the representation of respondents socialising with other

<sup>218</sup> The categories were organised according to respondents' self report. Respondents who said they could speak *the odd word* or *a few simple sentences* were included in the low ability category. The middle category represents respondents who can speak *parts of conversations* in Irish while the high ability includes respondents who can speak *most conversations* or have *native-speaker ability* in Irish.

parents involved with the gaelscoil and using *more Irish than English*—or *Irish only*—is 11.7% of the total surveyed cohort.

## Conclusion

Results show that the gaelscoil experience tended to have a certain impact on respondents' ability to converse in Irish. As shown above, respondents were equally distributed across the three main Irish-language ability groups, indicating higher ability in Irish than the national average. An analysis of their ability to speak Irish showed that respondents reported higher ability at the time of the survey compared with the time their child started school. There is also some evidence showing that respondents' attitudes to Irish and competence in Irish which are above average are not necessarily due to their growing up in an Irish-speaking background or in a family with positive attitudes to Irish.

Respondents with a child attending an Irish-medium school are very likely to use the Irish language on a day-to-day basis, whether it is on the school premises talking to the principal or at the teacher-parent meeting or at home when helping with homework. However, the amount of Irish used and the frequency with which it is spoken differ from one family to the other. In terms of communication with school staff respondents fall into three groups: the English language monolingual group which accounts for one quarter of the parents participating in this study and at the other extreme the group of parents who showed great commitment to the Irish-language with around 35.5% of respondents. The third group is composed of 39% who claim to make an effort to use Irish. When conversing with other parents, one can observe a general shift towards the use of English as the main means of communication, regardless of respondents' ability in Irish. Despite their good disposition towards Irish, a majority of respondents use mostly English on the school grounds. The inconsistency between their attitudes to Irish and their behaviour—in terms of language use—is due to personal and situational factors (Edwards, 1994) such as actual or perceived low ability in Irish, fear of embarrassment in front of other fluent speakers, and for fluent Irish speakers, a convenient way to carry on complex conversations with non-fluent Irish-speakers.

At home, the activities involving the use of Irish are mainly school-related and consist of helping with homework and discussing the school day with the child. But respondents also use it regularly in daily routine situations, whether it is a passive use for around a quarter of respondents (i.e. watching the Irish language channel TG4, reading bedtime stories, etc.,) or conversing in Irish at the dinner table for two fifths of respondents. However, the use of Irish is mostly exclusive to one parent and his/her child. Although it is unknown how much is being said each time Irish is used, both the quality and quantity of Irish spoken appears to depend very much on parent's ability in Irish. As seen above, an overwhelming majority of respondents said they answered their child in Irish when the latter was

addressing them in Irish. This behavioural response is of paramount importance to encourage their child to use Irish outside the school. However, due to various factors (ability in Irish, confidence in using Irish, opportunity to use Irish, etc.,) respondents may not use the Irish language as much as they would intend to. Findings indicate that respondents with a child in Senior Infants tend to use Irish at home more regularly than their sixth class counterparts, despite half of the participating sixth-class parents claiming that their commitment to using Irish increased from the time their child started school to the present time. Their commitment to using Irish may have not translated into more regular use in daily activities in the home.

Regardless of their own ability in Irish respondents encourage their child to use Irish after school. Although activities through the medium of Irish outside school are scarce a majority of respondents seem to make use of what is available around them. While some activities are more passive than others i.e. watching Irish-medium television programmes, respondents appear to actively encourage their child's exposure to the Irish language.

Finally, Irish-medium schools seem to have had a deeper impact on certain families as their use of the Irish language expanded to domains other than school-related activities. For about one third of respondents it expanded even further and led to the creation of social links between gaelscoil parents. Although English remains the main language for a majority of them, close to 12% of respondents converse almost exclusively in Irish with a few parents from the school. The emergence of social networks among a minority of gaelscoil families was already observed in the 1970s (Ó Riagáin & Ó Glasáin, 1979). Support and the provision of facilities through Irish in the community may strengthen those networks which may otherwise last only while children are attending the gaelscoil. It is on the stability of the social network of users that the stability of current Irish usage is dependent (Ó Riagáin, 2008, p.64).

## V- Interviews with teachers and parents: qualitative data

This chapter outlines the results obtained from the two types of interviews conducted after the questionnaires had been collected from the ten participating schools.<sup>219</sup> It focuses on certain points that needed to be further investigated or clarified. As Edwards (1994) pointed out, it is important to probe further so as to avoid the confusion between attitude and belief that may occur in language attitude studies. Because attitude includes belief as one of its components it is valuable “to attempt to find out something of the reasons for the choice, to try and add the affective component to the belief component already assessed” (Edwards, 1994, p. 101). This is what was attempted here by collecting qualitative data. While parents’ follow-up interviews allowed a more detailed investigation along with the data collected from the questionnaires, the idea of conducting interviews with the teachers was to consult a different source. As insiders, teachers were able to give a general assessment of parents’ attitudes to Irish as well as to Irish-medium education, their use of Irish, their involvement in the school, etc. In the following sections teachers’ reports on parents are directly compared with parents’ self-reports. Although the questionnaire was designed according to existing language attitude surveys, which made it possible to situate and compare the results with other studies, the follow-up interviews were very specific to this study. Therefore the results obtained were not systematically compared with other study results as the issues raised were not always issues covered by available research studies.

This chapter examines five main topics from the perspective of both participating teachers and parents. After briefly introducing the profile of interviewed participants, parents’ motivation for sending their child to an Irish-medium school are revisited from the teachers’ point of view and compared with the questionnaire findings. A recurring comment in the questionnaire was the acknowledgement of Irish as an important identity marker for participants. Therefore, reasons for selecting an Irish-medium school are further explored, focusing on the role the language plays, as an identity marker, in the school selection process, as well as on the implications it can have on the language. Parents’ commitment to Irish and Irish-medium education are also further assessed by focusing mainly on participants whose child is about to go to secondary school. Parents’ attitudes to immersion education are then examined, that is, their understanding of the concept and their reactions to its practice. This is an attempt to probe further into their positive disposition towards such an education system after an overwhelming majority said it benefited their child educationally and that there was no major disadvantage to it. This is followed by the analysis of the general attitudes towards Irish that participants convey to their child. This involves examining how much encouragement they give their child to use Irish in extra-curricular activities. Participants’ report on

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219 The pilot school is not included in the set of interviews.

their child's attitude to Irish is also included for it is, to a certain extent, suggestive of their own attitude to Irish. This is followed by discussion of participants' behaviour in terms of commitment to using Irish and involvement in the school. Finally, participants' reaction to some current issues that deal with the Irish language and the gaelscoileanna and that have been discussed in the print media (journalism) in recent years are examined. On the one hand this section consists of observing interview participants' stance towards the use and promotion of Irish nationwide. This directly follows the results obtained from the questionnaire and aims to find out the reasons behind their response, that is to add the affective component to the belief component (Edwards, 1994). On the other hand, it analyses parents' reaction to the perception of elitism associated with gaelscoileanna.

Cross-tabulation between interview participants' answers given during the interviews is made with the answers given in the questionnaire whenever it applies, that is when a question from the questionnaire is revisited. Most interview questions are however new questions that were raised after a first reading of the questionnaire results. A comparative analysis between both Senior Infants and Sixth Class cohorts is also made whenever it is relevant.



### 5.1 Background information

Senior infant teachers and sixth class teachers from the participating school were approached for an interview. Twenty-one teachers out of 24 took part in the interviews that is, 12 senior infant teachers out of 13 and 9 sixth class teachers out of 11.

In the case of parents follow-up interviews, a total of eighty respondents left their details in the questionnaire to be contacted for a follow-up interview. Forty parents were selected.<sup>220</sup>

#### Gender and marital status

As was the case with the questionnaire, interview participants were predominantly female ( $n=34$ , that is 85%). These figures reproduce exactly the gender breakdown of the questionnaire with 85.7% female respondents and 14.3% male respondents.

Again, similar to the questionnaire, a majority of interview participants were married or living in a partnership (92.5%). One mother was separated/divorced (2.5%) while two other mothers were single-parents (5%). When compared with the marital status breakdown of the questionnaire, interview participants' status is fairly representative of the total sample population ( $N=223$ ):

**Table 5.1: Comparison of Marital Status between Questionnaire Respondents and Interview Participants**

Marital Status	Questionnaire Respondents	Interview Participants
married/living with a partner	89.7% ( $n=200$ )	92.5% ( $n=37$ )
separated/divorced	3.6% ( $n=8$ )	2.5% ( $n=1$ )
single-parent	6.3% ( $n=14$ )	5% ( $n=2$ )
widowed	0.4% ( $n=1$ )	-

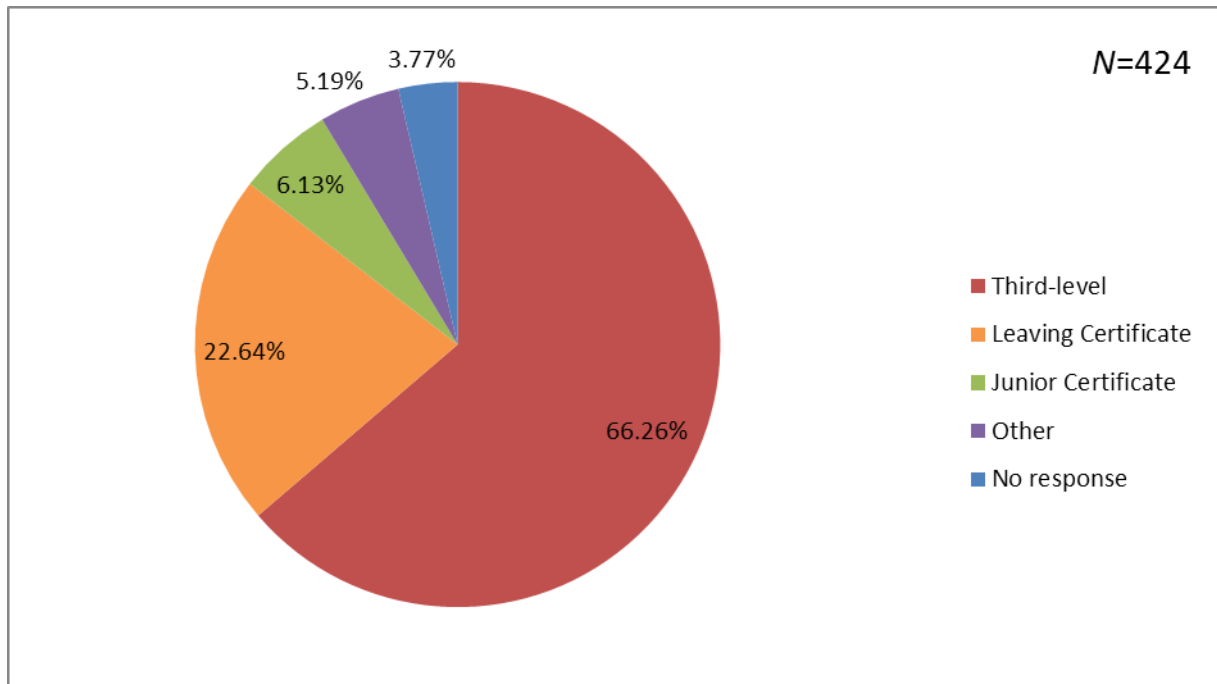
#### Educational qualifications

An overwhelming majority of participants who took part in the follow-up interviews had third-level educational qualifications. It is particularly striking when compared with the total sample of the population who completed the questionnaire. The following charts in Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2 establish a comparison in terms of the highest educational qualifications between the total sample population and the interview participants:

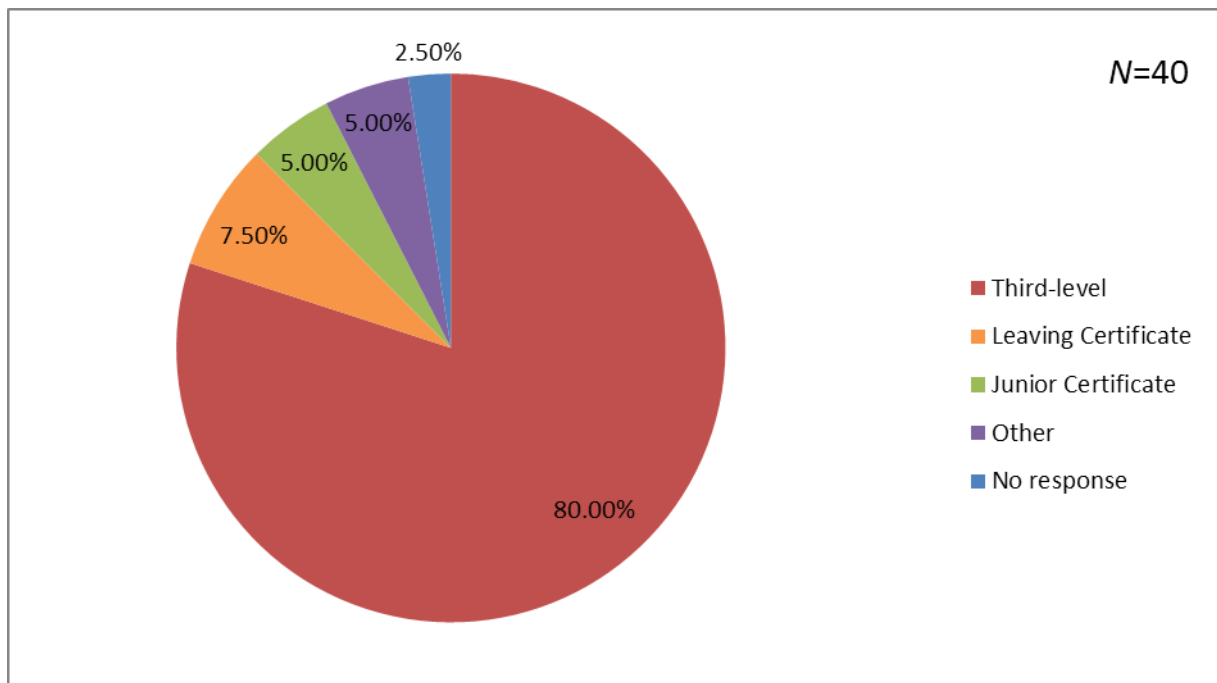
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<sup>220</sup> See methodology in Chapter Three for criteria of selection.

**Figure 5.1: Questionnaire Respondents' Highest Educational Qualifications**



**Figure 5.2: Interview Participants' Highest Educational Qualifications**



Whereas the representation of participants with the Junior Certificate as their highest qualifications is similar in both the questionnaire and the follow-up interviews (6%,  $n=26$  and 5%,  $n=2$  respectively), the rate of interview participants with either third-level qualifications or the Leaving Certificate only differs. The group of participants with third-level qualifications is indeed over-

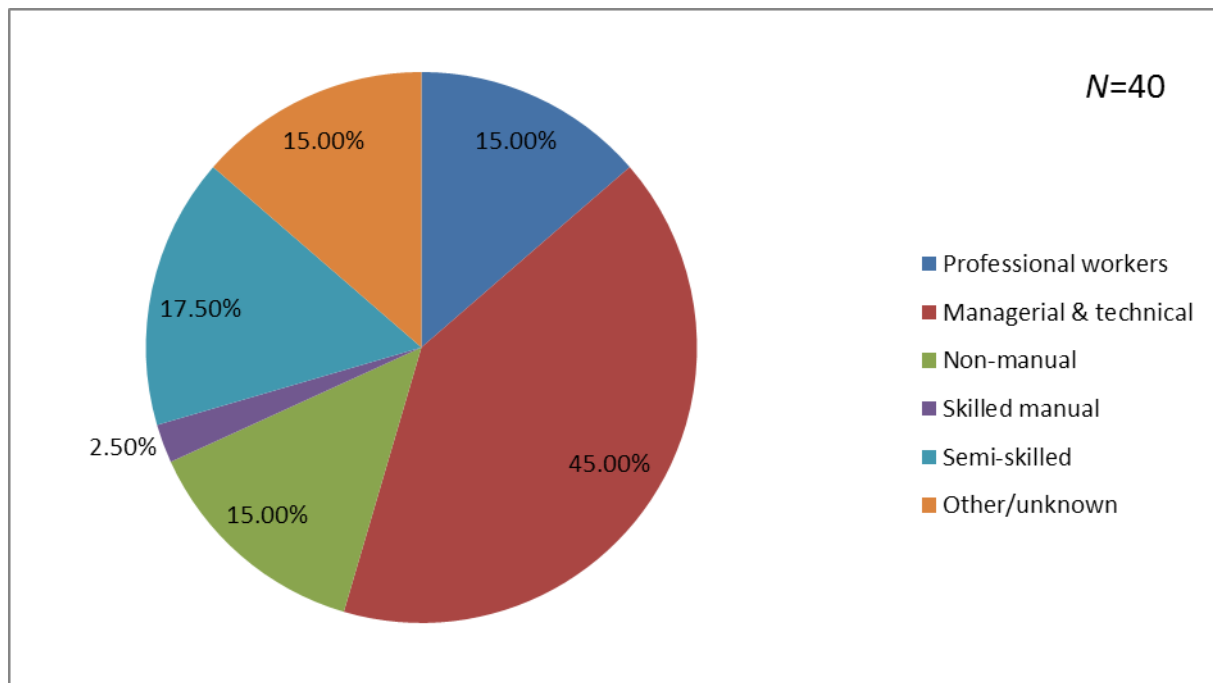
represented in the follow-up interviews with 80% of participants ( $n=32$ ) against 62% ( $n=264$ ) in the questionnaire. Due to this discrepancy the percentage of participants with the Leaving Certificate as their highest qualification is under-represented in the follow-up interviews (5%,  $n=3$  against 23%,  $n=96$  in the questionnaire).

#### Social class

The social class representation of the interview participants broadly reproduces the social classification of the questionnaire respondents. Indeed, the *managerial and technical* category largely prevails with 45% ( $n=18$ ) of the interview participants belonging to this group. However, it is up 7 percentage points from the questionnaire results. The second largest category *professional workers* found in the questionnaire is down 4.6% and equals the non-manual group which is up 0.9% in the interview sample. Both *skilled manual* and *semi-skilled* categories are down from the questionnaire results. Interview participants belonging to the *skilled manual* group are under represented (5% against 10% in the questionnaire) whereas the *semi-skilled* group has decreased by 0.8%.

Figure 5.3 illustrates the social classification of the forty interview participants:

**Figure 5.3: Classification of the Interview Participants according to their Social Class**



By and large the general distribution of the interview participants among the five social class categories is similar to the results obtained in the questionnaire, with the exception of the *skilled manual* group which is under represented. The *professional workers* category together with the *skilled*

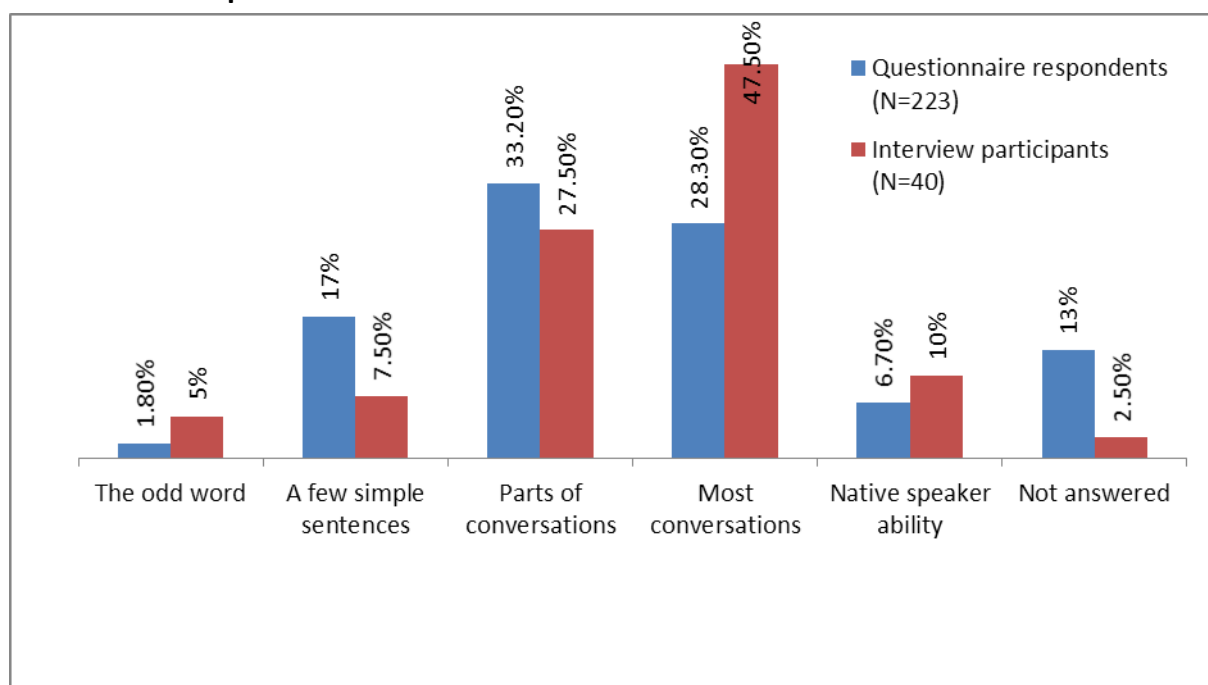
*manual* category experienced a loss of about 5 percentage points each which has mostly benefited the *managerial and technical* group.

One can conclude that once again participants tended to be from a middle-class milieu.

#### Competence in Irish

Interview participants reported similar ability to understand and speak Irish in the questionnaire. However, when compared with the total sample population who participated in the study,<sup>221</sup> interview participants have overall higher ability in Irish. As the graph in Figure 5.4 indicates, the number of interview participants who claimed to be able to conduct most conversations in Irish (47.5%,  $n=19$ ) is nearly twice as large as the number of questionnaire respondents who reported a similar ability (28.3%,  $n=63$ ). What is more, only 7.5% ( $n=3$ ) of interview participants can only speak a few simple sentences in Irish against 17% ( $n=38$ ) of questionnaire respondents. It seems therefore that gaelSCOIL parents who agreed to take part in the follow-up interviews tend to be more fluent in the Irish language, or at least more confident in their level of Irish insofar as they reported higher ability in it.

**Figure 5.4: Comparison of Ability to Speak Irish between Questionnaire Respondents and Interview Participants**



<sup>221</sup> The comparison is made with the 223 *self* questionnaire respondents only. This is because only *self* respondents participated in the follow-up interviews. Furthermore, *self* respondents were found to have higher ability in Irish than their spouse/partner (see Section 4.4.1 Competence in Irish).

## ***5.2 Selection of an Irish-medium education***

The question of the nature of parents' motives for sending their child to an Irish-medium primary school is central to this study. It first appeared as the opening question in the questionnaire. The results showed that respondents' choice was based on both language and educational factors. Due to the complexity of all the factors involved in the selection of an Irish-medium education it was not possible to distinguish the most important reason respondents had for selecting a gaelscoil. The interviews subsequently allowed more information to be gathered on the matter. While the first section further explores parents' reasons for sending their child to a gaelscoil from both teachers' and parents' viewpoints, the second section focuses on the importance of the Irish language as a core identity marker in the school selection process. Finally, parents' commitment to Irish-medium education is analysed through teachers' perspective.

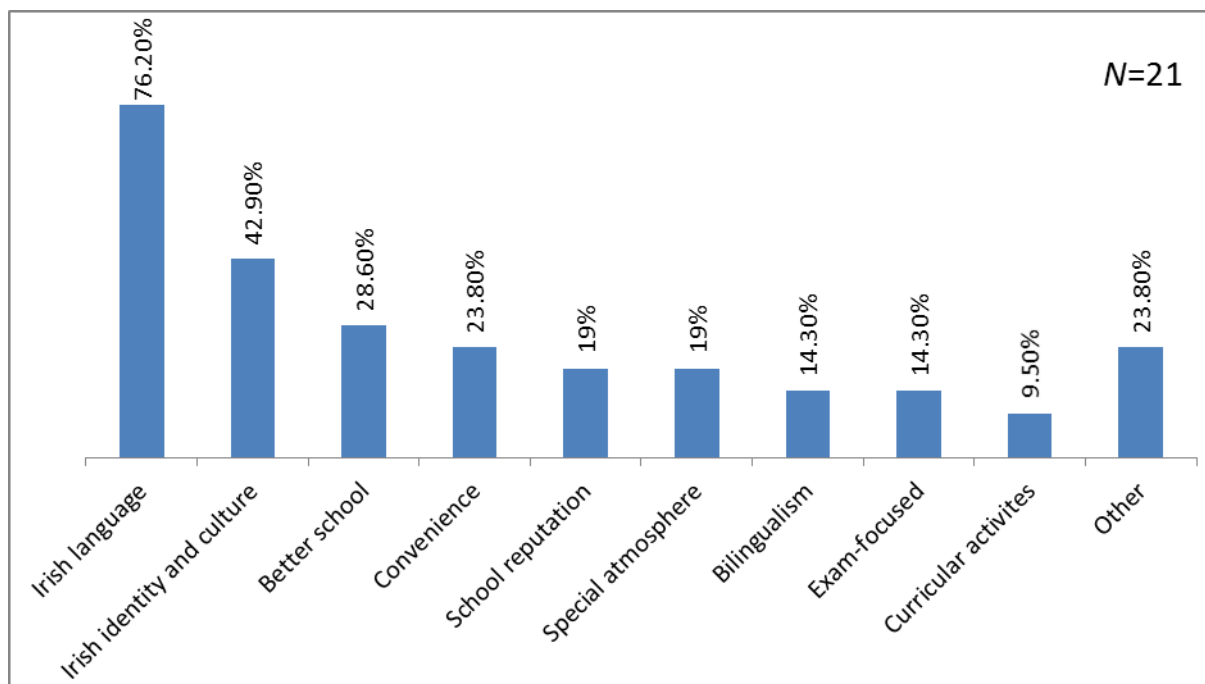
### **5.2.1 Parents' reasons for choosing an Irish-medium primary school**

This section is divided into two parts. Firstly, the question on parents' reasons for selecting an Irish-medium school was put to teachers. Consistency was sought between the answers given by questionnaire respondents and those given by teachers'. Secondly, an assessment of interview participants was carried out to find out how important the Irish language was in their decision-making. To this end, interview participants were asked whether they would reconsider their choice if Irish was not mandatory in post-primary schools.

The results from both parents' questionnaires and teachers' interviews are consistent and show a genuine interest from parents in the Irish language, Irish culture and Irish identity. Teachers unanimously said that parents' choice was motivated by the Irish language although other factors also came into play, including the school's record, its reputation, as well as its location.

Every teacher participating in the study was asked what they thought the most common reasons for parents for sending their child to a gaelscoil were. Fourteen different reasons were put forward by teachers. Although interviewed teachers gave more than one reason, most of them associated parents' decision with either an interest in the Irish language or in Irish culture and Irish identity. Figure 5.5 shows the different reasons interviewed teachers believe parents have for choosing a gaelscoil.

**Figure 5.5: Teachers' Views on Parents' Reasons for Sending their Child to a Gaelscoil**



Overall, interviewed teachers' views of parents' motives for sending their child to a gaelscoil are very similar to the results obtained in the questionnaire. Although labelled differently in the survey it is possible to establish a comparison between teacher's assessment of parents' choices and questionnaire respondents' declared reasons for choosing a gaelscoil. A majority of the teachers interviewed (76.2%,  $n=16$ ) mentioned parents' interest in the Irish language as a strong factor. Similarly, a majority of questionnaire respondents felt that it was important that the gaelscoil gave an opportunity for their child to learn Irish and become fluent (84.8%,  $n=189$ ).<sup>222</sup> The second most important reason turned out to be the same in both the questionnaire and the teachers' interviews (42.9%,  $n=9$ ) and dealt with the importance of being aware of Irish identity and culture.

According to the teachers interviewed, both the school's reputation (28.6%,  $n=6$ ) and school's educational record (19%,  $n=4$ ) were considerably strong factors after language-oriented reasons. In the questionnaire, they came in third and fifth position respectively. Teachers thought that the location of the school was also important for some parents (23.8%,  $n=5$ ), which was confirmed by just over a third of questionnaire respondents ( $n=79$ ) who thought having the school close to their home was very convenient. Other deciding factors for parents to send their child to a gaelscoil included the gaelscoileanna ethos (19%,  $n=4$ ), the advantage of being bilingual (14.3%,  $n=3$ ), the advantages of

<sup>222</sup> Percentages from the questionnaire are exclusive and do not total 100%.

being fluent in Irish for bonus points in the Leaving Certificate (14.3%,  $n=3$ ) and the provision of certain curricular/extra-curricular activities that are not available in other local schools (9.5%,  $n=2$ ).

The “other” category appearing in the graph is composed of various motives that were only mentioned once during the course of the interviews. This category refers to the social selectiveness that some people would associate gaelscoileanna with, peer influence, the school ethos (of a particular gaelscoil as opposed to the general gaelscoileanna ethos), parents' past experience as pupils in a gaelscoil and finally the perceived low participation by some communities with different ethnic and cultural values.<sup>223</sup>

Apart from a general agreement among all the interviewed teachers on the prevalence of parental language-related motives, no pattern was discernible. Teachers within the same school gave different answers and so did teachers teaching the same class level in different schools.

Parents participating in the follow-up interview were once more questioned on their motives for choosing a gaelscoil for their child. This time they were to imagine a situation in which Irish would not be compulsory as a subject at secondary level. They were then asked to think again about their decision to send their child to a gaelscoil. Although hypothetical, the almost unanimous selection of a gaelscoil in a context of non-compulsory Irish at secondary level shows a genuine interest in the Irish language.<sup>224</sup>

Thirty eight interview participants out of 40 (95%) said that they would still send their child to a gaelscoil if Irish was not compulsory as a subject in secondary school. One participant was not sure as she chose the school because of its convenient location. Another participant said she would not *only if* Irish was taught more efficiently in English-medium schools. The results are given in percentages in Figure 5.6 below.

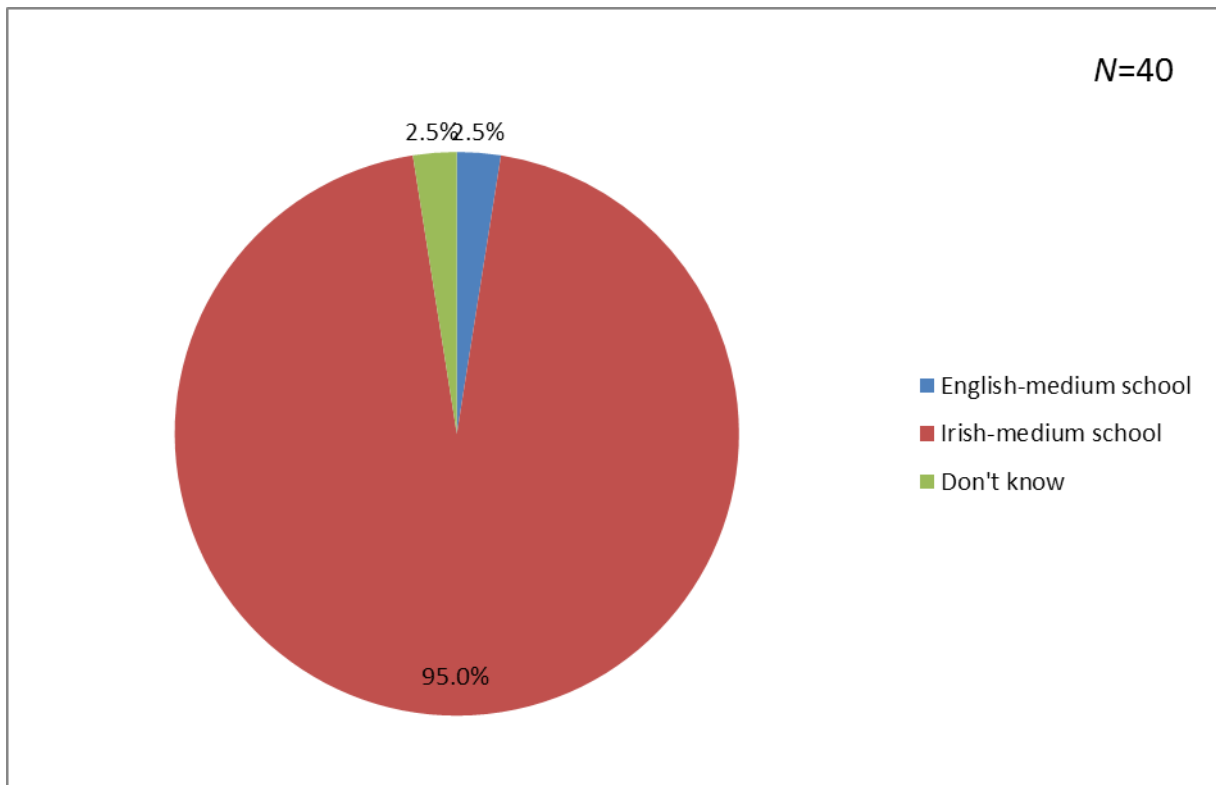
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223 One teacher believed that parents selected the gaelscoil because they regarded it as place where they could associate themselves with a certain social elite (she used the term “snobbery”). Another teacher thought parents' decision to send their child to an Irish-medium school could be influenced by other parents with a child attending the gaelscoil when sharing their positive experience in the school. One teacher indicated that parents were attracted to the school ethos cultivated by the principal. Another teacher said past pupils of the gaelscoil may wish to send their child to the same school. Finally one teacher working in a disadvantaged area claimed that some parents would select a gaelscoil as they would perceive it as a homogeneous school in terms of pupils' ethnic and cultural background as opposed to other local school that would be seen as rather multicultural.

224 Although the survey was conducted before the 2011 election campaign during which the Fine Gael party advocated the removal of “compulsory Irish” from the Leaving Certificate one can assume that a change in legislation would not influence gaelscoil parents as they would still send their child to an Irish-medium primary school. This appreciation of the language is probably restricted to parents who hold positive attitudes to the Irish language. As argued by opponents to Fine Gael's language policy making Irish optional would have damaging repercussions on the teaching of Irish and impact negatively on the language as a whole. See Chapter Two.



**Figure 5.6: Parents' Primary School Choice in a Hypothetical Situation where Irish would not be Mandatory at Secondary Level**



The interest in and love for the Irish language expressed by interview participants through the choice of an Irish-medium education—regardless of the mandatory status of Irish being taught at second level—may be the expression of something more profound than the mere opportunity for their child to become bilingual. The next section looks at whether the decision was influenced by an association between the Irish language and Irish identity.

### 5.2.2 The Irish language as a core aspect of Irish identity

Questionnaire respondents mentioned eighty-seven times in the questionnaire—in the blank spaces provided—the importance for their child of knowing the national language because the language was part of their identity. Since this sentiment was shared by several respondents it was investigated further during the follow-up interviews. Interview participants were asked whether the school choice they made was related to identity reasons and whether they thought that this sense of Irish identity was absent in other national schools teaching through the medium of English. Furthermore, interview participants were asked their view on the possibility that for an increasing number of parents the choice of a gaelscoil may have been triggered by a sense of loss of Irish culture and Irish identity.

The importance of the Irish language as an identity marker was already found in the 1973, 1983 and 1993 national language attitude surveys. In 1993, for instance, 61% of respondents agreed that *without Irish, Ireland would certainly lose its identity as a separate culture* (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, p. 19).<sup>225</sup>

In the current study, 82% ( $n=183$ ) of questionnaire respondents said that one of the reasons that made them choose a gaelscoil was that their child would be aware of their Irish identity and Irish heritage. This was the second most frequently chosen reason after bilingualism. Furthermore, a significant number of respondents mentioned the identity factor in the space provided for elaboration in various questions in the questionnaire. The most striking results come from question 2 and question 30 in the questionnaire.<sup>226</sup> In question 2, respondents were asked to justify why they had always thought of an Irish-medium education for their child—when applicable. The reference to the importance of knowing the national language and Irish culture for identity reasons was the second most frequently stated (22 respondents out of 114, that is 19%).<sup>227</sup> Questionnaire respondents were asked in question 30 to elaborate on their change in attitude to Irish between their school years and today. Out of 114 respondents who wrote a comment 17 (15%) said their attitude changed because they realised that the Irish language gave them a sense of identity and pride.

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225 See Chapter Two for a thorough discussion.

226 See questionnaire in Appendix 9.

227 The most frequently stated reason was based on parents' satisfaction with the gaelscoil as they themselves or relatives attended a gaelscoil (24%,  $n=27$ ). See Section 4.3.1, Table 4.7 Reasons Why Parents Had Always Considered an Irish-Medium Education for their Child.

Parents participating in the follow-up interview were asked if this identity factor was taken into account when deciding on their child's primary school. The first question focused on whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that a large number of parents choose an Irish-medium education for their child because it conveys a sense of Irish identity. Whether considered a primary reason or a secondary deciding factor it was found that most interview participants tend to value the Irish language as an identity marker.<sup>228</sup>

Twenty nine interview participants, that is 72.5% of the total sample ( $N=40$ ), agreed with this statement.<sup>229</sup> The following quotations illustrate their position: "Absolutely. It is very important to have your own language in your own country. You experience more what is being Irish." (IPA618); "It's part of who we are yeah." (IPD68). A further 22.5% ( $n=9$ ) agreed to a certain extent that the Irish identity element was a deciding factor when selecting a gaelscoil (represented as "yes conditional" in the chart below). Out of these nine interview participants three said it was the reason why they sent their child to the gaelscoil but they did not think it was the case for the majority of parents whereas six participants claimed it was part of the reasons why they sent their child to the gaelscoil but it was not their main reason.

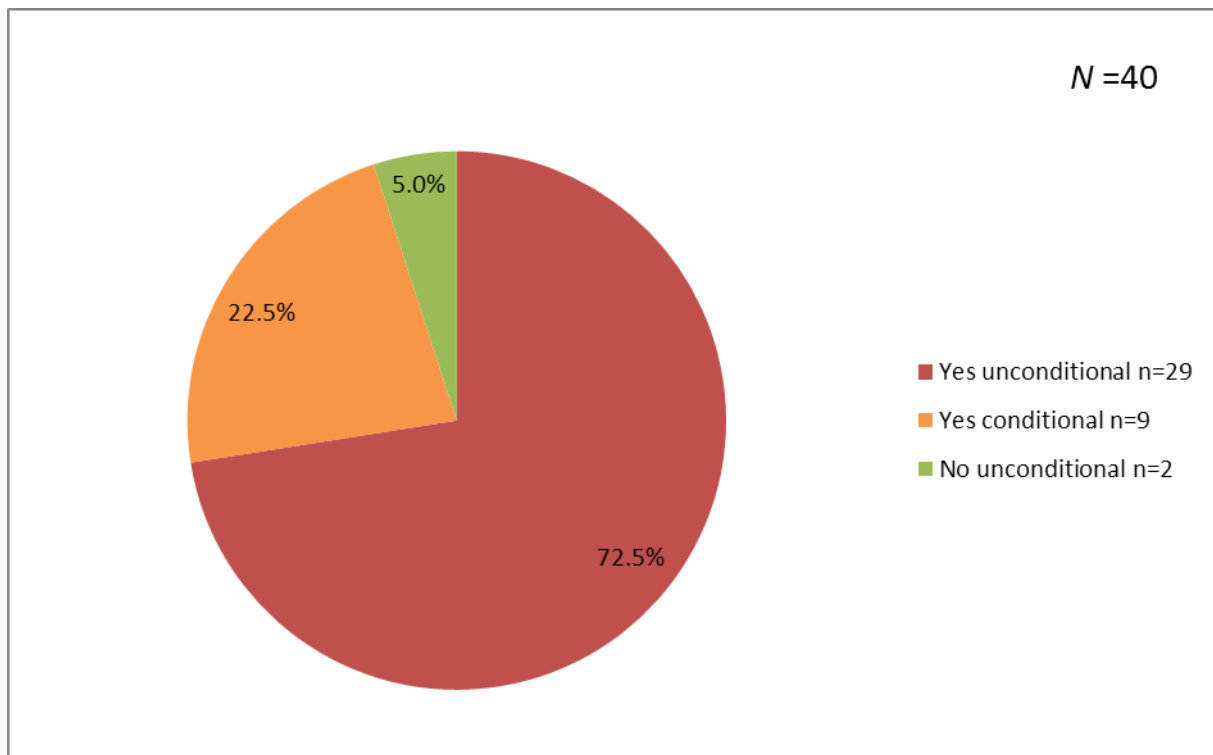
The two interview participants who disagreed (5%) or thought there were more important reasons to choose a gaelscoil listed various factors in favour of an Irish-medium education for their child. They alluded to a good social mix among pupils, the co-educational aspect of the gaelscoil, the advantages of being bilingual and learning other languages, the perception that gaelscoileanna have a very good standard of education and that Irish is taught more effectively than in English-medium schools.

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228 This was confirmed by nine teachers during the interviews (see Figure 5.5 Teachers' Views on Parents' Reasons for Sending their Child to a Gaelscoil).

229 Parents approached this question in various ways as some interview participants only spoke about their personal situation while others considered gaelscoil parents at large.

**Figure 5.7: Irish Identity as a Reason for Choosing a Gaelscoil**



The definition of Irish identity is not, however, limited to the Irish language per se. One can observe different aspects of Irish identity that are not necessarily linked to the language and that can be transmitted through religion, culture, etc. (Tovey et al., 1989). Researchers have also argued in the case of the Irish language that Irish people embrace their ethnic identity without having to speak Irish and therefore without having to give it a prevalent role (Smith, 1981; Edwards, 1985; Wardhaugh, 1987). As previously seen,<sup>230</sup> Omoniyi (2006, p. 20) speaks about a cluster of co-present identities with varying degrees of salience. Gaelscoil participants are therefore likely to consider the Irish language as salient in their definition of Irish identity.

Since respondents pointed out the importance of the identity factor for their selection of an Irish-medium school they were asked if they thought this sense of Irish identity was absent in other schools where Irish is taught as a subject. Two opposing viewpoints were put forward between those who thought Irish identity markers were not restricted to but more emphasised in the gaelscoil and those supporting the idea that the Irish language is an integral part of Irish identity therefore implying that language and identity are inseparable (Joseph, 2004). According to the latter group, English-medium schools do not convey a sense of Irish identity mainly because Irish is not efficiently taught or because

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<sup>230</sup> See Chapter One, Section 1.3.

certain negative attitudes prevail. As a consequence children express a negative predisposition towards Irish unlike *gaelscoil* pupils.

This question equally divided the forty participants interviewed. Twenty participants (50%) disagreed that English-medium schools do not convey a sense of Irish identity whereas nineteen (47.5%) agreed with this statement. However, five participants (12.5%) among those who disagreed highlighted a certain negativity towards Irish in English-medium schools. Two main views were put forward to explain this negative attitude to Irish. According to these views, it either depends on each individual school ethos and/or on teachers' attitudes or it is based on the fact that Irish is not taught effectively in school, which consequently engenders a negative predisposition towards Irish. One interview participant was not sure so preferred not to give any opinion on this topic.

The main explanation used by those who disagreed is that Irish identity markers are not absent from English-medium schools, rather they are more emphasised in the *gaelscoil* (28.2%,  $n=11$ ). Four participants (10.3%) also thought that the Irish language is not a substitute for Irish identity because there are other elements defining Irish identity.

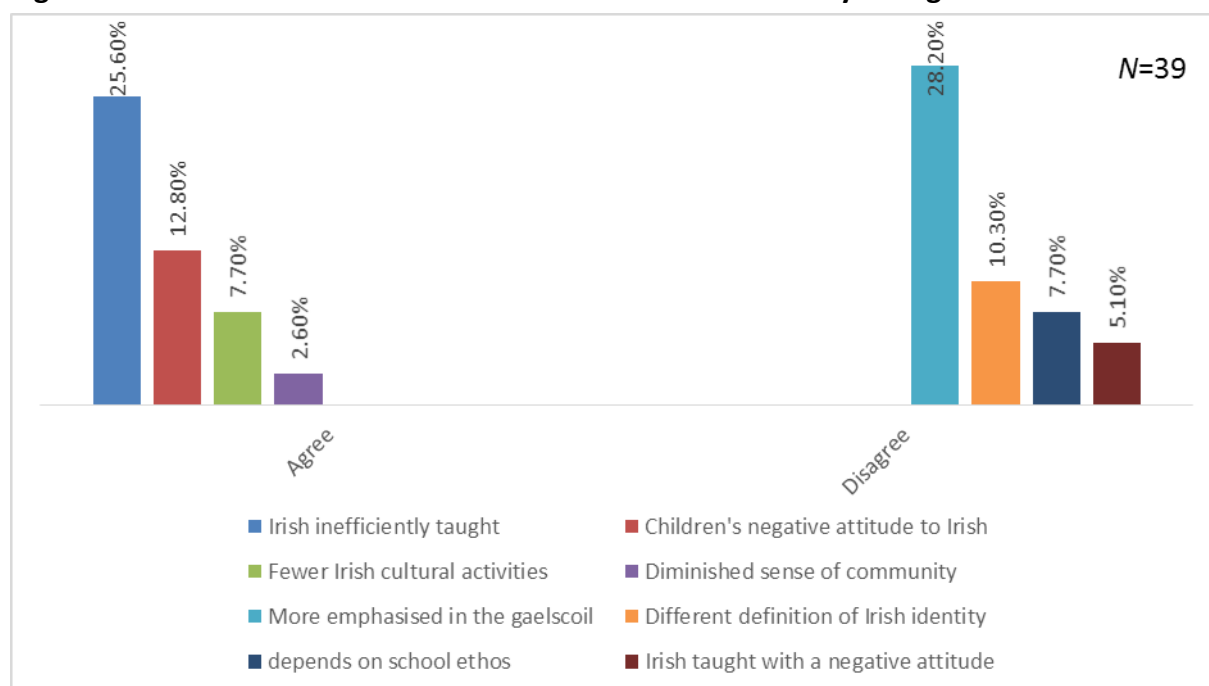
As for those who did not think English-medium schools did not convey a sense of Irish identity but thought there was a certain negativity attached to these schools regarding the Irish language, two reasons prevailed. For this cohort it either depends on the school ethos (7.7%,  $n=3$ ) and the emphasis put on Irish language and cultural activities or on the fact that Irish can be taught with a negative attitude (5.1%,  $n=2$ ).

The main explanation given to account for the absence of a sense of Irish identity in English-medium schools included what participants saw as the inefficient or little teaching and/or promotion of the Irish language in the school, which makes it difficult for children to embrace Irish in a positive way (25.6%,  $n=10$ ). "It's taught from a wrong perspective. You only get to cover a few hours a week. You don't get the essence of what it is. You just get to learn grammar. You don't get to part take in the language itself because you don't know how to converse in it." (IPD68); "I went to an English school and when I was being taught Irish although I'd love Irish they didn't teach it in a way that made me want to learn Irish, they didn't teach me the way that made me want to explore more. (...) if they had the children embrace the language more we would feel a much stronger identity with the Irish language." (IPG26); "It's missing, definitely. There is no promotion of Irish. In class everyone dreaded it." (IPK61). Others (12.8%,  $n=5$ ) thought that children in English-medium schools have a negative predisposition towards Irish and see it as a burden unlike children attending a *gaelscoil* for whom Irish is natural: "It is taught like any other subjects in English-speaking schools. Children don't like it. In the *gaelscoil* Irish is there from the start so they don't realise they're doing it." (IPA28); "They (i.e. English-medium schools) don't get you to appreciate the language." (IPJ25). Three participants (7.7%) said

there were fewer Irish cultural activities in English-medium schools i.e. GAA sports, Irish dancing, tin whistle, Irish songs, etc... while one mother said there was a greater sense of community in the gaelscoil, which is what facilitates the promotion of the Irish language and Irish culture. According to her, this is likely to be the result of the small school size of the gaelscoil.

Figure 5.8 sums up participants' views of the presence or absence of a sense of Irish identity in English-medium schools ( $n=39$  as one participant interviewed had no opinion). The horizontal axis represents participants' response that is, agree/disagree that English-medium schools do not convey a sense of Irish identity.

**Figure 5.8: Parents' Views on the Absence of a Sense of Identity in English-Medium Schools.**



There was no difference between the answers of parents with a child in Senior Infants and parents with a child in Sixth Class in so far as interview participants within each of those two groups were divided over this question.

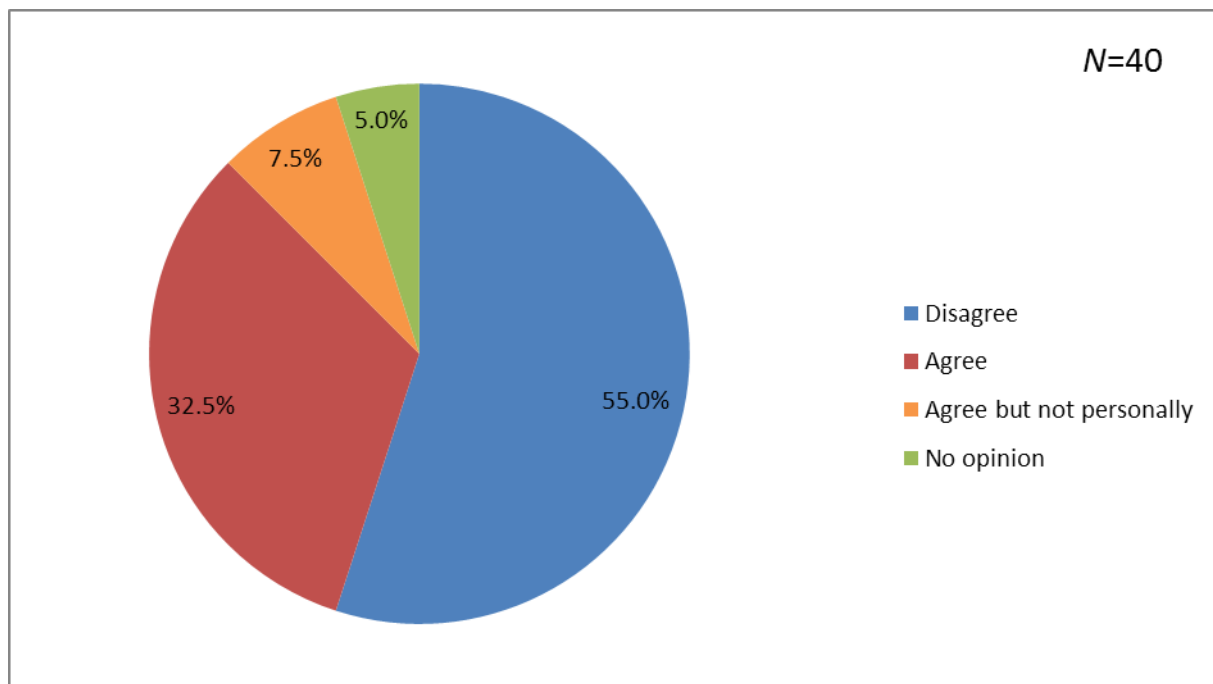
People start valuing and emphasising their identity when interacting with people from other ethnic groups (Tovey et al., 1989) or while going through major societal change. Arrowsmith (2004) refers to signs of a post-nationalist Irish identity. The adoption of capitalist values by Irish society subsequent to the Celtic Tiger years, the wider availability of American pop-culture and the arrival of various ethnic groups in Ireland in recent years may have therefore resulted in a change in attitudes to Irish among certain people. Following these observations, the focus of the interview question was put on the possibility that more and more parents send their children to a gaelscoil as a reaction to a perceived

loss of Irish culture and identity in Ireland. Seemingly, a majority of respondents disagreed with this statement. They did not select an Irish-medium school because of a perceived loss of Irishness but because it seemed to be the most natural way to learn the official language. It therefore appears to be a way for parents to ensure that the language is transmitted to the next generation.

Twenty-two interview participants (55%) disagreed with this statement while thirteen (40%) agreed. Among those who agreed however, four (10%) specified that they did not regard this factor as the main reason for their child's enrolment in the gaelscoil. Another three participants (7.5%) agreed that it seemed to be the general trend among parents but did not feel it was true in their particular case. Two interviewed parents had no opinion (5%).

Figure 5.9 below outlines the results.

**Figure 5.9: Parents' Views on Choosing a Gaelscoil as a Result of a Perceived Loss of Irishness**



The few participants who agreed there was a loss of Irish culture and identity explained their viewpoint. Some believed that there was no focus on Irish identity in national schools due to a mix of nationalities (10%,  $n=4$ ). They reckoned that English-medium schools now have to embrace ethnic differences due to the presence of migrants and cannot always emphasise Irish as an identity marker as gaelscoileanna do. Others thought that exposure to mass media and American culture could distance young people from Irish culture (7.5%,  $n=3$ ). One interview participant spoke about the importance of “counter balancing” this mass media culture with the Irish language. Two interview participants (5%) thought there was above all a loss of spoken Irish due to the lack of usage of the Irish

language after students leave school. Finally, another two participants (5%) referred to the homogenisation of Irish society as it resembles more and more its English-speaking counterparts by becoming less Irish and adopting more global features. One participant explained: “I think Ireland in recent years has improved in many respects but it has become very homogenised with the rest of the world in terms of children's interests. Now they are interested in the same things as kids in America whereas the one thing that we have, I suppose, which is very distinctively Irish is the language.” (IPA24)

There was no discernible difference between the answers of parents with a child in Senior Infants and parents with a child in Sixth Class.



### 5.2.3 Commitment to Irish-medium education after Sixth Class

The support that interview participants showed for Irish-medium education had already been alluded to in the questionnaire, especially when respondents revealed whether or not their child would continue through Irish at secondary level. Subsequent to their positive response, teachers were further questioned about parents' choice of a secondary school.

Questionnaire results showed that a majority of respondents had selected an Irish-medium secondary school as a natural continuation of their child's education (50.5%,  $n=110$ ).<sup>231</sup> In order to verify this finding, sixth class teachers were asked to give parents' most common arguments in favour of an Irish-medium secondary school as opposed to the most common arguments in favour of an English-medium secondary school. According to teachers, a great majority of their current pupils were to go to an Irish-medium school the following year mainly because parents were committed to Irish-medium education and to the Irish language; although some non-language related reasons were also considered.

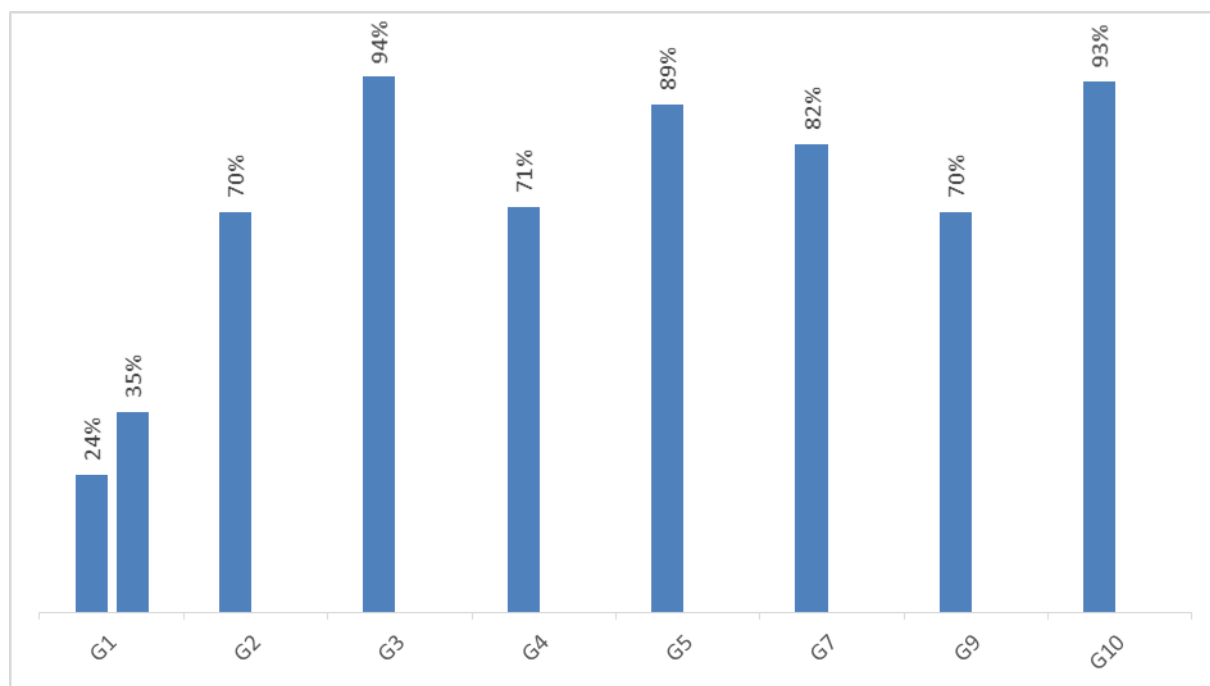
It should to be noted that the sixth class teachers who participated in the interviews represent eight gaelscoileannaí.<sup>232</sup> According to the figures the interviewed teachers gave regarding their respective pupils, seven gaelscoileanna have a rate of over 70% pupils going to an Irish-medium secondary school. Three of these schools have only two pupils per class going to an English-medium secondary school. Only one school has a maximum of one third of pupils going to an Irish-medium secondary school. Teachers' report on pupils' future attendance at an Irish-medium secondary school could not be compared with questionnaire results as the number of respondents with a child in Sixth Class was too low in some participating schools to be representative. Figure 5.10 illustrates the interviewed teachers' estimate for Irish-medium secondary school attendance for their own class.

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231 Of a 97.8% valid response ( $n=218$ ), See Section 4.3.3, Table 4.13 Reasons for Choosing an Irish-Medium Secondary School.

232 Two sixth class teachers from two different schools did not participate in the interviews.

**Figure 5.10: Percentage of Pupils Going to an Irish-Medium Secondary School According to Teachers**

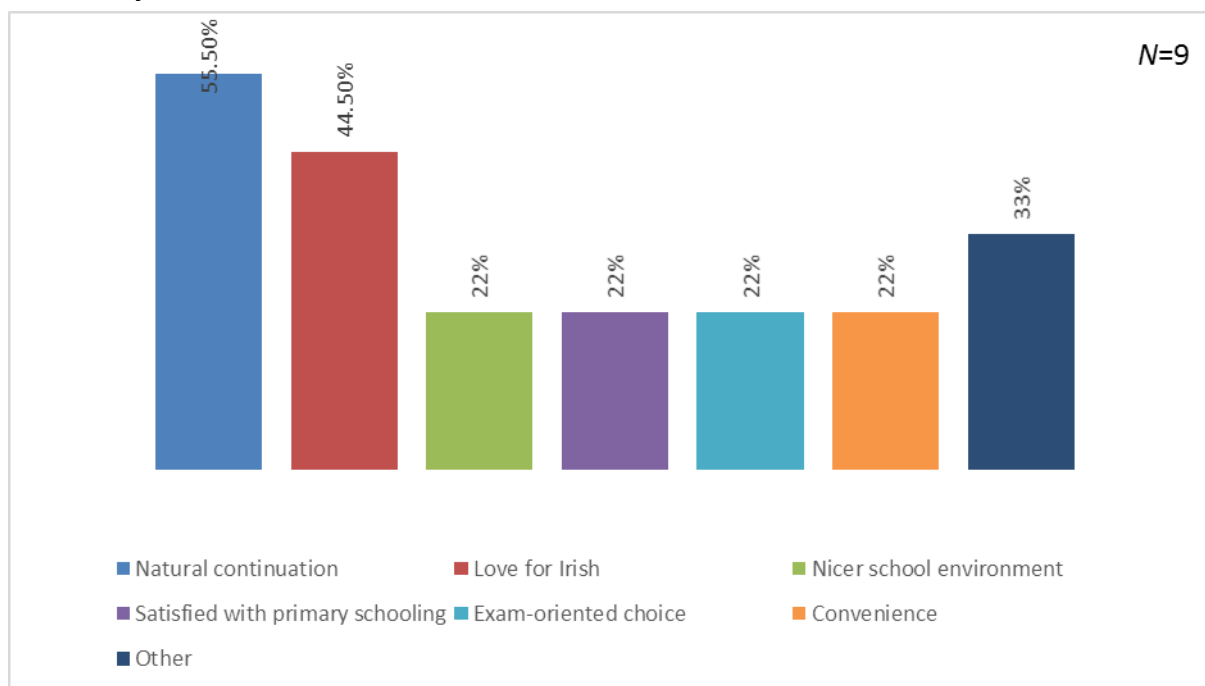


Overall, a large percentage of pupils continue their education through the medium of Irish at secondary level. The reason given for the poor result of gaelscoil G1 regarding the number of children going to an Irish-medium secondary school is that parents prefer to choose a local secondary school for their children: “[the Irish-medium secondary school] is not that far but people want again to go local if they can.” (TA61). A large number of questionnaire respondents from this particular school were also found to have selected an English-medium secondary school on the grounds that there was no Irish-medium secondary school in the area.

Teachers interviewed gave as many as nine reasons for parents to send their child to an Irish-medium secondary school. The most commonly stated reasons during the interviews were language-oriented. Some teachers gave more than one reason. However, each teacher from each school mentioned that it was either the next natural step for children to continue their education through the medium of Irish—from parents' point of view—or that it was motivated by parents' love for Irish or interest in the language. Figure 5.11 below outlines the results.<sup>233</sup>

<sup>233</sup> Percentages represented in the graph are exclusive and do not total 100% as some teachers gave more than one reason.

**Figure 5.11: Teachers' Views on Parents' Reasons for Sending their Child to an Irish-Medium Secondary School**



As mentioned above, going to an Irish-medium secondary school was mainly regarded by questionnaire respondents as a natural continuation of their child's education. This reason was also the most frequently stated among the interviewed sixth class teachers (55.5%,  $n=5$ ). Interviewed teachers also acknowledged a love for the Irish language among parents who chose an Irish-medium secondary school for their child (44.5%,  $n=4$ ). Other deciding factors (all at 22%,  $n=2$  each) include the perceived friendly atmosphere of the school, parents' satisfaction with their child's education through Irish at primary level, the convenient location of the school to home and the advantages children have in being educated through Irish for bonus points in the Leaving Certificate.<sup>234</sup> The "other" category (33%,  $n=3$ ) represents three individual statements which understand parents' school choice to be based on the school's reputation, the emphasis the school puts on Irish culture,<sup>235</sup> and their child's wish to go to such a school.<sup>236</sup> The last few reasons listed above imply that some parents do not seem to consider the medium of instruction an important factor as long as their child receives a good education and that their child's happiness is ensured.

<sup>234</sup> See Chapter One, Section 1.5.2.

<sup>235</sup> Some parents feel it is important for children to embrace Irish culture and that *gaelscoileanna* put more emphasis on Irish sports, music, etc. than English-medium schools.

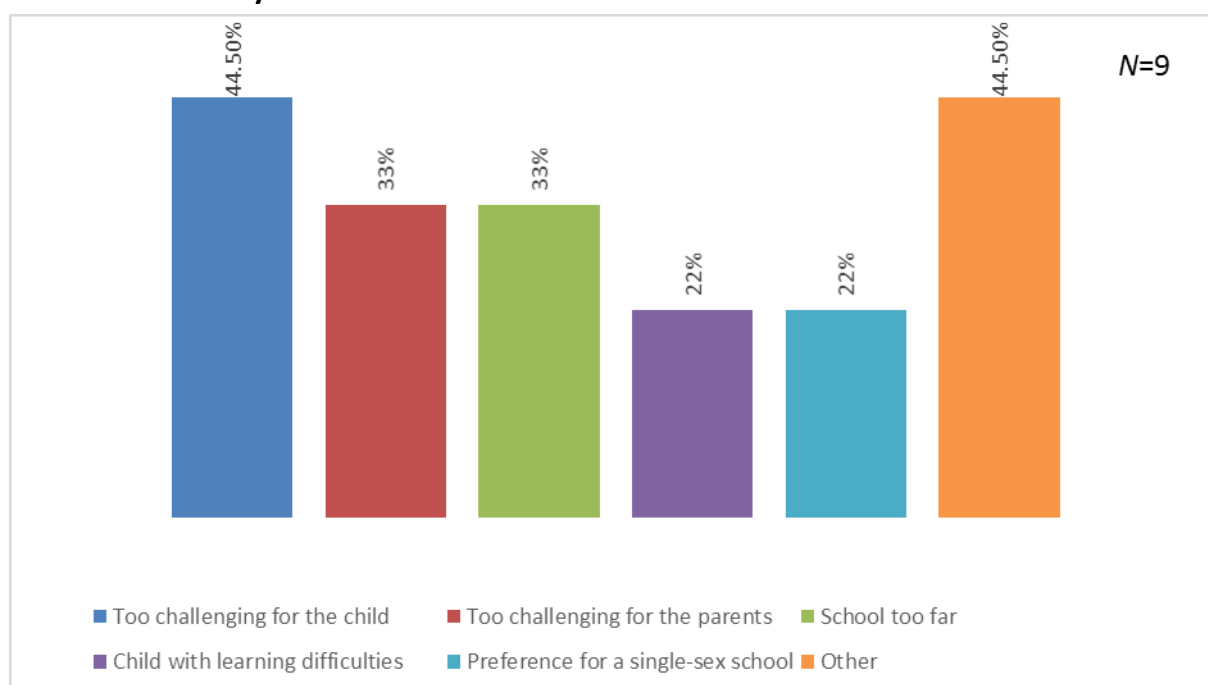
<sup>236</sup> Some children are influenced by their peers and want to go to the same school as their friends. In this situation the decision seems to depend more on the child than on the parents.

It must be noted that both sixth class teachers of G1—the gaelscoil with the fewest children going to an Irish-medium secondary school—were the only teachers who mentioned convenience as a deciding factor. What is more, one of them said parents also sent their child to an Irish-medium secondary school because of the school's reputation while the other teacher referred to parents' focus on the bonus points their child would get in the Leaving Certificate going to an Irish-medium secondary school. Parents from this school appear to consider Irish-medium schools on educational/practical grounds more than in any other schools according to teachers' response.

When asked about parents' reasons not to send their child to an Irish-medium secondary school, interviewed teachers mostly referred to the challenging aspect of such an education for both children and parents. This issue was also raised in the questionnaire as the most common reason (60%,  $n=30$ ) among respondents who decided not to send their child to an Irish-medium school.

The teachers interviewed stated nine reasons for parents not to send their child to an Irish-medium school. Again, some teachers gave only one reason while others gave up to three different reasons. Figure 5.12 outlines the results.

**Figure 5.12: Teachers' Views on Parents' Reasons for not Sending their Child to an Irish-Medium Secondary School.**



According to the teachers interviewed, parents' preference for an English-medium education at secondary level is based on the belief that it will be too challenging for their child to continue through

Irish (44.5%,  $n=4$ ). A significant number of interviewed teachers could also sense that some parents feared it would be too challenging for them (33%,  $n=3$ ) as their level of Irish would not be adequate to support and help their child with homework in Irish. The issue of learning difficulties was also raised when considering an Irish-medium secondary school (22%,  $n=2$ ): “If a child is struggling here with us, with the language, the parents would consider not sending him to our secondary school. There's some children who have severe learning difficulties, the Irish would be hard for them, you know, because they don't have it at home, it's not the first native language for them” (TG6). Parents in this case would feel that going to an Irish-medium secondary school would make it more difficult for the child's learning process. They would rather see their child concentrate on one language only and succeed academically rather than struggle with two languages at secondary level. Another significant reason—also stated by questionnaire respondents—is the location of the school being too far from home (33%,  $n=3$ ). In this instance, parents consider English-medium secondary schools that are closer to their home and therefore more convenient. Two interviewed teachers from two *gaelscoileanna* in North Dublin mentioned that some parents preferred their child to go to a single-sex school as they thought it enhanced better academic achievement. These parents therefore have no choice but to send their child to an English-medium secondary school as there is no single-sex Irish-medium secondary school in this area of Dublin.

A further four individual statements were made where parents' motivation is perceived to be based on the better school facilities English-medium schools have,<sup>237</sup> their child's choice,<sup>238</sup> the fact that they have set their mind on a particular secondary school—usually the school where older children attended or are attending, or the fear that their child will not acquire the proper English terminology to continue through English at third-level.

## Conclusion

The results from both sets of interviews further indicated that parents' selection of an Irish-medium school is mainly based on language and cultural reasons. Other factors such as the perception that Irish-medium schools are good schools or the school's location may therefore have been additional advantages that weighed in favour of the decision to select a *gaelscoil*. By and large interview participants considered the importance of the Irish language as an identity marker when deciding which primary school their child would go to. According to Omoniyi's hierarchy of identifications (2006), one can observe that Irish was attributed a high degree of salience among the participants interviewed despite the fact that most of them would not use the Irish language as the

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237 Some Irish-medium secondary schools might not have as many facilities as other local schools such as sports, for example. Some parents may give more importance to school facilities than the Irish language.

238 Some children do not want to go to an Irish-medium secondary school. In this situation the decision depends more on the child than on the parents themselves.

main means of communication. Although their views were divided on the issue of English-medium schools conveying a sense of Irish identity, a significant number of participants believed that there is a rather negative attitude towards Irish emerging from these schools either because of the way it is taught or because of children's negative disposition to the language. Despite negative reports on the Irish language in English-medium schools a majority of interview participants did not think that Irish culture and Irish identity were threatened. It appears that by selecting an Irish-medium school parents choose to emphasise the transmission of Irish cultural heritage and identity in their child's education. However, there seems to be a change in focus for some parents at the end of primary schooling. Despite a majority of parents sending their child to an Irish-medium secondary school (mainly for language reasons), parents' commitment to Irish-medium education does not seem as strong at secondary level. It appears that preconceived ideas on the difficulties ahead for pupils going to an Irish-medium secondary school are a deterrent to most parents who selected an English-medium secondary school for their child. Whether secondary level through Irish is regarded as too challenging for children or for the parents it seems to be the most common argument among parents not to continue education through that medium. This issue needs to be addressed so that the number of pupils attending an Irish-medium school can remain stable from primary school to secondary school. Current figures show that the percentage of secondary school students receiving an Irish-medium education is half that of pupils attending an Irish-medium primary school.<sup>239</sup>

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239 [www.gaelscoileanna.ie/about/statistics/?lang=en](http://www.gaelscoileanna.ie/about/statistics/?lang=en)

### ***5.3 Parents' attitude to immersion education***

As shown above, the identity factor appeared to be important to participants' decision on an Irish-medium primary school. But the popularity of Irish-medium education may also be due to other factors such as the democratisation of bilingual education systems in Western countries, together with the advantages of multilingualism that are put forward by the European Commission, for instance. However, Irish-medium education in Ireland which mostly relies on total immersion is limited to a minority of schools. This raises, among others, the question of the understanding of immersion education by parents who have a child in an Irish-medium school. Because the Irish-medium education milieu appeals to more and more parents regardless of their level of Irish it is of interest to know how much parents enrolling their child in a *gaelscoil* understand about immersion education. This section examines teachers' impressions of parents' understanding and attitude to immersion education and is followed by participating parents' own experience with this minority type of education in Ireland.

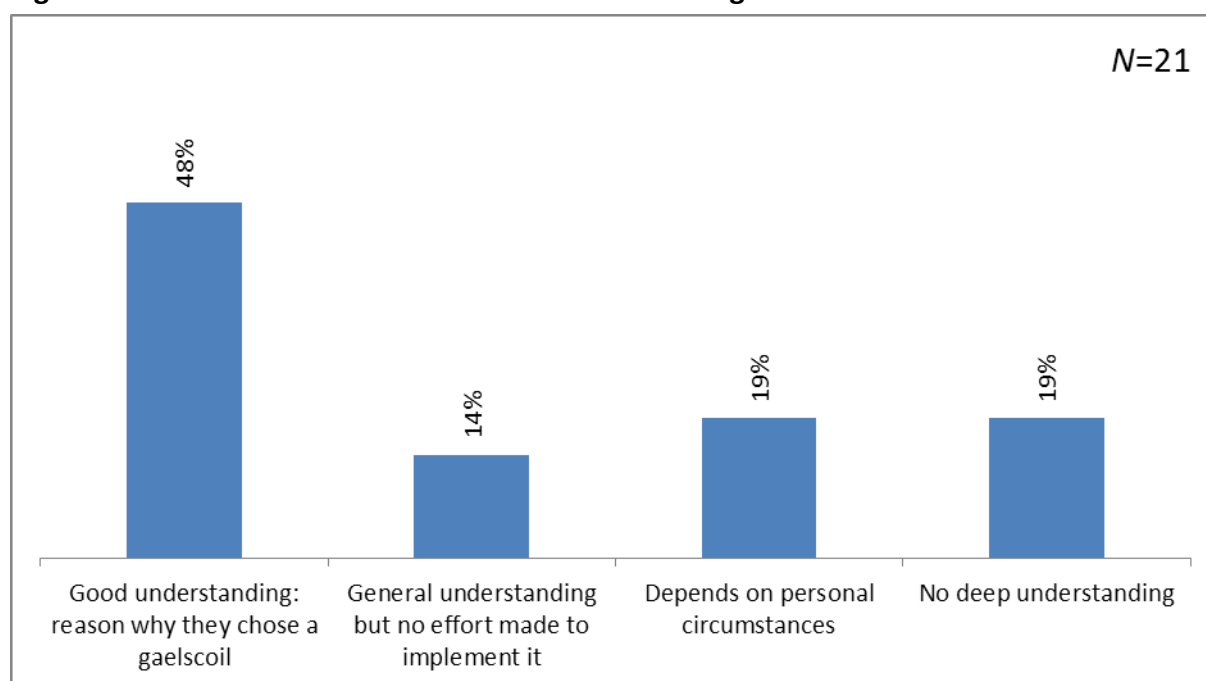
### 5.3.1 Parents' attitude to immersion education according to teachers

Teachers were first asked whether parents understood what immersion education entailed. Another question addressed the issue of parents' concerns about having their child entirely taught through Irish.

A majority of interviewed teachers (62%,  $n=13$ ) said that overall parents understood what immersion education involved. However, some teachers (19%,  $n=4$ ) thought that some parents understood better than others because of their educational background or their experience with bilingualism or because of their motives for choosing such an education; whereas other teachers (19%,  $n=4$ ) claimed that parents did not have a deep understanding of it.

Figure 5.13 below shows the various degrees of understanding of the concept of immersion education, according to the twenty-one teachers interviewed. The horizontal axis represents parents' different degrees of understanding of immersion education as defined by teachers.

**Figure 5.13: Teachers' Views on Parents' Understanding of Immersion Education**



As shown in the graph above, the teachers interviewed reported four different categories of understanding of immersion education among parents. Most parents were said to have a good understanding of it. The majority of teachers (48%,  $n=10$ ) interviewed assumed that parents understood this concept as they had made a conscious choice to send their child to a gaelscoil and



because they had been informed about the way the gaelscoil operated before starting school. A few teachers' quotes illustrate this point: "They understand that before they send them. At the beginning the principal and vice principal gather all new parents into the hall and would give a meeting to them." (TK2); "When they're starting junior infants parents know that everything is taught through Irish from day one and this year there's no English being taught until Senior Infants. Parents are aware of this because at the start of the year the teacher sent home a note explaining what's being taught and how it's being taught and they know it's all through Irish and they're happy with that." (TD21); "it's their choice (...) Parents wouldn't really be surprised because that's what they would expect and some parents would expect more emphasis on the Irish." (Teacher F2). A group of interviewed teachers (19%,  $n=4$ ), nevertheless, were able to distinguish parents who understood this concept very well from parents who only had a vague idea. According to them, the difference lays between parents who already have an experience with Irish-medium education through the naíonra or summer colleges in the Gaeltacht from those who do not have any; and parents who have chosen the school for language reasons as opposed to parents who would have chosen the gaelscoil because of educational or other practical reasons: "Some people understand it perfectly, others don't. Others I think it very much depends on the reasons for sending them here. I think people who send their children to the gaelscoil because it's a gaelscoil and want their children raised through Irish would have a much better understanding than people who send them because it's in their locality you know." (TA61); "I'd say the ones who send their children because of the Irish language would have a very good understanding. The ones who send them for more educational reasons might not have the same understanding. So it would depend really on the parents." (TJ6). A few more teachers (14%,  $n=3$ ) said parents understood what immersion education was (i.e. Irish is the language of instruction and the language used outside the classroom, in the school yard) but needed to be reminded that speaking Irish was the school rule as they did not always implement it on the school ground. Although the language rule only applies to children, gaelscoil staff strongly encourage parents to be respectful of it and to use Irish as much as possible when visiting the school: "a lot of the parents still speak English to [their child] even though we're trying to enforce the Irish rule on the school grounds. I think they [understand it] but they might not implement it themselves" (TJ2). Two of these teachers were sixth-class teachers. One of them explained: "throughout the years they might forget because (...) they try to speak English and I'm catching them, you know, you have to remind them that it's a school rule that they have to speak it as well as trying to pass on the love of Irish to [their children]" (TA62). Some of the teachers interviewed (19%,  $n=4$ ) suspected that parents only had a vague idea of the meaning of immersion education as something happening in the school and part of the children's daily routine. Although they would know their child is learning Irish they would not necessarily be aware of the details of how it is done, that

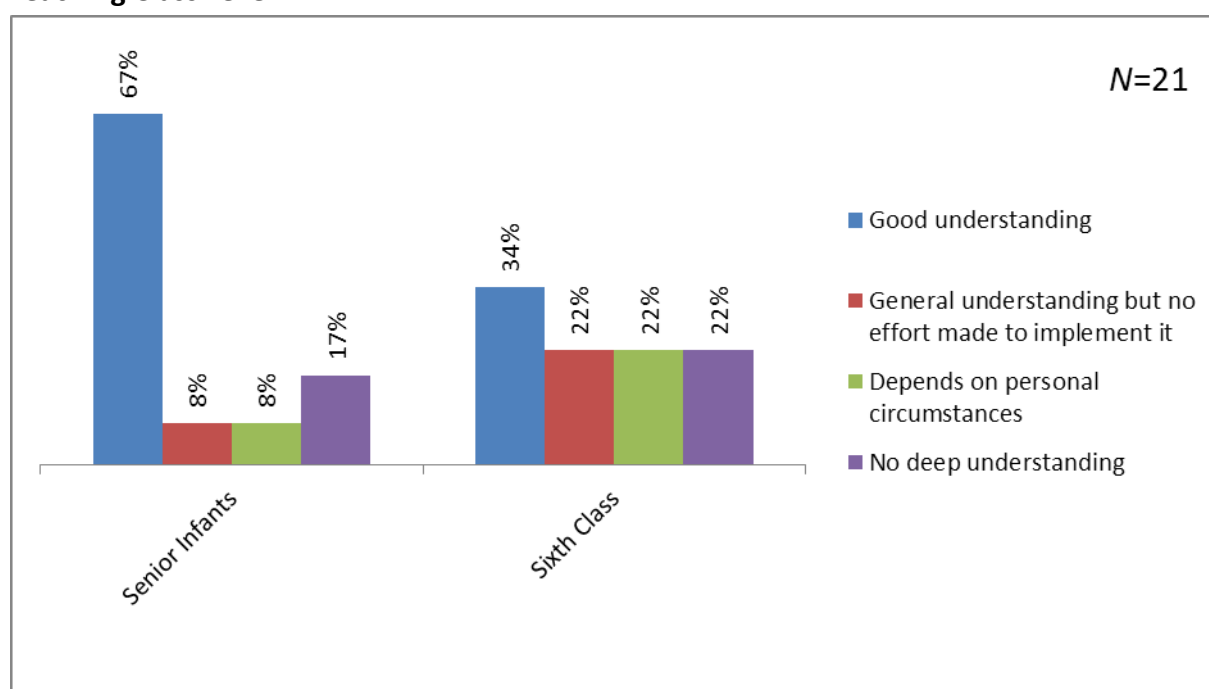
Irish is constantly used throughout the school day. As one teacher put it: “I don't think they realise it themselves that it's happening to an extent because, I suppose, within the school when a parent is talking to the teacher the teacher will speak English to the parent so the parent wouldn't probably realise how much Irish is being spoken to their child” (TE6). Two of these teachers were from the same school. A third teacher made the same remark. Their schools are located in disadvantaged areas.

When looking at teachers' answers according to the class level they teach it appears that even after attending the gaelscoil for close to eight years some parents do not seem to have a clear understanding of what immersion education is about. Note that this comparison is made on a small scale and that the results may only be suggestive.

Figure 5.14 below shows the different reports made by interviewed senior-infant teachers as opposed to sixth-class teachers in relation to parents' understanding of immersion education. The horizontal axis represents the four categories of understanding—as seen in the previous graph for each teaching class level.

The difference in answers given by both groups of interviewed teachers is somewhat striking. It must be noted that only two schools had their teachers agreeing on parents' understanding of immersion education: one group of teachers claimed that parents understood very well whereas the other group said they did not have a deep understanding of it.

**Figure 5.14: Teachers’ View on Parents’ Understanding of Immersion Education Classified by Teaching Class Level**



Whereas the majority of interviewed teachers (67%,  $n=8$ ) in Senior Infant Class claimed parents had a good understanding of immersion education, sixth-class teachers gave mixed reports with just over a third ( $n=3$ ) saying parents understood this concept. One would expect to see a greater number of parents with a child in Sixth Class understand the concept of immersion education very well as opposed to newer parents but figures seem to show otherwise. This could be explained by the fact that a larger number of senior infant teachers gave a more global assessment than sixth class teachers who were able to distinguish different degrees of understanding among parents.

When looking at the percentage of interviewed teachers who believed parents had no deep understanding of immersion education (22%, ( $n=2$ ) in Sixth Class as opposed to 17%, ( $n=2$ ) in Senior Infant Class) one can conclude that the eight year long experience in the gael scoil does not appear to have had an impact on parents' understanding of immersion education. However, this was only observed in schools located in disadvantaged areas. Two sixth-class teachers from two different schools suggested that some parents had literacy problems which may be one of the reasons why they do not fully understand the essence of immersion education.

The difference in the percentage of teachers who thought parents did not make any effort to respect the school language rule between Senior Infant Class and Sixth Class suggests that parents may be less enthusiastic and less committed to the school ethos along the years. Indeed, more teachers raised this issue in Sixth Class (22%,  $n=2$ ) than in Senior Infant Class (8%,  $n=1$ ).

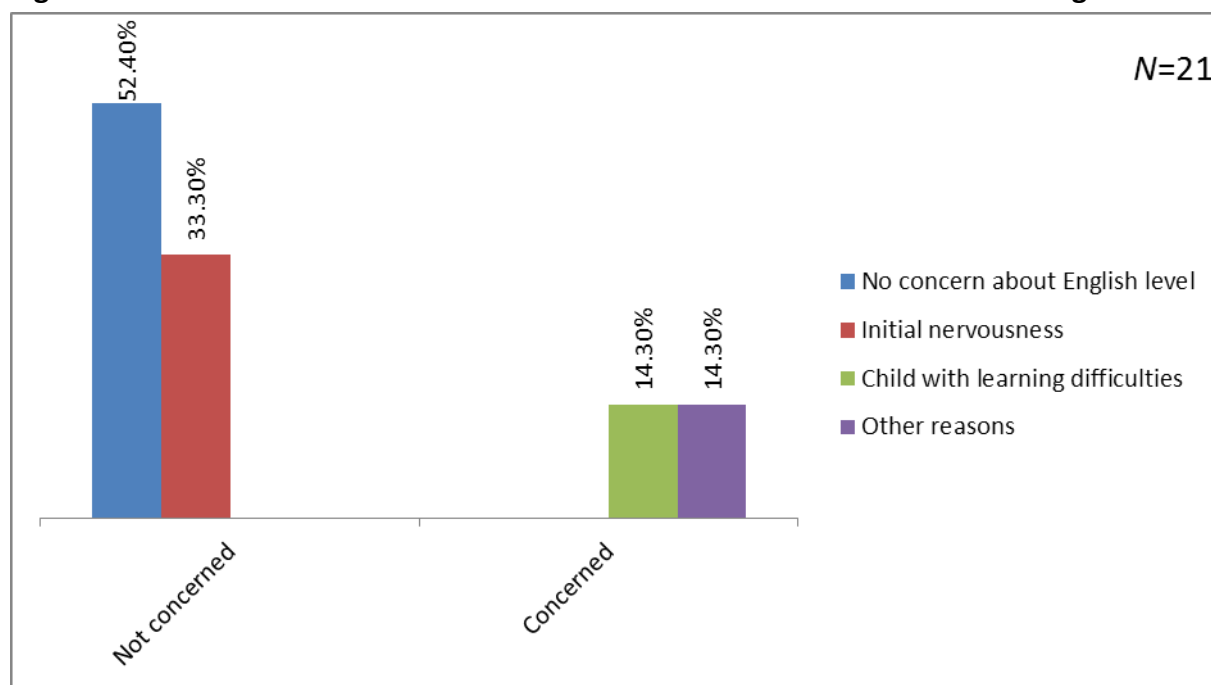
Teachers participating in the interviews were also asked about parents' response to immersion education and more particularly whether they were aware of parents expressing concerns about their child's education because it is entirely done through Irish. This question was only asked of the twelve senior infant teachers. Ten of them (83.3%) never encountered any serious concerns from parents apart from special cases when the child had learning difficulties and was showing early signs of dyslexia (33.3%,  $n=4$ ). Although there would generally be no concern, a certain number of parents would ask questions about teaching methods at the beginning of their child's schooling. This would be considered normal as immersion education would be a new experience for most parents. Most questions parents would ask would be related to children's level of English in comparison with their peers' in English-medium schools but these concerns would not usually last according to five teachers (41.7%). The following quotes illustrate this point: "Occasionally there are questions when it comes to reading because when in my class they're learning how to read they're taking books home, possibly for the first time, and they're worried that their reading in English will suffer. But they're usually very happy to hear that once you read in Irish it makes reading in any other language easier" (TA22). Finally, two teachers (16.7%) said some parents had expressed concerns but it was about their own level of

Irish and their ability to help their child with homework: “I think it's more so when homework is being sent home and the homework is in Irish and parents can't read it or they can't understand it because they don't have the Irish themselves. I think that's the only real concern when it comes to the Irish” (TD21).

Since a few parents mentioned in the questionnaire they feared their child would experience difficulties in English,<sup>240</sup> participating teachers were asked whether parents of their class were concerned about their child's level of English. A majority of interviewed teachers (86%,  $n=18$ ) did not think that parents had major concerns about their child's level of the English language. A few nonetheless referred to specific situations where a small number of parents would have serious concerns (28.5%,  $n=6$ ).

Figure 5.15 illustrates interviewed teachers' views on parents' concerns about their child's level of English. It is divided into two groups: teachers who think parents have concerns about their child's level of English and teachers who do not think so. The horizontal axis represents teacher's assessment of the level of concerns parent have. Some teachers gave more than one answer to this question.<sup>241</sup>

**Figure 5.15: Teachers' Views on Parents' Concerns about their Child's Level of English.**



240 See Section 4.3.2 Advantages and disadvantages to Irish-medium education.

241 The percentages given in the chart are exclusive and do not total 100%.

Among the interviewed teachers who did not think parents had concerns about their child's level of English (86%,  $n=18$ ), just under 40% ( $n=7$ ) mentioned an initial nervousness among newer parents. Those teachers said that parents in the lower classes were nervous at first and asked questions but generally realised after a while that their children were performing well in English as well as in Irish (six senior infant teachers; confirmed by one sixth class teacher). For instance, one teacher said: "Occasionally you get parents wondering if their level of English will suffer that they're not spending enough time on the English but I'm always able to reassure that there is enough time given to English and that research shows that children who work more and more on language have a greater facility with the language overall. Where there might be a concern is where children have special needs. That's the only area where it's a real concern for parents" (TA22).

Two teachers further explained that parents were informed by the school that immersion education involved a natural delay in the development of English language academic skills when compared with pupils in English-medium schools.

As for teachers who said parents expressed concerns about their child's level of English, it mainly applied to parents with a child showing signs or diagnosed with dyslexia or similar learning difficulties (14.3%,  $n=3$ ). Finally, three other reasons were mentioned only once during the course of the interviews. Two senior infant teachers (9.5%) referred to parents' fear of seeing their child fall behind in English when compared with peers in English-medium schools, as well as their fear of their child's general oral expression in English being poor. This is consistent with the concerns expressed in the questionnaire by parents with a child in Senior Infant Class as 4% ( $n=4$ ) said they were "a bit concerned" about their child learning through the medium of Irish because their English might suffer. The third reason was given by a sixth class teacher who experienced a situation where parents had concerns about their child's level of English, and more specifically about the child's command of English terminology in order to express himself/herself in English on a particular topic. In this instance, concerned parents were mostly focused on post-primary education as they had chosen an English-medium secondary school for their child or were thinking far ahead of third education level which is mostly delivered through the medium of English.<sup>242</sup> It is more difficult to check consistency with questionnaire respondents' views on their child's level of English as they were not asked the same question. Ten per cent of respondents with a child in Sixth Class ( $n=9$ ) agreed with the statement that gael scoileanna neglected the teaching of English; but whether or not it had an impact on the child's level of English was not specified in respondents' comments in the questionnaire.

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242 "[parents] do have concerns particularly when the children get older and they might not have the English terminology. Because in maths in my class I don't teach any English words so some of the children, they might not know the words for certain shapes in English, so some parents see that as a problem when they reach university level or even secondary school level if they don't go on to an Irish language secondary school." (TG6)

Two sixth class teachers (9.5%) mentioned during the course of the interviews that some parents had other concerns about their child's education. One of them did not come across any concerns about children's level of English because it is taught through the medium of English. However, some parents expressed concerns about the teaching of other subjects through Irish such as history, geography, science, etc. as they thought children would not understand the concepts because these subjects were taught through their second language. This issue relates to how well parents understand what immersion education involves (see above). The same teacher suggested that the gaelscoil should inform parents more about how the school operates as she thought a few parents were still uncertain at the end of primary school: "Some [parents] are aware of it and how it's run in school. Others I felt even this year, that they are kind of not sure (...). So maybe a bit more input is needed (...) for the gaelscoil to kind of inform parents, you know, it's Irish from day one as they come in" (Teacher A62). According to the second sixth class teacher, some parents with a child in sixth-class were simply scared of not being able to help at secondary level.

Finally, a significant number of questionnaire respondents (37.9%,  $n=83$ ) indicated that the teaching of English should be introduced from the first term of Junior Infants. Subsequent to these results the teachers interviewed were asked whether parents were concerned about the introduction of the reading of Irish before the reading of English in infant classes. No senior infant teachers interviewed reported any concerns from parents about Irish reading being introduced before English reading, regardless of the different practices between the schools. It must be noted that only two of the schools participating in the study start English reading in Junior Infants while the others delay this process until later during the second term of Senior Infants sometimes as late as after Easter.

Three interviewed teachers nonetheless mentioned that parents usually asked questions at the beginning as they wanted to make sure children's English would not suffer.

### 5.3.2 Parents' attitudes to immersion education according to interview participants

This section focuses on three different issues that were raised by respondents themselves in the questionnaire and that deal with their attitude to immersion education. Firstly, some findings needed clarification as they were not in line with what was expected. Indeed, a significant minority of respondents (37.9%,  $n=83$ ) thought the introduction of the teaching of English should happen within the first term of Junior Infants, which goes against most schools' language policy according to which pupils are fully immersed during the first term of Junior Infants—or even longer. Parents taking part in the follow-up interviews were therefore asked their view on the questionnaire results as an attempt to find out whether they objected to early total immersion. Secondly, a follow-up was carried out among respondents with a child in Senior Infant Class in order to understand what made a majority of respondents feel confident about having their child taught through the medium of Irish. Finally, since both questionnaire results and teachers' reports showed that parents were rather confident and satisfied that their child attended an Irish-medium school,<sup>243</sup> interview participants were asked their opinion about extending this education system to all schools in Ireland.

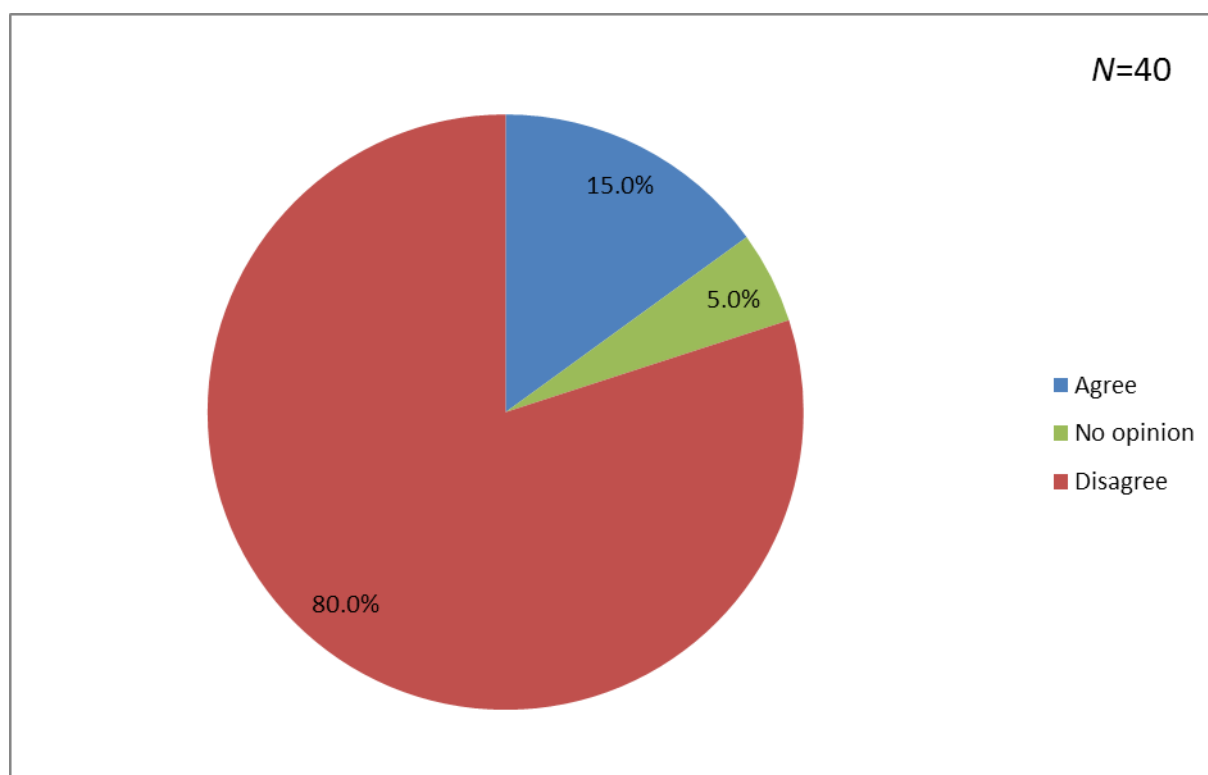
In the questionnaire a significant minority of respondents (37.9%,  $n=83$ ) showed a preference for the teaching of English to be introduced from the first term of Junior Infants as opposed to later during the two-year period of Infant classes. This is surprising as most Irish-medium schools usually have children immersed exclusively in Irish for the first term or in some cases for the first year, sometimes introducing English at the start of the fourth term in Infant Class. This question was therefore put a second time to the forty interview participants, giving them the opportunity to justify their choice. Surprisingly, most of them disagreed with the questionnaire findings. Rather, they were strongly in favour of early total immersion as the only efficient way to compensate for the extensive use of English outside the school environment.

Thirty-two parents (80%) disagreed with questionnaire respondents who preferred to see the teaching of English introduced from the very beginning of primary education. Six parents (15%) agreed but only one of them had a child in Sixth Class. Two parents (5%) did not think they could answer this question as they explained they were not experts in the field of bilingual education. Figure 5.16 below shows the interview results.

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243 See 4.3.2 Advantages and disadvantages to Irish-medium education.

**Figure 5.16: Parents' Views on the Introduction of the Teaching of English from the First Term of Junior Infants**



When viewing interview participants' response in the questionnaire, the follow-up interview cohort does not give a fair representation of the overall questionnaire results. On the question of the right time to introduce the teaching of English only 20% ( $n=8$ ) of interview participants thought at the time of the questionnaire that English should be taught from the start of primary schooling. Note that 30% ( $n=12$ ) gave a different answer during the follow-up interview. Among them, 75% ( $n=9$ ) changed their viewpoint in favour of early total immersion<sup>244</sup> which gives a total of 15% ( $n=3$ ) in favour of the introduction of the teaching of English from the first term of Junior Infants against 37.9% in the questionnaire.<sup>245</sup> One can therefore assume that parents who agreed to participate in the follow-up interview were more in favour of early total immersion than the rest of the questionnaire respondents.

<sup>244</sup> Five interview participants (42%) disagreed with the introduction of the teaching of English from the first term of Junior Infants during the interview whereas they had no opinion or had omitted to answer the question in the questionnaire. Three interview participants (25%) also disagreed although they had previously agreed in the questionnaire. Two interview participants were not sure anymore which way was best. Another one agreed with the introduction of the teaching of English from the start in the interview which contradicted her response in the questionnaire. Finally, one interview participant who had not given any answer in the questionnaire expressed her disagreement in the follow-up interview.

<sup>245</sup> See Table A18.1 in Appendix 18 for a comparison between the total sample population and the follow-up interview cohort



It must be pointed out that three parents changed their response from wishing to see the teaching of English introduced from Junior Infants in the questionnaire to disagreement with this practice. Six months passed between the time they completed the questionnaire and the time they were interviewed. Parents were interviewed at the end of the academic year so they may have seen progress in their child's competence in both languages that was not present at the time of the completion of the questionnaire. This is certainly true for two of the three participants who realised that their respective children learnt Irish faster and more efficiently because they were fully immersed. One participant had an older child going to the same school at the time when the Ministerial Circular 0044/2007 which recommended that the teaching of English should be introduced from the second term of Junior Infants was enforced. This parent was then able to compare her two children's progress and fluency in both languages. She personally thought that introducing English early only resulted in the child's being confused and using more English to communicate in the classroom.<sup>246</sup>

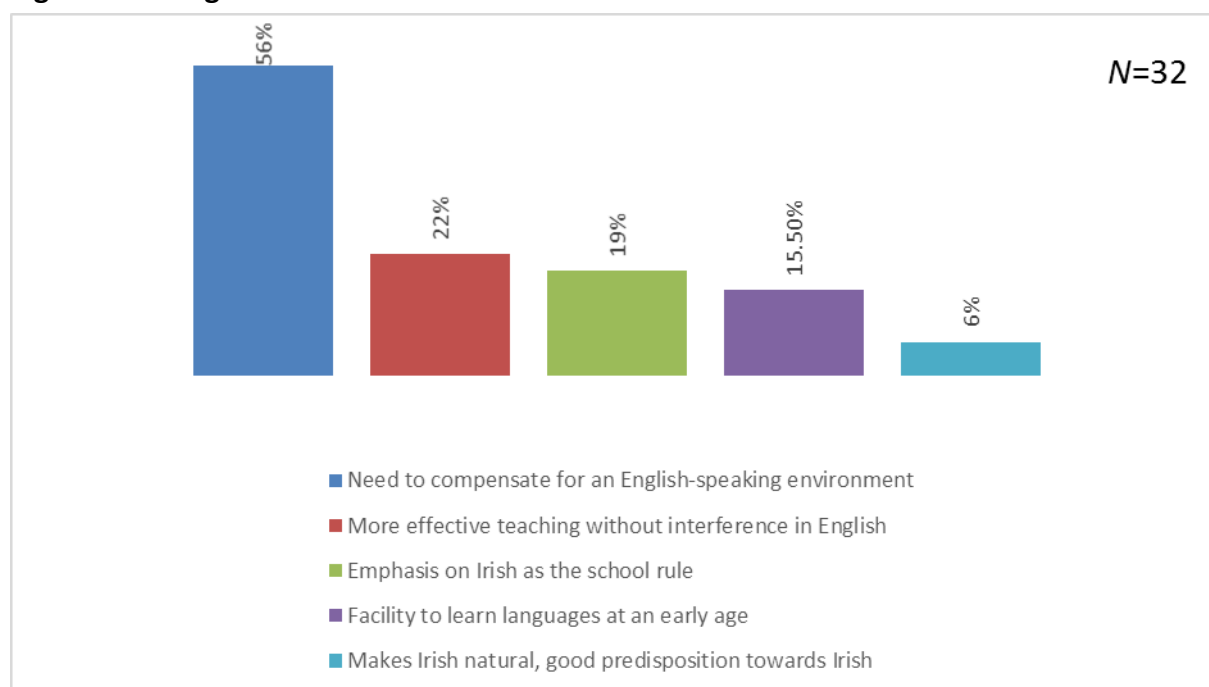
Most interview participants (80%,  $n=32$ ) supported early total immersion education as Irish is barely used outside the school context. Eighteen of them (45%) acknowledged the necessity to focus on Irish in the early years because children live in an English-speaking environment and need to compensate for the very few opportunities they have to use Irish. Seven others (17.5%) believed that early total immersion was more effective as there was no interference with the English language. As a result, children did not have to deal with two languages at the same time: "I think that they should have the first year completely immersed in the language, absolutely. If not the second at all. It's done for a reason you know. You can't expect a small child of five sometimes even four and a half to (...) cope in two languages" (IPD68). A few interview participants (15%,  $n=6$ ) emphasised the importance of not introducing English too early as it could interfere with the enforcement of the language school rule. Children starting school are told they can only speak Irish on the school premises. According to them, allowing the use of English from the outset could make it more difficult for children to comply with the school ethos. Another set of interviewed parents (12.5%,  $n=5$ ) explained that total immersion had advantages when it was done at an early age as children could learn two languages rapidly and with ease. As one participant put it "they're total sponges" (IPK23). Finally, two interview participants (5%) thought that it was important for children to be immersed at a young age so that they get a good predisposition towards Irish and regard it as a natural part of their lives.

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246 "My eldest is 10 so when he went to the naíonra he was fully immersed and then he came out of the naíonra and he went in to the gaelcoil, and they were teaching half and half, English and Irish. They could speak both in the class and he fell right back. He didn't understand... The language wasn't good as it was when he was 5 or 6 than it was when he was 3 because he could do both in school, do you know so.... And now they've changed it and my little boy is now 6 and my little girl is 5. They're both fully immersed because the gaelcoil now has changed to full immersion from Junior Infants. And their Irish is much better and they don't get into trouble for speaking English, they don't feel like they don't know enough Irish because they're speaking it all the time. So they're not getting confused" (IPG26).

Figure 5.17 illustrates interview participants' arguments in support of early total immersion. The horizontal axis represents the five arguments detailed above.

**Figure 5.17: Arguments in Favour of Full Immersion.**



The reasons given in support of the early teaching of English (15%,  $n=6$ ) varied from one interview participant to the next. It must be pointed out that five out of the six interview participants had a child in Senior Infants. Overall, they regarded the delaying of the teaching of English as either pointless or too challenging. What is common to their arguments though is the idea that children could not learn how to function in Irish at an early age. Two interviewed parents (5%) believed that the delay in the teaching of English for one year is of no benefit because children are already native English-speakers. Other reasons included the fear that children will have learning difficulties in English if the teaching of English is delayed (2.5%,  $n=1$ ); the belief that English-speaking children need their first language to understand and consequently learn Irish (2.5%,  $n=1$ ) and that children in Infant Class are too young to deal with Irish only from the outset (2.5%,  $n=1$ ). Finally, one interview participant (2.5%) believed that total immersion is idealistic and cannot be put into practice among young native English-speakers: “I just think it's naïve to think that you can fully immerse children of four or five years of age who don't come from an Irish-speaking background into Irish. I think it's naïve and I think it's idealistic. I think there is enough stress on the children starting out, you know, settling in without being bombarded with Irish. And you'd have to be strict about it which I think could become counterproductive” (IPA215).

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked whether they felt confident or concerned about their child being educated entirely through Irish. This question was asked to respondents whose child was in Senior Infant Class only. The results of the questionnaire showed that only 5% ( $n=5$ ) who answered this question were “a bit concerned” about their child learning through the medium of Irish. The main reason given was that their child's level of English may suffer, while other respondents were concerned about the level of comprehension being lower in a new language as well as the fear of not being able to help the child with his/her homework.

This question was asked a second time so as to find out about the reasons that made most participating parents with a child in Senior Infants feel confident about their child's being taught entirely through the medium of Irish. It also gave an opportunity to participants who would have expressed concerns in the questionnaire to explain why they were still having concerns or why they were feeling more confident six months later. Similar to the questionnaire results, very few interview participants had concerns regarding their child's education. They felt they knew enough about immersion education and what being bilingual entailed and therefore had no reason to feel concerned.

Out of the 26 interview participants with a child in Senior Infants, 22 had expressed a certain level of confidence in the questionnaire while 4 had concerns. However, only one participant among the four still had concerns at the time of the interview. When comparing the consistency in respondents' answers between the questionnaire and the follow-up interview, only one participant expressed concerns during the interview whereas he had none when completing the questionnaire. He probably did not think of a reason to feel concerned at the time of the completion of the questionnaire but thought of it during the interview. It had to do with both his and his spouse's level of Irish and the fear of not being able to help with the homework. However, he explained that this concern only lasted for a short period of time.

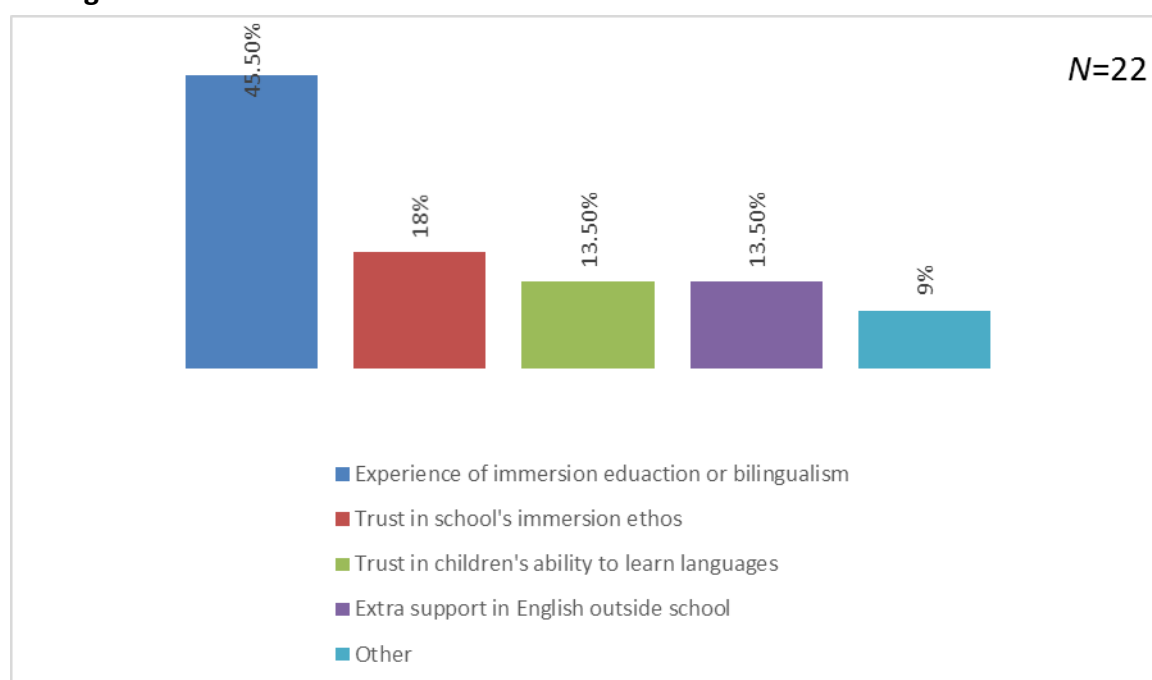
As previously mentioned, respondents who expressed some concerns at the start of their child's schooling did so either because they thought that their child's competence in English writing and reading would suffer as the teaching of English was delayed by one year ( $n=3$ ) or because of a fear of not having enough Irish to help their child through his/her education ( $n=1$ ). Only one participant was still concerned about her children's level of both Irish and English at the time of the interview. She personally thought that despite her children's scoring above average in standard tests their command of both languages was unsatisfactory. Therefore by the end of Senior Infant Class all but one interview participant expressed a certain level of confidence in the total immersion system.

The most common reason interview participants gave to explain this feeling of confidence (84.6%,  $n=22$ ) was that they already had had bilingual experience or they or some of their older children had

been to a gaelscoil (38.5%,  $n=10$ ). Other reasons included a certain level of trust in the gaelscoil ethos in so far as it provides a good education and promotes fluency in two languages (15.4%,  $n=4$ ); and a conviction that children are able to learn languages easily at a young age (11.5%,  $n=3$ ). A few interview participants were confident that children acquired both languages in parallel either in school or outside school with extra support in English, for example, including English translation while doing the homework ( $n=3$ ). Finally, one participant did not think a child's success at school depended on the medium of education but on the school ethos and its atmosphere while another one felt confident because she could understand what was done in school and was able to help her child.

Figure 5.18 below represents participants' reasons to feel confident about their child being educated through Irish.

**Figure 5.18: Reasons Parents Have to Feel Confident about their Child Being Entirely Taught through Irish.**



Although they form a minority, questionnaire respondents who expressed concerns about their child being taught through the medium of Irish were usually “newer” parents. Seemingly, during the interviews, they took a different approach to immersion education towards the end of Infant Class. They seemed more relaxed as soon as their child showed linguistic progress in both languages. One can assume that their concerns are mainly related to their fear of an educational practice that was new to them. Once they are familiar with immersion education they tend to be more confident in their child's academic performance. This was commonly found among interview participants who expressed

confidence in their child's education mainly because they were already familiar with immersion schools or the concept and implication of bilingualism.

In the questionnaire, 89.7% of respondents ( $n=192$ ) agreed that learning through Irish benefited their child educationally. Since they expressed a high level of satisfaction with this education system, parents participating in the follow-up interview were asked if all schools in Ireland should consequently either teach some subjects or all the subjects through Irish. This question divided interview participants. A majority acknowledged the need to use more Irish as a medium of instruction in national schools; but a significant number of interviewed parents were also concerned about people's right to choose whether they wanted their child to be educated through Irish or not, as well as the negative impact compulsory Irish might have on people's attitude to Irish.

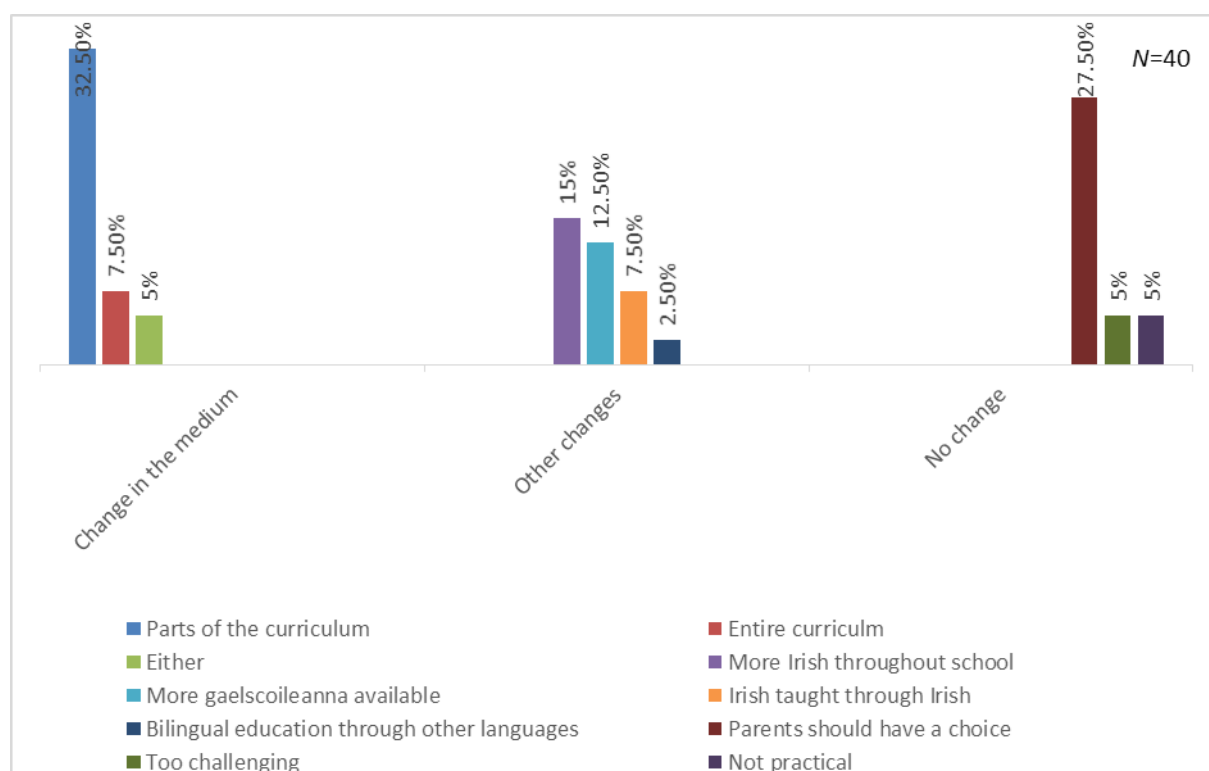
Interview participants' reactions to extending immersion education to all national schools fall into three categories: those in favour of a change in the medium of instruction in all national schools (42.5%,  $n=17$ )—either through partial or total immersion in the Irish language; those against any change (30%,  $n=12$ ); and those in favour of some change that could be easily implemented without entirely reforming the current system (27.5%,  $n=11$ ). Note that the percentages given in the breaking down below do not total 100% as a few participants gave more than one reason each.

Thirty per cent of interview participants ( $n=12$ ) thought parts of the curriculum should be taught through Irish whereas 7.5% ( $n=3$ ) thought the entire curriculum should be taught through Irish. Two interview participants (5%) did not show any preference as they thought that either option was good. By contrast, 27.5% ( $n=11$ ) did not think the current means of instruction in school should be reformed. They believed parents should have a right to choose between an English-medium education and an Irish-medium education: “I don't think it's right to force people to do it if it's not their choice because I know enough a lot of people who just don't see the point of it” (IPG28); I think there should be a choice for parents. I also think parents should be informed more about the advantages of educating a child in two languages” (IPA24). According to some, forcing Irish on people is more likely to provoke negative feelings towards the Irish language rather than promoting it: “I think people who aren't interested in Irish they shouldn't be forced to learn Irish. (...) when we went to school we were all forced to learn Irish and as a result no one of my generation can speak Irish. So I'd have no problem even with schools that don't teach Irish at all it's down to the parents if they want their children to learn” (IPC26). A further two interview participants (5%) did not think that extending immersion education to all schools in Ireland would be practical either because there would not be enough qualified teachers to teach through Irish or because it would be discriminatory towards people who cannot understand or speak Irish, especially when dealing with complicated terminology. Two

participants (5%) added it would be too challenging for children to have more subjects through the medium of Irish. A third group was more in favour of promoting the Irish language within the school rather than making it a medium of instruction. They suggested that Irish should be taught through the medium of Irish (7.5%,  $n=3$ ), that a greater use of Irish should be made throughout the day in school or during extra-curricular activities in school (15%,  $n=6$ ), or that there should be more Irish-medium schools available, which would give parents a choice and would not require reforming the current education system (12.5%,  $n=5$ ).<sup>247</sup> Finally, one interviewed parent believed that the promotion of immersion education should be encouraged through other European languages.

Figure 5.19 illustrates participants' response on extending Irish-medium education to all national schools. The horizontal axis includes three categories of answers based on the degree of change parents would like to add to the present educational system in terms of medium of instruction.

**Figure 5.19: Parents' Views on the Introduction of More Irish in the Curriculum in English-Medium Schools.**



There was no discernible difference between the answers of participating parents with a child in Senior Infants and parents with a child in Sixth Class.

<sup>247</sup> The latter argument was also stated by three interview participants who opposed to set up immersion education in all national schools.

## Conclusion

Overall parents understand what immersion education involved in their child's education. This was further confirmed when the interviewed teachers reported that parents did not have any serious concerns about the fact that their child was entirely taught through Irish nor were they concerned about their level of English—except in the rare case of children with learning difficulties. It appears throughout the interviews that the minority of parents raising concerns were either newer parents who were not familiar with the immersion system—and whose concerns were only temporary—and sixth class parents focusing on potential language challenges in post-primary education, either for their child or themselves. Findings also tend to show that there is a connection between concerns raised by participants about the effects of immersion education on their child's education—mainly on their skills in English reading and writing—and their experience of it. Interview participants who had several children attending the *gaelscoil* or who said had attended such a school themselves did not feel concerned. Although Irish-medium schools generally inform parents on how they operate, not all parents seem to understand immersion education to the same degree. Some sixth class teachers suggested that parents' deep understanding of immersion education may, to a certain extent, be related to how interested in and committed to the Irish language they are. This may be problematic because parents have had the right since 2010 to request the teaching of literacy in English in Junior Infants. Therefore those who do not understand the benefits of early total immersion could interfere with the school's policy on the best time for introducing literacy in English.

Because the follow-up interview cohort mainly included parents who had indicated in the questionnaire that they were in favour of early total immersion, it was not possible to determine the reasons why some respondents would like to see the teaching of English introduced from the outset, as opposed to what is currently practised in Irish-medium schools. However, evidence from a small number of interviewed parents seems to indicate that they were dubious about delaying the teaching of children's first language (English) for a set period of time in order to acquire Irish as their second language.

Strong support for and confidence in immersion education did not always translate into a desire to see all national schools in Ireland teach through the medium of Irish. Most interview participants indicated that they would like to see more Irish used in the school environment either as part of a partial immersion programme or more for cultural and extra-curricular activities. Furthermore, a significant number of interview participants were also conscious that even though they believed immersion education through Irish was a very good way to educate their child they did not want to impose this system on other parents as it might engender negative attitudes towards the language. The provision of more Irish-medium schools appeared to be a more reasonable alternative. This view is

in line with the government's approach for the past few decades which services the bilingual population and sectors where a community of Irish speakers is presumed to already exist (Ó Riagáin, 2008).



#### ***5.4 Attitudes to Irish conveyed by parents***

Despite discrepancies between secondary school choice respondents showed in the questionnaire that they were very positive towards the Irish language. However, it was not always sure how committed to Irish they were. This section attempts to throw more light on this matter by further investigating parental attitudes to Irish in both the follow-up interviews and teachers' interviews. It is divided into two parts and focuses on a more practical day-to-day manifestation of participants' attitudes to the Irish language. It first examines participation rate in Irish-medium recreational activities and deals with parental language attitudes that directly impact on children in terms of general perception of Irish. The second part analyses children's attitudes to Irish through participants' eyes as a potential reflector of parental attitudes.

### 5.4.1 Evaluation of the importance of the Irish language

This sub-section focuses on parental attitudes in relation to both the role and the use of Irish outside school hours. Both groups of parents and teachers were questioned. Before getting to the core of this topic more consistency was sought on parents' general attitudes to the Irish language.

Interviewed teachers' assessment of parents' general attitude to Irish was consistent with the overall results from the questionnaire in relation to their positive disposition towards the language.

A majority of the teachers interviewed (62%,  $n=13$ ) said parents generally had a very positive attitude towards Irish while a few (19%,  $n=4$ ) specified that parents encouraged their child to speak Irish—although this was observed on the school grounds rather than outside. Table 5.2 below lists the different attitudes parents were said to show or encourage in their child. Some of the teachers interviewed gave different examples illustrating parents' attitude to Irish.

**Table 5.2: Parents' Attitudes to Irish According to Interviewed Teachers**

Attitude	Total <sup>248</sup> ( $N=21$ )
General positive attitude to Irish	62% ( $n=13$ )
Child encouraged and praised when using Irish	28.5% ( $n=6$ )
Pride in child's level of Irish	19% ( $n=4$ )
Child encouraged to speak Irish in the school yard	19% ( $n=4$ )
Love for the Irish language fostered	14% ( $n=3$ )
Other <sup>249</sup>	19% ( $n=4$ )

As shown in the table above, most interviewed teachers spontaneously gave a general view of parents' attitudes to Irish. Parents were perceived to have a positive attitude towards the language (62%,  $n=13$ ). Some interviewed teachers, however, gave more details. While some claimed that parents praised and encouraged their child in his/her education through Irish (28.5%,  $n=6$ ), others talked about parents' pride in their child's ability to speak Irish fluently (19%,  $n=4$ ). Two of them, teaching in working-class areas, said some parents had a nationalistic attitude towards Irish, which

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248 The percentages given are exclusive and do not total 100% as some interviewed teachers gave more than one reason.

249 This category includes four different statements on parents encouraging their child to appreciate Irish culture, to see Irish as educationally useful, to develop an interest in other languages and finally on parents' lack of encouragement due to a neutral attitude to Irish: "sometimes that's something they don't care about maybe, but they don't express a negative attitude" (TA22).

resulted in parents strongly encouraging their child to speak Irish. By contrast, only one teacher mentioned parents' lack of enthusiasm in certain cases.<sup>250</sup>

One interviewed teacher acknowledged a positive attitude to Irish among parents, however, he felt that parents relied heavily on the school to encourage their children to speak Irish: "I think it's more left up to the school to encourage it. We do get support (...) but in general I think it's encouraged more by the school than by the parents" (TE6). Similarly, two interviewed teachers thought that despite positive attitudes parents regarded the language as restricted to the school environment. Consequently the use of Irish outside school was not encouraged: "They do encourage their children. Once they step inside the school gate they normally make them speak Irish but parents would tend to speak English to them" (TD21). This is consistent with what other teachers (19%,  $n=4$ ) said during the interviews in relation to parents encouraging their child to use Irish on the school premises.

What emerges from the teachers' interviews is that there seems to be a gap between parents' positive attitude to Irish and the encouragement they give their child to use Irish after school hours. In order to find out about parents' level of encouragement towards their child's use of Irish outside school hours both groups of interviewed participants and teachers were asked questions on children's participation in Irish-medium recreational activities.

During the teachers' interviews a majority (67%,  $n=14$ ) said that parents encouraged their child to participate in Irish-medium recreational activities. But as two teachers from the same school pointed out there are not many opportunities for children to use Irish outside school. Children from only two participating schools were said to have access to an Irish-medium youth club in their living area. Most interviewed teachers (57%,  $n=12$ ) therefore referred to children's participation in extra-curricular activities organised by the *gaelscoil* such as Irish dancing, hurling, Gaelic football, tin whistle, etc. A large number of children were said to attend such activities. However, two interviewed teachers (9.5%) did not think that children's participation in after-school activities was motivated by language. Rather, parents were likely to send their child to after-school activities because of the activity itself and because their schoolmates also attended, regardless of the medium of instruction: "It would be more for sports or the game or, you know, just friends" (TK6). Although after-school activities organised by the school were described as the only way for children to use Irish outside school, one interviewed teacher (5%) said parents from her school encouraged children from the *gaelscoil* to play together so they would have an opportunity to converse in Irish. Children's attendance at an Irish-language youth club was the other form of Irish-medium recreational activity mentioned by two teachers (9.5%) outside activities organised by the school.

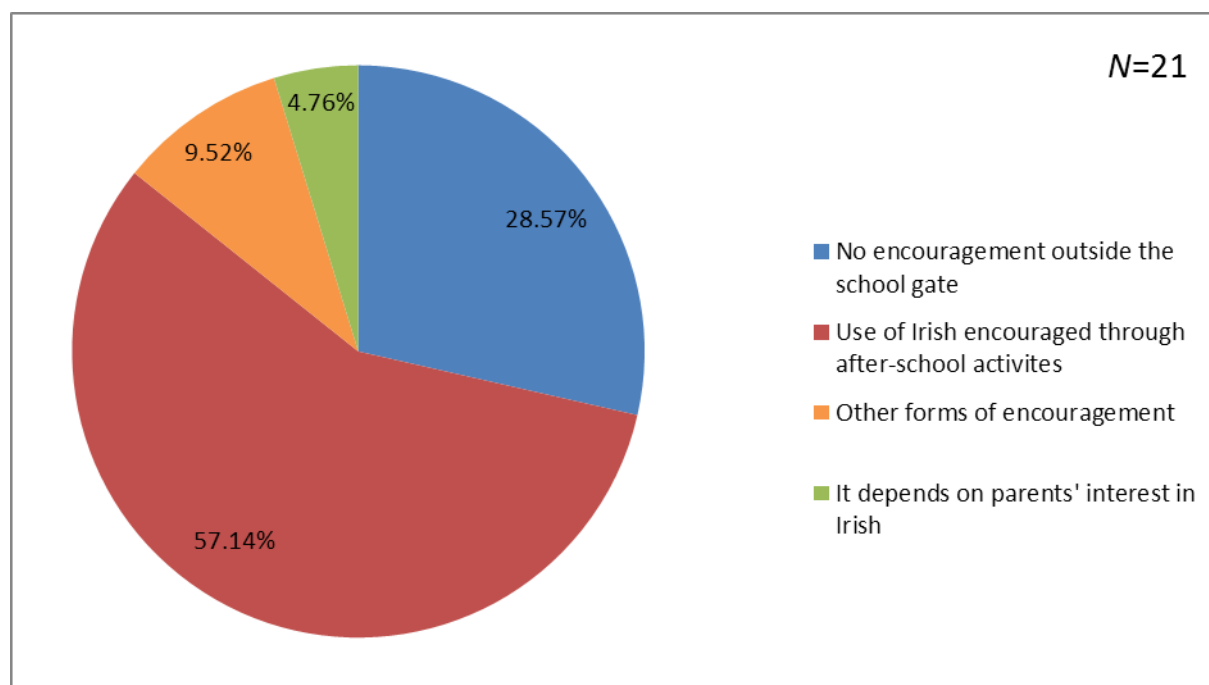
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250 See quote in "other" category (footnote 246 above).

By contrast, over a quarter of the teachers interviewed ( $n=6$ ) said parents did not encourage their child to use Irish after school hours. According to three of them (14.3%), this may be due to the fact that parents regard Irish as being school-related while one senior infant teacher thought children were too young to take part in any recreational activities. Finally, one interviewed teacher (4.8%) thought encouraging children to use Irish depended very much on parents' own interest in Irish.

Teachers' answers which fall into four different categories are illustrated by Figure 5.20 below:

**Figure 5.20: Teachers' Views on Parents' Encouraging their Child to Use Irish for Recreational Activities**

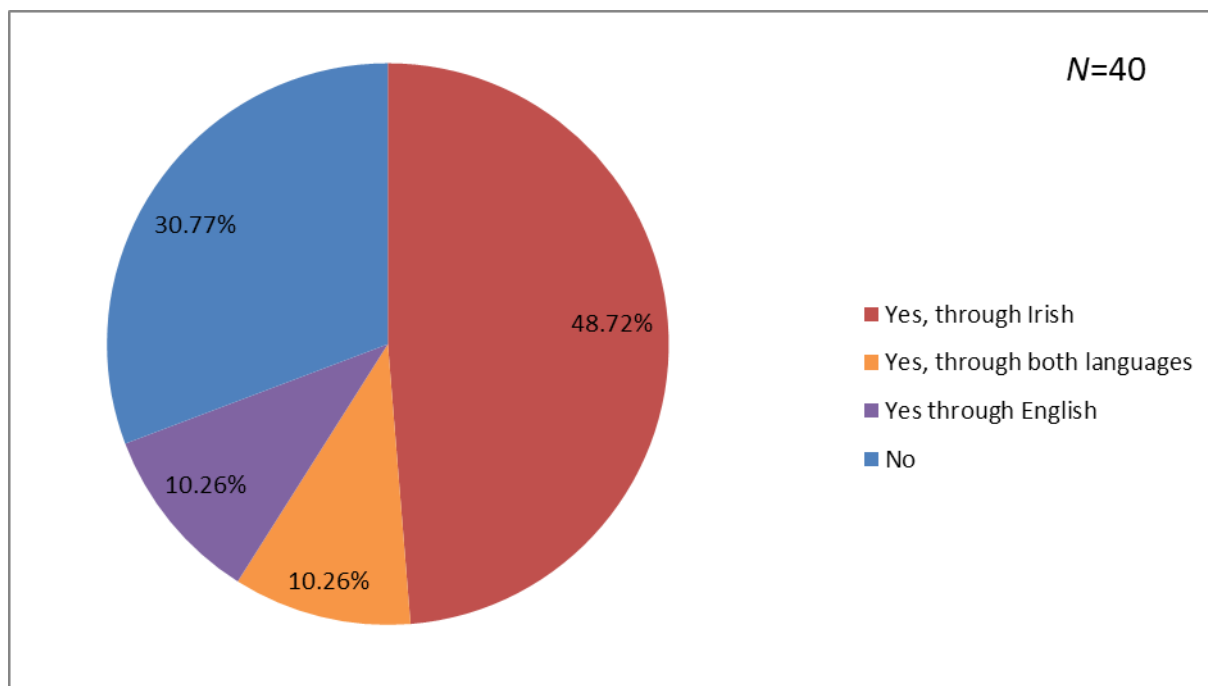


Because so few children's activities are available through the medium of Irish in the Dublin area, interview participants were asked directly whether or not their child participated in extra-curricular activities in the school. The results obtained in parents follow-up interviews show consistency with teachers' answers, that is a majority of participants encourage their child to participate in extra-curricular activities in the school.

Twenty-eight interview participants (70%) said their child participated in after-school activities organised on the school grounds. Nineteen of these (47.5%) said the extra-curricular activity/activities was/were through the medium of Irish; four (10%) said the activity(ies) was/were done through Irish and through English depending on the nature of the activity and the instructor, whereas four participants (10%) said it was done through the medium of English. One participant (2.5%) was not sure what medium the activity his child participated in was conducted. By contrast, twelve interviewed

participants (30%) said their child was not involved in any extra-curricular activities in the school. Figure 5.21 below outlines the results:

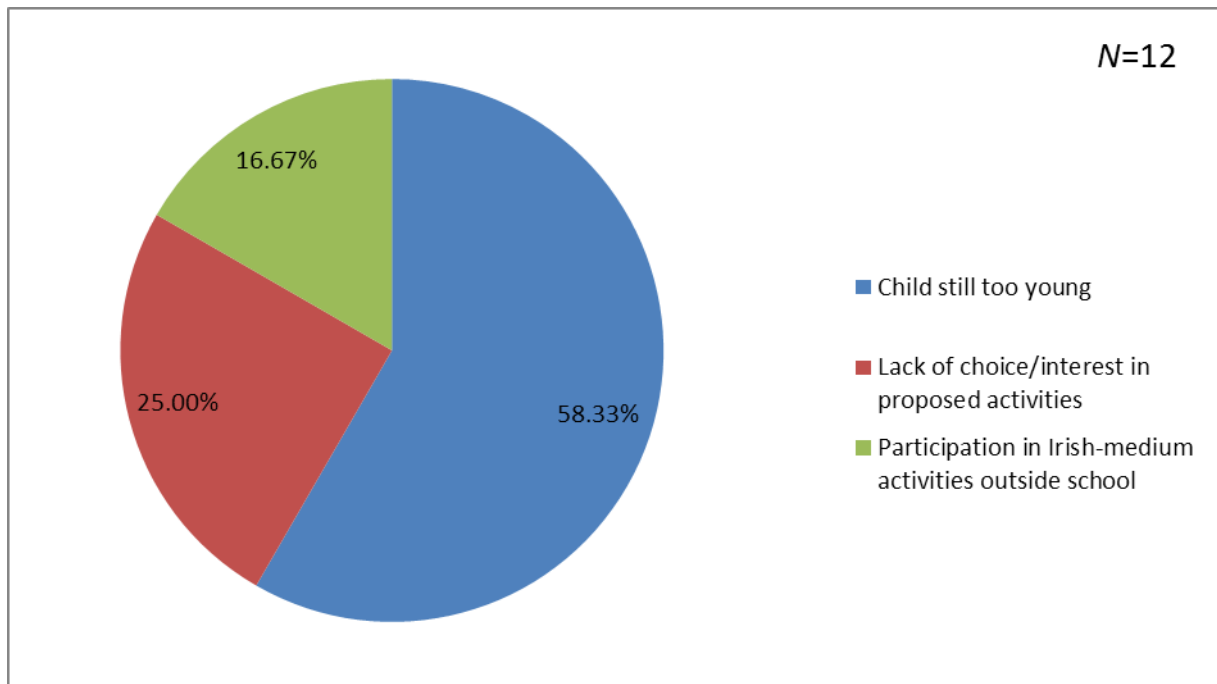
**Figure 5.21: Children Participating in Extra-Curricular Activities in the School**



Interview participants who gave a negative answer were asked about the reasons why their child was not taking part in an after-school activity organised by the gaelscoil. Their answers fall into three categories illustrated by Figure 5.22 below.

Participants with a child in Senior Infant Class represent the majority of parents who said during the interviews that their child was not participating in extra-curricular activities in the gaelscoil (58.3%,  $n=7$ ), which represents 17.5% of the total sample population. They all said their child was too young to take part in any activity organised by the school. This age requirement seems to concern certain schools only as interview participants from four schools out of the ten taking part in the study mentioned this issue. Other reasons not to attend Irish-medium recreational activities in the school included the lack of choice and/or the child's lack of interest in the proposed activities (25%,  $n=3$ ) and the fact that some children already participated in Irish-medium activities outside the school (16.7%,  $n=2$ ).

**Figure 5.22: Reasons for Children not to Take Part in Extra-Curricular Activities Organised by the School**

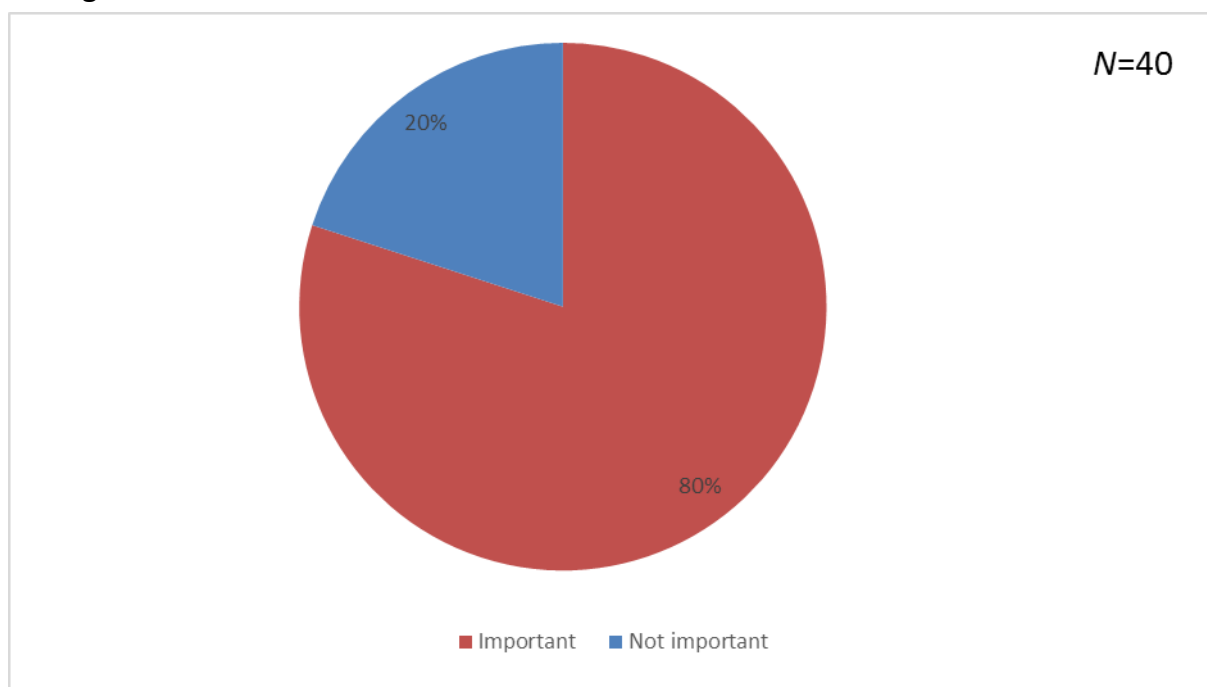


The percentage of parents who do not send their child to after-school activities in the gael scoil—around a quarter—coincides in both types of interviews. However, the reasons for not sending their child to such activities seem to differ. Most interviewed teachers who claimed parents did not encourage the use of Irish after school, thought parents associated the Irish language with school hours and therefore did not encourage their child to use Irish for recreational purposes. Only one interviewed teacher referred to the young age of children in senior infant class as a factor to their non-participation in extra-curricular activities. The latter reason was the most mentioned among interviewed parents.

By and large, the results indicate that 62.5% ( $n=25$ ) of interview participants encourage their child to partake in recreational activities through the medium of Irish after school hours whether it is within or outside the school. Note that this figure may have been larger if some of the activities proposed in certain schools were suitable for younger children and if more activities were conducted through the medium of Irish. This finding is further supported by the views of interview participants on the importance of recreational activities through the medium of Irish, which is examined below.

Thirty-two interview participants (80%) thought that taking part in a recreational activity through Irish was important for their child. The remaining eight participants (20%) did not share the same point of view. The results are outlined in Figure 5.23 below:

**Figure 5.23: Parents' Views on the Importance of Taking Part in Recreational Activities through the Medium of Irish**



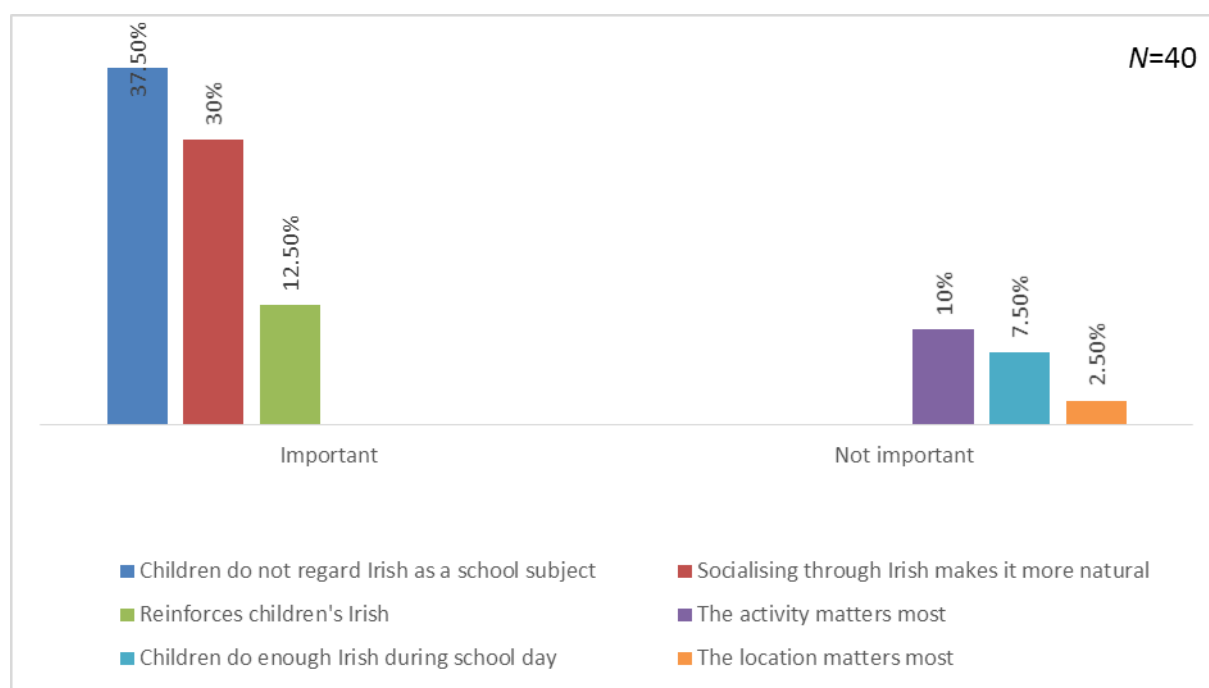
Interview participants who supported their child's participation in an Irish-medium extra-curricular activity explained how crucial it was for their child to use Irish while playing. According to 37.5% ( $n=15$ ) of them, it enables children to regard Irish as something more than a school subject and it also encourages a positive attitude towards the language. The following are a few quotations from the interviews illustrating this point: "They have to enjoy the language for itself as opposed to a subject" (IPA618); "I think it's important they [see] it's not just a subject that they learn in school" (IPD68); "that way they see the language as a living thing rather than just something they learn in school" (IPH23). A further 30% ( $n=12$ ) thought recreational activities through Irish help children realise they can socialise through the Irish language in a natural and informal way: "That [is] all Irish in a fun way. It makes it just more normal" (IPJ67); "she goes to a gaelscoil and has school friends there so it brings the fun side of the language and it's more natural" (IPF22); "There is a more relaxed atmosphere. My child learns to use colloquialism that you wouldn't use in school" (IPD61). Five interview participants (12.5%) thought

attendance at Irish-medium extra-curricular activities was important because it reinforced their child's fluency in the language.

As for interview participants who did not think activities through the medium of Irish were important (20%,  $n=8$ ), 10% ( $n=4$ ) argued that the activity matters more than the language it is conducted through. What they seem to regard as most important is the enjoyment their child gets from the activity: "It is not necessarily important. It is not so much the language as my child gets this aspect in the school. It is more for the game and the culture" (IPG61); "It's a bonus. The activity matters most" (IPG216). A further 7.5% ( $n=3$ ) argued that the language of instruction during after-school activities is not important as children use Irish exclusively in school: "I don't think it's that important mainly because they do it all day in school" (IPD212). Finally, one interviewed parent (2.5%) said her child attended extra-curricular activities through Irish because it was conveniently organised on the school grounds. The medium of instruction was not of primary concern.

Figure 5.24 below summarises interview participants' arguments as to how important it is for their child to participate in Irish-medium recreational activities. The horizontal axis is composed of two sections "important" and "not important" which represent the two opposing arguments.<sup>251</sup>

**Figure 5.24: Parents' Views on Children's Participation in Recreational Activities through Irish**



<sup>251</sup> One parent gave two reasons on why the medium of instruction does not matter when applied to recreational activities.



Overall, interview participants showed they value the provision of activities through the medium of Irish in the school as it is very often the only way for children to interact through Irish outside the classroom environment. As one parent put it, “it [is] nice but there are not many opportunities” (IPJ63). Due to the lack of Irish-medium recreational activities available outside the school, interviewed parents were questioned on their child’s future non-academic relationship with the Irish language. More specifically, they were asked whether they would continue to speak Irish with their child and would encourage him/her to use Irish in non-related school activities, regardless of the attended secondary school (i.e. English-medium or Irish-medium school). While this question focused on a near future for some, for others it meant projecting six years ahead.

Interview participants seemed to hold a positive picture of their future level of Irish and their commitment to using it with their children. All respondents but one (97.5%,  $n=39$ ) gave a positive response to both their future use of Irish and the encouragement they would give their child to keep using the language.

Although nearly all interview participants said they would still use Irish once their child goes to secondary school, only a few elaborated (40%,  $n=16$ ). Two distinct groups tend to appear from the answers they gave about their future use of Irish with their child. The first group is composed of participants who are willing to take action to improve their level of Irish (proactive group,  $n=8$ ) whereas the second group tends to rely on other children going through the *gaelscoil* to stimulate the use of Irish at home (passive group,  $n=8$ ). Interview participants falling into the proactive group were either convinced they would be more able to speak Irish by the time their child leaves primary school (18.8%,  $n=3$ ) or thought of increasing their current use of Irish. While two of them (12.5%) committed themselves to speaking more Irish as their child grows up, others indicated they would try to use it more in the future, although they admitted it might be difficult as they were not currently trying as much as they could (12.5%,  $n=2$ ). Finally, one interviewed sixth class parent (6.2%) had planned to attend Irish classes again. Participants from the passive group were mostly relying on their child's siblings or friends to speak Irish with their child (25%,  $n=4$ ). Others thought that the use of Irish at home would increase naturally as more of their younger children would attend the *gaelscoil* in the near future (18.8%,  $n=3$ ). One senior infant parent (6.2%) thought her child would teach her more Irish as she/he grows up.

Although it was sometimes hard for interview participants to imagine how their child would remain in contact with Irish outside the school a few could tell that they would either go to the *Gaeltacht* as part of a family holiday or attending a summer college ( $n=9$ ), or socialise through Irish with friends from school ( $n=3$ ), or would take part in youth clubs or summer courses through Irish ( $n=2$ ), or would attend sport GAA events or traditional music sessions ( $n=2$ ). It must be noted that the

last two events are more associated with Irish culture than the Irish language. Therefore, they are unlikely to be a way for children to converse through Irish, despite interview participants' belief.

Only one interview participant (2.5%) said she would not use Irish more or force her child to use it more once in secondary school. She did not think she would need to speak more Irish once her children move to secondary school as she believed that children become more independent once in secondary school. Furthermore, she thought she would let them decide whether they wanted to socialise through Irish or keep in contact with Irish in any other way as she did not think forcing Irish on children was beneficial.

There was no discernible difference between the answers of participants with a child in Senior Infants and participants with a child in Sixth Class. Interviewed parents of sixth class pupils responded positively and did not show any lack of interest in Irish despite the fact that their child may move on to an English-medium secondary school. This may be due to the self-selection element of the follow-up interviews—which probably appealed to parents with a good disposition towards Irish—as 85% ( $n=11$ ) had already selected an Irish-medium secondary school for the following school year. Their attitude and commitment to Irish were therefore more positive than the general impression teachers gave about *gaelscoil* parents and which is detailed below.

Participating sixth class teachers were asked if they had noticed a change in parents' attitudes to Irish as their child is preparing for secondary school. A majority (78%,  $n=7$ ) observed a change in parents' commitment to Irish. However, this change was not always a positive one. Interviewed teachers were divided between those who found a negative change (33.5%,  $n=3$ ) or a positive one (11%,  $n=1$ ) and those who observed a mix between positive and negative change depending on parents' choice of a secondary school for their child (33.5%,  $n=3$ ). Parents who had decided that their child would go to an Irish-medium secondary school were said to show a strong commitment to Irish whereas parents who had chosen an English-medium secondary school for their child were said to regard Irish not as important as before. One interviewed teacher explained that parents with a loss of interest in Irish represented a minority: “sometimes in Sixth Class I mentioned one or two parents who ... it's like they've given up in Sixth Class because they decided now they're sending their child onto an English secondary school so that's it, that time is behind them” (TA62). Another teacher said that the choice of secondary school could be explained by a confidence issue: parents who trust their child's ability to do well through the medium of Irish chose an Irish-medium secondary school whereas

parents who lack confidence either in their competence in Irish or their child's, preferred their child to go to an English-speaking secondary school.<sup>252</sup>

One teacher interviewed (11%) thought that parents were overall more confident in Irish and as a consequence used it more. By contrast, a few teachers (33.5%,  $n=3$ ) saw a decreasing commitment to Irish among parents either because they were focusing on the transition to secondary school: "They're more focused on the exams and getting into a good class, in a good school, to do well in exams. Irish might not be seen as important" (TJ6); or because they felt their child was fluent and had become more independent. One of them said parents in Sixth Class were less enthusiastic about Irish than newer parents. Finally, two interviewed teachers (22%) said that they did not notice any change in parents' commitment to Irish.

Although each interviewed teacher gave a different account it seems that the choice of secondary school impacts on parents' commitment and attitude to Irish. Parents showing a greater interest in and support for Irish usually have selected an Irish-medium secondary school for their child whereas parents showing less commitment and enthusiasm are sending their child to an English-medium school. This could explain why so many interview participants expressed positive attitude and commitment to continue to use Irish once their child goes to secondary school as most of them (85%,  $n=34$ ) had chosen an Irish-medium secondary school.

As seen previously,<sup>253</sup> pupil's orientation towards the target language depends on parents' attitudinal disposition (Lambert et al., 1968; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Although questionnaire respondents overtly showed positive attitudes to Irish and indicated they praised and encouraged their child to use Irish, a further attempt was made during the follow-up interviews to assess the nature of the general message parents send to their child regarding Irish. Interview participants were asked about the discourse they hold when talking to their child about the role of Irish in today's society, outside the school context.

Twenty-six interview participants (65%) seemed to have consciously shown their child—directly or indirectly—that the Irish language is not restricted to the school environment whereas fourteen participants (35%) did not seem to have dealt with this issue from their own initiative. Participants'

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252 "I think that the parents on one side who are sending their kids to an all-English secondary school maybe don't have confidence in themselves or don't have confidence in their children, that they think the Irish will be too hard that they won't manage it, that they won't cope, that it will become too much that no one will be able to help them. On the other side the other parents that are sending them to an Irish school have all the confidence in the world. (...) They would see that... you know they've been here quite a few years. They can read and write the language about any subject or any topic and secondary school is just the next step. You know because some of them might even feel that it'll be a step back to bring them to an English secondary school." (TB6).

253 See Chapter Two, Section 2.2.

answers were put into categories which are listed in Table 5.3 below.<sup>254</sup> Table 5.3 distinguishes between interview participants who were found to give an active input in their child's understanding of the Irish language by showing what it stands for or what role it has outside the school environment and interview participants who had a rather neutral approach to teaching about the role of Irish outside education.

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<sup>254</sup> Percentages do not total 100% as two interview participants gave two reasons each

**Table 5.3: Parents' Input on their Child's Understanding of the Role of the Irish Language Outside School**

<b>Active</b>	<b>Total %</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Total %</b>
Tells child about Irish history explaining language shift	27.5 (n=11)	Child is too young to understand or to ask questions about the role of Irish	15 (n=6)
Actively encourages the use of Irish so it becomes part of the child's life	15 (n=6)	Doesn't want to force Irish on the child/ doesn't want to influence child's opinion	7.5 (n=3)
Tells child that the Irish language is part of his/her identity	12.5 (n=5)	Irish is already part of family life and child doesn't question it because it is natural	5 (n=2)
Shows the practical usefulness of Irish in education, careers or abroad	10 (n=4)	No conversation about it (no specified reason)	5 (n=2)
Explains about the use of Irish in current legislation (bilingual official signs, documents, etc.)	2.5 (n=1)	No need to talk about it as child doesn't have a negative attitude towards Irish	2.5 (n=1)
		No need as child learnt history in school	2.5 (n=1)
<b>TOTAL (N=40)</b>	<b>n=27</b>		<b>n=15</b>

A significant number of interview participants (27.5%,  $n=11$ ) taught their children about the history of the Irish language in an attempt to explain the present status of the language. Some depicted its role in a symbolic way referring to Irish identity (12.5%,  $n=5$ ) while others showed in a practical way the advantages Irish offers in certain situations in life (10%,  $n=4$ ). A few interviewed parents preferred to actively encourage their child to use Irish rather than talking about its status (15%,  $n=6$ ).

Most interview participants who admitted that they had never talked about the role of Irish with their child had a young child in Senior Infants (15%,  $n=6$ ). Among the interviewed parents who never had a conversation with their child about the role of Irish outside school, four had a child in Sixth Class (29%). Two of them said they never had that sort of conversation with their children because they brought them up in an Irish language-oriented environment either speaking Irish at home or socialising with other Irish speakers at traditional Irish music sessions. As for the other two participants, they either did not want to influence their child's attitude to Irish or did not feel the need to talk about it as the child did not show any negative attitude to the language.

When taking children coming from an Irish-speaking home out of the equation as well as young children—assuming they will eventually have a conversation with their parents about the role of Irish in the near future—only a minority of interview participants (12.5%,  $n=5$ ) seems to have left the school with the task of teaching children about the role of Irish in today's society.

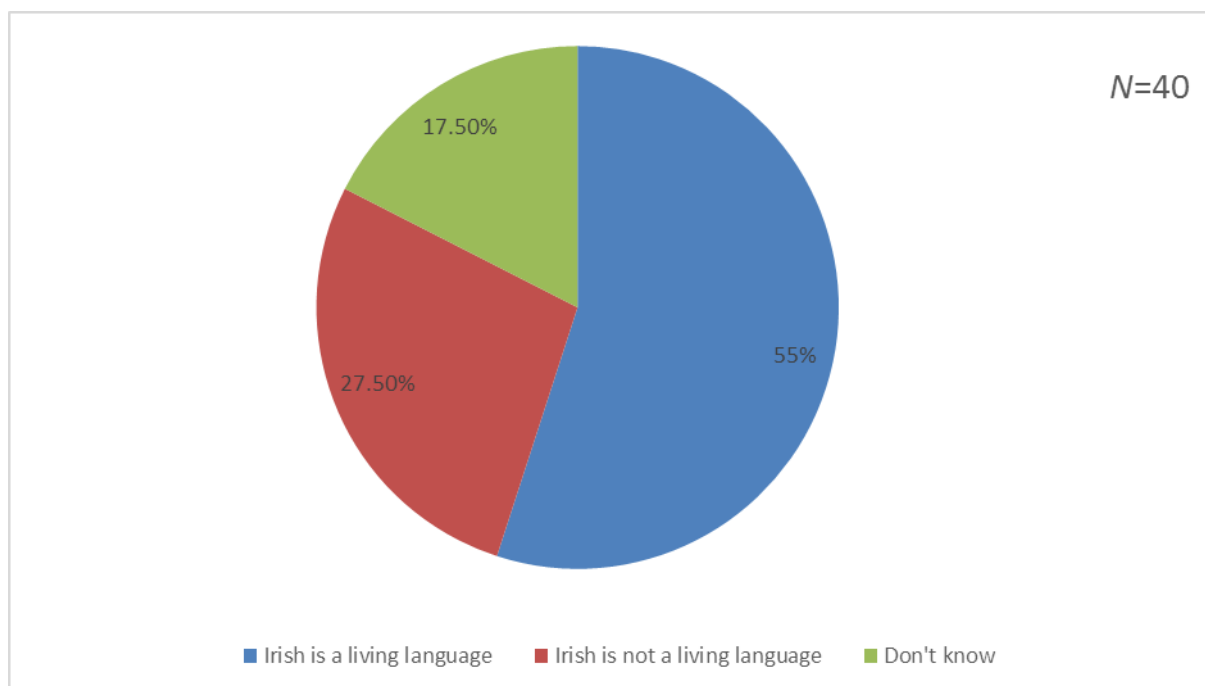
#### 5.4.2 Child's attitude to the Irish language according to parents

Children's attitudes to Irish may give further information on parents' own attitudes to the language as research has shown that parents' attitudinal disposition to a language influences children's attitudes (Lambert et al., 1968; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Baker, 1992; Bohner & Wänke, 2002). Although children's attitudes are reported by parents themselves, they can at least indicate whether there is consistency in interview participants' response. First, interview participants were asked whether their child valued Irish as a living language then, whether their child associated Irish with school only.

Just over half of the interview participants (55%,  $n=22$ ) said their child valued Irish as a living language. Participants who thought their child did not value Irish as a living language (27.5%,  $n=11$ ) were senior infant parents who believed their child was too young to understand. However, the difference between those who value Irish as a living language and those who do not seems, according to the results below, to lie more in a certain degree of exposure to Irish than in the age factor.

Figure 5.25 below outlines the results. Note that all of the participants who said their child did not value Irish as a living language had a young child in senior infant class. Seven interview participants (17.5%) were not sure about their child's perception of the Irish language. Four of them had a child in Senior Infants whereas three of them had a child in Sixth Class.

**Figure 5.25: Parents' Views on their Child's Understanding of Irish as a Living Language in Ireland**



The reasons why children consider—or not—Irish as a living language—according to interview participants—are listed in Table 5.4:

**Table 5.4: Reasons for Valuing or not Valuing Irish as a Living Language**

Child values Irish as a living language	Total %	Child does not value Irish as a living language	Total %
Child has relatives living in the Gaeltacht	18 (n=6)	Child is too young to understand this concept	18 (n=6)
Some Irish is spoken at home	15 (n=5)	There isn't enough Irish spoken around children	6 (n=2)
Gaeltacht experience through school	12 (n=4)	No specified reason	6 (n=2)
Child uses Irish when playing with friends	6 (n=2)	Child refuses to speak Irish outside school	3 (n=1)
Child sees Irish as a language of communication like any other language	6 (n=2)	Child doesn't understand why he/she goes to a gaelscoil whereas other children from the neighbourhood don't	3 (n=1)
Child comments on the language and shows an interest in it	6 (n=2)		
No specified reason	6 (n=2)		
Child watches TG4	3 (n=1)		
TOTAL (N=33) <sup>255</sup>	n=24		n=12

Interview participants who said their child valued Irish as a living language (55%, n=22) explained that it was mainly because their child had been exposed to a meaningful Irish-medium experience outside the school environment i.e. Irish spoken by relatives, at home, with playmates or in the community during a stay in the Gaeltacht.

All the participants who did not think their child valued Irish as a living language were parents of young children in senior infant class. The age factor can explain children's lack of understanding of the status and role of Irish in Ireland. However, it was not possible to determine why 27.5% of participants (n=11) with a child in Senior Infants said their child valued Irish as a living language whereas the exact same number said their child did not. It does not appear that participants' self-reported ability in Irish and frequency of Irish usage at home could account for their response. The presence of relatives in the

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<sup>255</sup> Seven interview participants had no opinion. Note that two participants gave two reasons why their child values Irish as a living language while one participant gave two reasons why her child does not. Therefore the percentages do not total 100%.



Gaeltacht or the use of Irish between siblings or with extended family may be one of the reasons why some children value Irish as a living language at an earlier age than others do: “My child speaks Irish with relatives and friends” (IPJ212); “some Irish is used at home especially between brothers. The eldest would encourage the youngest to speak it” (IPK22). A few participants ( $n=3$ ) who reported middle to high ability in Irish and regular use of Irish thought their child’s age was the only reason why they did not value Irish as a living language whereas two participants with lower ability and less frequent use of Irish thought it was due to a lack of exposure to Irish in their area: “I wouldn't say they see it as a living language because they'll use it in school and I'll speak to them a bit but their father doesn't so... and nobody around here does” (IPJ22); “because they're not from the likes of... if you go down to Connemara or you go down to Donegal or you go down to the real places down there. And I would feel if my kids were there and heard that a little bit more... Say, if we holidayed down there I would imagine that would just come naturally to them and they'd think that because everyone is speaking that way, that would come naturally to them that way. But because the society that we're in up here, not enough a lot of people do it” (IPF210).

These results suggest that young gaelscoil children exposed to Irish outside the school environment are more likely to value the Irish language as a living language than gaelscoil children who would simply use Irish at school. However, this situation is likely to change over time if one relies on the response of participants with a child in sixth class as 78.5% ( $n=11$ ) of the total sixth class participants said their child valued Irish as a living language.<sup>256</sup>

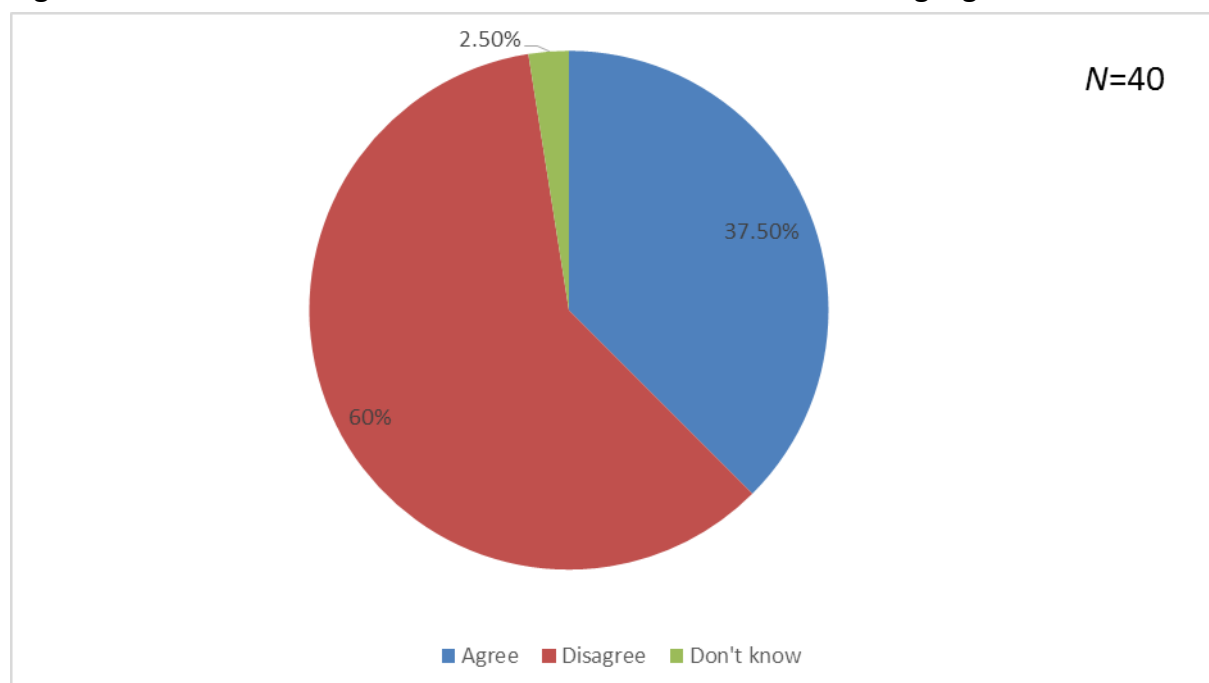
Due to limited exposure to Irish in the Dublin area, interview participants were also asked whether their child exclusively associated the Irish language with the school. Overall, a majority (60%,  $n=24$ ) said their child did not as they had already experienced the language outside school within the home environment with relatives, through TV, play dates, and trips to the Gaeltacht. Participants who believed that their child restricted Irish to the school environment (37.5%,  $n=15$ )<sup>257</sup> were mostly parents of a child in senior infant. Again, this could be related to the age factor and the degree of exposure to Irish outside school. Figure 5.26 below outlines the results.

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256 21.5% ( $n=3$ ) were not sure.

257 One participant (2.5%) had no opinion.

**Figure 5.26: Parents' Views on Children's Association of the Irish Language with School Only**



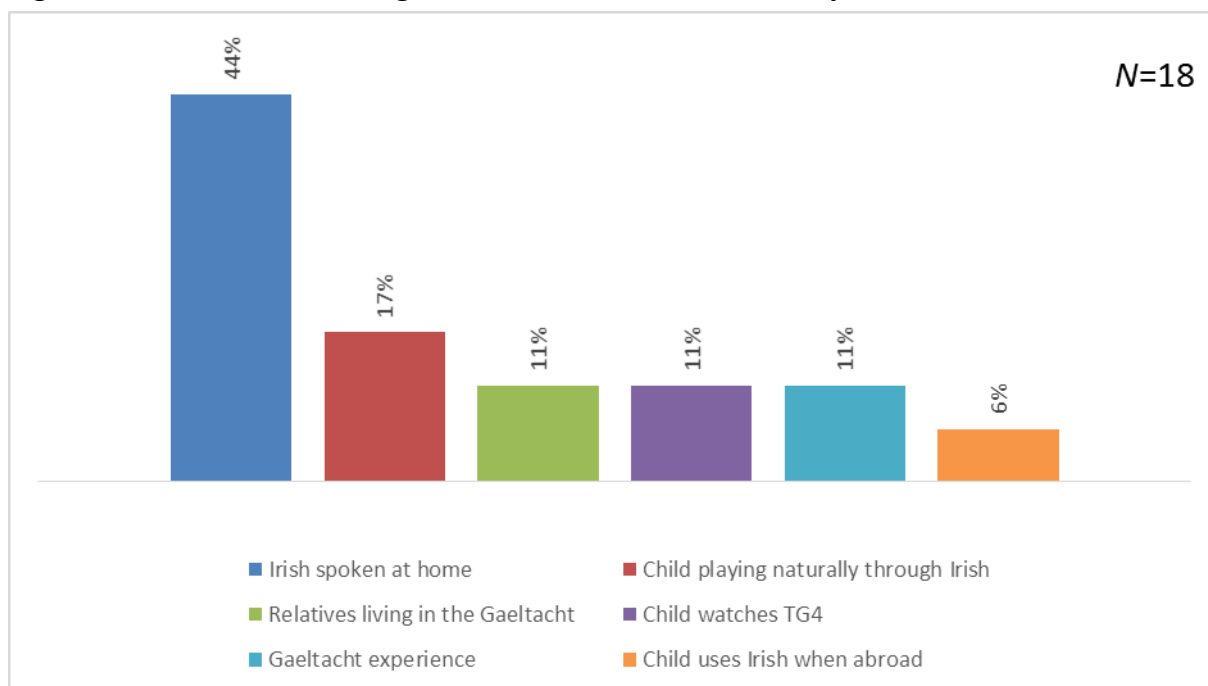
There seems to be a correlation between participants' view that their child does not value or may not value Irish as a living language and their view that their child associates Irish exclusively with school. Among the fifteen interview participants (37.5%) who said their child regarded Irish as only school-related, thirteen (32.5%) had a child in Senior Infants. Furthermore, it appears that the vast majority of this cohort ( $n=13$ ) had either said their child did not value Irish as a living language (69%,  $n=9$ )—or were not sure—or that they never had a conversation with their child about the role of Irish outside of the school context (15.5%,  $n=2$ ).<sup>258</sup> Children's age must nonetheless be taken into account, especially when coming from an English-speaking background, as children are probably too young to understand that Irish is not restricted to the school context. Only four of those participants (26%) attempted to explain their child's attitude to Irish as school-related mentioning the child's young age (6.5%,  $n=1$ ), the lack of Irish spoken at home (13%,  $n=2$ ) or the fact that the child did not converse in Irish while playing with schoolmates (6.5%,  $n=1$ ).

The remaining two participants (15.5%) whose child associated Irish with school had a child in Sixth Class. While one was not sure how the child valued Irish, the second one explained that her child did regard Irish as a living language mainly because he/she visited the Gaeltacht as part of a school trip. The fact that the trip was organised by the school may be the reason why Irish is still considered school-related.

<sup>258</sup> Three participants said both.

Seventy-five per cent ( $n=18$ ) of interview participants who did not think their child only associated Irish with school gave a few arguments supporting their responses. While a majority of this cohort (72%,  $n=13$ ) talked about regular exposure to the language and interaction with Irish speakers (parents, relatives, friends), a few others mentioned the passive use of the Irish TV channel TG4 (11%,  $n=2$ ), trips to a Gaeltacht community (11%,  $n=2$ ) and spontaneous use of Irish while travelling abroad (6%,  $n=1$ ).<sup>259</sup> Figure 5.27 below gives a visual synthesis of interview participants' response vis-à-vis their child's non-exclusive association of Irish with school.

**Figure 5.27: Evidence Showing that Children Do Not Exclusively Associate Irish with School**



Again, it appears that exposure to Irish at home, while playing with friends or when visiting the Gaeltacht play an important role in the way children regard Irish as something more than a mere school subject/language.

## Conclusion

Parents' attitudes towards their child using Irish outside school were positive in both sets of interviews. This is exemplified by their child's attendance at extra-curricular activities through the medium of Irish. Because they live in an English-speaking environment, those activities are an

<sup>259</sup> In the latter instance the child was said to have naturally switched to Irish when meeting Irish people on holiday in a non-English-speaking country.

opportunity for children to interact through Irish with their peers in an informal way that is not taught in the classroom. Interviewed participants emphasised the impact such activities could have on the way their children speak and regard Irish. Although interviewed participants valued the importance of immersing their child in Irish for recreational purposes the lack of Irish-medium activities in the Dublin area compel children to socialise through Irish on the school premises. This is an example of what has been referred to as institutionally-based bilingualism where specific organisations; schools, clubs and families operate as Irish-medium institutions although they are not in their totality Irish-speaking (APC, 1988). In the case of Irish-medium schools, some after-school activities are provided through the medium of English or require the presence of instructors whose competence in Irish may be inadequate. Because parents rely on the school to provide Irish-medium extra-curricular activities problems such as age requirement to participate in Irish-medium after-school activities and lack of choice in the activities may limit children's exposure to Irish in a recreational context. It seems that even when organised by the schools themselves it is difficult to find instructors able to provide a wide variety of activities through the medium of Irish that cater for all ages.

While it can be argued that the provision of Irish-medium extra-curricular activities on the school grounds mostly restricts the Irish language to the school environment, most interview participants were found to support the school ethos at home by teaching their child about the role of Irish outside school. By doing so, parents transmit positive thoughts about the language and make their child aware of a whole Irish-speaking world beyond the school. Overall, a majority of interview participants (55-60%) believed their child regarded Irish as a community language, that is to say a language that is used as a means of communication outside the school context (home and Gaeltacht areas in this context). The results of the follow-up interviews suggest that children who are exposed to the Irish language outside the school environment are more likely to both value Irish as a living language and view it as something more than the school language. This was particularly obvious among younger children in Senior Infant Class. Gaelscoil pupils eventually get to know more about the status and role of Irish and use it more as they progress through primary school. Parents' support to expose their child more to Irish at an early age together with further efforts to make their child aware of both its status and role at large may have positive outcomes on the child's attitude to and perception of the Irish language outside the school context.<sup>260</sup>

Interview participants also had positive attitudes towards their child's exposure to Irish once he/she moves to secondary school. They indicated they would still interact with their children through Irish once they go to secondary school whether it is through an active use of Irish or through a more

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260 It should be noted that these findings are only suggestive since they are based on parents' views on their child's attitudes to Irish.

passive approach relying on their younger children to stimulate the use of Irish at home and become linguistically independent. It should be noted that their intentions to use Irish do not inform us on their future behaviour. Their answers may have expressed an aspiration to continue using Irish rather than actual use of Irish. They were also willing to encourage their child to remain in contact with the language outside education. It should be noted that despite the limited availability of Irish-medium activities outside the school context students attending an Irish-medium secondary school are more likely to use Irish at home or in Irish-speaking social networks than their peers who attend an English-medium school (Murtagh, 2007). The correlation between the type of school attended and Irish usage is somewhat reminiscent of the correlation found in the current study between the type of school selected and parents' commitment to the language. The teachers interviewed reported a decrease in commitment to Irish amongst sixth class parents. It appears that parents' loss of interest in the Irish language coincides, for the most part, with their choice of an English-medium secondary school for their child. The results of both sets of interviews were probably different because most parents who participated in the follow-up interviews had selected an Irish-medium secondary school for their child—which supports teachers' view that parents who choose an Irish-medium secondary school are generally still committed to Irish at sixth class level.

### ***5.5 Parents' use of Irish***

It has been mentioned previously that living in an English-speaking area makes exposure to Irish rather difficult. In most cases the gaelscoil seems to be the only place that allows interaction through Irish on a daily basis. It is in this sense at the centre of the Irish language community for both children and parents. It is therefore interesting to see whether parents visiting the school seize the opportunity to use Irish and whether the gaelscoil experience enhances parents' use of Irish beyond the school yard. This section examines interview participants' use of Irish on the school grounds and whether or not parental involvement in school life is influenced by the school language policy. It also explores parents' use of Irish at home according to both interviewed teachers and parents as well as their use of Irish with other families.

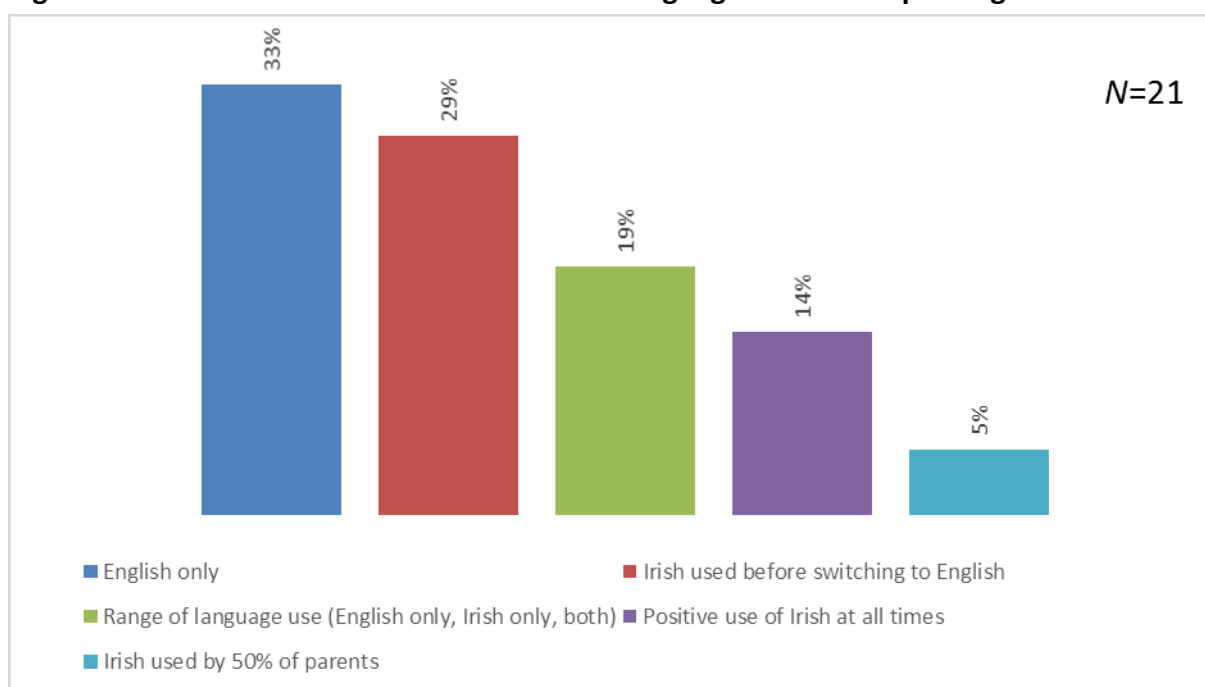
### 5.5.1 Parents' use of Irish on the school grounds

This section first examines which language parents use when speaking to teachers, according to interviewed teachers. It then analyses the reasons why parents who use English do so when speaking to teachers. This is followed by parents' views on their use of Irish on the school grounds and teachers' views on parents' use of Irish during school events.

When asked which language parents used when speaking to the teachers, interviewed teachers reported that parents would speak mainly English although most conversations would generally begin with greetings in Irish.

Figure 5.28 below represents interviewed teachers' report on parents' use of Irish in more detail. The horizontal axis includes the various assessments given by the 21 teachers interviewed from the most frequently stated to the least.

**Figure 5.28: Teachers' Assessment of Parents' Language Use when Speaking to Teachers**



Interviewed teachers said that overall most parents would use English with the teachers (95%,  $n=20$ ) except for one teacher (5%) who said she used Irish with half of the parents. However, interviewed teachers also said parents were using Irish to various degrees. This is reflected in the chart above through its different categories. Seven interviewed teachers (33%) gave a clear-cut answer regarding parents' exclusive use of English when speaking to them. It is worth noting that three teachers (14%) mentioned one or two parents being the exceptions to the rule and making an effort to

use Irish. Although English is the main language used a certain number of teachers (29%,  $n=6$ ) specified that parents would usually start the conversation in Irish and carry on through English. Some teachers (19%,  $n=4$ ) were able to differentiate between groups of parents based on their commitment to using Irish with them. They were able to point out a range of language use between different groups of parents within their class including parents using English only, both Irish and English and parents who were fluent in Irish and therefore used Irish at all times. A further three teachers (14%) gave a very positive report on parents' language use emphasising the effort made to use Irish to the best of their ability. Parents were said to switch to the English language only when the topic of the conversation becomes complex, which happens during parents-teacher meetings, for example.

A few negative comments were also given regarding parents' language use. One teacher said that most parents would use English despite her greeting them in Irish and her encouraging them to speak some Irish. Another teacher emphasised the commitment of foreign nationals to learning and using Irish compared with the lack of effort made by Irish parents to use Irish on the school grounds. This comment echoes one of the non-Irish parents' remark made during the follow-up interviews on how careful she was not to “overdo it” in presence of other parents in the school yard despite her enjoying speaking Irish (RA613).

No difference was found during the interviews between the reports of senior infant teachers and those of sixth class teachers about the level of Irish used between parents and teachers.

When comparing interview participants' own assessment of their use of English and Irish with teachers' assessment, results appear to coincide in so far as they mostly use English to communicate with teachers; but according to the parents, they also tend to use Irish whenever they can. As shown in the questionnaire results 39.4% of respondents ( $n=160$ ) said they were using “more English than Irish” with teachers whereas 23.4% ( $n=95$ ) said they were using “English only”. By contrast, 23.6% ( $n=96$ ) claimed to use “more Irish than English” while the remaining 13.6% ( $n=55$ ) is constituted of fluent speakers who use Irish at all times.

The teachers interviewed were then asked to give the reasons why they thought parents would mostly speak English when talking to them. Overall, the two main reasons are based on:

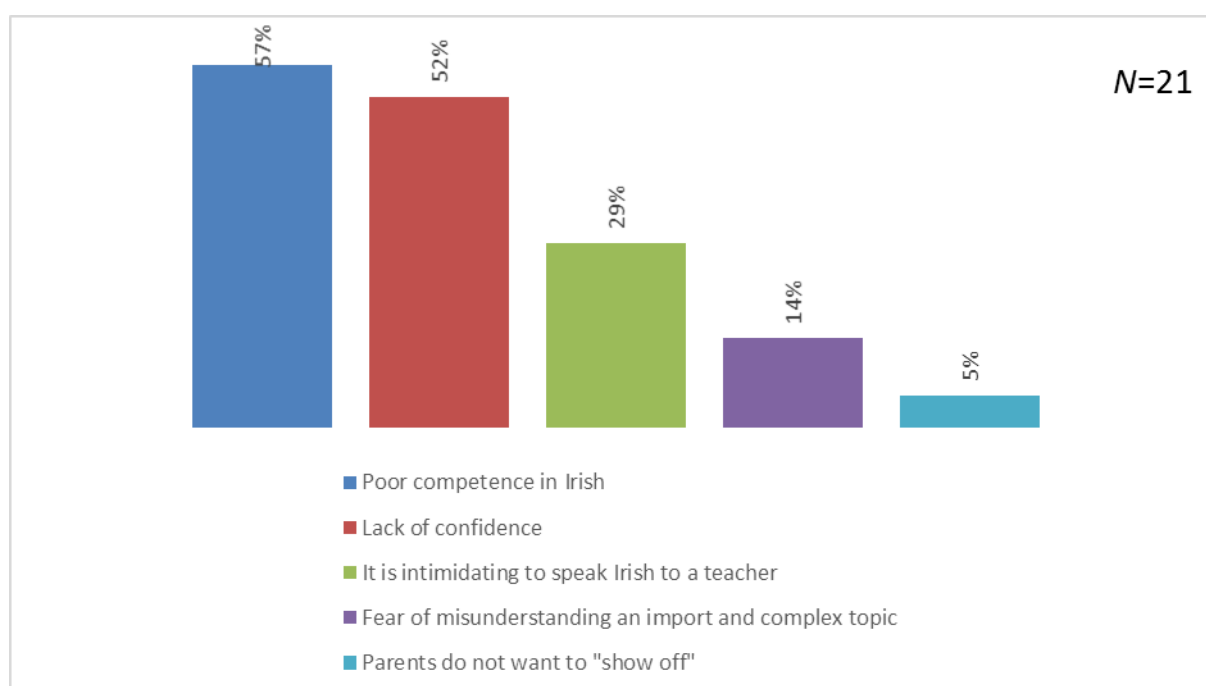
- parents' poor level of Irish
- parents' own perception of their poor competence in Irish, which is not necessarily true but which nonetheless impacts on their use of Irish. Parents would usually think they are not competent enough to converse in Irish with a fluent speaker such as the teacher. They would therefore, for the most part, prefer to speak English rather than taking the risk of speaking Irish and making mistakes. This is in line with questionnaire results where 41.4% ( $n=152$ )



agreed with the statement *I do not like to speak Irish with people who may know it better than I do*. The lack of confidence in speaking Irish was also expressed by 43% ( $n=127$ ) of questionnaire respondents who reported low usage of Irish on the school grounds.<sup>261</sup>

Figure 5.29 below summarises the reasons interviewed teachers believed why parents prefer to use English over Irish when speaking with them. The horizontal axis shows the various reasons teachers put forward during the interviews from the most stated to the least. Percentages do not total 100% as some teachers gave more than one reason.

**Figure 5.29: Teachers' Assessment of Parents' Reason for Using English when Speaking to Teachers**



Whereas some parents were reported to use English when talking to teachers because of their poor competence in Irish (57%,  $n=12$ ) a significant number of teachers also pointed out that parents usually lacked confidence and therefore used English rather than Irish (52%,  $n=11$ ). The following are a few quotes that illustrate this point: “I think they have the vocabulary but many of the parents won't have used it since they were 18 so you're looking at parents who are in their mid-thirties so 18 years since possibly a lot of them have spoken a word of Irish. It takes a lot of confidence to bring it back” (TA21); “they might be embarrassed to speak to the teacher *as gaeilge*<sup>262</sup> when they don't feel they have enough. I think that's something with everyone in the country that they don't feel that they can...

<sup>261</sup> See Section 4.4.3 Parents' use of Irish.

<sup>262</sup> “as gaeilge” means “in Irish” in the Irish language.

you know, even just a few words” (TA62); “They're very, you know, enthusiastic at learning a few words and they come to classes and everything but I suppose they're more confident around their children making the effort. But when with the teacher they don't want to appear foolish in front of the teacher, which I would always encourage to try but I suppose it's intimidating approaching the teacher who, you know, is well able to speak Irish” (TB2). Some teachers (29%,  $n=6$ ) even associated parents' non-use of Irish with a past fear of the teacher that remained into adulthood and manifested itself through a feeling of intimidation. A few teachers (14%,  $n=3$ ) thought that the reasons why parents would mostly speak English to them was because they would usually discuss their child's education with them and would not wish to misunderstand what the teacher said: “Some parents would have, you know, Irish but would want to discuss something in particular. In Sixth Class they really want to discuss kind of the future so they want to ensure that they'll know what they are discussing” (TK6); “They generally have enough Irish to speak to their children basic instructions and so on but when I'm talking to them it becomes a little more complicated and technical and they might have a very good idea of what I'm saying but they don't want to misunderstand so they'd ask if we can refer to English” (TA22). A fifth reason accounting for parent's tendency to use English over Irish contrasts with the rest as it implies that parents have the ability to speak Irish with teachers but choose not to for fear of overdoing it and standing out, according to one interviewed teacher (5%).

After reviewing teachers' assessments of parents' use of Irish with them, the next results give a different view of parents' use of Irish within the school grounds from the perspective of interview participants. Interview participants were asked whether they used Irish when helping out with or attending school events. Due to the open nature of the question, they gave varied answers because not all of them use the same amount of Irish on the school grounds. The amount of Irish used depends on the interlocutor. Some participants may use more Irish when talking to teachers than when talking to other parents, for example, or vice versa. Some interview participants gave a general view of their use of Irish while others specified how much Irish they used when talking to teachers, parents or children. Their answers were spontaneous. Participants are likely to have answered this question according to how relevant it was in their personal situation. For instance, some of them may never or barely ever talk to other parents therefore they may not have mentioned how much Irish they would use with other parents, but focused on how much they would use with teachers.

This variety of answers is due to participants' different relationships with the school i.e. the type of activity/event they take part in (help in the classroom, help with school outings, attendance at school concert/play, parents' committee meetings, Board of Management meetings, etc.), the frequency with which they visit the school, the relationship they have with other families, participants' own level of Irish, etc.

All interview participants answered this question except for one who said that she was not involved in the school and did not go to the school on a regular basis. Interview participants' answers were sorted into four tables. Each table refers to a different interlocutor with whom they would use—or in some cases would not use—Irish. Table 5.5 shows general use of the Irish language on the school grounds and represents 30% ( $n=12$ ) of the interview participants. Table 5.6 shows the use of Irish with other parents at the school to which 47.5% ( $n=19$ ) interview participants gave a response. Table 5.7 shows the use of Irish with teachers by 52.5% ( $n=21$ ) of participants. Table 5.8 shows the use of Irish with children on the school ground by 27.5% ( $n=11$ ) of the participants. The total count is different in each table as not all interview participants mentioned their use of Irish with the different interlocutors. The various categories in the tables were worded according to the participants' response.

Among those who gave a general assessment of their use of Irish when visiting the school (30%,  $n=12$ ), a majority (58%,  $n=7$ ) said they were trying to use whatever Irish they had while a minority (17%,  $n=2$ )—probably comprised of fluent Irish-speakers—said they used it all the time. Again, poor ability to speak in Irish and lack of confidence were the main reasons not to use Irish more on the school grounds. For instance, one interview participants said she would use only a few words of greetings because of her limited competence in Irish: “A *cúpla focal* [a few words] you know, I kind of shy back a bit because I'd start the conversation, I have no problem saying *Dia duit* [hello], *conas atá tú* [how are you] and you know all that type of stuff but then, if it's thrown back at me, if it's something I don't understand coming back at me I go back to *as Béarla* because it gets too difficult” (IPB22); others expressed low level of self-confidence: “I feel that I don't have adequate Irish so I wouldn't use it that much” (IPD67); “I wouldn't be brave enough” (IPE23).

**Table 5.5: General Use of Irish on the School Grounds**

General amount/frequency of Irish used ( $N=12$ )	Total %
comfortable using Irish at any time	17 ( $n=2$ )
tries to use whatever Irish he/she has	58 ( $n=7$ )
speaks the <i>cúpla focal</i> /starts conversations with greetings in Irish	25 ( $n=3$ )

Whereas a significant number of interview participants (42%,  $n=8$ ) in Table 5.6 admitted not using Irish with other parents, four of them (21%) said they would use some words in Irish—mostly greetings—that everybody could understand and would not necessarily require them to carry on the conversation through the medium of Irish. Whether this is a token effort or a polite way to avoid embarrassing situations where they would not be able to converse through Irish is hard to say. As an interview participant said, she would use Irish with other parents “probably more in a jocular way”

(RD26). The exchange of a few words, greetings and set phrases in Irish between parents is likely to be reflected in the questionnaire figures where 36.8% ( $n=150$ ) of respondents said they were using “more English than Irish” with other parents on the school ground. However, those who would be fluent in Irish said they would use Irish with parents whom they knew would feel comfortable conversing in Irish (37%,  $n=7$ ). One participant who reported native speaker ability in Irish confessed: “It is bad manners to speak Irish to parents” (IPA618), which further indicates that some parents fluent in Irish, would exclusively speak to people who they know are also fluent in Irish. This position, however, was not shared by all interview participants with higher ability as one of them explained: “I find it cynical that other parents don't reply in Irish when addressed in Irish” (IPA66).

**Table 5.6: Use of Irish with Other Parents on the School Grounds**

Amount/frequency of Irish used with other parents ( $N=19$ )	Total %
speaks Irish with parents who have Irish	37 ( $n=7$ )
speaks the cúpla focal [a few words]	21 ( $n=4$ )
does not speak Irish at all (no reason given)	10.5 ( $n=2$ )
it is rude to speak Irish to parents who have less/little Irish	10.5 ( $n=2$ )
does not speak Irish to parents because they either do not have Irish or they do not seem to try to speak it	21 ( $n=4$ )

Overall, there seems to be an equal number of participants stating they use “Irish only”, “more Irish than English”, “as much Irish as possible”, “a few words in Irish” and “no Irish” with teachers. Compared with the questionnaire results, the number of interview participants who said they were using “Irish only” and “more Irish than English” with the teachers (43%,  $n=9$ ) seems over represented here: in the questionnaire 13.6% ( $n=55$ ) said they used “Irish only”, 23.6% ( $n=96$ ) “more Irish than English”.<sup>263</sup> The large number of participants who said that they were using “Irish only” and “more Irish than English” may be due to the fact that they were not specifically asked about the amount of Irish they used with teachers rather, participants themselves chose to talk about their interaction with teachers through Irish. It is therefore likely that most participants who would not use Irish with teachers did not allude to them as potential interlocutors. Interview participants’ comments on their use of Irish with teachers was consistent with teachers’ accounts (see above). While fluent speakers said they used Irish all the time, some said they switched to English for complex conversations: “with teachers I would always try to talk in Irish as much as I can. Occasionally I would have to say look this is too complex, because I might not understand what the response is, you know, if there's a difficulty

263 39.4% ( $n=160$ ) said they used *more English than Irish* and 23.4% ( $n=95$ ) *English only* in the questionnaire.

with the child” (IPK23), while others restricted their use of the language to certain words as this participant who said was afraid of making mistakes: “when I speak to the teachers I use very little Irish because I know they know that I'm wrong” (IPG16).

**Table 5.7: Use of Irish with Teachers on the School Grounds**

Amount/frequency of Irish used with teachers (N=21)	Total %
Irish only	19 (n=4)
more Irish than English	24 (n=5)
as much as possible	19 (n=4)
the cúpla focal/greetings	24 (n=5)
not confident to use Irish	14 (n=3)

Some interview participants also claimed they used Irish with children, mostly when helping out in the classroom or on school outings. Depending on their personal level of Irish they would either speak Irish or would use as much Irish as they can.

**Table 5.8: Use of Irish with Children on the School Grounds**

Amount/frequency of Irish used with children (N=11)	Total %
Irish only	45.5 (n=5)
As much as possible	54.5 (n=6)

Interviewed teachers were also asked about parents' use of Irish when participating in school events. A majority (81%, n=17) said parents would usually use some Irish at school events. However, the nature of parents' commitment to using Irish was described differently by different teachers. Overall teacher's assessment of parents' commitment to using Irish when participating in a school event is similar to the whole picture obtained from parents' perspective in the follow-up interviews. Indeed, interview participants said they would use whatever Irish they have and would make an effort to use Irish when involved in certain school events, especially when addressing children. Again, parents who are fluent in Irish are more likely to be committed to using the language at any time.

Interviewed teachers' answers fall into five categories illustrated by the graph below.<sup>264</sup> On the one hand parents were said to make an effort to use a few words and phrases in Irish according to 43%

264 Note that percentages do not total 100% as some teachers gave more than one answer.

( $n=9$ ) of interviewed teachers<sup>265</sup> while others talked about parents' commitment to using the language (38%,  $n=8$ ) whether it is by parents with a good fluency in Irish who are usually involved with the Board of Management or the Parents' Committee organising events through the medium of Irish (14%,  $n=3$ ) or by parents who do not have great ability in spoken Irish but who nonetheless use phrases and sentences in the language (24%,  $n=5$ ). Two of those teachers emphasised that parents were very respectful of the school ethos and of the language when on the school premises: "They would use what they have (...) they're respectful of the language rule in the school" (TK6); "As they say if they have it they will use it definitely. And the people who say don't have it would try their best with a few words. But everyone does try. Well, there is a kind of ethos in the school they're respectful of it" (TJ2).

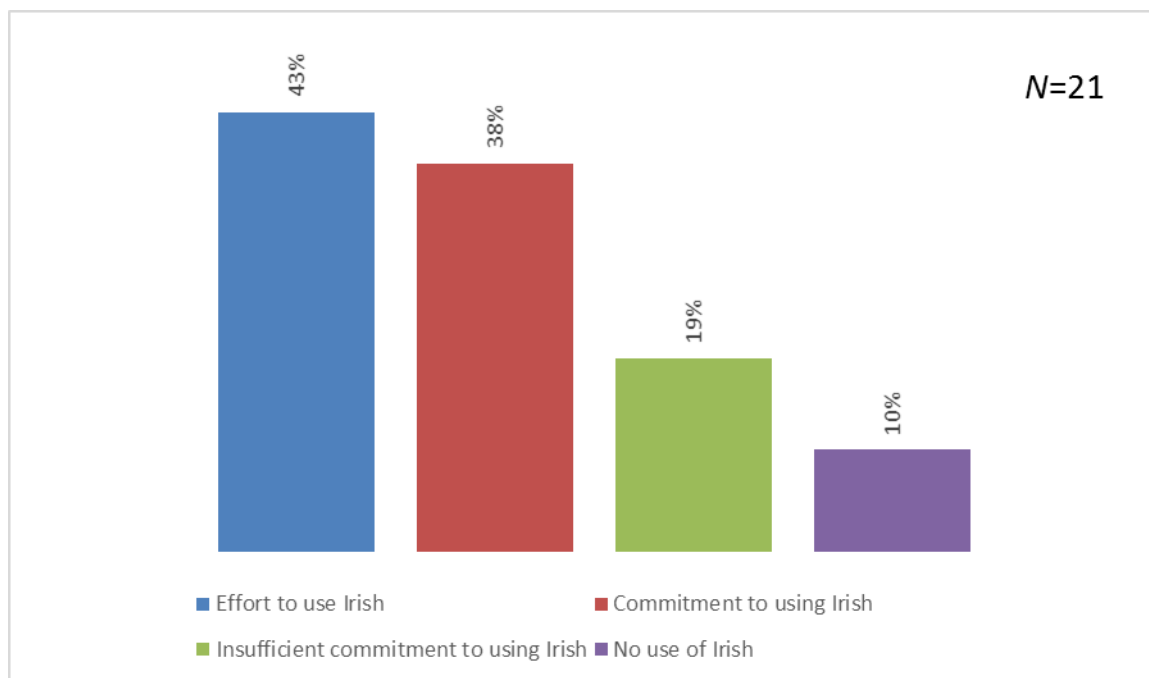
On the other hand, 29% ( $n=6$ ) of interviewed teachers didn't think parents used enough or any Irish at all. Among those, one teacher said parents were not committed to using Irish as much as they would like to whereas another teacher said parents claimed they were committed to Irish but they would very often forget about using it. One teacher noticed that parents were more committed to speaking Irish when they were isolated, away from other parents, which is possibly due to a lack of confidence: "Whenever they come to the secretary they try to speak as much Irish as they can but again it depends on their level of confidence and who's around and who's listening to the conversation. But they will try if you find them in isolation they will try and speak the Irish that they have" (TD21). One interviewed teacher thought parents should be encouraged to use more Irish on the school ground according to the Irish-only school rule so as to set an example for children. Finally, two teachers (9.5%) from the same school located in a disadvantaged area said that parents would not be committed to using Irish because of their poor level of the language as well as their lack of confidence using it: "No they wouldn't really be committed to using Irish. You could say to them try and use Irish if you can but they generally won't. It's all lack of confidence really, you know. Most of the parents deal with a real lack of confidence when it comes to social skills and they're just always afraid of making mistakes and they just won't go there, you know. So that's generally what happens" (TE2). On a more optimistic note, one of these teachers said this trend should change for the better in the near future when the first former pupils of the gaelscoil send their own children to the school.

Figure 5.30 shows the various degrees of parents' commitment to using Irish when taking part in a school event as stated by the teachers during the interviews.

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265 "I would say they do make an effort. My own experience is when the parents are in with me they would make an effort, they would say maith buachaill as opposed to good boy so that would be the experience that I have directly" (TA21); "They try to make an effort, they will, obviously, they'll say excuse me in Irish and thank you and bye. They will try to make an effort" (TB2).

**Figure 5.30: Teachers' Views on Parents' Use of Irish when Participating in School Events**



### 5.5.2 Parental involvement in education

When taking into account the main reasons given by questionnaire respondents for their low usage of the Irish language when visiting the school, that is their poor level of Irish as well as the lack of confidence in using it, the question of parental involvement appears to be problematic. On the one hand school life is conducted through the medium of Irish, on the other hand parents make a conscious choice to send their child to an Irish-medium school—in the sense that immersion education is a minority type of education in Ireland. They are therefore likely to show interest in the school life and consequently actively participate in it. This section focuses on parents' involvement with the school from the viewpoint of both teachers and parents.

In order to get an overview of parental involvement in the gaelscoil, interviewed teachers were asked whether parents were involved in the school life. All teachers replied positively. Teachers' report on parents' involvement with the school is consistent with Murphy's findings (2002). Her qualitative research based on the interview of 24 parents focused on parental involvement in an Irish-medium primary school. Her study showed that despite general involvement being lower than personalised child-based involvement (i.e. homework), a core group of parents actively participated in the school life.

Eleven interviewed teachers (52%) emphasised in the current study that parents' involvement was very good. One teacher claimed this was due to the middle-class background of most families as they had more time to dedicate to the school and had a genuine interest in their child's education.<sup>266</sup> Another teacher emphasised parents' involvement despite some parents lacking competence in Irish: “They are very much involved in things like after school curriculum, setting up projects and things like that, (...) helping out. They're always on board, you know, to assist in any way. I think that is a testament of Gaelscoileanna in general like. (...) it always came about that parents were more involved in it. And even that maybe some of them don't have the Irish language they still want to give, they still have an interest in it, they see the benefit of it coming to help” (TA62).

Similar to Murphy's findings (2002), a further six interviewed teachers (29%) said that only a selected group of parents was involved. Whereas two teachers said it very much depended on each parent's personality three teachers thought that some parents were more involved than others. This appears to be due to a lack of time or due to decreasing interest in getting involved after attending the school for several years, or as one teacher put it due to the growing size of the gaelscoil: “Now the

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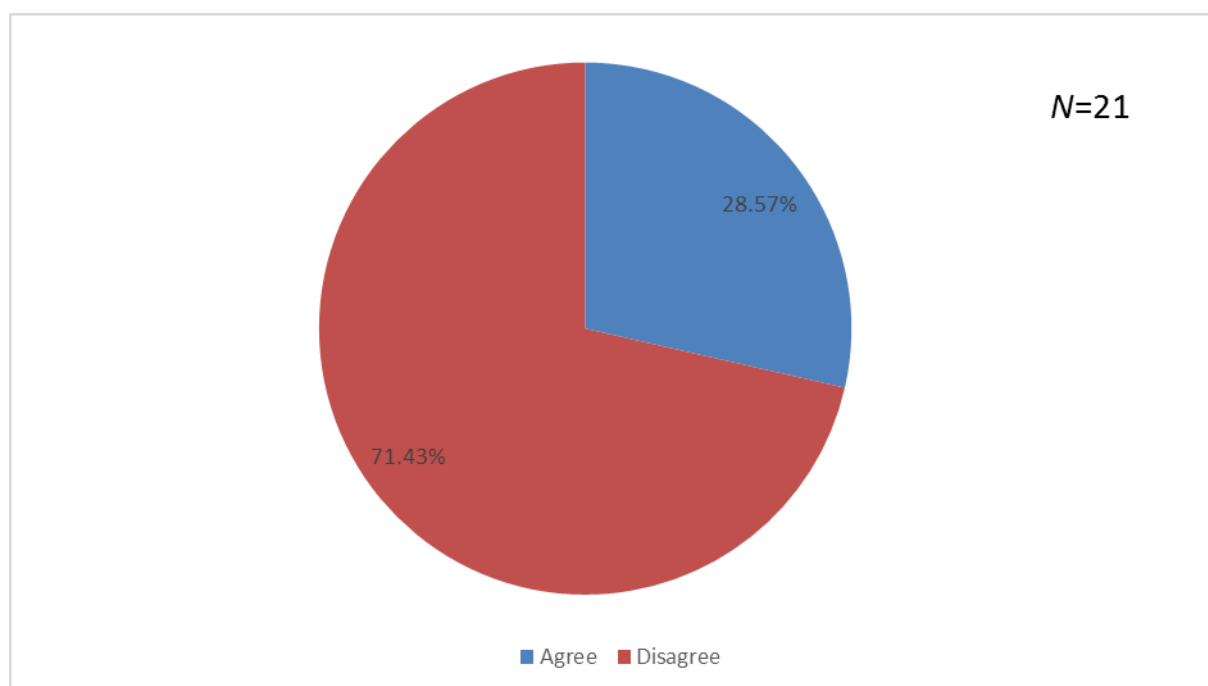
<sup>266</sup> “They're very involved here yeah. I think it depends on the location of the school. We are in a very, it's not an upper class area but middle class area so the parents would have the time and the interest whereas if we were in a different area maybe a disadvantage area in Dublin the parents might not have the interest but they do have a lot of interest here in school” (TG6).



school has grown to the max. We have six classes, you know. But up to now, every year there'd be a lot of parents that would get involved between sports and dramas and getting involved in classes and making sure that kids have hurls and things. But as the school grows that's always left to one set or one group and every year you can see the same people doing the same jobs. So again it really depends, some people get involved and once their child or their children are in the school you don't see them again, you know" (TB6). One teacher explained that it was very often left to the same group to organise events or fund-raising. Parents' working hours were also mentioned as an obstacle to parental involvement with the school: "I suppose a lot of parents especially work evenings and night shifts (...) it doesn't suit the majority of them if you work the school day or the school hours" (TB6). One sixth class teacher observed that parents were more involved at the beginning when their child was younger. By the end of primary schooling fewer parents are seen on the school grounds as they do not drop-off or collect children any more or because children themselves do not want them to be in the classroom helping out: "I think the parents are more interested and more involved with younger classes. I think children like to see the parents come in until a certain level and then it stops being cool to have the parent in the class. So I think the parents will be happy to be involved to a certain age. As well as that, once the parents stop picking the kids up when they reach the age when they can go alone you might not see a parent then, you might see them once a year. While I think they are much more involved when kids are younger. They come up and talk to the teachers and therefore because they're talking to the teachers they might get involved in some course in school or some reading or whatever" (TE6). Hickey (1997) observed that at pre-school level the main contact for parents with the naíonra was dropping off and collecting their child and in checking on the child's progress. This point was also made in Murphy's interviews where parents with a child in infant classes had more informal contacts with the principal and the teachers as they would come into the school as opposed to waiting at the gate, for instance (Murphy, 2002, p. 102).

In her study on Irish-medium pre-schools, Hickey (1997) suggested that parents' low involvement in the naíonra was likely to be linked to low competence in Irish for a large number of parents while family and work commitments were also factors. Following this idea and because of the nature of the gael scoileanna ethos making Irish the main working language, teachers were asked if they thought the Irish language could be a deterrent to parents to get involved with the school life. Over two thirds of teachers ( $n=15$ ) did not think parents regarded Irish as a barrier to their involvement in the school. Figure 5.31 below illustrates this finding:

**Figure 5.31: Teachers' Views on the Irish Language as a Barrier to Parental Involvement in the School**



Some interviewed teachers (42.9%,  $n=9$ ) explained why they believed Irish was not a barrier to parental involvement in the school. Three factors prevailed throughout their answers. Firstly, there is no requirement for parents to use the Irish language when participating in the school life. Parents, for instance, are not expected to speak Irish within the Parents' Committee—as it is mostly run through English—or even at the school where the use of Irish is encouraged but not mandatory for parents (55.6%,  $n=5$ ). Secondly, there is a no exclusion policy practised in the school. Parents know they are welcome regardless of their level of Irish and are not excluded if they do not have any Irish. (33.3%,  $n=3$ ). Finally, one teacher (11.1%) believed that parents' interest in their child's education transcended any language barriers: “basically if they're interested in their child and the education of their child and that's the number one factor, I think that anything they do in the school they have no hesitation whether it's in Irish or English they take part anyway and they help as much as they can” (TD21). Although he could not give any explanation one interviewed teacher observed that parents with little Irish tended to be more involved than parents with a good level of Irish: “In my experience it's the parents without Irish who are the most involved in the school. The parents with Irish tend to be a bit distant. Whether them parents don't feel the need to get involved, I don't know. But from what I've seen it's the parents with the least amount of Irish are the parents who are the most active in the school” (TG6).

Just under one third of interviewed teachers ( $n=6$ ) thought Irish could be a barrier to some parents as regard to their involvement in the school. According to the majority, parents' lack of involvement depended on their own personality rather than on their actual level of Irish. (66.7%,  $n=4$ ). Yet, two teachers (33.3%) did believe that parents' poor competence in Irish impacted on their involvement in the school. They said that a few parents would think that they need to know how to have Irish to get involved. As a result of their poor command of the language they do not get involved: "Some parents think they need Irish to join the parents' association so they don't get involved. However, the parents' association tries to get them involved regardless of their level of Irish" (TG21).

Despite teachers' positive report it can be hard to know for sure whether parents feel somehow excluded because of their poor competence in Irish. As a teacher said "we try not to make it an issue but whether they feel it is another thing. It's hard to know. We'd like to think it doesn't" (TJ2).

Interview participants were asked the same question during the follow-up interviews so as to get an insight into the way they feel themselves towards their involvement with the school. Thirty-two participants (80%) answered this question. Although it was initially designed for twenty-four participants (60%) who were not fluent in Irish, eight parents (20%) with a good level of fluency in the language gave their opinion about other parents' feelings.

Among the 32 interview participants who answered this question 50% ( $n=16$ ) thought Irish was a barrier to their involvement in the school whereas 50% ( $n=16$ ) did not. Table 5.9 lists the various arguments expressed by interview participants in relation to their attitude to the Irish language as a deterrent to their involvement in the school:

**Table 5.9: Reasons why Parents Feel Irish Is or Is Not a Barrier to their Involvement in the School**

<b>Irish = a barrier</b>	<b>Total (<math>n=</math>)</b>	<b>Irish <math>\neq</math> a barrier</b>	<b>Total (<math>n=</math>)</b>
Feels intimidated, lacks confidence, afraid of embarrassment	8	Makes an effort to speak Irish although has to use English sometimes	10
Feels that own level of Irish is not adequate so does not get involved (at all or in certain activities)	6	Most parents speak English. There is therefore no embarrassment about not speaking Irish fluently	4
Personality issue	1	The school will use English if parents do not have any Irish	1
Meetings are through Irish only	1	Meetings are through English	1
<b>TOTAL (<math>N=32</math>)</b>	<b>16</b>		<b>16</b>

A majority of participants who thought Irish was a barrier to their involvement in the school explained that this was due to either a lack of confidence in their level of Irish (25%,  $n=8$ ) or their lack of ability to speak Irish (18.8%,  $n=6$ ). The following quotes illustrate this argument: “It is hard to speak it. You have to make a conscious effort and have to get over embarrassment. The gael scoil helps giving more confidence. I don't talk to parents as I'm afraid of making mistakes” (IPG216); “if I had the language I could really help the school out with their show and I would love to help them with the show but I can't because I don't have the language. Which is a shame and then on school trips and stuff like that, you know. For instance, we went to the panto and I know they've asked me because I know that I would put an effort in to try to speak the language but again I really only feel comfortable doing that with the younger ones and not with the older ones in school, you know” (IPG26); “I wouldn't have enough to kind of carry out a good conversation as a result I kind of feel that even getting involved much, as I keep saying you don't need to have Irish to be involved in parents' committee or involved in the school, I kind of feel that a lot of people do and the people that are fluent speakers are the ones that are the doers in the school. So it does put me off a bit alright” (IPG28). By contrast, participants who did not think Irish was a barrier to their involvement (31.3%,  $n=10$ ) did not seem to feel intimidated or embarrassed to try to use some Irish: “I would prefer if my Irish was a lot better than it is but I'm not afraid to use it or I don't feel stupid if I make a mistake. I would prefer like try, you know, the idea of *is fearr Gaeilge briste ná Béarla cliste*<sup>267</sup> I would go with that and I would do my best you know to make myself understood” (IPK23). As one participant admitted, her involvement may have been greater had she been more fluent in Irish, however, she did participate in the school life: “I would have been more involved if I had been more fluent, with the committee in particular. It doesn't stop me from doing things though” (IPJ212). Others (12.5%,  $n=4$ ) pointed out that English was the common language spoken among parents that they could resort to when experiencing linguistic difficulties without feeling embarrassed about it. Only one participant (3.1%) felt excluded because some meetings were in Irish only. She referred to the Annual General Meeting and the Board of Management meetings. Another participant (3.1%) acknowledged that it was more of a personality issue and had nothing to do with the school language policy being exclusive. One interview participant explained that although she did not personally feel intimidated she observed that other parents could be: “I don't think it's a barrier but I do think that you could feel a little bit self-conscious. And listening to some of the other mums down there they don't volunteer. If they haven't got any Irish they would be self-conscious in doing it” (IPD24).

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267 Broken Irish is better than clever English.

When comparing teachers' reports with interview participants' comments one can conclude that a majority of parents do participate in school life. However, the nature of their involvement depends on their perception of how important it is to be able to speak Irish. Despite principals' and teachers' efforts to welcome all parents regardless of their level of Irish it is very difficult for them to know whether parents feel excluded on language grounds or not. Indeed, some interview participants thought they were restricted to certain duties or activities because they felt they did not have enough Irish whereas others thought their child's education was their first priority so they got involved regardless of their level of Irish. It should be noted that only a minority do not get involved in school life because of their inadequate command of Irish. Most participants who expressed feelings of embarrassment or intimidation would still make an effort to participate in school life.

Whereas some parents have a genuine poor level of Irish<sup>268</sup> others tend to underestimate their skills in the language as they lack confidence. This is true for two interview participants who explained how intimidated they could feel, despite their high ability in Irish: "at parent-teacher meeting even though I would have good Irish myself, if they give me the option of English or Irish I'll say English if I have something I really want to say. And I always, with the principal as well, I always get panicked if she addresses me in Irish and I'm inclined to break into English not because she's daunting, she's really nice but I'm just nervous about it" (IPA215). Finally, one interview participant thought that he could change this situation by learning the language and attending Irish classes: "The AGM, most meetings are in Irish so it can be a barrier. But then again I'm taking classes so it's up to me to work on that" (IPG61).

While attendance at Irish classes organised by the school was said by interviewed teachers to be popular they are mostly attended by parents whose child is in the junior classes. This phenomenon may be explained by newer parents' need to acquire basic knowledge or "brush up their Irish" in order to assist their child in their education rather than their desire to learn Irish as an additional language. As one teacher put it: "I'm not quite sure that it's their priority to have it as a fluent language but it's a means towards enabling them to assist their children with their homework" (TA21). It is worth noting that the nine sixth-class teachers had either none of the parents in their class attending adult Irish language classes in the gaelscoil or knew one or two parents who attended Irish language classes organised by voluntary Irish language organisations or adult education centres. This shows that parents who are interested in becoming fluent in Irish appear to go to language classes outside the school environment, unless they decide to meet in an informal way as part of a conversation group. Two interviewed teachers from two different schools were aware of the existence of such groups in their area that gathered a few parents from the gaelscoil: "I know even a few parents just have their

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268 Interview participants who claimed not to have enough Irish reported middle ability at best.

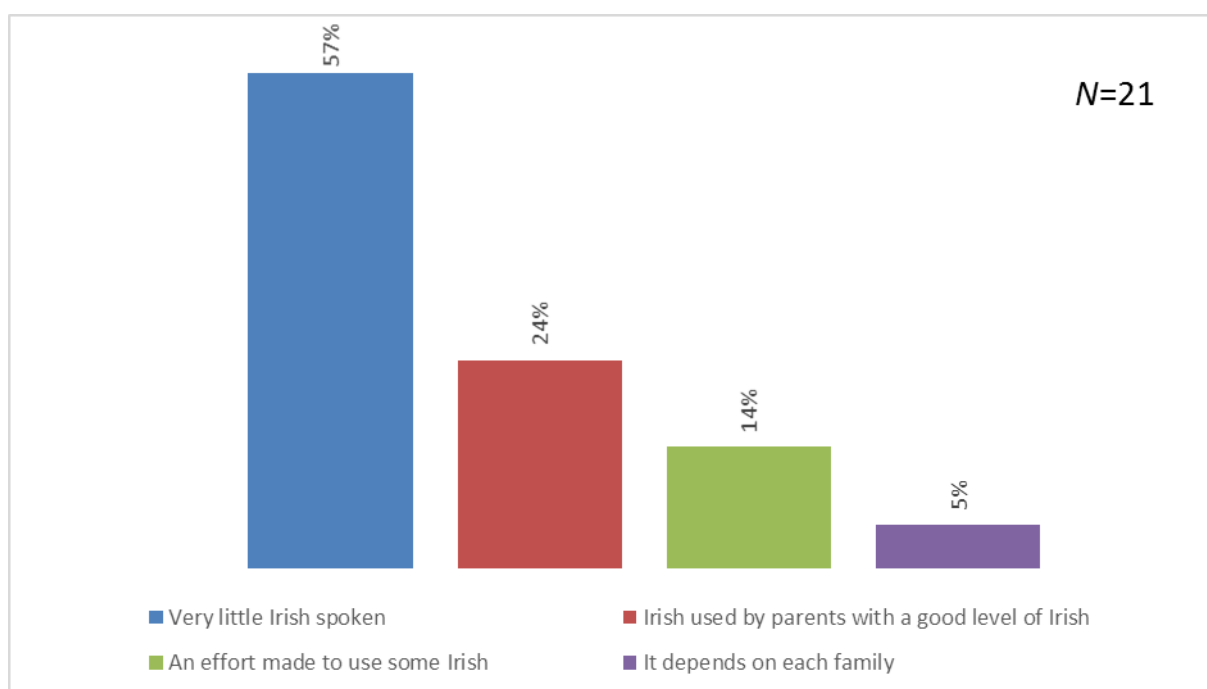
own, do you know, like a few parents are friendly, they call around each other's houses and they would kind of have an hour dedicated to Irish, to speak Irish. That's a new thing recently" (TK2).

### 5.5.3 Parents' use of Irish outside the school

While parents tend to make an effort to use Irish in the school context, according to the results of both sets of interviews, it is interesting to see whether or not it is also true within and outside the home environment. This involves examining teachers' views on the use of Irish made at home between parents and child and exploring the existence of bilingual social networks among gael scoil families.

Interviewed teachers were asked their view on the amount of Irish used at home. A majority (57%,  $n=12$ ) thought that very little Irish was spoken at home between parents and child. Only a few families with a very good command of Irish would actually converse in it, according to five interviewed teachers (24%). Figure 5.32 below shows the amount of Irish interviewed teachers believed is used at home between parents and child.

**Figure 5.32: Teachers' Views on the Amount of Irish Used at Home between Parents and Child**



Teachers gave nuanced accounts on how much Irish is used at home. Unless parents are fluent in the Irish language, few teachers (14%,  $n=3$ ) said that parents would generally make an effort to use Irish at home. As pointed out by this teacher, parents' poor level of Irish may be the main reason why so little is spoken at home: "There might be maybe five or six [families] that you'd find, you know, one of the parents at home does have Irish so they would speak Irish to them quite often. It's generally probably around 5 out of 30 families. It's not a lot but there's a few. The children themselves now

speak Irish at home but, you know, the parents wouldn't have the Irish to converse back with them. But you find that a lot of parents would come in and say to me *Oh my God she speaks a lot of Irish at home* or *he speaks Irish*, you know, but they wouldn't have the Irish to converse back with them" (TK2). Parents would usually be limited to a few words or phrases: "perhaps just greetings you know and using phrases like *obair bhaile*, *did you get any obair bhaile?*"<sup>269</sup> And things like that but to have a conversation I'd say (...) there [is] no Irish." Four interviewed teachers (19%) said that the only use of Irish made at home was related to homework. Parents were likely to be reminded of speaking Irish when helping their child doing his/her homework. One interviewed teacher explained: "Parents are willing to use the phrases that we do have but it might only be a couple of phrases. I do have parents coming to me and saying I don't have a word of Irish at home so we can't use it. Mainly, when it comes to the homework they will try to speak Irish but apart from that I don't think so" (TD21). One teacher said the amount of Irish used at home could be easily improved as most parents simply do not make the effort to use simple sentences and phrases they know. Another teacher did not think parents were using Irish as much as they claimed to: "At home on average I'd say, in my opinion, very little Irish is used at home. I have 32 children in the class and I'd say maybe one child uses Irish on a daily basis at home. Now, the parents would say on a form that they use it on a daily basis but I honestly don't think they do, I really don't" (TG6). However, two sixth class teachers pointed out that sometimes despite parents' effort to speak Irish at home children were behaving rather negatively as they associated Irish with school: "Once they're outside school (...) it's a chore for them. Even though they're very relaxed about it in school most of them think it's not cool to speak Irish." (TE6).

As indicated by teachers only a small number of parents would use Irish with their child in a context other than school. This is in line with the questionnaire results in so far as a majority of respondents<sup>270</sup> indicated they used Irish most with their child when helping with homework (81.1%,  $n=146$ ) or discussing the school day with their child (55.9%,  $n=100$ ) on a regular basis. Other home activities conducted through the medium of Irish (mealtimes, household chores, etc.,) were said to be mostly occasional.<sup>271</sup>

Due to the absence of a formal Irish-speaking community in Dublin, it appears to be difficult to measure the use of Irish made by parents themselves outside the home environment. As shown in the questionnaire, some respondents do conduct a bilingual social life using the *gaelscoil* as a meeting point between parents willing to converse in Irish (47.1%,  $n=104$ ). Interview participants who said they socialised with other parents through the medium of Irish were asked to describe the circumstances in

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269 "homework" in Irish.

270 Of an 81.2% valid response, which solely includes respondents who use some Irish at home.

271 See Table 4.17 Circumstances and Frequency of Irish Use at Home in Section 4.4.3.



which they meet and converse through Irish so as to further understand the extent to which Irish is used in their social lives. Eighteen interview participants (45%) said they would regularly socialise with other families from the gaelscoil through the medium of Irish, which is a fair representation of the total sample population who completed the questionnaire

There are two distinct groups among the interview participants: those who use Irish as the sole medium of communication when meeting with other parents (22%,  $n=4$ )—usually on a weekly basis—and those who use both English and Irish but who make a special effort to use as much Irish as possible (78%,  $n=14$ ). The latter is usually induced by the nature of the event (school meeting, Mass) or the location they find themselves in (education centre, gaelscoil) whereas in the first group the Irish language is what brings them together. Being in contact with people who are able to converse in Irish in an environment that is culturally Irish (GAA, Irish dancing) or linguistically related to the Irish language (Mass and meeting through Irish, play date with children from the gaelscoil) seems to foster the use of the Irish language among those interview participants.

It should be noted that most interview participants socialising through the medium of Irish reported high ability in Irish (72%,  $n=13$ ).<sup>272</sup> A further two (11%) speaking *parts of conversations* in Irish had a spouse with high ability in Irish. One family (5.5%) where both parents were foreign nationals said they used some Irish with other gaelscoil families whenever possible, despite their low ability in Irish (i.e. speak *the odd word*).

Table 5.10 lists different ways and places participants said they socialised with other parents through Irish. Three interview participants with native-speaker or very good ability were not included in this table as they said they regularly socialised through Irish in a range of situations and with people who were not connected to the school. The purpose of this table is to show social interaction through Irish between families attending the same school.

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272 Two interview participants reported native speaker ability (11%), eleven said they could conduct most conversations in Irish (61%), four could conduct parts of conversations in Irish (22%) while one had the odd word (5.5%).

**Table 5.10: Places where Families from the Gaelscoil Socialise through the Medium of Irish on a Regular Basis**

Parents using Irish only	Total n=	Parents using more Irish than English	Total n=
Meeting at the pub	2 (11%)	GAA club	5 (28%)
Dinner at the house	1 (5.5%)	Birthday parties/play date at a school friend's house	5 (28%)
Conversation group (in the school)	1 (5.5%)	After Mass meeting	2 (11%)
		Irish dancing class (for adults)	1 (5.5%)
		Parents' Committee	1 (5.5%)
Total (N=18)	4 (22%)		14 (78%)

## Conclusion

This section examined gaelscoil parents' use of the Irish language in various situations from both teachers' and interview participants' perspectives. Overall, it was observed that parents make a conscious effort to use Irish in school-related contexts. However, the use of English prevails when speaking to teachers, to other parents as well as within the home environment.

Although it was acknowledged that a certain number of parents were not sufficiently competent in Irish to be able to use it with teachers, interviewed teachers interpreted parents' use of English with them as the result of a lack of confidence. In the presence of the teacher parents who would not consider themselves fluent in Irish may find the situation intimidating and would rather use English instead. Some interviewed teachers used the terms “make an effort” or “try” in reference to parents' use of the Irish language at school events whereas others spoke of parents' commitment to using the language regardless of their level of Irish: “if they have it they will use it definitely” (TJ2). Parents' use of Irish therefore seems to depend on the confidence they have in speaking Irish and to a lesser extent on their competence in Irish.

Similarly, parents' involvement in school life appears to depend on each individual's personality rather than on their competence in Irish. By and large, interviewed teachers did not think the Irish language was a deterrent for parents to get involved as none of the schools would exclude parents on linguistic grounds nor would they require parents to speak Irish when taking part in the school life. Some parents would think their inadequate command of Irish is the main reason for their small role in the school while other parents would feel confident to participate regardless of their level of Irish. This divide was also observed among interview participants between those who lacked confidence or had

poor competence in Irish and those who felt comfortable using English through their involvement in the school. It must be noted that parental involvement in school life also depends on factors such as work commitments or regular contact with the school. Interview participants who would participate in school outings said they would use as much Irish as they can with the children.

Lastly, despite the use of a few greeting words in Irish on the school premises, English seems to remain the language of communication between parents for several reasons. On the one hand, participants fluent in Irish thought it was rude to speak Irish to other parents<sup>273</sup> as it could put them in an embarrassing situation had their level of Irish been inferior. On the other hand, participants with some Irish would feel embarrassed and intimidated to speak with other parents who are more fluent. Because parents tend to use Irish more with school staff than with other parents, regardless of their competence in Irish, it can be assumed that staff's fluency in Irish and the institution they represent are an incentive for parents to use more Irish.

In the home environment, interviewed teachers did not think parents used much Irish unless they had a good level of fluency in the language. Most parents do the homework with their child using some Irish but rarely use the language in other contexts. This is consistent with questionnaire results in which respondents reported regular use of Irish during school-related activities conducted at home.

Finally, in a broader context, beyond the *gaelscoil* and the home environments, a significant number of interview participants (45%,  $n=18$ ) stated that they socialised through Irish with other families of their school. Most of them would do so incidentally, that is to say when in the company of other *gaelscoil* families in certain places where Irish culture and the Irish language would be central to the event or social gathering attended. Furthermore, they would converse bilingually. However, a minority of participants did indicate that the Irish language would be for them the cause of their meeting other *gaelscoil* parents and would therefore be the only medium of communication while socialising together. It is on this kind of relationships that the stability of Irish usage depends, one with friendship and interpersonal knowledge (Ó Riagáin, 2008). Although those social networks are not strong enough to ensure the expansion of spoken Irish they are capable of recruiting new members who are not necessarily fluent in Irish. As Ó Riagáin pointed out when referring to the current state language policy that focuses on services to Irish speakers: "a sustainable, bilingual language policy has to aim always to recruit from the ranks of those currently speaking English, rather than simply service those currently speaking Irish" (2008, p. 65). According to this view, the Irish-medium schools can be regarded as a valuable institution for the promotion of spoken Irish.

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273 Not using Irish in the presence of people who may not be able to speak it was considered an act of politeness by native speakers in the 1973 survey on attitudes to Irish (CILAR, 1975).

### ***5.6 Reaction to current issues***

This final section examines parents' attitudes to the Irish language and Irish-medium education in a broader context. The first part focuses on attitudes to the Irish language in a linguistic and political context exploring the issues of language preference in a fully bilingual Ireland and of language promotion. The second part addresses the issue of how Irish-medium schools can be perceived by members of the general public as elitist and analyses gaelscoil parents' response to such attitudes.

### 5.6.1 Parents' attitude to the promotion of Irish in the Republic of Ireland

In the questionnaire, respondents were to imagine that they were living in a fully bilingual Ireland. They were asked to make a language choice in their daily lives, that is to say whether they would speak Irish or English or both, knowing that everybody in Ireland would understand and speak either language. Although very few respondents chose to speak *English only* (2.3%,  $n=9$ ) and *less Irish than English* (4.3%,  $n=17$ ) it was expected that a majority would show their support for the Irish language by choosing to speak it as much as or more than the English language. However, the questionnaire results showed that if everyone in Ireland could speak Irish and English equally well a majority of respondents (44.2%,  $n=175$ ) would prefer to speak *Irish and English equally well* as opposed to *Irish only* or *more Irish than English*. This outcome was further explored in the follow-up interviews so as to understand what motivated their choice; why parents who clearly showed that being able to speak Irish fluently and being aware of their Irish heritage and identity mattered to them, did not choose to speak more Irish when given the opportunity.

The results obtained from the interviews were in line with those from the questionnaire. In a situation where Ireland would be fully bilingual a majority of interview participants chose to speak Irish and English equally well. The main reasons justifying this language preference refer to the prime role English plays worldwide, the importance of being fluent in English so as to preserve balanced bilingualism as well as the importance given to both languages in terms of ethnic identity. By contrast, the cultural and identity elements were the most relevant reasons among participants who chose Irish over English.

As shown in Figure 5.33 below, twenty-four parents out of forty (60%) said they would prefer to speak both Irish and English equally well. Nine of them (22.5%) said they would use more Irish than English whereas seven of them (17.5%) said they would use Irish only if everybody in Ireland was fully bilingual.

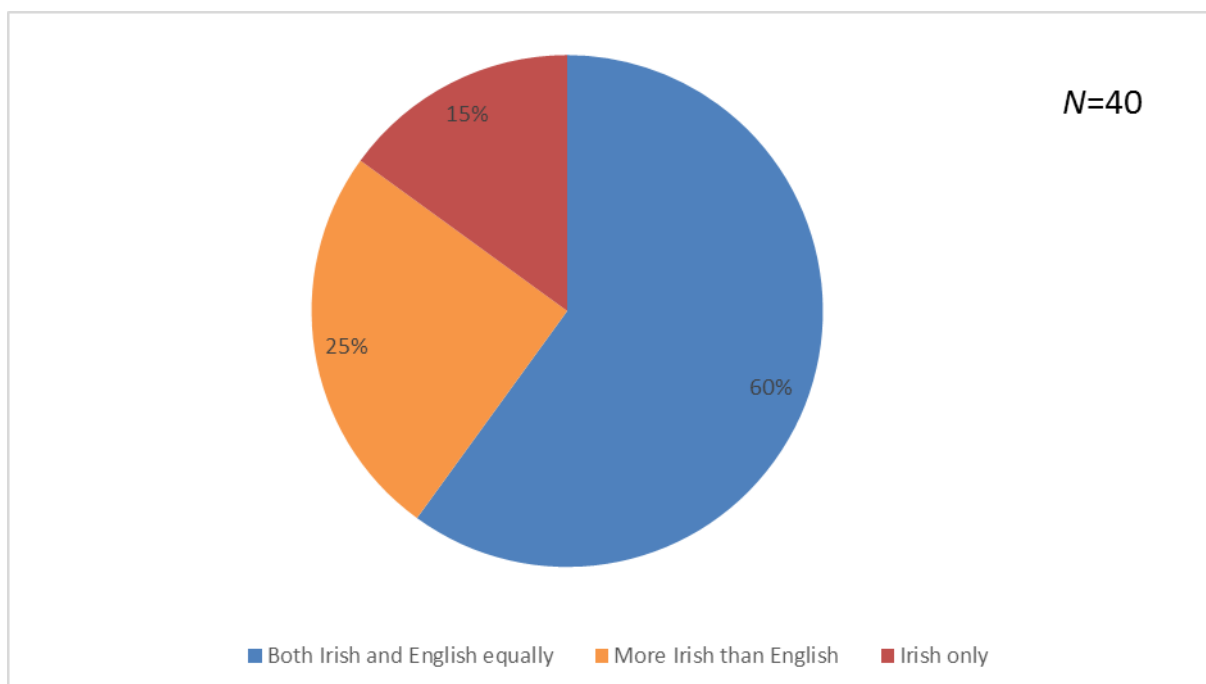
When their language preference was compared with the answers they gave in the questionnaire fifteen parents (37.5%) expressed a different opinion between the time of the survey and the time of the interview.<sup>274</sup> It seems that five interview participants (12.5%) changed their answer in support of more Irish whereas ten parents (25%) were in favour of a more moderate use of Irish than previously stated in the questionnaire. None of them suggested the use of more English than Irish. However, participants were not confronted with the response they gave in the questionnaire when the latter

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<sup>274</sup> Interview participants were not confronted on their lack of consistency as the detailed questionnaire data was not available at the time of the interviews.

turned out to be different from the response they gave during the interview. This is because individual responses were not fully available from the database when the interviews were conducted.

**Figure 5.33: Parents' Language Preference in the Hypothetical Case of a Fully Bilingual Ireland**



Interview participants were asked to elaborate on their language choice. Their answers were put into categories<sup>275</sup> from which two separate groups emerged according to their language preferences.

Among those who showed a preference in speaking both languages equally well (60%,  $n=24$ ), 15% ( $n=7$ ) insisted on the importance of being able to speak English in Ireland as it is an international language: "Because English is spoken worldwide for that reason you know it's nice to have both languages, to able to speak both equally well" (IPB22); "In today's world English is important no matter where you go they're all learning English so you need English today, in today's world. But also Irish, I think, is a beautiful language and it's also an identifying language and it's a very old language. So yeah I'd like to see it used equally as English in the country" (IPH23). Others (15%,  $n=7$ ) justified the need to speak both languages equally well in order to maintain a certain balanced bilingualism. One interview participant chose "both in an interchangeable way like in Sweden. If there is business through Irish it will survive. Otherwise people won't speak it if they don't have to" (IPJ212). It seems that some interview participants (8%,  $n=4$ ) might have misunderstood the hypothetical aspect of the question as

275 See Table A18.2 Reasons for Parent's Language Preference in a Bilingual Ireland in Appendix 18. Percentages do not total 100% as some interview participants gave more than one reason to explain their language choice.

they had difficulties imagining that everybody in Ireland could be fluent in both languages. They mentioned, for example, the need to be able to communicate with people who would not have a good command of the Irish language: “Both equally so people are more comfortable communicating” (Interview Participant C27); “if other people from the outside came in and they didn't know their *as gaeilge* obviously I wouldn't be having a conversation because I feel it's rude to speak and they haven't a clue what we'd be speaking about. But among ourselves we would” (IPF210).<sup>276</sup> Although they could have alluded to non-Irish nationals this should not pose a communication problem for by choosing to speak more Irish than English they could switch to the English language in occasional contexts, such as speaking to foreign nationals. This point was made by three interview participants (7.5%) who showed a preference for Irish to be used in the home and with friends. They seemed to regard the use of English as a polite way to address people who would not have a good command of the Irish language.<sup>277</sup> The following quotes illustrate participants' argument: “I would prefer to speak more Irish than English. It is never going to be 100% Irish. You can't expect foreigners who come to Ireland to learn Irish. It has to be practical” (IPA64); “I would use more Irish. It is our first language. I would use English with tourists so there is no language barrier” (IPF22); “Well I suppose if we could speak them equally I would probably use Irish because it would be like your home language that you can speak on your own but I would still highly encourage English because it's so widely spoken” (IPE23).

Seven interview participants out of the total cohort (17.5%) preferred to speak both languages equally well because they thought that Irish and English were both intertwined and part of Irish identity: “When growing up with English as your first language you can't say you don't like it” (IPG216); “They both have important values. English is part of who we are. We should be fully bilingual” (IPG61). This point was also raised by 10% ( $n=4$ ) of interview participants who also justified speaking more Irish than English on identity grounds: “I would use more Irish. It's a lovely language. (...) I went to Germany and felt I had to learn German to communicate. It is natural. It is not hard to learn. We would be the same” (IPK61). Those arguments illustrate different attitudes to Irish identity in terms of how they define it. As seen in Chapter One, members of an ethnic community share different traits of their identity (Mahmood & Armstrong, 1992). While some are more in favour of Irish English—that is to say an Irish variety of the English language—to express their national identity (Wardhaugh, 1987; White, 2006), others feel that the Irish language has a special position in defining who they are (Smith, 1981; Maguire, 1991; Spolsky, 1999). Finally, a further 15% ( $n=6$ ) thought that speaking Irish only was a natural thing to do for Irish people: “Irish only like a French person would speak French in France” (IPA66); “Well I would prefer to speak Irish then. Because it is our major language so that would be the

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276 The term “outside” refers to people who do not belong to the interview participants' family as opposed to “among ourselves” which includes family members.

277 This behaviour is reminiscent of Irish native-speakers (Ó Riagáin, 1997)

language I would choose if I could speak it fluently I would. This is like a French person who speaks French before English you know. Scandinavians have very good English but I'm sure they choose to speak their native language" (IPJ22); "Irish only. It is part of our identity. People in other countries have their own language so why not in Ireland?" (IPJ63). Again, one can observe that the identity factor was emphasised by interview participants although it did not translate into a homogeneous language preference as some thought the English language was an additional identity marker whereas others preferred to think Irish was the only language identity marker.

Interviewed participants were very supportive of bilingualism as no one showed a preference towards the use of *less Irish than English* in the context of a fully bilingual Ireland. The promotion of bilingualism in the Republic of Ireland has always been mainly state-coordinated and state-funded. The data obtained from the three national attitude surveys of 1973, 1983 and 1993 (CLÁR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984; 1994) showed that although the Irish population was supportive of the government being responsible for language promotion<sup>278</sup> a significant minority (38%) in 1993 agreed that promoting Irish was the job of voluntary organisations rather than the government's. In 2000, this percentage decreased as an all-Ireland survey conducted in 2000 in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland shows. As a matter of fact, 57% of respondents from the Republic of Ireland disagreed that voluntary organisations should be responsible for the promotion of Irish (Ó Riagáin, 2007, p. 382). It was even lower among the gaelscoil cohort as only 5.3% ( $n=20$ ) of questionnaire respondents agreed that voluntary organisations rather than the government should promote Irish. Even though gaelscoil parents are likely to be in favour of government support for the promotion of Irish since Irish-medium schools are state schools, Irish language voluntary organisations also play an important role in this area. One of the most important voluntary organisations that directly concerns parents is Gaelscoileanna Teo. which supports the development of Irish-medium schools nationwide. Some of the services other voluntary organisations offer, such as Irish language classes and cultural events, are even used by respondents themselves. The question on attitudes to state support was further explored in the follow-up interviews in order to better understand why 78% ( $n=290$ ) of respondents thought promoting Irish should be the exclusive responsibility of the government.<sup>279</sup>

A majority of interview participants (90%,  $n=36$ ) disagreed with the statement that promoting Irish should not be the job of government but of voluntary organisations, which reflects the results obtained in the questionnaire. As shown in Figure 5.34 below, a further three interview participants (7.5%) agreed with the statement and one had no opinion (2.5%). When asked to elaborate, most

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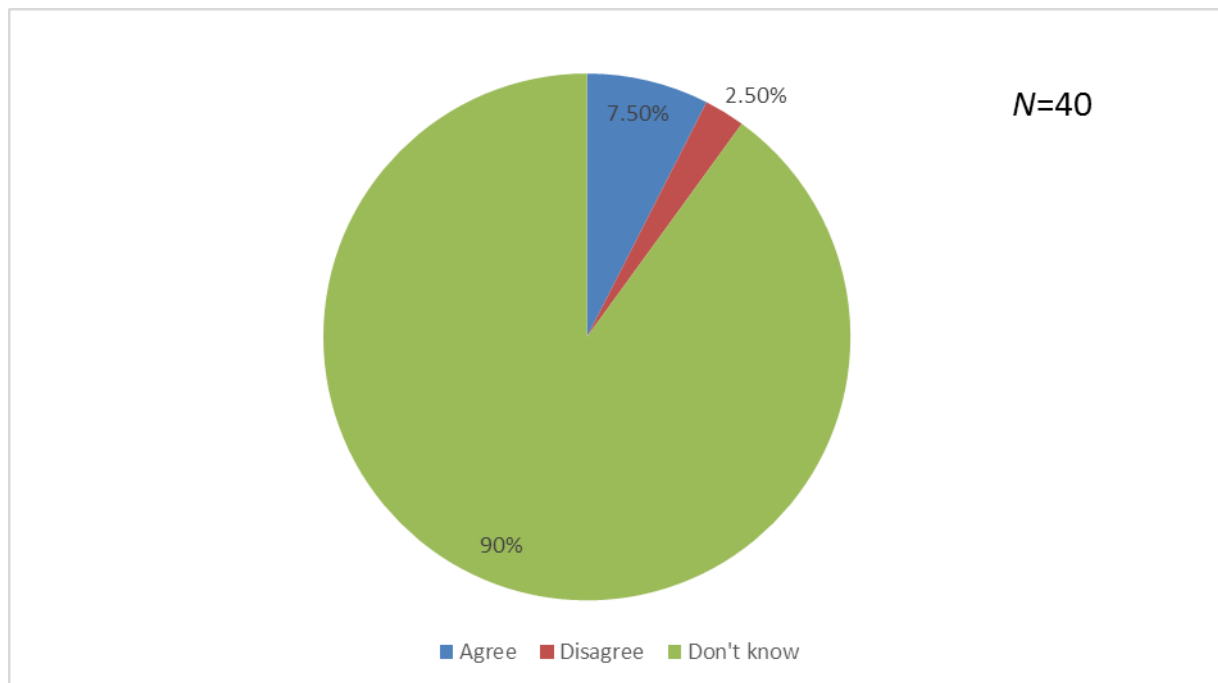
<sup>278</sup> See Chapter Two

<sup>279</sup> 16.7% ( $n=62$ ) had no opinion (see Table A19.1 in Appendix 19).



participants (55%,  $n=22$ ) believed that the government had the mechanisms together with the financial resources to implement legislation unlike voluntary groups. According to some (27.5%,  $n=11$ ), the promotion of the Irish language is a constitutional duty. Furthermore, in the specific context of education a significant number of interview participants (25%,  $n=10$ ) thought that the promotion of the Irish language was essential to language maintenance and could only be provided by the government.<sup>280</sup>

**Figure 5.34: Parents' Views on the Promotion of Irish as Being the Job of Voluntary Organisations as Opposed to the Job of the Government**



When comparing interview participants' responses in the questionnaire with the answers they gave during the interview, seven (17.5%) expressed a different opinion.<sup>281</sup> This inconsistency may be due to the format of the questionnaire where respondents were required to tick a series of boxes. This can be done hastily and has a greater margin of error than a one-to-one interview.

Among participants in favour of state language promotion (90%,  $n=36$ ), close to a third ( $n=11$ ) said that the government had the mechanisms to implement legislation to promote and maintain the Irish

<sup>280</sup> Note that a certain number of parents gave several reasons. Percentages are exclusive and do not total 100%.

<sup>281</sup> Two interviewed parents agreed with the statement during the interview whereas they had disagreed in the questionnaire; four of them disagreed with the statement but had not expressed any opinion in the questionnaire; one was not sure what the best solution was whereas she had shown her disagreement with this statement when completing the questionnaire; one agreed with the statement but her response could not be compared with her previous answer from the questionnaire as she never completed this question.

language as opposed to the limited impact voluntary groups have—essentially due to a lack of funding. “If there's no legislation to keep it up I think it will die, slowly but it will. I think keeping it as a legal requirement forces more people to learn it and keep it going” (IPD26); “It is the job of the government to keep it alive if people want to do it. It is the national language. They need to back it up, put money into it. Voluntary organisations are struggling. (IPK65). These two quotes echo the recognised importance of state support and promotion of the minority language in order to give it status and ensure its vitality (Fishman, 1991; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006). A significant number of interview participants (30.5%,  $n=11$ ) also thought that the government had a duty to promote Irish because it represents the Irish nation: “the government should be promoting more the Irish language because they represent the Irish country and for that reason alone they should be out there encouraging people to learn the language” (IPG26). This argument also suggests the need for a national language policy that is not conceivable for community-based voluntary organisations: “there needs to be a national policy you know a national strategy to promote the language. If it's the work of voluntary groups it won't happen because, you know, voluntary groups are restricted by where they are, who's in them... Voluntary groups notoriously split” (IPK23). The example of the promotion of Irish in the education system whether as a compulsory subject or as a medium of instruction was recurrently stated (28%,  $n=10$ ) and viewed as an important and exclusive state duty. Finally, a few interview participants thought that the government and voluntary organisations should work in tandem (17%,  $n=6$ ).

It should be noted that four interview participants (11%) in favour of state promotion emphasised the fact that the government should do more for the Irish language. Another four (11%) highlighted the importance of encouraging and developing Irish-medium schools as the key to the promotion of Irish: “the secret to reviving the language is to encourage gaelscoileanna” (IPA24).

Interview participants (7.5%,  $n=3$ ) in favour of voluntary organisations being put in charge of the Irish language had different reasons to believe this was the right way to promote Irish. Two of them (5%) argued that the work of voluntary organisations is more effective because they are community-based: “Voluntary organisations have more time and are community based so there is a better understanding by the communities” (IPG61). Another interview participant (2.5%) suggested it should be the decision of individuals to get involved in the promotion of Irish, without any state intervention, if they think Irish is worth keeping alive.

### 5.6.2 Parents' attitude to the concept of elitism within the gaelscoileanna

This last section examines gaelscoil parents' attitudes towards a general perception of the Irish-medium schools and their participants. As shown in Chapter Two, gaelscoileanna have often been perceived as being elitist on both socio-economic and educational grounds. Although this perception is generally anecdotal,<sup>282</sup> it has also been the topic of a certain number of published pieces (McWilliams, 2005), mostly in newspaper articles (Carey, 2008; Holmquist, 2008). Respondents were asked in the questionnaire to show their agreement or disagreement with the statement "Irish-medium education is for the middle classes" which resulted in strong opposition with 86.8% ( $n=184$ ) disagreeing. Due to the nature of the question (i.e. close-ended question requiring ticking a box) respondents could not elaborate on their answer by leaving an explanatory comment. Subsequently, parents participating in the follow-up interviews were asked a second question on the idea of elitism being attached to gaelscoileanna in the hope of getting a full picture of this association between gaelscoileanna and social elitism from an insider's point of view.

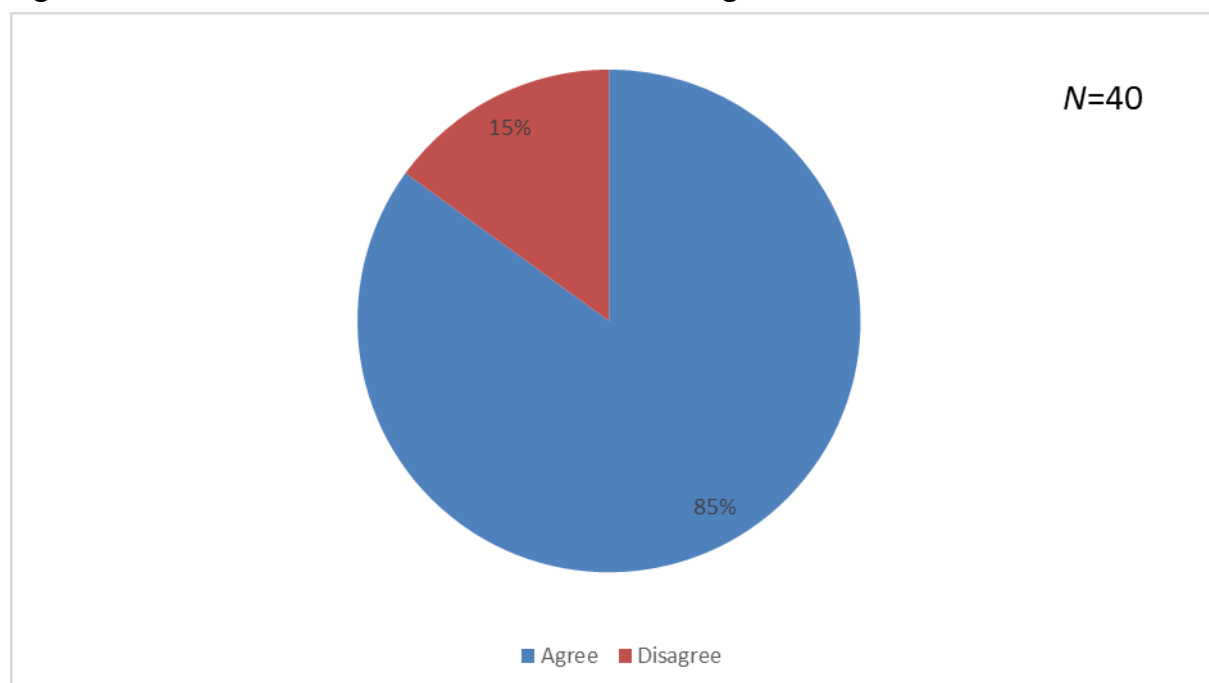
Results show that 85% ( $n=34$ ) of interview participants disagreed that gaelscoileanna were elitist against 15% ( $n=6$ ). However, 35% ( $n=14$ ) who disagreed admitted that there was a general perception of elitism attached to these schools.

It must be noted that interview participants interpreted the word elitist differently. Most of them defined elitist in terms of social class while others associated it with a different selective aspect, referring to the selective linguistic criterion for admission in the gaelscoil that would require genuine parental interest in the Irish language, the teaching of what has been referred to as "pure" Irish by an interview participant, ethnicity, and gaelscoileanna's standard of education. Furthermore, the term elitist was not always defined in negative terms (20%,  $n=8$ ) as it referred to a certain educated group of parents with an appreciation of Irish-medium education for their child.

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<sup>282</sup> Anecdotes collected from personal conversations with people and from comments left on online fora such as [www.boards.ie](http://www.boards.ie), [www.politics.ie](http://www.politics.ie), [www.dailti.com](http://www.dailti.com), etc.

**Figure 5.35: Parents' Views on Gaelscoileanna as Being Elitist**



A majority of participants (53%,  $n=18$ ) who disagreed with gaelscoileanna being elitist highlighted the fact that children from various social backgrounds attended these schools: “Definitely not from our part of town. I mean, maybe some areas of Dublin, Dublin 4 or whatever but I don't think it is elitist here at all. I mean, the cross section of children at their school is very diverse, so no” (IPC210); “Definitely not, maybe other areas yes but certainly, I don't think, here. There is a broad range of kids going there coming from all aspects of works of life” (IPD67); “I wouldn't say that they are from one section of society or another I think it's a mix bag in that class” (IPJ67); “Not this school. There are mixed social classes” (IPJ212); “Absolutely not. Children are coming from a variety of backgrounds” (IPK65). Note that nearly all participants appeared to defend their school from some form of social elitism association while acknowledging this situation might exist in other schools located in more affluent areas of Dublin. However, other interview participants (15%,  $n=5$ ) argued that gaelscoileanna were located in middle-class areas alongside other prestigious schools as well as in working-class areas accommodating and representing its local population in terms of social backgrounds. The following quotes illustrate this argument: “Well, I suppose this gaelscoil is in a very middle class area. It's in an area where, you know, people are well off. So it's no more elitist than [name of other local schools] are, I would have thought. (...) But no I don't think gaelscoileanna are elitist” (IPA24); “There is a lot of disadvantaged areas like my friend's sending her daughter to a disadvantaged gaelscoil. I think that's where they originated. It was more in disadvantaged areas and working class areas. So I don't think it is elitist. Maybe in the South side of Dublin it is, I don't think it is here” (IPJ22); “[name of gaelscoil]

isn't elitist in terms... isn't a middle class gaelscoil. I know that argument is made... [This area] is very much a working class area" (IPK23). Some participants pointed out that gaelscoileanna were national schools and therefore non-fee paying (9%,  $n=3$ ) and open to everyone (12%,  $n=4$ ), while others indicated that gaelscoileanna suffered from lack of funding and had accommodation issues unlike private schools (12%,  $n=4$ ). Two participants (6%) indicated that parents who send their child to a gaelscoil do so because they believe it is what is best for their child, regardless of their own social background. One interview participant (3%) explained that her local gaelscoil was not socially elitist as a large number of parents had attended this school when they were young and were now sending their own child to it because they were satisfied with it. Finally, one participant (3%) disagreed that gaelscoileanna excluded families on ethnic grounds. The table below outlines the results:

**Table 5.11: Reasons why Gaelscoileanna are Not Elitist**

Reasons	Total % <sup>283</sup> ( $N=34$ )
Good social mix	53 ( $n=18$ )
Open door policy	12 ( $n=4$ )
Underfunded and accommodated in prefabs	12 ( $n=4$ )
Gaelscoil located in a working-class area	12 ( $n=4$ )
Non-fee paying	9 ( $n=3$ )
Choice based on the provision of a good education not on social grounds	6 ( $n=2$ )
Gaelscoil located in a middle-class area therefore no more elitist than other local schools	3 ( $n=1$ )
A large number of parents are former Gaelscoil pupils	3 ( $n=1$ )
No fewer foreign nationals attending than in other local schools	3 ( $n=1$ )

As noted previously, a significant number of interview participants refuted the idea that their gaelscoil was elitist but appeared at the same time to acknowledge that this may be the case in other gaelscoileanna. Thirty-five per cent of interview participants ( $n=14$ ) said they could understand why the perception of elitism existed, although they did not entirely agree with it. As shown in Table 5.12 below, some interview participants (29%,  $n=4$ ) thought that the availability of such schools in middle-class areas made people think they were intended for a social elite. Other participants (21%,  $n=3$ ) indicated that people believed that having a child attending a gaelscoil required commitment together with a good educational background to support the child through his/her education. According to

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<sup>283</sup> Percentages given in this table are exclusive and do not total 100% as a few interview participants gave several reasons.

them, being both committed and well educated is often associated with being from a certain social class. During the interviews, these participants also said they knew people who wished their children had been to a *gaelscoil* but were afraid they would not be able to support their child educationally because of their poor ability in Irish.<sup>284</sup> Judging by their remarks one can understand that people's fears are essentially based on a lack of information about bilingual education and that people assume that only well-educated people with a good level of Irish are able to send their child to a *gaelscoil*: "People think it's too hard to send their child to a *gaelscoil*" (IPK61).

Other factors such as smaller classes and the absence of foreign nationals in these schools (21%,  $n=3$ ) were also said to give the impression that *gaelscoileanna* were elitist: "It looks like the smaller the school the more elitist. It's only a perception" (IPF22). A further two participants (14%) thought *gaelscoileanna* had an elitist image because they were considered "very good schools". Finally, one participant (7%) thought that some parents do send their child to the *gaelscoil* because this elitist label exists: "people send their children for the wrong reasons. It's a perception among English speakers. It's not a class thing" (IPA618).

Again, most interview participants gave a social class dimension to the concept of elitism; except for one who associated elitism with the teaching of a pure form of the Irish language as opposed to letting the language evolve: "I always said if the school here is getting too elitist I'd pulled m[y children] out because that takes it from the common people. (...) To make it elitist then is wrong it won't survive if it's made elitist. I don't think it will. Some of them can be. They would be very hard core about how the language has to be spoken without allowing it to evolve you know, because a language has to evolve to survive. (...) That a *gaelgeoir* would be first on the list all the time, I think that would make it elitist, you know" (IPH23).

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284 "there'd be more a tendency for middle to upper classes using them [*gaelscoileanna*]. And I would think that is because a lot of people would fear their knowledge of the language is not enough to send their kids to Irish. That would be maybe people who would have done their Leaving Cert, would have gone on to university, would be quite comfortable in their kids using Irish. People that would be from maybe more working classes who may not have had the same education in Irish, who feel that their knowledge wouldn't be sufficient to send their kids through Irish. I would know a lot of parents who said to me I would love to have sent them to Irish but my Irish isn't good enough, which I'm telling them there is no need to fear that's not the way it operates. (...) kids (...) won't need you, you know, to be fluent and things like that" (IPD67); "a lot of parents of kids around would say to me 'I'd love to send my son to an Irish school I just haven't got the Irish. I wouldn't be able to help him with the homework'. So it would actually put them off a little bit (IPD24).

**Table 5.12: Reasons Accounting for a General Perception that Gaelscoileanna are Elitist**

Reasons	Total % <sup>285</sup> (N=14)
Perception that Gaelscoileanna are elitist in some parts of Dublin because of their location in middle-class areas	29 (n=4)
Perception that parents need to be committed and educated to be able to help their child through his/her education in Irish, which is sometimes associated with being from a certain social class	21 (n=3)
Gaelscoileanna are viewed as schools with smaller classes and/or with no foreign nationals attending the school	21 (n=3)
Gaelscoileanna are viewed as very good schools	14 (n=2)
Some schools teach “pure” Irish and oppose to letting the language evolve	7 (n=1)
Because the perception of an elitist school exists it leads some parents to send their child to the Gaelscoil for the wrong reasons	7 (n=1)

Finally, a minority of interview participants (15%,  $n=6$ ) agreed with the general perception that gaelscoileanna are elitist. Half of them ( $n=3$ ) confirmed the perception others had—see above—insofar as Irish-medium education is usually considered by an educated middle class. As one interview participant put it: “It is a self-selecting group. People who are interested in Irish are more interested in education. They are usually middle-class people” (IPG216). This quote ties up with what Tovey et al. (1989) observed, that people who are from a middle class milieu and who are somewhat competent in Irish seem to have learnt to appreciate their culture and to have taken pride in what defines Irishness as a distinctive culture. A second participant also explained that “to have the ability to do this [i.e. send your child to a gaelscoil] you would have to be somewhat educated to do it” She then continued adding a social class dimension to her argument: “And nine times out of ten you very seldom see rough children being taken through the school. (...) I think that the normal working class people (...) don't seem to (...) think that far ahead of where they want their kids to be” (IPF210). The last part of her argument, that is parents’ well-thought out decision to choose a school that can offer their child great educational opportunities, was regarded as some form of positive elitism. Similarly, a third interview participant thought that gaelscoileanna were elitist to some extent: “I don't think everybody sees it important. So just in terms of people who see it important maybe people who are more... better educated” (IPD26). One can observe that whereas most interview participants interpreted the

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285 Percentages given in this table are exclusive and do not total 100% as one interview participant gave two reasons.

term elitist in negative terms others gave it a positive aspect: “The gaelscoil is a private school without being fee-paying (IPG216).

Interview participants (7.5%,  $n=3$ ) who indicated their disagreement with the association of gaelscoileanna with social elitism<sup>286</sup> expressed nonetheless similar thoughts on how gaelscoil parents are a self-selected group. While two of these participants referred to the commitment to and interest in Irish-medium education parents must have to send their child to primary level, a third participant alluded to the even more selective group of parents at secondary level as they show a genuine interest in the Irish language. The following quotes illustrate those two arguments respectively: “I do think it's a certain type of person who'll go there; because you have to make an effort if your child is going to go to a gaelscoil and your Irish isn't great. You'll have to make the effort to go to night classes to help with the homework, to get help if you can't give it to them. It is a big commitment” (IPD24); “once you go to secondary school it's different because there is a selection because people won't send their children to an Irish speaking school because it is more a challenge, and also it is a real choice to go to secondary school through Irish. So it is elitist in that sense that it is a certain kind of people that decide to send their children to an Irish speaking school. But it's a good thing in a way... it's elitist but it's elitist in a good way it's not elitist in a bad way I think” (IPA613).

A further two interview participants (33%) thought that gaelscoileanna were positively elitist from a linguistic point of view rather than one of social class. Both of them alluded to the selective enrolment criterion in their school that guarantees a place in the school to families showing a genuine interest in the Irish language. This was thought to be necessary due to a risk of some families getting into these schools for the wrong reasons: “I think sometimes they have to be [selective] because they don't want people just coming in who aren't serious about learning [Irish] and are just going to probably drop out after primary and not carry it on because then what's the point if there's no people out there actually speaking it” (IPE23).

Finally, one participant (17%) criticised some parents for not being honest about their true motives in sending their child to the gaelscoil. According to him, some parents regard the gaelscoil as a place to mix socially with people from a well-off background. This remark was also found in Packer and Campbell's study results (1997) after interviewing parents with a child in a Welsh-medium primary school. Some parents thought that the idea of social selectiveness revolving around Welsh-medium schools may have influenced some parents to enrol their child in such schools. Packer and Campbell (1997) found that parents of children going to an English-speaking school in Wales would not always have positive attitudes towards Welsh-medium schools. They would sometimes refer to a social

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286 They were not counted as part of the six interview participant agreeing with the statement that gaelscoileanna are elitist as their main argument indicated otherwise.



selectiveness or “snobbery” factor—a term also used by one of the senior infant teachers participating in this study when listing the reasons why parents would send their child to a gaelscoil. However, no evidence was found in the present study to support the idea of school choice being based on social selectiveness. As seen earlier on, most parents based their choice on a complex consideration of language and educational reasons.

**Table 5.13: Reasons why Gaelscoileanna are Elitist**

Reason	Total % (N=6)
Parents who consider such an education for their child are generally better educated and from a middle-class milieu.	50 (n=3)
There is a selection at the time of enrolment that prioritises families with a genuine interest in the Irish language.	33 (n=2)
Parents are not necessarily interested in the Irish language but in mixing with certain people of a certain social class	17 (n=1)

Some interview participants (15%,  $n=6$ ) gave further comments on the perception that gaelscoileanna are separatist and do not cater for non-Irish children, as suggested in the media (Holmquist, 2008).<sup>287</sup> All of them disagreed somewhat with this perception. On the one hand they disagreed that selecting a gaelscoil was a way for parents to secure a place in a school environment where children are mainly Irish: “I know some people say it's a way of keeping immigrants out of the school but that wouldn't be my view” (IPA215). On the other hand, they disagreed with the fact that there are no foreign nationals in gaelscoileanna. Participants either listed a few foreign nationalities there were in their school or explained that there were very few non-Irish families living in their area. This fact was therefore reflected in the low attendance of non-Irish children in their local gaelscoil. Talking about her area one interview participant explained: “there aren't too many non-Irish people, they're really Irish around here [i.e. in the area]” (IPK23).

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<sup>287</sup> See Chapter Two, Section 2.6 for a more thorough discussion.

## Conclusion

This final section reviewed parents' attitudes towards various current issues on social bilingualism and on Irish-medium schools and their users, in other words, themselves. Overall, interview participants were in favour of a bilingual society where Irish and English would be used equally. Their language preference reflects on the one hand their interest in the Irish language and the importance attributed to the English language due to its international status, and on the other hand the role both languages play in the definition of their identity. The follow-up interviews showed that parents were divided over the definition of Irish identity. Interviewed participants who raised the issue of Irish identity did not question the Irish language being an identity marker. Rather, the conflicting arguments came from the association of Irish identity with the English language. While some interview participants regarded Irish identity as other-ascribed, others saw the Irish variety of the English language as the best way to express a post-nationalist Irish identity (Arrowsmith, 2004).<sup>288</sup>

By and large, interview participants were strongly in favour of the maintenance of the Irish language. They showed support for state intervention and the government's national promotion of Irish, especially in the education sector. As participants in Irish-medium schools, they directly benefit from state support for immersion education.

This growing sector has been perceived as elitist by some in recent years but gaelscoil parents seem to disagree with this view. A majority of interview participants did not think that gaelscoileanna were elitist on social class grounds given their presence in various locations, the mix of family backgrounds and their non-fee paying status. However, a significant number of participants were aware of this perception which they thought came from an erroneous extrapolation that gaelscoileanna are located in middle-class areas and therefore are for middle-class children. It was also thought to come from what seems to be a lack of information on immersion education. It appears anecdotally that some parents would regard their own level of Irish as a deterrent when contemplating an Irish-medium education for their child.

Finally, the association of Irish-medium education with a self-selected group of parents emerged as something more subtle than the snobbery factor described in Packer & Campbell's study in Wales (1997). Although some claimed that it relied on educational and, by association, on social selectiveness, others preferred to speak of a genuine interest in and dedication to the Irish language and Irish-medium education. Despite these differences, there seems to be an overall agreement that attending a gaelscoil does not necessarily mean belonging to a certain social category but instead it means making a conscious decision and showing both a great interest in and commitment to their

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288 See Chapter One, Section 1.3.

child's education. However, when applying Bourdieu's (1997) theory on cultural capital in this context, the social class dimension is apparent. As explained in Section 2.5.3.3, educational qualifications can be used to acquire economic or symbolic capital in the labour market. By deliberately sending their children to these schools which produce cultural capital, gaelscoil parents hope to enhance their children's life opportunities, which ultimately relates to social reproduction and social mobility.

## **5.7 Discussion**

This section presents a discussion of the main findings obtained from the questionnaire and interviews. While the findings are based on parental attitudes to Irish and Irish-medium education, they are discussed under thematic headings that emerged from the analysis of the data. They include parents' motivation for selecting an Irish-medium education, home and social use of the Irish language and finally societal bilingualism and Irish identity.

### 5.7.1 Parents' motivation for selecting an Irish-medium education

The results of this study clearly show that parental motivations for selecting an Irish-medium school have evolved since the beginning of the *gaelscoileanna* movement. Whereas Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin (1979) were able in the late 1970s to distinguish three groups of parents according to their motives for participating in immersion education (language reasons only, non-language reasons only and mixed reasons), this study highlights the complexity behind the selection of an Irish-medium school. Nearly all respondents (95.1%) chose a *gaelscoil* for their child because of both language and educational reasons. Teachers interviewed also thought that parents selected such a school because they had an interest in the Irish language or in Irish culture and heritage (integrative reason) but also because the school had a good reputation and a good educational record (instrumental reason). The combination of integrative and instrumental orientations—as defined by Gardner (Gardner & Lambert, 1972)—seems therefore to be integral part of the decision-making process when choosing an Irish-medium school. Compared with Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin's study (1979), the school's reputation—whereby the *gaelscoil* is viewed as a good school—together with the school's educational record are given more consideration nowadays. Respondents seem to have favoured Irish-medium education for academic values. Unlike parental motivation in Wales where bilingual education is highly valued for its career prospects (Bush, Atkinson & Read, 1984, cited in Baker, 1988; Packer & Campbell, 1997) respondents did not grant a high level of importance to career opportunities. Rather, they believe in the advantages to immersion education in terms of ease to learn other languages and enhancement of cognitive thinking.

Although it would have been useful to retain the original question that required respondents to highlight the main reason for choosing a *gaelscoil*, it was nonetheless possible to observe a difference in parental motivations between respondents who had always considered a *gaelscoil* (51.1%) and those who had recently thought of it (48.9%). For respondents who had always thought of an Irish-medium education for their child, their decision seems to have been based more on language reasons. In addition, it was found that those who had always considered such an education were mostly respondents with high ability in Irish. There therefore appears to be a positive correlation between high ability in Irish and integrative reasons to select a *gaelscoil*. It should be noted, however, that over half (60.5%) the respondents who considered Irish-medium education relatively recently, did so because of the advantages to bilingualism. Although this reason can be regarded as instrumental in terms of academic achievement in languages for example, it may also be viewed as integrative. Almost all interview participants (95%) who were equally composed of respondents who had always considered a *gaelscoil* (52.5%) and of respondents who had only recently thought about it (47.5%) said

they would still send their child to an Irish-medium school if Irish was to become optional at secondary level. Although this question addresses a hypothetical situation in which the language status in education would be altered, participants expressed a strong integrative motive. Again, when questioned about their choice of a secondary school 57.3% of respondents said they would send their child to an Irish-medium secondary school as a natural continuation in their child's education (88%). By contrast, only 23% selected an English-medium secondary school either because of the non-availability of such school in their living area—as is the case for one school in particular—or because of the challenging aspect of secondary level education through the medium of Irish (either for children or parents). It should be noted that cross-tabulation indicated that two-thirds of the respondents who had selected an English-medium secondary school appeared to have chosen a *gaelscoil* mainly on educational grounds. However, it would be too simplistic to assume that parents who choose an English-medium secondary school for their child are the same as those who initially sent their child to a *gaelscoil* for instrumental reasons only. As Connor's (2002) study has shown, children seem to play an important role in decision-making when selecting a secondary school. The selection of a secondary school may not always reflect the nature of parental motivation. Similarly, children's attendance at an Irish-medium pre-school is not a good indicator of parents' motivation due to the non-availability of *naíonraí* in certain areas, or the fact that until recently pre-schools were fee-paying, or the non-suitability of the opening hours for working parents. The latter reason was already an issue in Hickey's (1997) study on Irish-medium pre-schools. Furthermore, it appears that *naíonra* attendance may be influenced to some degree by the enrolment criteria of some Irish-medium primary schools. As this study shows, *gaelscoileanna* that consider *naíonra* attendance as a criterion for enrolment appear to have a larger representation of respondents who said their child attended such pre-school. However, the most frequently stated reason for attending a *naíonra* was more about the opportunity children have to get familiar with the Irish language (70%) rather than securing a place in the *gaelscoil* (17%).

The results of this study confirm what previous research showed in terms of parents' high level of satisfaction with Irish-medium education (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979; Ó Donnagáin, 1995). While close to 90% thought there were advantages to Irish-medium education (ease of learning languages, enhancement of cognitive thinking, etc.), only 25.5% mentioned disadvantages to such an education which mainly referred to a perceived lower level of the English language. It should be noted, however, that when questioned about their own child, fewer respondents expressed concerns about the standard of English taught and acquired by their child. Respondents with a child in Senior Infant Class were for the most part (95%) confident in their child's education. Follow-up interviews with both parents and teachers further indicated that participants who expressed concerns about their child being educated through Irish were generally new to the concept, that is to say with no experience of

Irish-medium education, or participants who only chose a *gaelscoil* for educational reasons. Interviewed teachers described those concerns as a sort of initial nervousness which was temporary. As parents follow-up interviews proved, respondents who had expressed concerns in October 2009 when completing the questionnaire admitted to feeling more confident at the end of the school year. As for respondents with a child in Sixth Class, 81.6% disagreed that the teaching of English was neglected in the *gaelscoil*. Respondents who agreed (10.3%), on the other hand, expressed only minor concerns as most of them had decided to send their child to an Irish-medium secondary school.

Although it is assumed that parents who decide to send their child to an Irish-medium primary school understand what Irish-medium education entails, respondents were assessed on their understanding of immersion education. As pointed out in Chapter One, there is no guideline in the 1999 Primary School Curriculum for the Irish-medium education sector in terms of language policies (Mac Donnacha et al., 2005; Ó Laoire & Harris, 2006). Therefore, Irish-medium schools may choose from an array of practices. However, it seems that most schools outside the Gaeltacht introduce formal reading in Irish (Ní Bhaoill & Ó Duibhir, 2004). Out of eleven participating schools, only two introduce literacy in English before literacy in Irish. Early total immersion practised in the remaining nine schools nevertheless differs in duration from one school to the other (for two terms, three terms or close to four terms). Findings show that only a small majority of respondents (47.5%) showed their preference for early total immersion. By contrast, a substantial minority (37.9%) indicated that they would rather see English being introduced in the first term of Junior Infant Class as recommended by the Ministerial Circular 0044/2007<sup>289</sup>—which was later withdrawn in January 2010. It should be noted that cross-tabulations indicated a link between middle to high ability to speak Irish and preference for early total immersion. Once respondents from the two schools where the teaching of English reading is introduced before Irish reading were identified, there were still 23.3% ( $n=51$ ) of respondents who disagreed with the early total immersion practised in their respective schools regardless of their child's class level. Although this figure includes new parents with no experience of immersion education (35.3%) who may feel nervous about early total immersion, it is probable that the rest were not aware of the practice of their school since respondents did not show any signs of dissatisfaction with immersion education. Furthermore, the teachers interviewed indicated that parents appreciated the full meaning of immersion education in different ways. One teacher highlighted the need for the school to give more information about its language policies and practices on a continuous basis as parents tend to forget as their child progresses through primary school. One interview participant said she only realised what the immersion practice in her child's school was at the time when the Ministerial Circular 0044/2007 was enforced. The issue on parents' understanding of immersion

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289 See Chapter One, Section 1.5.3.

education and awareness of the various practices does not seem to have been addressed by previous studies. However, since 2010 it has become a crucial issue as each *gaelscoil* has to comply with parents' wishes if the latter require that the teaching of English be introduced from the outset. Ní Bhaoill and Ó Duibhir (2004) showed that most Irish-medium schools in Dublin introduce literacy first in Irish and that the wishes of parents have little influence on school reading policy. This may however change if parents start using their rights to request the early introduction of literacy in English. It must be noted that it does not require a majority.<sup>290</sup> Further research has shown similar results with the current study in the sense that parents (47%) are not always ready to have formal literacy introduced in Irish first (NCCA, 2007, p. 21). Follow-up interviews helped shed some light on the debate over early total immersion. Although results are limited in the sense that interview participants appear to be a self-selected group naturally in favour of early total immersion (80%) the qualitative data collected during the interviews gave more insight in parents' understanding of immersion education. While a majority supported the absence of English teaching for one or almost two years to compensate for the little use of Irish outside school and to avoid confusion between the two languages; a minority of participants (15%) were opposed to it as they believed their child could not learn how to function solely through the medium of Irish at an early age. Even though these participants value bilingualism they seem to be uncomfortable with what Heller (1995) refers to as symbolic domination when describing the immersion school system in the English-speaking province of Ontario, Canada.<sup>291</sup> Symbolic domination is the relation of power between two groups in which one group imposes its values (Myers-Scotton, 2006). Similar to French-medium schools in English-speaking parts of Canada, the main language ideology of Irish-medium schools emphasises monolingualism—in this case the imposition of Irish language values. This linguistic situation contrasts with the daily English monolingual practice of a large majority of Irish people. Whether participants were concerned about their child's level of English or could not understand how early total immersion in Irish could have a positive impact on a native English speaker it appears that their reasoning was influenced by the English hegemony discourse. When asked about societal bilingualism, a minority of participants were in favour of balanced bilingualism as they associated the English language with the language of commerce and the dominant language of globalisation, placing the Irish language at a disadvantage. Although most *gaelscoil* parents who participated in this study support societal bilingualism in Ireland, follow-up interviews indicated that English is still given more importance. According to Bourdieu's theory (1991, 1997), English is viewed as economic capital whereas Irish tends to be seen as only valuable on the cultural market, even in a hypothetical situation. This changed somewhat from 2007

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290 See Chapter One, Section 1.5.3.

291 See Chapter One, Section 1.2.



when Irish became an official working language in the European Union. Before addressing the issue of societal bilingualism in more detail, it is important to analyse the impact Irish-medium school attendance has on parents' attitudes to Irish as well as on their use of the language.

### 5.7.2 Home and social use of the Irish language

Although respondents are not all fluent Irish speakers, their competence in Irish is higher than average. While their ability to understand and speak Irish may be related to the interest they have in the Irish language, it appears that gaelscoil attendance also has a positive impact on parents. This is true in terms of attitudes to the Irish language as the gaelscoil experience was the most frequently stated reason for attitude change by respondents who reported a positive change in their attitudes to Irish from their school years to the time of the survey. Furthermore, 75.5% of respondents agreed that gaelscoil attendance opened their mind about the Irish language. It may be assumed that attitude change in this case operates by association between favourable attitudes and what is perceived as “good things” (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, p. 217) including the standard of education, children's happiness, etc.

Findings also tend to show that gaelscoil attendance has a positive impact on parents' level of Irish and use of Irish. The present cohort is equally represented in three groups ranging from low ability in Irish, middle ability Irish to high ability in Irish. Evidence from self-reports show that attending a gaelscoil had a positive influence on respondents' level of Irish between the time their first child started school and the time of the survey. Figures show that 38.3% ( $n=136$ ) reported an increase in their ability to understand and speak Irish, two-thirds of whom ( $n=90$ ) made significant progress moving up one ability group. It should be noted that close to a quarter of respondents ( $n=85$ ) were already fluent in Irish and therefore could not report any language enhancement. Although it is not clear whether respondents' level of Irish improved because of the language classes they attended to support their child or because of the daily contact with Irish through the school and homework, findings show that 55.1% ( $n=75$ ) of the respondents who reported a higher level of Irish after their child started attending a gaelscoil also said they had attended or were attending adult Irish classes. Those who did not attend adult Irish language classes either considered their level of Irish to be sufficient or did not have the time to do so.

In terms of Irish language use, there seems to be a direct link between Irish-medium school attendance and increased use of Irish at home. This correlation was first observed in Ó Riagáin and Ó Glasáin's study (1979) where over half of the participating families were found to use more Irish at home than before their child attended the gaelscoil. A direct comparison between Irish home use before and during gaelscoil attendance was not done in the current study but it should be noted that only 14% of respondents said they selected an Irish-medium school because Irish was spoken at home. This does not constitute evidence for little or no use of Irish at home among the remainder as some families (up to 50% of the sample population) may have introduced Irish in the home when their child

started attending an Irish-medium pre-school (Hickey, 1997, 1999). However, when considering earlier findings on scarce home use of Irish before gaelscoil attendance (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979) it is highly probable that the majority of respondents participating in this study did not use Irish at home either. The large percentage of respondents who said they used Irish at home now that their child attends a gaelscoil must be analysed with caution. First of all, these findings are based on respondents' self-reporting and therefore may be biased. Secondly, the 81.2% of respondents who claimed to use Irish at home include individuals who would use Irish differently in terms of frequency, contexts and interlocutors. For instance, only 8.5% of parents regularly use Irish at home between themselves. It appears that Irish at home is mostly used between parent and child unless parents have a very good level of Irish in which case they may communicate in Irish occasionally. Results also show that frequent use of Irish between parent and child coincides with greater use of Irish between siblings. The use of Irish is therefore very much centred on the child. The impact of Irish-medium school attendance on the use of Irish at home may be observed in the frequency with which Irish is used for school-related activities between parent and child, as opposed to other home life situations. Homework (81.1%) and discussing the school day (56%) involve the use of Irish on a regular basis. These figures contrast with the 41.4% of respondents who use Irish at mealtimes on a regular basis while around a third of respondents occasionally use Irish for other activities around the house. These results are somewhat better than those recorded during Hickey's (1997) study on pre-schools, which may suggest that parents increase their use of Irish as their child progresses through immersion education. However, according to the teachers interviewed, apart from the time dedicated to the homework when parents are somewhat reminded to use Irish with their child, the use of Irish between parents and child remains generally low unless parents are fluent in the language.

One of the hypotheses made before the fieldwork was conducted related to the difference in commitment to using Irish that may exist between parents of a senior infant pupil and parents of a sixth class pupil. Findings indicate that respondents who were in contact with the gaelscoil longest did not necessarily use more Irish with their child at home. Nor did they improve further their ability to speak Irish compared with parents of younger children who were new to the system. The majority of improvement in ability to speak Irish seems to happen in the early years of Irish-medium school attendance although it may also continue throughout the years. It was found that a total of 36% of respondents in the sixth class group ( $n=58$ ) reported an improvement in their ability to speak Irish since their child attended the gaelscoil; 65.5% of them ( $n=38$ ) thought they progressed between Senior Infant Class and Sixth Class. Despite over half the respondents with a child in Sixth Class reporting an increase in their commitment to using Irish over the years, parents of senior infants were found to use Irish more in both school-related and other home activities. Results also show that respondents with

an only child in Senior Infants reported more frequent use of Irish at home than respondents with both a child in Senior Infants and older children attending the gaelscoil. This is particularly noticeable for activities that do not involve homework. While special attention is generally paid by parents to the homework, it appears that parents of younger children who are new to the immersion system may be more conscious of the need to expose their children to Irish to get familiar with the language. It may be assumed that parents with older children who went through the system may not be concerned about their child's progress in school as their other children adapted to the Irish language without any difficulties. However, it should not be concluded that only parents of younger children use Irish as much as they can. Although the latter group seem to make a more conscious effort to use Irish at home, other factors that were not measured here may explain the difference in the results.

Although the amount of Irish used at home highly depends on parents' ability to converse in Irish, it was found that respondents were very supportive and praised their child whenever he/she spoke Irish (75%), regardless of their level of Irish. This contrasts with parental encouragement recorded in English-medium schools (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Harris et al., 2006) and reinforces the idea that Irish-medium school attendance further impacts on parents' positive attitudes to Irish. Parental encouragement also extends to their child's participation in Irish-medium recreational activities. The low rate (30%) of respondents who said their child engaged in such activities outside the school may be explained by the low availability of such activities in the Dublin Area. However, data collected during the follow-up interviews indicate that a great number of pupils participate in after-school activities organised by the gaelscoil. Furthermore, 80% of interview participants agreed that it was important for their child to participate in Irish-medium extra-curricular activities. According to these parents, playing through Irish gives another dimension to the language—as something more than a school language—and provides a natural environment for socialising through Irish. There are however disadvantages however to these activities organised on the school grounds as they are not always catering for younger pupils and rely on the instructor's level of Irish. As a consequence, not all the activities are delivered through the medium of Irish. The use of passive activities through the medium of Irish (51-63%) at home such as telling stories or watching the Irish language television channel, TG4, appears to be an important complement to the lack of interaction through Irish during after school activities for some children.

It is assumed that the lack of recreational activities outside school compels families to use school facilities and therefore restricts the use of Irish to the school environment. This situation was found to affect children in their attitude to the Irish language. Although the data come from interview participants' views on their child's attitude to Irish, results suggest that children who are exposed to Irish outside the school environment tend to value Irish as a living language. This appears to be

obvious among senior infant pupils. By contrast, children who are not exposed to the Irish language outside school are likely to associate Irish with the school language. While a majority of interview participants seemed to supplement the school teaching by explaining to their child the role the Irish language has in modern society, the teachers interviewed did not think parents encouraged the use of and exposure to the Irish language outside the school gate. When questioned about their future use of Irish when their child goes to secondary school, interview participants expressed aspirations to speak more Irish. However, their wish to use more Irish seemed to rely either on the improvement of their ability in communicating in Irish through the passage of time or on other children attending the *gaelscoil* who would stimulate the use of Irish at home. Participants whose child was registered in an Irish-medium secondary school for the following school year tended to show stronger positive attitudes and commitment to Irish. But despite both positive attitudes and intentions, it remains difficult to predict their behaviour, especially in a context where the formulation of their intention is not close to the time of behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). However, it is highly probable that they will make more use of Irish in the future than any other parents because language attitudes are likely to predict broad behavioural patterns of sociolinguistic behaviour (Ladegaard, 2000, p. 232).

The complex relationship between intentions and behaviour is also visible in the verbal exchange parents have with school staff (principal, teachers, other) and with their peers at the school gate. Although two-thirds of respondents said they used some form of bilingualism when speaking to school staff, the teachers interviewed reported low usage of Irish between parents and teachers. Follow-up interviews with questionnaire respondents indicated that parents' use of Irish with teachers would usually be limited to a few words or sentences unless the interview participants were fluent Irish speakers. Both parties explained that the low usage of Irish was due to poor competence in the language or a lack of confidence in speaking it. This general pattern tends to change when parents are around children as interview participants claimed they were making more effort to use Irish when participating in a school outing or helping in the classroom. When in the presence of other parents, Irish appears to be even less used as 56.3% of respondents said they exclusively used English. Despite respondents' wish to be able to use Irish more (80%) and their agreeing with the statement that it is better to speak Irish badly rather than not at all (83.5%), their use of the language remains low. This discrepancy is due to personal and situational factors (Edwards, 1994) which mainly include the desire to avoid embarrassment for those with lower ability or those who perceive their level of Irish as insufficient and the desire to avoid communication barriers or avoid being impolite, from the point of view of fluent Irish speakers.

Due to the prevalence of the Irish language policy in Irish-medium schools, both interviewed teachers and participants were questioned about Irish being a deterrent to parental involvement in

the school. The results show that gaelscoil parents are very involved with their child's education and are generally involved in school life. However, as observed in Murphy's (2002) study in an Irish-medium primary school, parental involvement in school events, outings, fundraising etc., is usually specific to a core group as well as to newer parents. On a personal level, the majority of teachers interviewed (71.4%) did not think that Irish was a deterrent to parental involvement mainly because there is no requirement for parents to speak Irish on the school premises—even though it is highly encouraged. Nor are parents excluded if they do not speak the language. Interview teachers and participants stated that the main barrier to parental involvement was related to parents' lack of confidence in speaking Irish and was not necessarily the result of poor competence in Irish since parents with low ability still participated in school life.

The social use of Irish outside both the school and the family home environments was also investigated. Because of the complexity of this research area in terms of the nature of Irish-medium activities/events or the relationships with other people able and willing to speak Irish, this study only presents some elements on social networking through Irish. Since Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin's (1979) study showed that Irish-medium schools generated Irish-medium networks, the present study concentrates on the particular relationship between gaelscoil families. Close to half of the respondents reported using some Irish with other gaelscoil families. The frequency with which Irish is used depends on the respondents' ability to speak Irish. So does the amount of Irish spoken. The higher the ability, the more frequent and the larger amount of Irish used. It appears that over a quarter of respondents who became friends with other families and use the Irish language when meeting each other use more Irish than English. It should be noted, however, that they represent only a minority of the total sample population (11.9%). The data from the follow-up interviews gave more details on the nature of these networks. Unlike Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin's (1979) research, this study only examines relationships generated by the school. It did not enquire about Irish-speaking friends outside the school environment. It was found that two distinct groups existed. The first group would meet specifically to converse in Irish in a pub or at home while the second group would speak Irish because of the event or the location they would find themselves in. The nature of the encounter for the latter group would usually involve children (e.g. sports, playdate, Mass, etc.). While the first group is likely to develop a strong friendship, the relationships of the second group may only exist while their child attends the gaelscoil. While it is encouraging in terms of Irish use outside institutions it is also very fragile and may only be temporary.

### 5. 7.3 Societal bilingualism and Irish identity

CILAR found in the first sociological national attitudinal survey (1975, p. 83) that very positive attitudes to the Irish language were generally expressed by individuals from an upward mobile social class with a high level of education and competence in Irish. The relationship between positive attitudes to Irish and the social class, education and ability to speak Irish variables was also advanced in a more recent national survey (Ó Riagáin, 2007). It is therefore not surprising to find that respondents who participated in this study and who clearly indicated positive attitudes to Irish scored higher than average on all three variables. It is also worth noticing that the present sample population seems to coincide with the subgroup that was found to be the most supportive of Irish revival in Mac Gréil and Rhatigan's (2009) attitude survey. Their results show that the younger groups (18 to 25 year old and 26 to 40 year old) living in urban areas—Dublin city and county Dublin being the strongest—who had a third-level education and higher occupational status supported the revival of the Irish language (pp. 9-22). Gaelscoil respondents expressed their confidence in the revival of Irish (83.7%) while just over half also believed that Irish could survive without the Gaeltacht. This contrasts with the general pessimism observed in the 1993 national attitude survey (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994). When looking at respondents' attitudes to societal bilingualism it is evident that despite reflecting the national preference in terms of equal use of both languages a larger percentage (49.2%) indicated they were in favour of using at least more Irish than English. This finding therefore supports the argument that belief in the bilingual future of the Republic of Ireland is also associated with social class, education and ability to speak Irish (Ó Riagáin, 2007). It should be noted, however, that the gaelscoil parent cohort is not exclusively middle class. O' Connor (2002, p.48) found for example, that his parent cohort from a gaelscoil in County Kerry had mixed social backgrounds. Nor is it a homogenous educated elite as two of the participating schools in the current study were located in disadvantaged areas. Furthermore, a low response rate was recorded in these schools, which resulted in an under-representation of parents with lower educational qualifications and from a lower social class than the majority of the sample population.

While respondents' aspirations to national bilingualism (80%) coincides with their personal wish to use the Irish language more (80%), a significant percentage (39%) perceived Irish to be a difficult language to learn. Results showed that a majority of these respondents (61.2%,  $n=85$ ) never attended adult Irish language classes. This negative view is of concern, especially among respondents with low ability in Irish (52.9%,  $n=45$ ) who as a result are unlikely to try to learn more Irish and use it. It should also be noted that this attitude may threaten the viability of the language as fewer people may be inclined to learn what is perceived as a "difficult" language as an additional language. Furthermore,

another problem seems to be a challenge to respondents' intentions to use the Irish language more. It concerns their personal fear of using the Irish language with fluent speakers. This issue of lack of confidence was recorded in various attitude measurements in both the questionnaire and follow-up interviews and concerns over 40% of respondents. This is not negligible, especially when this feeling appears to affect parents regardless of their level of Irish. Although 83.5% of respondents agreed that people should speak Irish badly than not at all, it seems that they are not ready to act according to their convictions.

Bilingualism is highly valued among gaelscoil parents as both Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin's (1979) research and this study show. It is considered a very important deciding factor. In fact, it is the top reason why respondents selected an Irish-medium school for their child. While it is not clear whether the idea of their child becoming bilingual in both English and Irish is important to them, it would be interesting to know if they would still select an Irish-medium school if they had the choice of other non-fee paying immersion programmes delivered in other European languages, for instance. There are nonetheless reasons to believe that parental motivations are integrative towards Irish as both questionnaire and follow-up interview data indicate. As a matter of fact, the second most frequently stated reason to select an Irish-medium education is based on the importance for their child to be aware of Irish identity and cultural heritage. For about two-thirds of interview participants, there is an identity value attached to Irish. However, as Omoniyi (2006) observed, the concept of identity includes a cluster of co-present identities with varying degrees of salience. The latter depends on the most preferred presentation of self in a given moment (*ibid.*, p. 20). Although respondents and interview participants alike may have emphasised the identity value of the Irish language because they may have been conscious they were giving a presentation of themselves to a non-Irish researcher, results show that participants were divided over the definition of Irish identity. While no participant claimed that only speakers of the Irish language were true Irish people—as it has been found among native and fluent speakers of Scottish Gaelic (Dorian, 1998) and Welsh (Bowie, 1993; Parsons, 1998; Robert, 2009)—half of the interviewed cohort seemed to attribute to the Irish language an important role as a marker of Irish identity. Because they felt Irish was not taught efficiently in English-medium schools—because they thought Irish was taught with a negative attitude—that their children could only get a real sense of their identity by attending an Irish-medium primary school. The other half felt this sense of identity was more emphasised in Irish-medium schools and that the ethos of such schools naturally conveyed positive attitudes towards the language and Irish culture, which was not always perceived to be the case in English-medium schools. Finally around 10% did not think that Irish identity was solely defined in terms of the Irish language. This position looks at other attributes that shape Irish identity without rejecting Irish as an identity marker; unlike other views on Irish identity described in Chapter



Two. A similar argument was made when interview participants were asked which language they would prefer to speak if all Irish people were fully bilingual. Supporters of a fully bilingual Ireland associated an economic advantage to the English language while others emphasised the importance of English as part of Irish identity, along with the Irish language. By contrast, supporters of a larger usage of Irish in both society and the home appeared to recognise Irish as the only ethnic identity marker. In other words, while some interview participants regard Irish identity as other-ascribed, others see Irish English as the best way to express a post-nationalist Irish identity (Arrowsmith, 2004), taking advantage of the English language as economic capital.

Whether Irish is a strong identity marker or not, it seems that by sending their child to an Irish-medium school a large number of participants materialise their support for the revival of the Irish language. As McCabe (1978) noted the selection of an Irish-medium education is easier for parents as a way to support the revival than to learn and use the Irish language themselves. Despite over 40% of respondents attending adult Irish classes, very few are likely to have the intention of becoming fluent. Being fluent in Irish seems to be an aspiration that parents are living through their child. Even though *gaelscoil* parents may be seen as a distinct group who express very positive attitudes to the language and are very supportive of its promotion, the Irish language does not define them as a group. Although the language appears to have indirectly brought them together—through the schooling of their children—it is not an attribute that would define their group identity since Irish is not a language that parents would commonly use between themselves. What seems to define this group is a common interest in and a sentimental value towards the cultural dimension of Irish identity as opposed to a more political and nationalist aspect commonly found in Northern Ireland (Maguire, 1991; O’ Reilly, 1999). O’ Reilly’s definition of cultural discourse applies to *gaelscoil* parents in so far as Irish is viewed as a unique language and as an integral part of the Irish heritage to the point of having their children educated through Irish and of attending adult language classes. However, contrary to this discourse *gaelscoil* parents generally use Irish in their daily lives. Respondents showed they were willing to include Irish in their family life although in most cases its use is limited to school related activities and contexts.

It can therefore be assumed that what identifies *gaelscoil* parents as a group is their common interest in the Irish language as a cultural identity marker—which for some is also viewed as a strong ethnic identity marker—as well as their interest in education. While the last argument was stated by a few interview participants and teachers it is also evident from the data collected. As mentioned earlier, findings highlight the complexity of the reasons involved in the selection of a *gaelscoil*. They combine an interest in the Irish language and Irish culture with an interest in bilingualism and education. The importance of educational reasons, especially in terms of school educational records was very

apparent in the collected data and is in line with other studies on immersion education such as in Wales (Baker, 1988; Packer & Campbell, 1997). But while respondents are very supportive of Irish they do not want to impose this education system on other parents. A minority of interview participants (42.5%) thought that the introduction of full or partial immersion education in all schools would be beneficial in terms of positive attitudes towards and fluency in the Irish language. Others were divided over the practicality of such a reform and the rights for parents to select the education of their choice for their child. The availability of more *gaelscoileanna* was seen as an alternative way to support the Irish language in education without imposing it on mainstream schools.<sup>292</sup> Overall, interview participants expressed the wish to see more Irish used in school but were aware this may not be the choice of the majority of parents.

The notion of choice is really important here as Irish-medium schools are state non-fee paying schools which accept any children as long as parents show some interest in the Irish language. As indicated in the questionnaire and further confirmed during the interviews, *gaelscoil* parents do not think that Irish-medium education is for the social elite (86.8%). Interview participants were aware that this perception existed but they refuted it mostly by pinpointing the social mix there is in their own school as well as the presence of *gaelscoileanna* in all sorts of areas including middle class and working class areas. As Packer and Campbell's study (1997) in Wales shows, the elitist—sometimes referred to as snobbish—element of immersion schools is usually perceived by people who do not participate in such education. A minority of interview participants (12.5%,  $n=5$ ) nonetheless agreed there was a certain elitist aspect to such an education although the latter was not based on social grounds. They referred to it as positive elitism because it involves a group of parents with a real interest in the Irish language as well as a real interest in education. Therefore, it appears that the *gaelscoil* parent cohort may be defined as a self-selected group with a special interest in Irish as a cultural asset but also as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Since very few *gaelscoil* parents communicate in Irish among themselves, their collective identity cannot be defined in linguistic terms. Rather, this sense of group belonging resides in their sharing similar forms of cultural capital, which in this case relates to the Irish language. It must be noted that a majority of parents participating in the study were from a middle-class background. According to Bourdieu's theory, showing an interest in education and cultural capital implies an interest in social reproduction, whether *gaelscoil* parents did it consciously or subconsciously. Participating parents may have precluded the concept of social elitism in the *gaelscoil* context due to the fact that their involvement was based on personal choice rather

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292 Mainstream schools refer here to English-medium schools that are dominant in terms of their number and therefore more commonly found. It must be noted that *gaelscoileanna* are recognised by the Department of Education and deliver the same curriculum as English-medium schools. They are therefore also part of mainstream education in Ireland.

than resulting from social prerogatives or matching certain socioeconomic criteria. Yet, their aspiration for the success of their children's education and, by extension, their children's career, is closely related to the issue of social class and, for those coming from a working class milieu, social mobility. Although the Irish language does not have an extensive value as economic capital, its institutionalised form as cultural capital (i.e. the recognised linguistic skills of students who complete the Leaving Certificate in Irish) symbolises cultural competence and authority.

As this research study has shown, parental motivation is not solely based on instrumental reasons such as the benefit of bilingualism for academic achievement but they also consider integrative reasons. While Irish-medium education is sought for its emphasis on Irish culture and heritage it is also valued for its association with a strong Irish identity marker. Finally, it may be added that through this search for cultural capital parents give their children the opportunity to live a bilingual life and to participate in societal bilingualism.

## CONCLUSION

The aims of this concluding section are threefold. Firstly to highlight the key findings in relation to the research questions and to previous research in the field. Secondly to address the limitations of the study. Finally, to highlight implications for policy and practice as well as to make recommendations for further research.

The question of attitudes towards the Irish language was tackled in different ways throughout this study. Participants' general attitudes towards Irish were explored and compared with available data from various national surveys (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984, 1994; Mac Gréil, 1996; Ó Riagáin, 2007; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009). This process helped situate the focus-group within the context of the general population. The results confirmed the hypothesis that gaelscoil parents have a very positive attitude towards the Irish language. Further analysis of language attitudes concentrated on participants' attitude towards both Irish and Irish-medium education as part of their daily lives. This included the motivations of parents for selecting an Irish-medium school, attitudes to immersion education and language use both at home and outside the home environment.

Earlier research on post-1970 Irish-medium schools—that is to say schools that were established in response to parents' demand—indicated that families involved in such schools had different but specific motives for enrolling their child/children, such as language reasons exclusively, non-language reasons exclusively or mixed reasons (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979). By contrast, the present study highlights the complexity of the factors that come into play when selecting an Irish-medium school or gaelscoil. It seems that all parents participating in the study showed an interest in both the Irish language and education. In the most recent general attitude surveys (Ó Riagáin, 2007; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009), participants regarded the Irish language as a strong marker of cultural identity. Interestingly, a significant number also considered Irish to be a strong marker of ethnic identity. This contrasts with the belief among the general public in the year 2000 that Irish as a symbol of ethnicity was weakening (Ó Riagáin, 2007). Although the importance of education-related factors such as the schools' educational record and the school's reputation may be interpreted as instrumental in selecting an Irish-medium school, it emerged that the resulting bilingualism was viewed as a valuable aspect of Irish immersion education. When considering parental support for societal bilingualism, parental encouragement of the use of Irish in recreational activities, and parental efforts to use Irish at home, one can conclude that parents show strong integrative orientation towards Irish when choosing an Irish-medium education for their child.

The popularity of *gaelscoileanna* has been associated (most commonly in popular journalism) with a form of elitism and the current study indicates that *gaelscoil* parents are interested in culture and education, elements which in Bourdieu's view (1991) define Irish as cultural capital and which is closely related to social class. Despite the link being made between class, education and level of Irish (Ó Riagáin, 2007), Irish has little value on the economic market, unlike Welsh in Wales. In Ireland, employment requiring the use of Irish is restricted to teaching, translation, some civil service positions and the voluntary Irish language sector. Bilingualism, on the other hand, is valued on the economic market and is perceived by parents to enhance career opportunities and social mobility. The Irish language is also appreciated for reasons of identity. As seen in the current study, participants seem to view Irish identity as mostly constructed around the Irish language and traditional Irish heritage/culture. It should be noted that this identification is also shared by the general public in the national language attitude surveys over four decades (CILAR, 1975; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984, 1994; Mac Gréil, 1996; Ó Riagáin, 2007; Mac Gréil & Rhatigan, 2009) although there may be a difference of ordering in the hierarchy of identities. As seen in Chapter One, identification involves foregrounding a preferred identity at a given moment from an array of identities (Omoniyi, 2006). Therefore the importance given to Irish as a symbol of ethnic identity is greater for *gaelscoil* families as they are exposed to Irish and are likely to use the language on a daily basis. Since most respondents are not fluent Irish speakers themselves the school environment appears to strengthen this identity. Waldron (2004) suggests that the recent ideological shift in the curriculum embracing cultural pluralism could engender a change in identity that may not be favourable to the Irish language. However, there is some evidence that this may not have been the case for members of the current focus-group. The *gaelscoil* cohort interviewed showed their commitment to the language and to immersion education by indicating they would support this type of education even in the event of a change being made to the status of the language in the educational sphere. In other words, if Irish were to become optional at secondary level, as was proposed by the Fine Gael government while in opposition in 2010, those interviewed indicated that they would still select an Irish-medium education for their child. It should be noted that this support may indeed be vital for the sustainability of Irish-medium education, as Ó Riagáin (2007) indicated that support for bilingual education is in decline. However, support for Irish-medium education remains unchanged, with a higher percentage of the population showing an interest in it than the percentage of those who are actually involved in it, that is to say with children attending an Irish-medium school. Finally the percentage of the population who are undecided is about equal to the number of people who are showing an interest in such an education system. It may therefore be possible to increase the number of *gaelscoil* participants by promoting Irish-medium education. As research indicates, participants are generally satisfied with immersion education

although further analysis has revealed that parents' understanding of immersion education and consequently parental attitudes to immersion education are dependent on their exposure to and experience of immersion education. As suggested below, there is a need for more information on bilingualism and immersion education in order to further promote Irish-medium education.

As this study shows, participating parents with neutral or positive attitudes towards Irish experienced a further positive change in attitude as a result of the *gaelscoil* experience. Furthermore, this experience was very often accompanied by the use of the Irish language in the home. This finding is therefore consistent with earlier studies which showed that the Irish-medium education experience impacts on families' lives and linguistic patterns (Ó Riagáin & Ó Glasáin, 1979; Hickey, 1997). There is no evidence that parents with a young child use more or less Irish than parents with older children. However, results in this particular study suggest that participants whose first child is attending Senior Infants Class tend to make a conscious effort to use the Irish language, especially for non-school activities, in comparison with participants who have older children attending the school. Despite the fact that most families who took part in the study reported—to varying degrees—that Irish was used at home on a regular basis between parent and child, it is very difficult to assess the quantity, frequency and quality of these exchanges as the data rely on self-reporting. In the context of language maintenance, the support of the educational system is necessary but not sufficient. There must be at least ideological and institutional support from the community (Spolsky, 1999, p.186), if not support from the families involved in immersion education.

Although a significant number of participants mentioned their lack of confidence as a deterrent to speaking Irish, it may not be such an obstacle in the confines of the home when addressing their child. However, parents' ability to speak Irish remains problematic for some. The cornerstone of Fishman's Reversing Language Shift (RLS) theory (1991) is the family and community link, in particular intergenerational transmission. But as pointed out by Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer “the paradox is that the vernacular lives in spontaneity and intimacy, but reversing language shift requires planning. How can you plan intimacy and spontaneity?” (1998, p. 97). Families willing to interact through the medium of Irish with their children do not have much support in the community as there does not seem to be many family activities through Irish available on a regular basis or such activities are very limited. The only link is the school while English prevails outside of school hours. However, a minority of participants managed to a certain extent to achieve this intimacy and spontaneity through the medium of Irish by socialising with other parents from the school. Although the creation of Irish-medium social networks—which Ó Riagáin and Ó Glasáin observed in their 1976 research study (1979) among *gaelscoil* families—did not expand together with the number of *gaelscoileanna* around the

country, it can be assumed that the gaelscoil still generates social networks thanks to the positive initiative of a few individuals.

The main findings that are highlighted in the current study include an important contribution to the field of language attitudes in the Irish-medium school context as research on parental attitudes has been scarce (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979; Ó Donnagáin, 1995; Hickey, 1997) or very limited (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Harris et al., 2006). However, the conclusions reported in this study should be considered in light of the following limitations:

- geographic restrictions.
- sample size
- participants' social class
- reliability of self-reporting

The participating schools are all located in county Dublin, which is an urban area. Therefore, the generalisation of certain results to the whole country might be restrictive. The Dublin area has the largest concentration of Irish-medium schools, giving parents the opportunity to choose such a school over other types of schools. In the rest of the country, however, gaelscoileanna are not always available. Secondly, the generalisation of the present findings is also limited in terms of the number of participants who volunteered to take part in the study. About a third of the targeted sample population returned the completed questionnaire to their school. Because of the voluntary nature of the study, it could be argued that more time could have been spent meeting with the teachers, explaining to them the aims and objectives of the study and encouraging them to remind parents to return the questionnaires. As a consequence, the deadline to return the questionnaire could have been extended and a follow-up letter could have been sent to parents reminding those who had not returned the questionnaires that there was still time to do so. It should be noted, however, that most teachers played an important role in the distribution and collection of the questionnaire and their help was highly valuable. As has been discussed, some schools had an extremely low response rate, which made the comparison between groups of schools according to the date of their foundation irrelevant. Furthermore, schools located in disadvantaged areas and working class areas tended to have had lower response rates. It is therefore difficult to interpret the results in terms of social class as the lower classes may have been underrepresented. O'Connor's study (2002), for instance, involved gaelscoil parents from mixed social backgrounds. Although participants from the current study were predominantly from a middle class milieu, this may have been the result of the voluntary nature of the study which appealed to a self-selecting group of parents. The idea of a self-selecting group is more apparent among interview participants as they scored higher than the sample population in terms of

educational qualifications, social class and ability to speak Irish. Finally, as seen in the research methodology in Chapter Three, both questionnaire and follow-up interviews relied heavily on respondents'/interview participants' self-reporting. But once this limitation is acknowledged, it should be noted that this is an efficient way of assessing language attitudes rapidly and systematically, and getting an insight into participants' general view of the language, personal attitude to it and personal commitment to using it (Baker, 1992; Codó, 2007).

While this research study answers questions it also raises new ones. The question of identity is central here as it was not thoroughly addressed in previous research in the Republic of Ireland (see Maguire, 1991 for Northern Ireland). It would appear that no strong correlation between the Irish language, the choice of Irish-medium education and identity was ever reported. By contrast, a significant number of participants emphasised the importance of Irish as an identity marker. Although follow-up interviews included questions on the Irish language and ethnic identity the views of gaelscoil parents need to be investigated further so as to understand why a group of individuals who do not speak Irish fluently in their daily lives believe that the language is nonetheless a strong marker of Irish identity. While a majority of participants associated Irish with cultural identity, which O' Reilly (1999) refers to as cultural discourse, others seem to have adopted a more nationalistic approach although it is very different from the nationalistic discourse found in Northern Ireland. O' Reilly (1999, p. 174) refers to the language as a lost heritage that is being reclaimed to reaffirm their identity. However, a difference exists between parents whose choice of an Irish-medium school may be a way to exemplify their aspiration to revive Irish and parents who are committed to using Irish and raising their children bilingually.

A second question worth investigating would relate to the broader context of language maintenance by focusing on parents who are themselves past pupils of a gaelscoil and comparing their use of Irish at home and in social contexts with other parents'. Research has shown that immersion education produces competent bilinguals (Williams, 1999; Harris, et al., 2006). However, it is not clear how confident former pupils are in using the minority language or even how committed they are to speaking it once they leave school.

Findings in this study sometimes highlighted implications for school practice and educational policies. The following remarks address the issues of bilingualism and immersion education, the provision of adult Irish language classes, the provision of extra-curricular activities through the medium of Irish and finally the creation of social networks.



Results show that the advantage of being bilingual was the most common reason for selecting a gaelscoil (84.8%). Bilingualism was also the most common deciding factor for respondents who had considered an Irish-medium education for their child only relatively recently (60.5%). Although this reason was already the most commonly stated one in Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin's (1979) early study of Irish-medium schools in the Dublin area, it seems to be given even more consideration now. Despite positive attitudes towards immersion education, around a quarter of respondents believed there were disadvantages to such education mostly in relation to the command of the English language in terms of writing and reading and to the acquisition of specific terminology. Similar concerns were raised by gaelscoil parents who participated in Ó Donnagáin's study in 1995. However, findings show that respondents who have some experience with Irish-medium education or other sorts of bilingual situations are less likely to be concerned about their child's level of English. Inexperienced parents therefore need reassurance. Although Irish-medium schools usually organise a meeting at the beginning of the school year to inform new parents, it appears that parents would benefit from extra meetings and information resources for a couple of years as a reminder of how literacy is introduced and how it manifests itself in the child's school progress compared with children attending an English-medium school.

More research should also be undertaken in the field of Irish-medium education for children diagnosed with dyslexia or other learning difficulties as it was considered by respondents to be the third most important issue in terms of disadvantages of immersion education. Similarly, this issue is usually raised when parents select a secondary school, according to a few teachers interviewed. As Caroline Nolan, researcher for POBAL, the umbrella organisation for the Irish language community in Northern Ireland, pointed out at a seminar organised by the North-South Standing Committee on Irish-Medium Education (17 January 2011), there is an urgent need for both Departments of Education North and South to give teachers guidelines in relation to pupils with learning difficulties; whether they should continue their education through Irish or transfer to an English-medium secondary school. It seems that at present, teachers do not get any support in this area. They usually advise parents to revert to English-medium education although there is no evidence showing any advantage in moving a child from a gaelscoil to an English-medium school because of learning difficulties (POBAL, 2010).

The current study indicates that more information on bilingualism and immersion education and its accessibility should be made more widely available to the general public on the one hand and also specifically to parents who are considering an Irish-medium education for their child on the other hand. This emerged after respondents indicated that their child did not go to an Irish-medium pre-school and/or would not attend an Irish-medium secondary school because none was available in their area. After verification, it appears that respondents were misinformed in most cases. As mentioned in

the previous chapter, respondents from one particular school seemed to have thought that their local Irish-medium secondary school was too far away to be considered part of their living area as number of English-medium secondary schools were located closer to home. Information on the location of naíonraí especially and Irish-medium secondary schools to a certain extent should be made available in a single document/webpage for parents before they send their child to the gaelscoil. In the interest of promoting the Irish language and bilingualism, parents should be informed about the different options available to them in terms of education, whether it concerns the medium of education or the patronage and ethos of local schools (Catholic, Educate Together, An Foras Pátrúnachta, etc.). This could be included in a maternity pack, for instance. Leaflets and guides on why and how to raise one's child bilingually are already available through Comhluadar—an organisation which guides and supports parents who are raising their child/children with Irish in the home—and could benefit from wider dissemination to reach as many parents as possible.

Irish-medium pre-schools have nonetheless become more popular in recent years (Ó Riagáin & Ó Glasáin, 1979; Hickey, 1997). As this study shows, participating parents valued pre-schooling through Irish as it prepares their child for immersion education. Attendance at a naíonra is also acknowledged in the enrolment criteria of certain schools, which may therefore be an incentive for parents to send their child to an Irish-medium pre-school. The popularity of such pre-schools is likely to increase as since January 2010 children aged 3 years and over are entitled to one free year of pre-school attendance. It should be noted that even though the cost of pre-schooling was rarely mentioned (3.8%,  $n=3$ ), it should no longer be an issue on that account. The difficulty encountered by a few respondents getting a place in a naíonra (9%)—due to high demand—may as a result become more acute if the demand for free pre-schooling increases at a faster rate than the opening of new naíonraí.<sup>293</sup>

In relation to immersion education, parents should also be given more information once they have decided to send their child to a gaelscoil. As findings show, parents do not all have the same understanding of the concept of immersion education and in some cases they appear to be unsure about the practice in their school. While parents with low to middle ability in Irish and with no or little experience of Irish-medium education need to be aware of how literacy is introduced and how a day in the gaelscoil is structured, parents of older children need to be reminded of the school's language policies and practices. This is all the more important now that parents have a right to request the introduction of literacy in English if they wish—which goes against the early total immersion practice

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293 Information obtained in a personal correspondence via email with a representative of Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta (July 2011).

of most Irish-medium schools. As this study shows, new parents with no experience of immersion education are more likely to be concerned about their child's education, especially with their child's level of English literacy. Although in most cases parents' concerns are temporary and dissipate before the end of Senior Infants Class, they may request a change and interfere with early total immersion practice before their concerns disappear. It is therefore important to educate parents more about the procedure of early total immersion and the different stages that children go through compared with a monolingual education, as parents usually compare their child's progress to that of children attending an English-medium school. Although Irish-medium schools have information meetings for new parents and even though teachers are available to answer parents' questions, parents could still benefit from extra informative documents or exchanges. This could be done at various stages when parents complete the enrolment application form, when children start school and again on a regular basis as the child progresses through primary education. Finally, information should be shared between newer parents and experienced parents to respond to concerns by the former who might feel uncomfortable talking to teachers, for instance. This could take the form of a parent mentoring relationship in which experienced parents could volunteer and give support and general guidance to other parents in need.

Because of the nature of Irish-medium education which involves the use of a minority language as the main language of instruction, parents need extra support to assist their child in their education. Adult Irish language classes are one example of support that is usually available to parents. A large number of respondents (45.3%) attended adult Irish language classes at some stage during their child's primary schooling. It appears that more respondents would have been interested in attending these classes had they had the time to do so. Although it is unlikely that parents attend Irish language classes to become fluent in Irish themselves and raise their child bilingually at home, nevertheless it shows how committed they are to their child's education. These classes should nonetheless encourage parents to include Irish in the family's daily routine by offering advice, taking the form of a forum where parents would ask questions and exchange personal experience and by organising role play to make parents participate in the class rather than adopt a passive role. The promotion and use of parental guides such as the phrasebook and CD *BunGhaeilge do Thuismitheoirí agus Feighlithe Leanaí* (basic Irish for parents and child minders) that was updated recently, should be made available to parents to improve the use of Irish at home. Furthermore, efforts should concentrate on newer parents as they seem to attend classes more and make rapid progress in terms of ability to speak Irish, while support should be given to experienced parents in the form of regular conversation groups—as opposed to language classes—and meetings where parents could exchange experiences and discuss problems encountered.

In terms of opportunities to use the Irish language outside school hours, this current study shows that participation in Irish-medium extra-curricular activities is high. However, most of the time it is restricted to the school environment as very few recreational activities are available through the medium of Irish outside the school. This limits the use of Irish to school and limits the variety of activities offered through Irish to children. Irish-medium television programmes are available for children but they only encourage a passive use of Irish. More efforts should concentrate on developing youth clubs and supporting parents to organise play dates, especially for younger children who sometimes cannot participate in any activities organised by the gaelscoil due to their age. Exposure to Irish outside the school environment, according to the present data, appears to be essential for younger children to regarding Irish as a living language. This is also an important way of supporting the school in its task of producing fluent speakers since Irish is rarely spoken in the home as a strong language. As Nettle and Romaine pointed out (2000, p.187):

*It is difficult to maintain the proficiency achieved by the pupils in Irish-medium schools in an urban environment without adequate community support for the language, and there is a need to create a more supportive social environment for Irish outside school.*

It would also be important to analyse the implications of immersion education in terms of instrumental and integrative motivation for teenagers and young adults to use Irish after school (see Robert, 2009). Further research could examine whether or not Irish use after school is linked to parents' attitudes towards Irish and their motivation for selecting an Irish-medium education as well as to opportunities to use Irish in the home.

Although this study confirmed some of the early findings that the gaelscoil generates adult Irish-speaking networks it is still limited to a minority. As in the case of extra-curricular activities for children, there is a lack of infrastructure to support such networks for adults. At the moment they exist because of the strong will of a few parents who have decided to socialise through Irish. However, it is uncertain whether or not they will continue to exist once their child moves on to secondary school. Furthermore, because these meetings are spontaneously organised in private spheres or in English-speaking public spaces it makes it difficult to expand these Irish-speaking circles to other Irish speakers.

To conclude, it should be highlighted that parents' attitudes towards Irish and Irish-medium education are overall very positive. Although these positive attitudes do not always translate into more use of the language, there is evidence that parents are committed to trying to interact through Irish with their children and to encouraging them to speak Irish. Although this is not sufficient in terms

of language maintenance, the transmission of positive attitudes to children together with their exposure to Irish-medium education and social activities—a positive linguistic environment that some participants admitted to having been deprived of themselves when younger—may be a step forward towards a functional bilingual Ireland. Although Williams (1999) speaks of survival of the language rather than revival since the educational system does not produce large numbers of competent bilinguals who wish to use Irish in the economy, the Irish-medium sector should be considered apart. This particular educational system appears to be a strategic focal point in the maintenance of the Irish language. When considering the government's twenty-year strategic plan (Government of Ireland, 2010) the gaelscoil milieu has a promising part to play provided that the governmental plan goes ahead and emphasises the Irish-medium education sector, gives support to families willing to function bilingually and continues the work started with the Official Languages Act (2003) by targeting the private sector and making Irish an official language for business services.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Irish speakers, 1851-2006

**Table A1.1: Percentage of Irish Speakers in Each Province, 1851-2006 (Census data)**

Year	State	Leinster	Munster	Connacht	Ulster (part of)
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### All ages

1851	29.1	3.5	43.9	50.8	17
1861	24.5	2.4	36	44.8	16.7
1871	19.8	1.2	27.7	39	15.1
1881	23.9	2.1	33.5	44.6	19.5
1891	19.2	1.2	26.2	37.9	17.8
1901	19.2	2.3	25.7	38	20.7
1911	17.6	3.5	22.1	35.5	20.4
1926	18.3	8.8	20.4	31.7	22.9

### 3 years and over

1926	19.3	9.4	21.6	33.3	23.9
1936	23.7	15.9	25.2	36.7	28.3
1946	22.1	15.1	22	33.2	26
1961	27.2	22.2	28.7	37.6	31.4
1971	28.3	24.5	30.6	37.2	29.5
1981	31.6	28.2	34.6	38.8	30.8
1986	31.1	27.4	34.8	38.7	30.1
1991	32.5	28.8	36.5	40.2	31.3

### New question (3 years and over)\*

1996	41.1	37.4	45.4	48.2	39.3
2002	41.9	38.2	46.8	48.5	39.4

### New question (3 years and over)

2006	40.8	37.5	45.4	46.5	38.5
------	------	------	------	------	------

*Note.* Source: CSO.

A new question on the ability to speak the Irish language and frequency of speaking Irish was introduced in the 1996 Census of Population. The new question marked a major departure from the version used in previous censuses. The latter asked respondents to write whether they could speak Irish only, Irish and English, read but cannot speak or to leave a blank as appropriate. The version introduced in 1996 focused on the frequency of

language use and asked respondents who said they could speak Irish to tick the relevant box: daily, weekly, less often, never. In 2006, a new category was added to differentiate between respondents who spoke Irish daily within the education system and respondents who spoke Irish daily outside the education system.

**Table A1.2: Number of Irish speakers in each Province, 1861-2006 (Census data)**

Year	State	Leinster	Munster	Connacht	Ulster (part of)
------	-------	----------	---------	----------	---------------------

**All ages**

1861	1, 077,087	35,704	545,531	409,482	86,370
1871	804,547	16,247	386,494	330,211	71,595
1881	924,781	27,452	445,766	366,191	85,372
1891	664,387	13,677	307,633	274,783	68,294
1901	619,710	26,436	276,268	245,580	71,426
1911	553,717	40,225	228,694	217,087	67,711
1926	543,511	101,474	198,221	175,209	68,607

**3 years and over**

1926	540,802	101,102	197,625	174,234	67,841
1936	666,601	183,378	224,805	183,082	75,336
1946	588,725	180,755	189,395	154,187	64,388
1961	716,420	274,644	228,726	148,708	64,342
1971	789,429	341,702	252,805	137,372	57,550
1981	1, 018,413	473,225	323,704	155,134	66,350
1986	1, 042,701	480,227	337,043	158,386	67,045
1991	1, 095,830	511,639	352,177	162,680	69,334

**New question (3 years and over)\***

1996	1,430,205	689,703	451,129	201,195	88,178
2002	1, 570,894	768,404	493,500	216,128	92,862

**New question (3 years and over)**

2006	1,656,790	823,555	510,005	224,953	98,277
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*Note.* Source: CSO

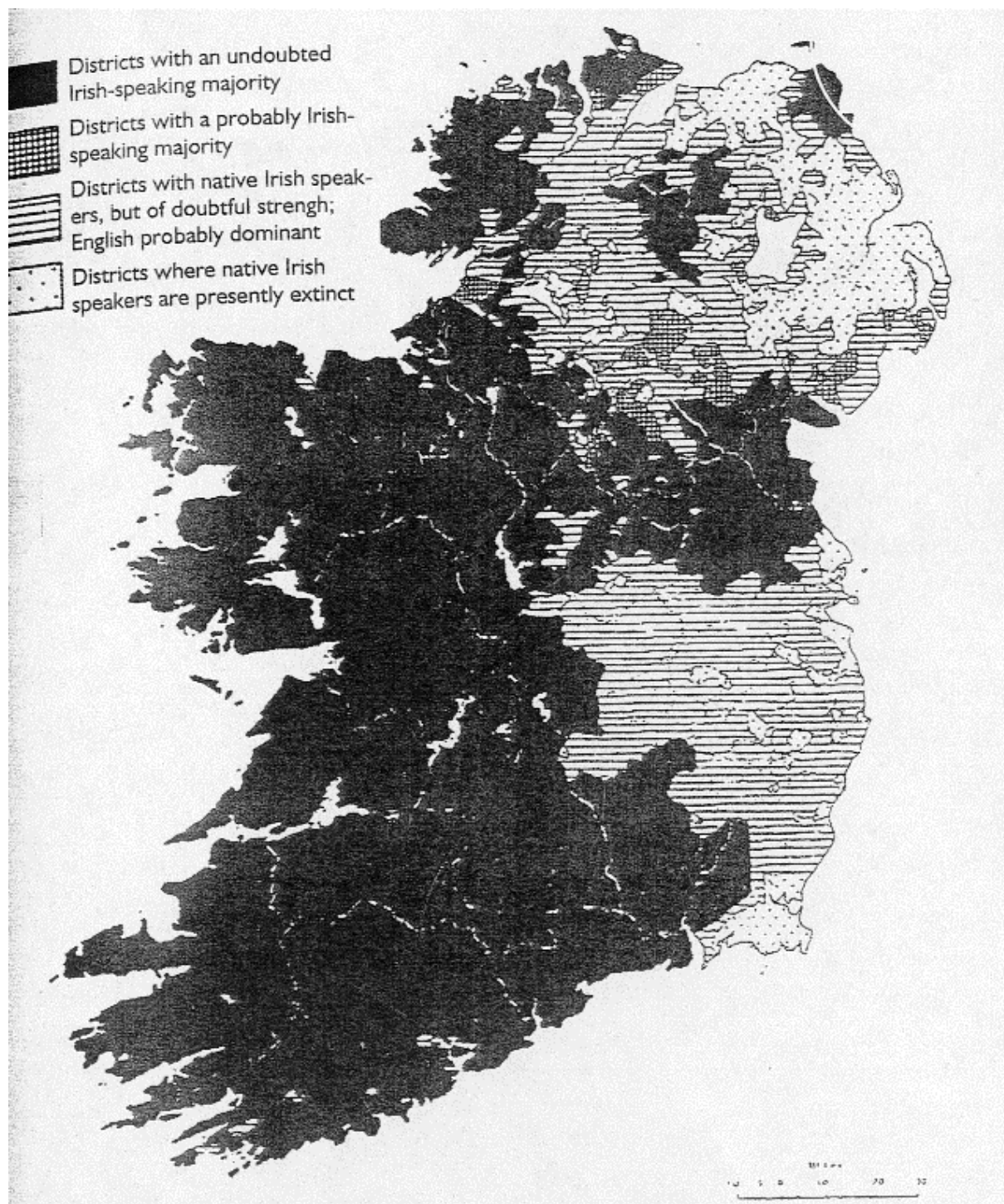
\*a new question on ability to speak the Irish language and frequency of speaking Irish was introduced in the 1996 Census of Population. The new version of the question marked a major departure from the version used in previous censuses which asked respondents to write *Irish only*, *Irish and English*, *Read but cannot speak Irish* or to leave blank as appropriate. The version introduced in 1996 focused on the frequency of language use and asked respondents who said they could speak Irish to tick the relevant box: *daily*, *weekly*, *less often*, *never*. In 2006, a new category was added to differentiate between



respondents who spoke Irish daily within the education system and respondents who spoke Irish daily outside the education system.

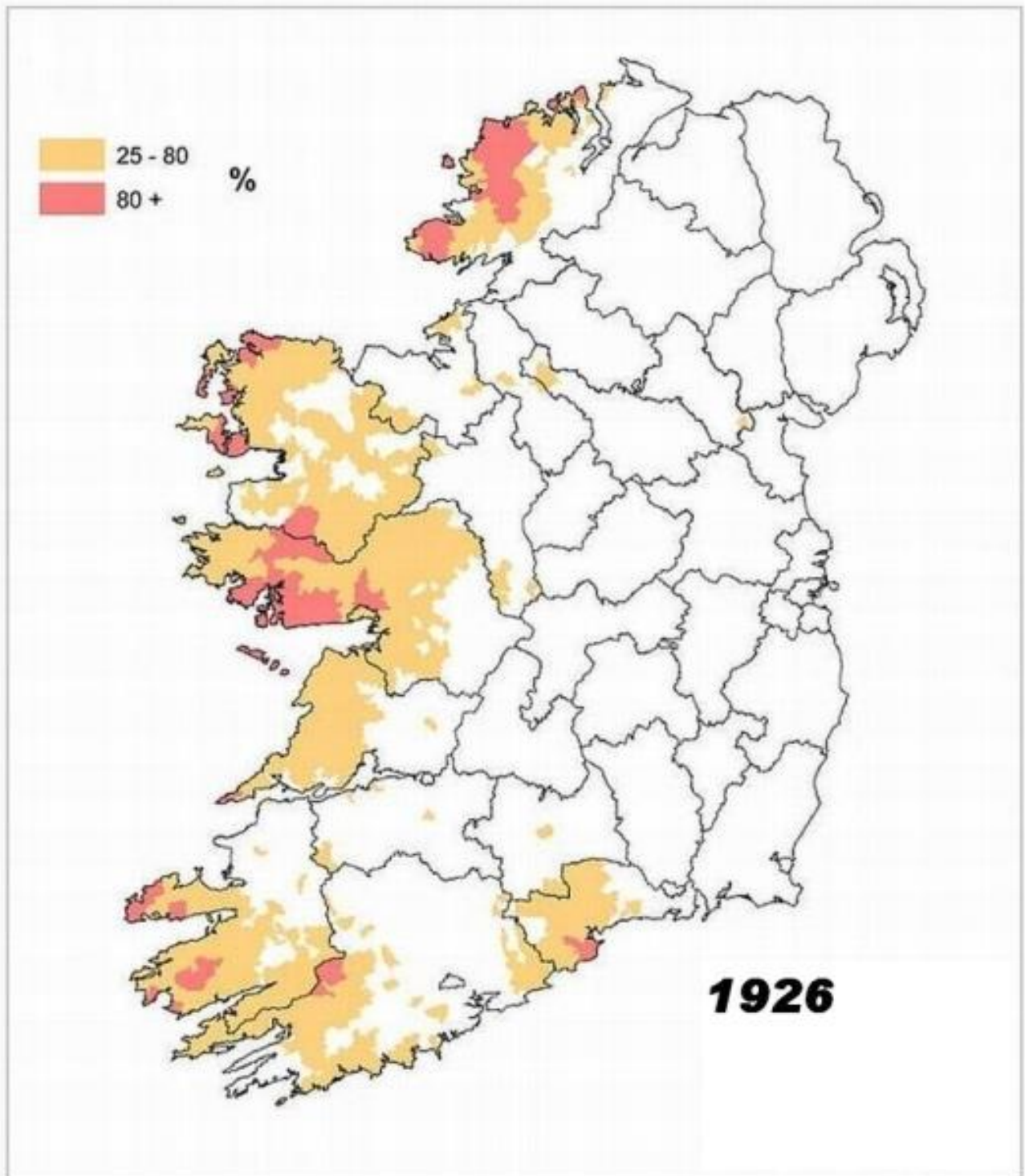
## Appendix 2: Distribution of Irish speakers, 1800-2011

Figure A2.1: Distribution of Irish speakers around 1800



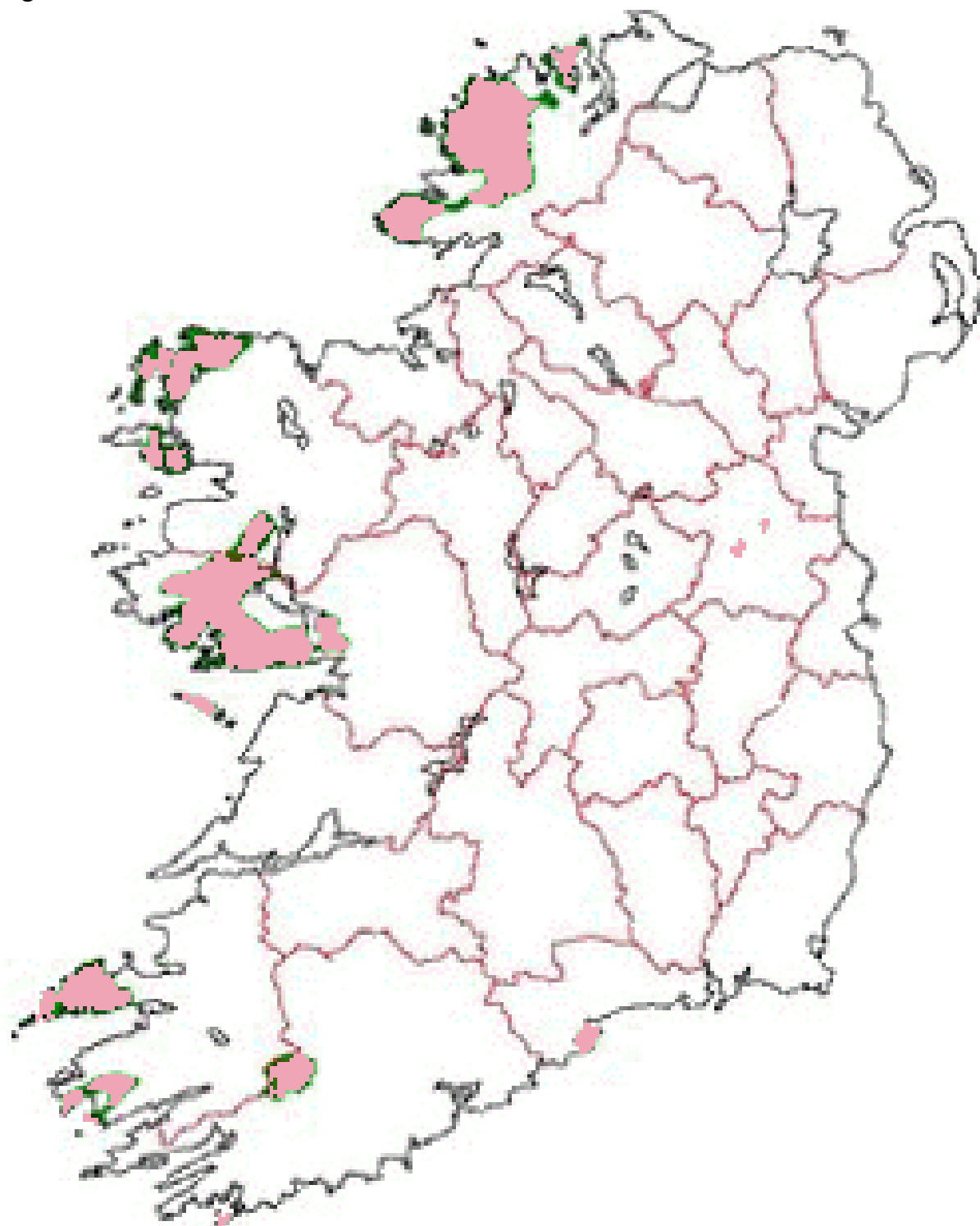
*Note.* Source: Hindley, 1990, p.9. This map is a reconstruction based on literary sources and the population censuses of 1851, 1881 and 1911.

Figure A2.2: The Gaeltacht in 1926



Note. Source: Ó Riagáin, 1997, p.52.

Figure A2.3: The Gaeltacht in 1956



*Note.* Source: Ó Riagáin, 1997, p.56.

**Figure A2.4: The Gaeltacht in 2011**



*Note.* Source: Údarás na Gaeltachta, 2011, p.4.

### ***Appendix 3: Effects of bilingualism***

**Table A3.1: Median Mental Age of Children from 7 to 11 Years Old**

class	physical age (yrs.)	7	8	9	10	11
	mental age (yrs.)					
Rural monoglots		7	7.8	8.3	9.4	10.2
Rural bilinguals		6.5	7.1	7.8	8.5	9.2
Urban monoglots		7.4	7.9	8.8	9.5	10.5
Urban bilinguals		7.4	8	9	9.4	10.5

*Note.* Source: Saer, 1924.

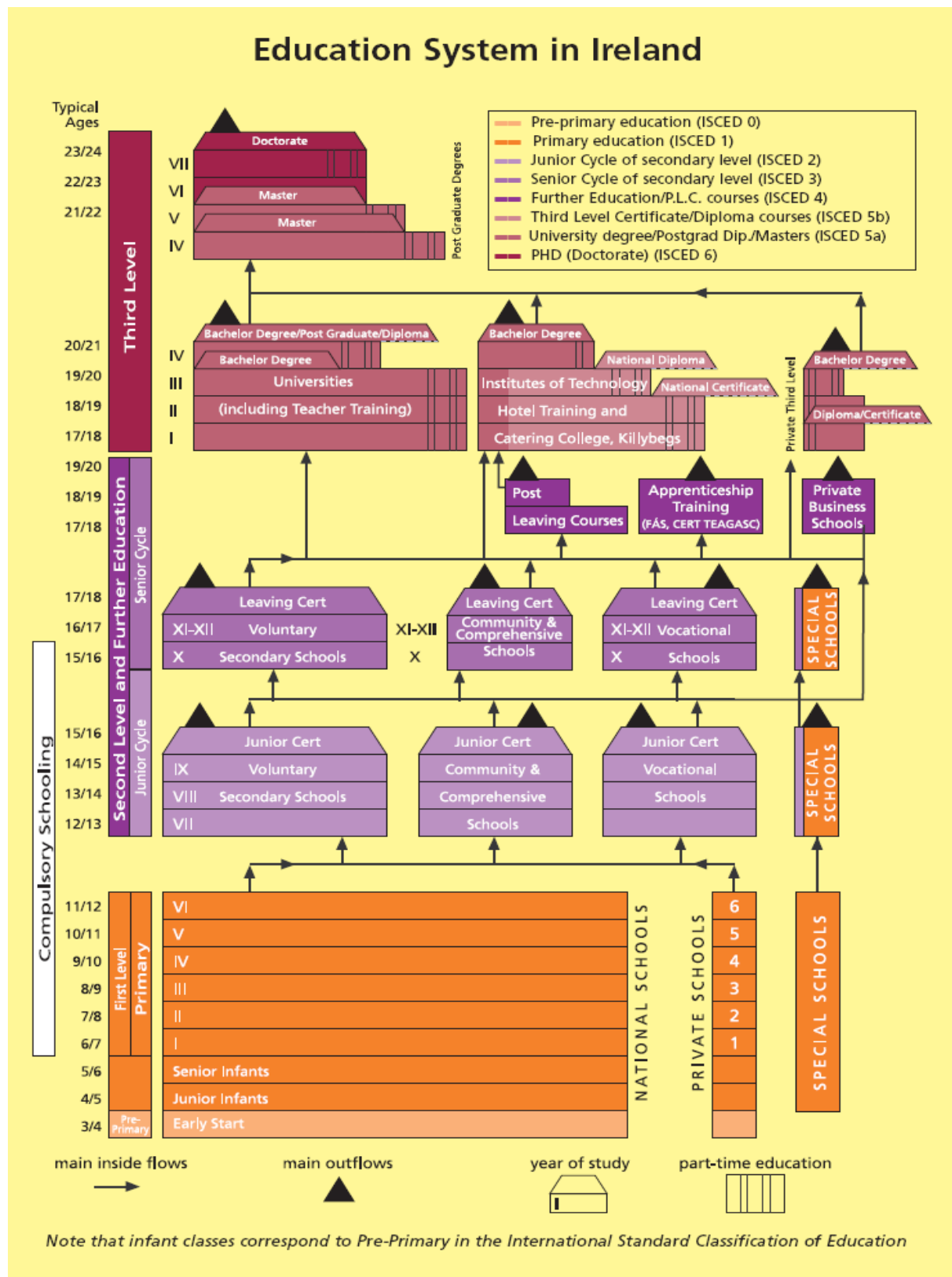
This table relates to the discussion of the effects of bilingualism in Chapter One, Section 1.4.2.

Urban and rural Welsh children from the age of 7 to 14 years from monolingual and bilingual backgrounds were given an IQ standardized test. The results of the test carried out in the 1920s are displayed in Table A3.1. Saer concluded that bilinguals manifested lower intelligence than monolinguals.



## Appendix 4: Irish Education System

Figure A4.1: Education System in Ireland



*Note.* Source: DES, 2004.

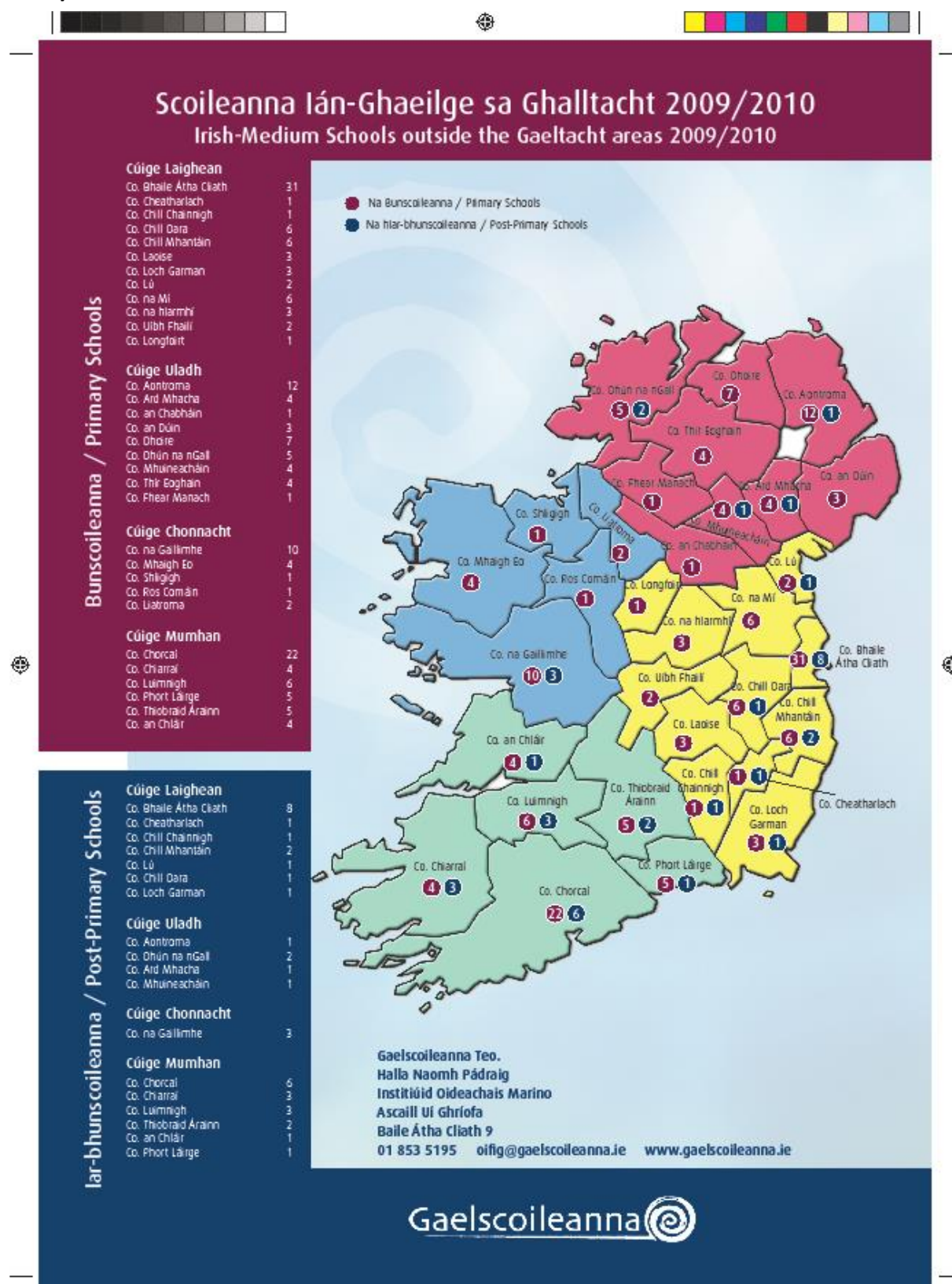


**Table A4.1: Percentage of Students Attending an Irish-Medium Secondary School, 1930-2010**

School year	Total number of secondary-school students	Students attending an Irish-medium school (Gaeltacht included)	Total of students attending an Irish-medium school %
<b>1929-1930</b>	27,645	2,142	7.7 (33.2 % in both immersion and bilingual programmes)
<b>1939-1940</b>	37,670	11,126	29.5 (63.4% in both immersion and bilingual programmes)
<b>1949-1950</b>	47,065	11,648	24.7 (55% in both immersion and bilingual programmes)
<b>1959-1960</b>	73,431	11,971	16.3 (50% in both immersion and bilingual programmes)
<b>1973-1974</b>	167,309	2,992	1.8 (8.4% in both immersion and bilingual programmes)
<b>1979-1980</b>	281,385	3,030	1.1 (2.1% in both immersion and bilingual programmes)
<b>1983-1984</b>	308,384	3,097	1 (1.9% in both immersion and bilingual programmes)
<b>1989-1990</b>	318,601	3,309	1 (1.7% in both immersion and bilingual programmes)
<b>1993-1994</b>	367,645	6,377	1.7 (1.8% in both immersion and bilingual programmes)
<b>1999-2000</b>	353,860	7,328	2.1 (2.2% in both immersion and bilingual programmes)
<b>2009-2010</b>	350,687	9,622	2.7 (4.5% in both immersion and bilingual programmes)

Note. Source: DES, 2011.

Figure A4.2: Geographical Distribution of Irish-Medium Schools Outside the Gaeltacht Areas, 2009/2010



Note. Source: www.gaelischoileanna.ie



**Table A4.2: Number of Irish-Medium Schools in the Republic of Ireland, 2010/2011**

	Primary schools	Secondary schools	Total
<b>Leinster</b>			
Co. Carlow	1	1	2
Co. Dublin	31	8	39
Co. Kildare	7	1	8
Co. Kilkenny	1	1	2
Co. Laois	3	-	3
Co. Longford	1	-	1
Co. Louth	2	1	3
Co. Meath	7	-	7
Co. Offaly	2	-	2
Co. Westmeath	3	-	3
Co. Wexford	3	1	4
Co. Wicklow	5	2	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Munster</b>			
Co. Clare	4	1	5
Co. Cork	21	6	27
Co. Kerry	4	2	6
Co. Limerick	6	3	9
Co. Tipperary	5	2	7
Co. Waterford	5	1	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Connaught</b>			
Co. Galway	10	3	13
Co. Leitrim	2	-	2
Co. Mayo	4	-	4
Co. Roscommon	1	-	1
Co. Sligo	1	-	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Ulster</b>			
Co. Cavan	1	-	1
Co. Donegal	5	2	7
Co. Monaghan	4	1	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Sum Total</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>175</b>

Note. Source: [www.gael scoileanna.ie](http://www.gael scoileanna.ie)

**Table A4.3: Number and Percentage of Primary Schools Teaching through the Medium of Irish, 1930-2010**

School year	Total of primary schools	Number of Gaeltacht schools	Number of Irish-medium schools outside the Gaeltacht	Total of schools teaching through Irish %
<b>1930-1931</b>	5,378		228	4
<b>1939-1940</b>	5,114	363	280	12.6
<b>1949-1950</b>	4,886	308	201	10.4
<b>1959-1960</b>	4,882	234	138	7.6
<b>1973-1974</b>	3,688	157	12	4.6
<b>1979-1980</b>	3,304	138	19	4.7
<b>1983-1984</b>	3,266	125	30	4.7
<b>1989-1990</b>	3,242	116	60	5.4
<b>1993-1994</b>	3,202	109	74	5.7
<b>1999-2000</b>	3,172	108	112	6.9
<b>2009-2010</b>	3,165	103	138	7.6

Note. Source: DES, 2011.

**Table A4.4: Changes to the Proportion of Marks for Oral Irish in the Certificate Examinations**

	Previous arrangements			Revised arrangements			
	Oral	Aural	Written	Oral	Aural	Written	First Examination
Junior Certificate Optional oral	20%	25%	55%	40%	10%	50%	2010
Leaving Certificate Ordinary Level	25%	20%	55%	40%	10%	50%	2012
Leaving Certificate Higher Level	25%	16.7%	58.3%	40%	10%	50%	2012
Leaving Certificate Foundation Level	25%	30%	45%	40%	20%	40%	2012
Leaving Certificate Applied	33%	30%	37%	40%	25%	35%	2011/2012

Note. Source: DES, 2007.

## Appendix 5: Daily Irish speakers

**Table A5.1: Percentage of Daily Irish Speakers in 2006 (Census data)**

Total %	Daily Irish speakers within education system	Daily Irish speakers outside education	Daily Irish speakers (inside and outside education)
Population of the Republic of Ireland (N=4,057,646)	12	1.8	13.3
Population of Irish speakers (N=1,656,790)	29.7	4.4	32.5

Note. Source: CSO, 2007.

**Table A5.2: Number of Daily Irish Speakers in 2006 (Census data)**

Daily Irish speakers	Total daily Irish speakers within education system	Total daily Irish speakers outside education	Grand total daily Irish speakers (inside and outside education)
Within education system only	453,207		453,207
Within education system but also daily outside education		18,677	
Within education system but also outside education (less regularly than daily)	31,605		31,605
Outside education system		53,471	53,471
Total	484,812	72,148	538,283

Note. Source: CSO, 2007.

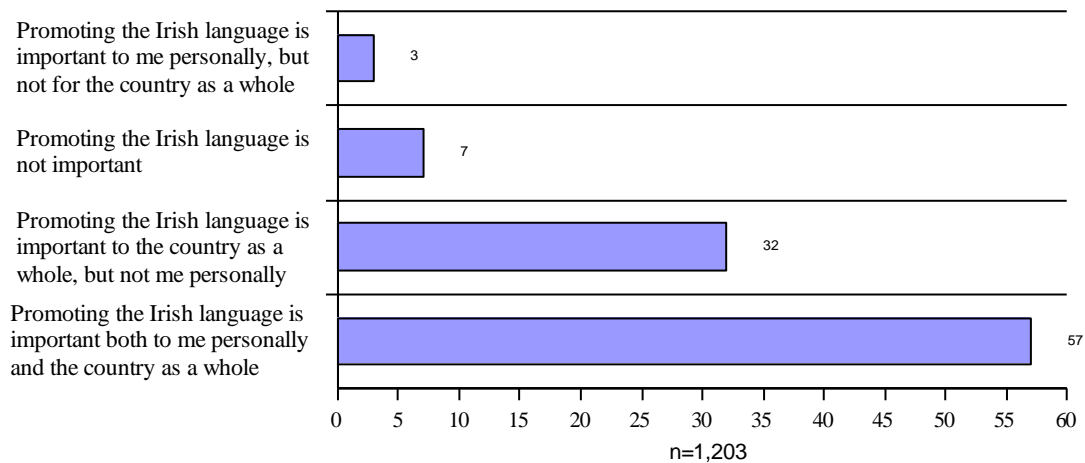
**Table A5.3: Daily Irish Speakers within the School Age Group in 2006 (Census data)**

	5-19 age group	Other age groups (aged 3 years and over)	Total
Irish speakers	550,474 (33.2%)	1,106,316 (66.8%)	1,656,790
Irish used daily within in education only	398,548 (87.9%)	54,659 (12.1%)	453,207
Irish used daily outside education	17,542 (24.3%)	54,606 (75.7%)	72,148
Total daily speakers	416,090 (79.2%)	109,265 (20.8%)	525,35

Note. Source: CSO, 2007.

## Appendix 6: Irish Language Attitude Surveys

**Figure A6.1: Attitudes towards the Promotion of the Irish Language, 2004 (national survey)**



Note. Source: MORI Ireland, 2004.

**Table A6.1: Percentage Distribution of Parents according to the Various Subjects with which they Usually Help their Children, 1989**  
(parents' attitude survey in 7 classes of primary schools located in the Dublin area)

Parental help with	Total %
Mathematics	70.2
English	47.5
<b>Irish</b>	34.8
History/Geography	37.9
Environmental studies	13.1
Arts & Crafts	15.2

Note. Source: Harris & Murtagh, 1999.

## Appendix 7: Irish-medium schools (statistics)

**Table A7.1: Number and Percentage of Secondary Schools Teaching through the Medium of Irish (Gaeltacht Included), 1930-2010**

School year	Total of secondary schools	Number of Irish-medium schools	Number of bilingual schools	Total of schools teaching through Irish %
<b>1929-1930</b>	294	21	64	28.9 (7.1% total immersion)
<b>1939-1940</b>	345	104	102	59.7 (30.1% total immersion)
<b>1949-1950</b>	416	107	108	51.7 (25.7% total immersion)
<b>1959-1960</b>	512	81	160	47.1 (15.8% total immersion)
<b>1973-1974</b>	554	21	27	8.7 (4.7% total immersion)
<b>1979-1980</b>	823	15	7	2.6 (1.8% total immersion)
<b>1983-1984</b>	818	14	6	2.4 (1.7% total immersion)
<b>1989-1990</b>	804	14	4	2.2 (1.7% total immersion)
<b>1993-1994</b>	782	33	7	1.7 (1.6% total immersion)
<b>1999-2000</b>	752	35	5	5.3 (4.6% total immersion)
<b>2009-2010</b>	730	45	10	7.5 (6.2% total immersion)

Note. Source: DES, (2011).



**Table A7.2: Percentage of Pupils Attending an Irish-Medium Primary School, 1930-2010**

School year	Total number of pupils in primary school	Pupils in Gaeltacht schools	Pupils in Irish-medium schools outside the Gaeltacht	Total of pupils in Irish-medium schools %
<b>1930-1931</b>	502,393	Data not available	3,100	n.a
<b>1939-1940</b>	471,233		Data not available	
<b>1949-1950</b>	463,703		Data not available	
<b>1959-1960</b>	506,208		Data not available	
<b>1973-1974</b>	521,805	10,536	3,130	2.6
<b>1979-1980</b>	537,069	11,276	4,920	3
<b>1983-1984</b>	558,648	10,848	5,917	3
<b>1989-1990</b>	540,572	10,054	10,422	3.8
<b>1993-1994</b>	494,322	9,003	14,266	4.7
<b>1999-2000</b>	428,339	7,507	19,451	6.3
<b>2009-2010</b>	490,010	7,236	29,024	7.4

*Note.* Source: DES, (2011).

## Appendix 8: Parents' language attitudes, 1976-2002

**Table A8.1: Percentage of Parents in Two Populations of Schools according to their General Attitude to Irish in 2002 (national survey in 219 primary schools, N=3,928)**

Parents' general attitude to Irish now	English-medium school %	Irish-medium school (outside the Gaeltacht) %
Very favourable	14.5	56.5
Favourable	34.2	35.9
Neutral	39.6	6.6
unfavourable/very unfavourable	11.2	0.7
Missing	0.5	0.3

Note. Source: Harris et al., 2006.

**Table A8.2: Mothers' Attitudes towards their Child Having Irish-Medium Education, 1976 (parents' language attitude survey in 10 Irish-medium primary schools in the Dublin area, N=110)**

Attitude	Before child attended gaelscoil %	Now %
Strongly in favour	35	67
Somewhat in favour	31	22
No particular feelings	25	6
Somewhat opposed	6	5
Strongly opposed	4	-

Note. Source: Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979.

**Table A8.3: Main Advantages to an Irish-Medium Education, 1995 (parents' language attitude survey in 7 Irish-medium primary schools, N=158)**

Advantage:	%
A greater understanding of Irish culture	32
Fluency in the Irish language	31
Teachers are more committed in Irish-medium schools	20
The standard of education is higher than in English-speaking schools	16
Irish-medium schools are better resourced	1

Note. Source: Ó Donnagáin, 1995.

**Table A8.4: Main Disadvantages to an Irish-Medium Education, 1995 (parents' language attitude survey in 7 Irish-medium primary schools, N=158)**

Disadvantages:	%
Difficulty with terminology in English-speaking secondary schools and universities	13
A danger that the child's knowledge of all facets of the English language may suffer (reading, vocabulary, grammar)	9
Parents' inability to assist with homework	6
The schools are under-funded, poorly resourced and lack basic facilities	5
The lack of Irish in the community	4
The location of the particular schools	2
An over emphasis on the Irish language	2
Problematic for slow learners and children with learning difficulties	2
Children's inability to understand their teachers	1
Irish as an obstacle in the teaching of mathematics	1
Learning difficulties overlooked because of the emphasis on the language	1
Friends from school do not live close by and children could become isolated from peers in their own neighbourhood	1
Parents who have children in English-medium schools lack understanding of gael scoileanna, which leads to social isolation	1

*Note.* Source: Ó Donnagáin, 1995.

**Table A8.5: Main Reasons for Deciding on an Irish-Medium Education, 1976 (parents' language attitude survey in 10 Irish-medium primary schools in the Dublin area, N=110)**

	Main arguments	Exclusive %*
1	Bilingualism a good thing/children would at least have language even if never used subsequently	37
2	Pupil/teacher ratios (including no room in the local national school	28
3	Irish properly taught and its future ensured/taught in a natural manner	23
4	Atmosphere prevalent in Gaelscoil/no snobs/not rough/parents involved etc.	14
5	Doubts about effects on child	12
6	Accessibility of the school to the home	9
7	School's educational record (good results, committed teachers)	8
8	Good grounding in Irish for secondary school later (including passport to particular all-Irish secondary schools)	6
9	Good for jobs later (including Irish = 2 honours in Leaving Certificate)	5
10	Respondent or spouse had been to (same) Gaelscoil and liked it	5
11	No argument — always accepted that children would go to Gaelscoil	5
12	School's status or reputation/recommended by person with Gaelscoil experience	4
13	Irish a good foundation for learning a third language	3
14	The children's wishes	2
15	All-Irish education "a challenge for a particularly bright child"	2
	miscellaneous	4

*Note.* Source: Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979.

\*These percentages do not total 100% as some respondents gave only one reason (55%) while others gave several reasons (29% gave two, 13% gave three, 3% gave four).

Irish language reasons are represented in the table by a grey-shaded colour.

**Table A8.6: School Attended by Reasons Given for Choosing Irish-Medium Education, 1976 (parents' language attitude survey in 10 Irish-medium primary schools in the Dublin area, N=110)**

Reason	Pre-1970 gaelscoil %	Post-1970 gaelscoil %
Language only	48	28
Language/non-language	19	34
Non-language only	33	38

*Note.* Source: Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979.

**Table A8.7: Main Reasons for Deciding on an Irish-Medium Education, 1995 (parents' language attitude survey in 7 Irish-medium primary schools, N=158)**

Reasons	%
The emphasis on Irish culture, music, sport and drama in the school	24
The high standard of teaching	23
Everything except English is taught through Irish	20
The school has a very good name	15
The small classes	10
The school is mixed	5
Location of the school (it is nearby)	3

*Note.* Source: Ó Donnagáin, 1995.

Irish language reasons are represented in the table by a grey-shaded colour

**Table A8.8: Attitudes to Bringing up One's Own Children through Irish at Home, 1976 (parents' language attitude survey in 10 Irish-medium primary schools in the Dublin area, N=110)**

Attitude	Before child at gaelscoil %	Now %
Strongly in favour	21	38
Somewhat in favour	36	37
No particular feelings	37	20
Somewhat opposed	5	4
Strongly opposed	1	1

*Note.* Source: Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979.

## Appendix 9: Parents' questionnaire



UCD School of Irish, Celtic Studies,  
Irish Folklore and Linguistics

Newman Building  
University College Dublin  
Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland

Scoll na Gaeilge, an Léinn Cheiltigh,  
Bhéaloideas Éireann agus na  
Teangeolaíochta UCD

Áras Newman  
An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath  
Belfield, Baile Átha Cliath 4, Éire

### INFORMATION LETTER

Dear parents,

Vanessa is ainm dom. Is as an Fhrainc dom.

I am currently doing research in the School of Celtic Studies, University College Dublin as part of a Doctorate of Philosophy on attitudes towards the Irish language in Irish-medium schools (Gaelscoileanna) in Co. Dublin.

Irish-medium schools have been quite popular for the past thirty-five years in Ireland. Although it is still a growing sector we still do not know much about the reasons for their popularity or the impact they have on the families involved.

The aim of my study is to find out more about parents' attitudes towards the Irish language as well as towards education through the medium of Irish.

I would be very grateful to you if you could give me some of your time to fill in the questionnaire.

It involves, for the most part, ticking boxes and *should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.*

Your participation in this research is **voluntary**. You can therefore refuse to complete the questionnaire without giving a reason. There are no known risks or benefits to you from taking part in this study and all information obtained from you during the study will be kept confidential. Identifying information about you will not be used in any report on the research.

The information provided in the questionnaire will be used for statistical purposes later on.

However the results of the study may be used in future academic research or publications but the same level of confidentiality will be guaranteed.

Thanks to your participation this study could help throw some light on the work of Gaelscoileanna on the transmission of the love for Irish.

It is important that you remember that personal identifying details will only be used to contact you for follow-up interviews. The data used in the study results will be entirely anonymous and non-traceable. You can therefore answer the questions as honestly as you can without fearing being judged by anybody.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me:

Vanessa.Mas-Moury@ucdconnect.ie

Please return this questionnaire completed to your school by.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh

Le dea-ghu

Vanessa Mas-Moury

If you decide to participate in the research study, please sign the following form below and keep one copy for your own records.

Researcher's copy:  
**DECLARATION:**

- I have read this information letter.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary.
- I understand that my name will not be identified.
- I agree that once I have submitted the questionnaire it will not be possible to withdraw the information I gave.
- I also consent to the publication of the study results as anonymous data in future academic publications.

Name of participant (in block letters):

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:     /     /



Questionnaire on parents' language attitudes towards the Irish language  
and Irish-medium education

Participant's copy:  
**DECLARATION:**

- I have read this information letter.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary.
- I understand that my name will not be identified.
- I agree that once I have submitted the questionnaire it will not be possible to withdraw the information I gave.
- I also consent to the publication of the study results as anonymous data in future academic publications.

Name of participant (in block letters):

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:     /     /

**THE GAELSCOIL AND YOU.**

1. Why did you choose to send your child to an Irish-medium school? (gaelscoil) (tick (✓) all that apply)

- a. so that your child will be aware of his/her Irish identity and heritage ☐
- b. because the school is close to your home ☐
- c. because of the school's educational record ☐
- d. because of the pupil-teacher ratios ☐
- e. so that your child has a good grounding in Irish before going to secondary school ☐
- f. because your family/close friends had their children in this school ☐
- g. because Irish is spoken at home ☐
- h. because you get better educational and work opportunities after attending a gaelscoil ☐
- i. because the local national schools have too many non-English-speaking children which could lead to, language problems and a lowering of the standard of education ☐
- j. because you or your spouse/partner went to an Irish-medium school and liked it ☐
- k. to give your child the opportunity to learn Irish properly and become bilingual ☐
- l. because of the good reputation of the school ☐
- m. other. ☐

specify: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Did you always think that your child(ren) would go to a gaelscoil?

no ☐ *proceed to question 3*

yes ☐ Why? \_\_\_\_\_

*proceed to question 4*

3. If the answer to question 2 is no, what/who influenced your decision? (tick (✓) all that apply)

- a. relatives/friends who had children in a gaelscoil ☐
- b. the growing number and the success of gaelscoileanna ☐
- c. the opening of a new gaelscoil near your home ☐
- d. the importance and the advantages of being bilingual ☐
- e. other ☐

specify: \_\_\_\_\_



4. How important is it to you that your child receives his/her education through the medium of Irish? (*tick (✓) one answer*)

- a. very important ☐  
b. important ☐  
c. neither important nor unimportant ☐  
d. unimportant ☐  
e. not at all important ☐

Why: \_\_\_\_\_

5. *For parents whose child is in infant class only:*

How do you feel about your child learning through the medium of Irish? (*tick (✓) one answer*)

- a. very confident ☐  
b. confident ☐  
c. no particular feelings ☐  
d. a bit concerned ☐  
e. very concerned ☐

If you are concerned, please give the reasons why: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Do you think that learning through the Irish language benefits your child educationally?

- a. no ☐

Why: \_\_\_\_\_

- b. don't know ☐

- c. yes ☐

Why: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you think there are disadvantages to an Irish-medium education?

- a. no ☐

- b. don't know ☐

- c. yes ☐

If yes, please elaborate: \_\_\_\_\_

8. *For parents whose child is in 6<sup>th</sup> class only:*

Do you think Irish-medium schools (gaelscoileanna) neglect the teaching of English?

(tick (✓) one answer)

- a. no ☐
- b. don't know ☐
- c. yes ☐

If yes, please elaborate: \_\_\_\_\_

9. When should the teaching of English be introduced (tick (✓) one answer):

- a. the first term of junior infants ☐
- b. the second term of junior infants ☐
- c. the first term of senior infants ☐
- d. the second term of senior infants ☐
- e. don't know ☐

10. Did your child attend an Irish-medium pre-school/naíonra?

- yes ☐
- no ☐
- why? \_\_\_\_\_

11. Have you enrolled or do you plan to enrol your child in an Irish-medium secondary school? (tick (✓) all that apply)

yes

- a. because the Irish language is part of our daily lives ☐
- b. because it is the next logical step in my child's education ☐
- c. because Irish is more and more important for a wide range of careers ☐
- d. because my child wants to ☐
- e. other ☐
- specify: \_\_\_\_\_

no

- e. I would like to but there is none in the area ☐
- f. my child does not want to ☐
- g. 2nd level education through Irish would be too challenging for my child ☐
- h. because Irish-medium secondary schools do not have adequate Irish-medium resources ☐
- i. my child has enough Irish and can continue in an English-medium secondary school ☐
- j. I have not decided yet what secondary school I want my child to attend ☐
- k. I would not be able to help my child with his/her studies as I do not have enough Irish ☐
- l. other ☐
- specify: \_\_\_\_\_

12. What language is usually used by you and your spouse/partner with the following people on the school premises? (tick (✓) one answer per column)

a. Self:	principal	teachers	other staff	parents
1. Irish only	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. more Irish than English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. more English than Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. English only	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Spouse/partner:	principal	teachers	other staff	parents
1. Irish only	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. more Irish than English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. more English than Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. English only	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. If you do not use Irish much/at all with the different people you usually meet on the school premises, is it because: (tick (✓) all that apply)

	self:	spouse/partner:
a. your Irish is not good enough	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. you do not feel confident using it with people who are fluent in Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. it is easier to switch to English to carry on complex conversations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Irish only leads to superficial conversations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. you do not like speaking Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. you do not have Irish at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
specify: _____		

Here are some statements about Irish and the gael scoil. Please say whether you agree or disagree with these statements. Remember this is not a test and there are no right or wrong answer.

	agree	no opinion	disagree
14. a. The Irish taught in Irish-medium schools (gael scoileanna) in Dublin is different from the Irish spoken in the Gaeltacht	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Irish people need to accept changes in the Irish language grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc. if they want the language to continue to live	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. The Irish language spoken by young people is influenced by the English language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Most families involved in Irish-medium schools do not care about the Irish language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Irish-medium education is for the middle classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. The gael scoil has opened your mind about the Irish language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### IRISH AT HOME

If you never use Irish at home proceed to question 17.

15. How often is Irish used between (one tick per line):

	most of the time	often	occasionally	seldom	not applicable
a. self and spouse/partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. self and child(ren)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. spouse/partner and child(ren)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. children with each other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. When and how often is Irish used by either parent with the child? (tick (✓) all that apply)

	most of the time	often	occasionally	seldom	never
a. helping with homework	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. at mealtimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. reading/telling stories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. while watching television	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. while listening to the radio	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. doing housework/gardening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. discussing school day with child	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

specify: \_\_\_\_\_

17. For parents whose child is in 6<sup>th</sup> class only:

If you were to compare your level of commitment to using Irish with your child when he/she was in senior infants with now, would you say that there has been:

- a. no change ☐  
b. an increase ☐  
c. a decrease ☐

why? \_\_\_\_\_

18. Do you encourage your child to use more Irish at home through different activities (tick (✓) all that apply):

- a. reading/listening to stories in Irish ☐  
b. watching programmes on TV or DVDs in Irish ☐  
c. playing games in Irish ☐  
d. other, specify: \_\_\_\_\_ ☐  
e. not applicable ☐

19. If your child speaks Irish, do you (tick (✓) all that apply):

- a. praise him/her ☐  
b. answer in Irish ☐  
c. answer in English ☐  
d. not applicable ☐

20. Rate your ability to speak and to understand Irish (*one tick per column*)

a. SELF	Before your child went to school		during senior infants		during 6 <sup>th</sup> class if applicable	
	Understand	Speak	Understand	Speak	Understand	Speak
No Irish						
The odd word						
A few simple sentences						
Parts of conversations						
Most conversations						
Native speaker ability						
Do not know						
Not applicable/never learnt Irish in school						

Rate your spouse/partner's ability to speak and to understand Irish (*one tick per column*)

b. SPOUSE/PARTNER	Before your child went to school		during senior infants		during 6 <sup>th</sup> class if applicable	
	Understand	Speak	Understand	Speak	Understand	Speak
No Irish						
The odd word						
A few simple sentences						
Parts of conversations						
Most conversations						
Native speaker ability						
Do not know						
Not applicable/never learnt Irish in school						

21. If you know only "a few simple sentences" in Irish is this because (*tick (✓) one answer*):

- |  | self                     | spouse/partner           |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. you have no interest in learning more as Irish is not used in everyday life | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. you did not have the opportunity to learn it well                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. you do not have the courage to learn Irish                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. other   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- specify: \_\_\_\_\_

22. Have you ever attended adult Irish classes? (*tick (✓) one answer*)

	self	spouse/partner
a. yes		
a1. before my first child's enrolment in a gaelscoil	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
a2. after my first child's enrolment in a gaelscoil	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
where: _____		
b. no	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. why? _____		

23. What kind of attitude towards Irish do you try to encourage in your child? (*tick (✓) all that apply*)

a. I let my child know that Irish is important	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. I let my child develop his/her own attitude to Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. I discourage my child from taking Irish too seriously	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### IRISH AND YOUR SOCIAL LIFE

24. Do you socialise through Irish with families involved with the gaelscoil? (*tick (✓) one answer*)

a. never ( <i>proceed to question 26</i> )	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. seldom	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. occasionally	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. often	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. most of the time	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. how many families do you meet regularly? _____	

25. What language is used when you meet these families? (*tick (✓) one answer*):

a. Irish only	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. more Irish than English	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. more English than Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. English only	<input type="checkbox"/>

26. Do you go to any activities where Irish is used?

	Often	sometimes	used to but no longer do	never
a. Irish music sessions/concerts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Irish dances	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. sports events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. language associations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. clubs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. private parties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



27. Does your child participate in activities through Irish outside both the school premises and the home?

a. no ☐

b. yes ☐ what are they? \_\_\_\_\_

#### GENERAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE IRISH LANGUAGE

28. How did you feel about Irish when you were in school? (*tick (✓) one answer*)

	self	spouse/partner
a. strongly in favour	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. somewhat in favour	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. no particular feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. somewhat opposed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. strongly opposed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

29. How do you feel about Irish now? (*tick (✓) one answer*)

	self	spouse/partner
a. strongly in favour	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. somewhat in favour	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. no particular feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. somewhat opposed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. strongly opposed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

30. If there has been a change in the way you feel about Irish between your school years and now, please give reasons why: \_\_\_\_\_

31. If everyone in Ireland could speak Irish and English equally well, which would you prefer to speak? (*tick (✓) one answer*)

	self	spouse/partner
a. English only	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. less Irish than English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Irish and English equally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. more Irish than English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Irish only	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

32. If the Gaeltacht were to suddenly disappear, promoting Irish for the rest of the country would be (*tick (✓) one answer*):

	self	spouse/partner
a. more important than ever	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. as important	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. less important	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. no longer important	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. was never important	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Here are some statements about the Irish language. Please say whether you agree or disagree with these statements.

	SELF			SPOUSE/PARTNER		
	agree	no opinion	disagree	agree	no opinion	disagree
33. a. I am committed to using Irish as much as I can	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. I will always speak Irish if spoken to in Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. I wish I could use the Irish I know more often	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. I do not like to speak with people who may know it better than I do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. I do not like to begin a conversation in Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. I do not like people speaking Irish when others are present who do not know Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. people in my circle just don't use Irish at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. I like hearing Irish spoken	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. I like speaking Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34. a. no real Irish person can be against the revival of Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Ireland would not really be Ireland without Irish-speaking people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. without Irish, Ireland would certainly lose its identity as a separate culture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. to really understand Irish culture, one must know Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
35. a. far less money should be spent reviving Irish, no matter what effect this has on the language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. what the government does about the Irish language is not important to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. the government should provide Irish-medium schools wherever the public want them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Irish speakers have the right to expect civil servants to be able to speak Irish with them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. it is better for people to speak Irish badly than not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. the government should encourage and support Irish language organisations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. promoting Irish should be the job of voluntary organisations, not the government	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



	SELF			SPOUSE/PARTNER		
	agree	no	disagree	agree	no	disagree
	opinion		opinion	opinion		opinion
36. a. no matter what the government does, attempts to revive Irish are bound to fail	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Irish can be revived as a common means of communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. most people just don't care one way or the other about Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Irish is a dead language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. if nothing is done about it, Irish will disappear in a generation or two	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. if the Gaeltacht dies out, Irish will die out also	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Gaeltacht areas are dying out	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. the Irish language cannot be made suitable for business and science	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. being in the European Union contributes greatly to the loss of Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Irish is less useful than any continental language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
k. it is more important that a child at school learn Irish than a foreign language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
l. Irish is difficult to learn	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
37. a. it is important to be able to speak English and Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. to speak one language in Ireland is all that is needed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. speaking both Irish and English helps to get a job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. speaking two languages is not difficult	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. I feel sorry for people who cannot speak both English and Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. people know more if they speak both English and Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. young children learn to speak Irish and English at the same time with ease	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. all people in Ireland should speak Irish and English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. both the Irish and English languages can live together in Ireland	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# **PERSONAL INFORMATION**

38. Please specify for the person who answered the questionnaire:

- |                                  |                          |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. female                        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. male                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. married/living with a partner | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. separated/divorced            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. widowed                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. single parent                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

39. What year were you born?      self: 19\_\_\_\_      spouse/partner: 19\_\_\_\_

40. What is your highest educational qualification? (*tick (✓) one answer*)

- |                        | self                     | spouse/partner           |
|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Junior Certificate  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Leaving Certificate | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. third level         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. other               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| specify: _____         |                          |                          |

41. Did you receive an Irish-medium education? (*tick (✓) all that apply*)

- |                              | self:                    | spouse/partner:          |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. no                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. yes:                      |                          |                          |
| b1. pre-school               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b2. primary school           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b3. secondary school         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b4. third-level (or part of) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

42. Was Irish spoken in your home when you were a child? (*tick (✓) one answer*)

- |                     | self:                    | spouse/partner:          |
|---------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. most of the time | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. often            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. occasionally     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. seldom           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. never            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

43. If your answer is "never", were your parents:

- |                                | self                     | spouse/partner           |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. strongly in favour of Irish | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. somewhat in favour of Irish | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. no particular feelings      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. somewhat opposed to Irish   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. strongly opposed to Irish   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. not applicable              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

*now proceed to question 45*

44. Who spoke Irish in the home? (tick (✓) all that apply)

- a. you and your mother
- b. you and your father
- c. you and your older brother(s)/sister(s)
- d. you and your younger brother(s)/sister(s)
- e. your parents between them
- f. other

self: spouse/partner:

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

specify: \_\_\_\_\_

45. Is there currently another language spoken in the house apart from English and Irish?

- a. no ☐
- b. yes ☐

specify: \_\_\_\_\_

46. Do you currently have any other school-going children?

- a. no ☐ (proceed to question 47)
- b. yes ☐

please fill in table below per child to include; school, class/year, and whether it is in an Irish or English medium school (see sample)

Child	Pre-school	Primary	Secondary	Class/Year	Other	Irish	English
Sample		✓		4th		✓	
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							

47. What is your occupation?

self: \_\_\_\_\_  
 spouse/partner: \_\_\_\_\_

48. Do you use Irish in your job? (tick (✓) all that apply)

- a. I use more Irish than English
- b. I use more English than Irish
- c. occasionally
- d. seldom
- e. never
- f. not applicable

self: spouse/partner:

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

49. Where do you live? (name of the village/town + postal code – ex: Clonsilla, D.15)

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50. How long does the trip to school take (in minutes) from your house?

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51. Are there any important issues you would like to raise that you feel have not been covered in this survey?

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Thank you very much for taking the time to fill out the questionnaire.

Are you willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview?

If you are, please write down your name and contact details:

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Go raibh mile maith agat

## ***Appendix 10: Letter to School Principals (June 2009)***

Clonsilla, Dublin 15  
vanessa.masmoury@ucdconnect.ie

To (name of school principal)  
Principal of (name of gaelscoil)

Object: Request concerning Ph. D. (thesis) field work in your school

A chara,

I am currently pursuing a Ph.D. on the Irish language in Co. Dublin under a joint-supervision scheme between my home university, Michel de Montaigne, Bordeaux (France) and University College Dublin.

I developed a keen interest in the Irish language when I first came to Ireland as an Erasmus student four years ago. I attended an optional course in Trinity College entitled 'Elementary Irish' and learnt a cúpla focal as Gaeilge. The position of Irish in Ireland aroused my curiosity and I decided to make it the subject of my thesis.

Although many interesting aspects of the language can be studied, I chose to focus on parents' attitudes towards Irish and Irish-medium schools in Co. Dublin. My principal goal is to survey parents whose child is in a Gaelscoil and analyse their attitudes towards Irish and the immersion education system. I would like to compare their attitudes to those of the general public collected in different national surveys in 1973, 1983, 1993 and most recently in 2009. The questionnaire also asks about language proficiency and language use as an attempt to establish a link between language attitudes, ability to speak and understand Irish and the amount of Irish that is used at home or in any other situations.

In order to carry out my research efficiently I need to contact families involved with Irish-medium education as well as school staff.

I therefore would have three requests:

I would like to meet you to know more about the school itself, for example its ethos, its historical and socio-economic background, etc.

I have designed a questionnaire for parents involved with Irish-medium schools as the central part of my thesis and I would be very grateful if you allowed me to distribute these questions to parents of both senior infants and sixth class pupils via whatever means you find most suitable. Parents' participation is voluntary and all the information obtained during the study will be kept confidential and will be used for statistical purposes only.

I will also need to interview two to three teachers so that I can obtain a different perspective on parents' attitudes towards Irish and its use as a medium of instruction.

If you wish to have a look at the questionnaire or ask more about my research methods, I will be happy to meet with you and discuss it.

Ideally, I would like to begin the survey as early as September/October at the start of the new school year, so if I could hear back from you at your earliest possible convenience I would be delighted with your response. I hope to hear from you soon.

Le dea-ghuá

Vanessa Mas-Moury



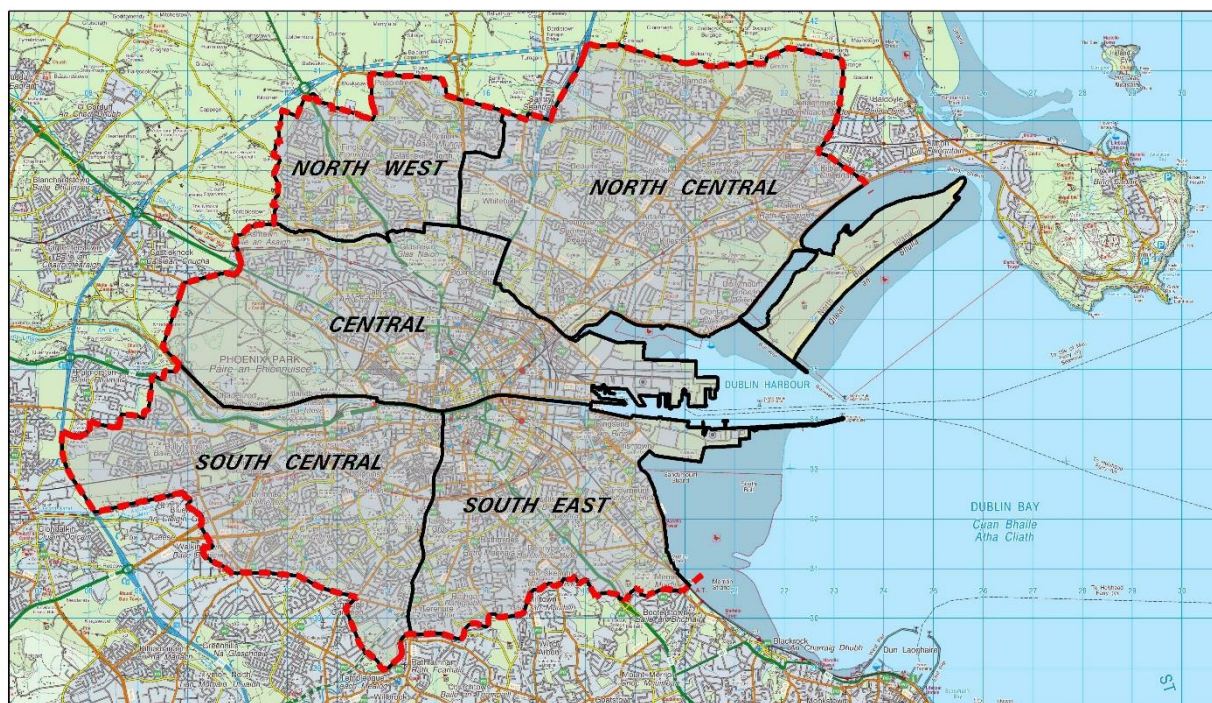
## Appendix 11: Irish-Medium Primary Schools Participating in the study, 2009/2010

**Table A11.1: General Description of Participating Gaelscoileanna, September/October 2009.**

Name	School size
G0	Medium/one-stream
G1	Large/two-stream
G2	Medium/one-stream
G3	Small/one-stream
G4	Medium/two-stream
G5	Medium/one-stream
G6	Small/one-stream
G7	Large/two-stream
G8	Medium/one-stream
G9	Medium/one-stream
G10	Medium/one-stream

*Note.* small<200 pupils; 200<medium>300 pupils; large>300 pupils

**Figure A11.1: Dublin Districts**



*Note.* Source: Retrieved from <http://www.dublincity.ie/YourCouncil/LocalAreaServices/Pages/LocalCouncilOfficesa.aspx>

**Table A11.2: Enrolment Policy of the Participating Gaelscoileanna, September/October 2009**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>G1</b>	<b>G2</b>	<b>G3</b>	<b>G4</b>	<b>G5</b>	<b>G6</b>	<b>G8</b>	<b>G9</b>	<b>G10</b>
Child raised through Irish/Irish-speaking family	3		3			1	1	1	3
Naíonra attendance	4	1	4		4		6	4	4
Siblings attending gaelscoil	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	1
Children of past pupils					2		4	6	2
Children of school staff	1	3	2			3	5		1
Date of registration (depending on child's age)	6		6	2	3		7	8	5
Parents showing an interest in Irish						2			
Parents' competence in Irish			5					5	
Bilingual family (at least one parent fluent in Irish)								3	
Relative attending gaelscoil								7	
Children from the area	5								

*Note.* The numbers in the table represent the order in which the criteria appear on the enrolment policy document of each school. It is not necessarily the order with which children are selected. Four schools specified in their enrolment policy document that only children from the area could attend the school (G2 & G8) and that priority was given to Catholic children due to the school Catholic ethos (G3 & G6).

## ***Appendix 12: Teachers' Interview Questions***

- 1- What are the most common reasons for parents to send their child to a gaelscoil?
- 2- Have parents ever expressed their concern about their child's education because it is done entirely through the medium of Irish? (for senior infant teachers only)
- 3- How would you assess their overall understanding of immersion education?
- 4- Are parents concerned about their child's level of English?
- 5- Are they concerned that reading of Irish is taught before reading of English (if this is the case in the particular school in question)?
- 6a- What language do parents usually use when speaking to you?
- 6b- If mostly English, why?
- 7- Are parents involved in the school life?
- 8- Are parents committed to using Irish when participating in school events?
- 9- Is the Irish language a barrier to parents' involvement in the school?
- 10- If language classes are offered by the school for parents, are there many parents attending Irish language classes?
- 11- In your opinion, how much Irish is used at home?
- 12- Do parents encourage their child to use Irish for recreational activities?
- 13- What kind of attitude towards Irish do parents encourage in their child?

### ***For teachers of Sixth Class:***

- 14- Do you feel that parents' commitment to Irish has changed now their child is preparing himself/herself for secondary school?
- 15- How many parents have enrolled their child in an Irish-medium secondary school?
- 16- What are the most common reasons for parents to send their child to an Irish-medium secondary school?
- 17- What are the reasons for parents not to send them to such a school?
- 18- What is your opinion of the level of competence acquired by the children now that they have reached 6<sup>th</sup> class?
- 19- Do you believe that all the children in sixth class who have enrolled in an Irish-medium secondary school have sufficient competence in the language to continue their education through that medium?



## **Appendix 13: Parents' Follow-up Interview**

### **Figure A13.1: Parents' Follow-up Questions**

- 1- A large number of parents choose an Irish-medium education for their child because it conveys a sense of Irish identity. Do you agree?
- 2- (If agrees) Is this sense of Irish identity absent in other schools where Irish is taught as a subject?  
If yes: why?
- 3- Some people say that more and more parents send their children to a gaelscoil as a reaction to a perceived loss of Irish culture and identity in Ireland. Do you agree?
- 4- If Irish was not compulsory as a subject in secondary school, would you still send your child to a gaelscoil?
- 5- In your opinion, should all schools in Ireland either teach some subjects or all the subjects through Irish? Why?
- 6- A majority of parents said that the teaching of English should be introduced from the first term of junior infants. Do you agree? Why?
- 7- When you filled out the questionnaire you expressed a certain level of confidence/concern about your child being entirely taught through Irish. What makes you feel this way?
- 8- Do you use much Irish when helping with or attending school events? If not why?
- 9- *For parents who speak "parts of conversations" at best:*  
Do you feel that Irish is a barrier to your involvement in the school? Why?
- 10- Does your child participate in after-school activities organised on the school grounds? Why?
- 11- Do you think it is important that your child takes part in recreational activities through Irish?
- 12- Do you believe your child values Irish as a living language in Ireland?
- 13- What do you tell your child about the role of Irish outside school?
- 14- Does your child associate Irish with school only? What about you?
- 15- Once your child has moved to secondary school, will you:  
still try to use as much as Irish as you can?  
encourage your child to keep in touch with Irish outside school?
- 16- *For parents who said they socialised through Irish with other families from the gaelscoil:*  
what do you usually do when socialising with other families through Irish?
- 17- Some people say that gaelscoileanna are elitist. Do you agree with this statement? Why?
- 18- A majority of parents said that if everyone in Ireland could speak Irish and English equally well they would prefer to speak Irish and English equally as opposed to Irish only or less Irish than English for example. Do you agree? Why?
- 19- A majority of parents said that promoting Irish should not be the job of the government but of voluntary organisations. Do you agree? Why?

**Figure A13.2: Interview Participant Consent Form**

**Research Participant Consent Form**

Research Topic:

Research study on parents' attitudes towards Irish-medium education and towards the Irish language in ten gaelscoileanna in County Dublin.

This research project is being carried out by Vanessa Mas-Moury as part of a doctoral research study in both the School of Irish, Celtic Studies, Irish Folklore and Linguistics, University College, Dublin and UFR des Pays Anglophones, Michel de Montaigne University, Bordeaux (France).

Procedures:

A questionnaire on attitudes towards Irish-medium education and towards the Irish language was distributed last September/October in the Gaelscoil your child attends. You completed the questionnaire and returned it to the school. You also volunteered for a follow-up interview by answering positively to the question “are you willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview?” and by leaving your contact details. I have contacted you and we are about to start the follow-up interview. There are however a few things that you should be aware of before we proceed.

The interview is based on 19 questions that are related to the questionnaire. The questions were carefully selected after analysing the data from the questionnaires collected among the ten participating gaelscoileanna so as to throw some light on certain findings. This interview should take approximately 20 minutes. An MP3 player will be used to record your responses.

Confidentiality:

All information obtained from you during the interview will be kept confidential. I will use a code number to label your recorded responses so as to guarantee anonymity. The code numbers will be kept in a separate locked file. I will be the only person to have access to the recording which will be safely stored in a secure location. Your recorded responses will neither be publicly available or used in presentations of the research. There is therefore no risk you will be identified by your voice.

Identifying information about you will not be used in any report on the research. The information you provided will however be used for statistical purposes which may be used in future academic research or publications to which the same level of confidentiality will be guaranteed.

Your recording will eventually be destroyed after my thesis has been completed.

Rights:

There are no known risks to you from taking part in this research.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to refuse to take part at any time without giving a reason. Even if you have already agreed to participate, you can change your

mind and withdraw without disadvantage. You may also refuse to answer any questions without penalty.

If you have any questions on this research, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time:  
[Vanessa.Mas-Moury@ucdconnect.ie](mailto:Vanessa.Mas-Moury@ucdconnect.ie)

**Signature of research participant:**

I have read this information form and I understand what is involved in this research. I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this information form.

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/2010

**Signature of researcher:**

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/2010

## Appendix 14: Data Comparison between the Current Study and Other Studies

**Table A14.1: Social Classification of the Respondents Compared with the General Population**

Social class	General population (Census data) %	Respondents (current study) %
Professional workers	6.5	19.6
Managerial and technical	26.4	38
Non-manual	17	14.1
Skilled manual	17.1	10
Semi-skilled	11.1	3.3
Unskilled	4.3	-
Others/unknown	17.6	15.1

Note. Source: CSO, 2007.

**Table A14.2: Attitudes to Interpersonal Use of Irish (1973, 1983, 1993, 2009)**

Statement	1973	1983	1993	2009
Agreeing	%	%	%	%
<i>I am committed to using Irish as much as I can</i>	11	13	19	<b>69.9</b> total N=369
<i>I will always speak Irish if spoken to in Irish</i>	34	40	39	<b>60.9</b> total N=353
<i>I wish I could use the Irish I know more often</i>	41	43	45	<b>79.9</b> total N=363
<i>I do not like to speak Irish with people who may know it better than I do</i>	45	59	45	<b>41.4</b> total N=367
<i>I do not like to begin a conversation in Irish</i>	51	69	57	<b>39.5</b> total N=349
<i>I do not like people speaking Irish when others are present who do not know Irish</i>	59	72	60	<b>46.3</b> total N=361
<i>People in my circle just don't use Irish at all</i>	64	80	77	<b>52.2</b> total N=364

Note. Source: CILAR, 1975 (1973 national survey, N=2,443); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (national survey, N=791), 1994 (national survey, N=1,000).

**Table A14.3: Attitudes to Irish as an Ethnic Symbol (1973, 1983, 1993, 2009)**

Statement	Year	Agree %	No opinion %	Disagree %
No real Irish person can be against the revival of Irish	1973	72	3	25
	1983	73	2	25
	1993	66	3	31
	2009 (N=366)	43.7	24.6	31.7
Ireland would not really be Ireland without Irish-speaking people	1973	64	3	34
	1983	66	2	32
	1993	60	3	37
	2009 (N=373)	70.2	8.9	20.9
Without Irish, Ireland would certainly lose its identity as a separate culture	1973	56	6	38
	1983	66	3	31
	1993	61	3	36
	2009 (N=372)	74.7	8.6	16.7
To really understand Irish culture, one must know Irish	1973	58	6	36
	1983	57	2	41
	1993	46	3	51
	2009 (N=370)	32.2	15.1	52.7

*Note.* Source: CILAR, 1975 (1973 national survey, N=2,443); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (national survey, N=791), 1994 (national survey, N=1,000).

The drop in the number of respondents supporting the idea that *no real Irish person can be against the revival of Irish* is mainly due to the high percentage of respondents who expressed no opinion on the topic as the percentage of disagreeing respondents remains the same. This is also true for the last statement *to really understand Irish culture, one must know Irish*.

**Table A14.4: Attitudes towards Public and State Support for Irish (1973, 1983, 1993, 2009)**

Statement	Year	Agree %	No opinion %	Disagree %
Far less money should be spent reviving Irish, no matter what effect this has on the language	1973	46	6	48
	1983	38	10	52
	1993	34	9	57
	2009 (N=366)	3.8	9.6	86.6
What the government does about the Irish language is not important to me	1973	46	2	52
	1983	38	2	60
	1993	38	2	60
	2009 (N=364)	5.5	7.4	87.1
The Government should provide Irish-medium schools wherever the public want them	1973	70	6	23
	1983	67	5	28
	1993	70	5	25
	2009 (N=373)	84.7	8.6	6.7
Irish speakers have the right to expect civil servants to be able to speak Irish with them	1973	71	7	22
	1983	80	3	17
	1993	72	6	22
	2009 (N=374)	55.9	17.9	26.2
It is better for people to speak Irish badly than not at all	1973	69	5	26
	1983	78	5	17
	1993	69	5	26
	2009 (N=369)	83.5	11.9	4.6
The government should encourage and support Irish language organisations	1973	64	8	28
	1983	71	14	15
	1993	78	12	10
	2009 (N=377)	93.4	5.3	1.3
Promoting Irish should be the job of voluntary organisations, not the Government	1973	46	12	42
	1983	41	9	50
	1993	38	6	56
	2009 (N=372)	5.4	16.6	78

*Note.* Source: CILAR, 1975 (1973 national survey,  $N=2,443$ ); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (national survey,  $N=791$ ), 1994 (national survey,  $N=1,000$ ).

Overall, all the surveys expressed a positive attitude to Irish state support and language policies. The major difference between the national survey results and the questionnaire results lies in the absence among questionnaire respondents of significant minorities who do not share the same view.

**Table A14.5: Attitudes and Perceptions Regarding the Viability and Future of Irish (1973, 1983, 1993, 2009)**

Statement	Year	Agree %	No opinion %	Disagree %
No matter what the government does, attempts to revive Irish are bound to fail	1973	45	9	46
	1983	48	10	42
	1993	41	8	51
	2009 (N=368)	6.8	9.5	83.7
Irish can be revived as a common means of communication	1973	39	7	54
	1983	41	9	50
	1993	45	4	51
	2009 (N=363)	62.5	14.9	22.6
Most people just don't care one way or the other about Irish	1973	79	3	18
	1983	78	3	19
	1993	65	3	32
	2009 (N=365)	41.7	17.5	40.8
Irish is a dead language	1973	42	4	54
	1983	40	6	54
	1993	31	3	66
	2009 (N=353)	3.1	5.4	91.5
If nothing is done about it, Irish will disappear in a generation or two	1973	71	5	24
	1983	70	5	25
	1993	66	5	29
	2009 (N=362)	54.1	8.6	37.3
If the Gaeltacht dies out, Irish will die out also	1973	60	7	33
	1983	64	7	29
	1993	62	6	32
	2009 (N=353)	28	16.2	55.8
Gaeltacht areas are dying out	1973	53	19	28
	1983	52	24	24
	1993	41	20	39
	2009 (N=348)	31.9	26.1	42
The Irish language cannot be made suitable for business and science	1973	62	11	28
	1983	55	11	34
	1993	56	6	38
	2009 (N=365)	15.9	23	61.1
Being in the ECC/EC will contribute/ Being in the European Union contributes greatly to the loss of Irish	1973	55	8	37
	1983	46	12	42
	1993	42	8	50



	2009 (N=359)	9.2	19.8	71
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*Note.* Source: CILAR, 1975 (1973 national survey, N=2,443); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (national survey, N=791), 1994 (national survey, N=1,000).

**Table A14.6: Attitude to the Promotion of Irish if the Gaeltacht Disappears (1973, 1983, 1993, 2009)**

Attitude %	1973	1983	1993	2009 (N=397)
More important than ever	31	43	35	70
As important	23	24	31	26.2
Less important	19	19	13	2
No longer important	16	10	12	0.5
Was never important	11	4	8	1.3

*Note.* Source: CILAR, 1975 (1973 national survey, N=2,443); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (national survey, N=791), 1994 (national survey, N=1,000).

**Table A14.7: Attitude to Irish as Opposed to Other Foreign Languages (1973, 1983, 1993, 2009)**

Statement	Year	Agree %	No opinion %	Disagree %
Irish is less useful than any continental language	1973	79	3	18
	1983	78	3	19
	1993	81	2	17
	2009 (N=350)	33.1	20.3	46.6
It is more important that a child at school learn Irish than a foreign language	1973	n.a	n.a	n.a
	1983	40	4	56
	1993	25	4	71
	2009 (N=359)	41.5	20.9	37.6

*Note.* Source: CILAR, 1975 (1973 national survey, N=2,443); Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1984 (national survey, N=791), 1994 (national survey, N=1,000).

## Appendix 15: Attitude change towards Irish

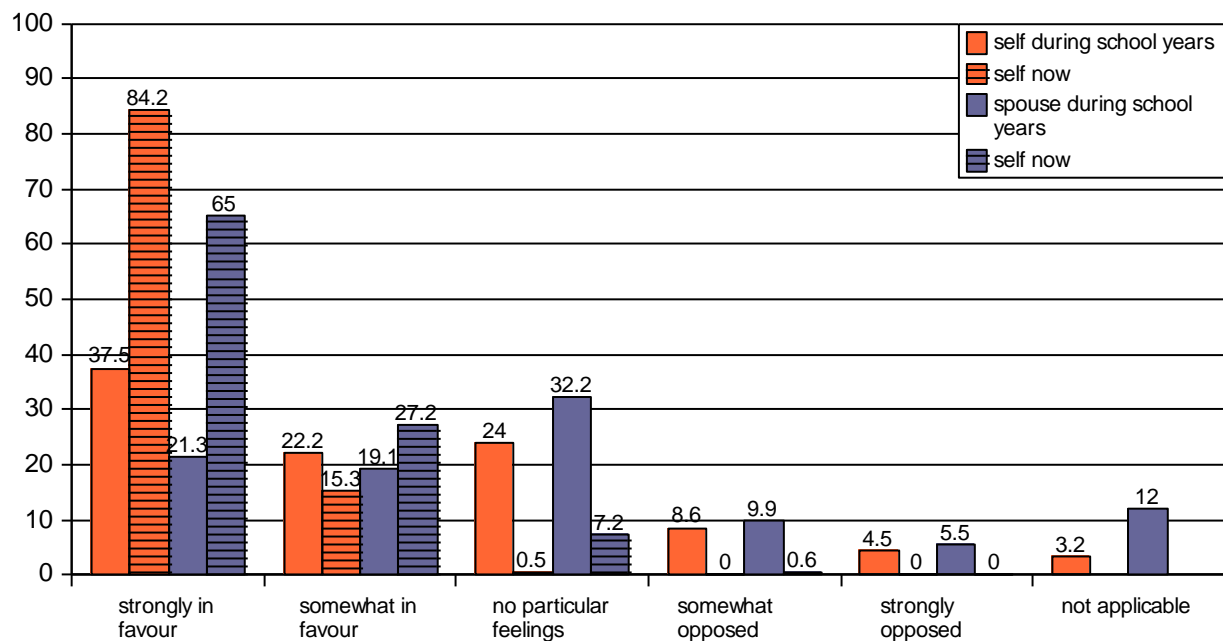
**Table A15.1: Reasons for Respondents' Attitude Change towards Irish (current study)**

Reasons given by the respondents	Total (N=114)
A better appreciation of heritage/language throughout the years (maturity)	27
Irish badly taught in school	<b>25</b>
Irish gives a sense of identity and pride	17
See Irish differently thanks to the gaelscoil	<b>12</b>
Importance of knowing one's own native language	9
Important to maintain Irish heritage	7
Seeing children enjoying Irish	<b>6</b>
Irish taught through encouragement in the gaelscoil, not fear/a better way of teaching	<b>5</b>
A choice to learn Irish as opposed to compulsion in school	<b>5</b>
Irish taught in a natural way in gaelscoileanna (hence more confidence). Not forced on the children.	<b>5</b>
Parent would like to speak his/her native language	3
Parent wishes he/she had learnt more Irish	2
Anxious to maintain Irish alive	2
Bad experience in school. Parents therefore want something better for their child	<b>2</b>
Irish not encouraged during parent's childhood	2
Better opportunity to learn as an adult	2
The gaelscoil offers the best education	2
More modern and more used now	2
Great achievement to be able to speak Irish	1
Taught differently and at a younger age now	1
To support child	1
Easier to learn Irish in a gaelscoil	<b>1</b>
Irish not taken seriously by most people	1
Parents want to learn Irish to be able to communicate with their child	1
Beauty of the language	1

*Note.* Respondents' answers were grouped into categories and are not direct quotes.

Figures in bold characters represent respondents ( $n=61$ ) who explained that their attitude towards Irish changed as a result of their child's attendance to a gaelscoil—whether directly or indirectly.

**Figure A15.1: Respondents' Change in Attitude towards the Irish Language from School Years to the Present (current study)**



*Note.* The graph illustrates respondents' self-report on their attitude to Irish during their schools years as well as at the time of the survey. While the response rate for this question was 99% ( $N=221$ ) "during school years" and 99.5% ( $N=222$ ) "now" among "self" respondents, it was respectively 91% ( $N=183$ ) and 89.5% ( $N=180$ ) among respondents' "spouse/partner".

### **Appendix 16: Attitudes to Irish-medium education**

Note that the wording of the reasons/arguments given in the following tables are based on respondents' responses/comments.

**Table A16.1: Other Reasons for Choosing a Gaelscoil (current study)**

<b>Other reasons</b>	<b>Total (N=21)</b>
Religious beliefs (interdenominational school)	1
Crèche provided at the gaelscoil after school	1
To build up self-esteem and confidence	1
Good education in gaelscoileanna	1
Better appreciation of Irish after being abroad	1
Parent's interest in Irish	2
Grandparent is a native speaker	1
Already two languages at home: interest in a third one	1
Easier to learn more languages	1
Family history with school	1
Beauty of the language	1
Atmosphere of the school (community spirit)	2
Recommended	1
To speak Irish unlike parents who never got the chance	1
Small school	2
Co-educational school (all children in same school)	4
Parents never got this opportunity	1
Very good teachers	1
Open-mindedness, new perspectives on things thanks to languages	1
Relatives taught through Irish successfully	1

**Table A16.2: Respondents' Views on the Importance that their Child Receives his/her Education through the Medium of Irish (current study)**

<b>View: very important</b>	<b>Total %* (n=30)</b>
Attachment to/ pride in Irish heritage and culture. Finding once roots by speaking the national language**	<b>33</b>
To be able to speak Irish naturally	<b>23</b>
To know about Irish heritage/culture	<b>17</b>
To get a good grounding/fluency in Irish	<b>13</b>
Awareness of Irish identity**	<b>10</b>
To see Irish as a living language/To keep Irish alive	<b>10</b>
To get a very good education	<b>10</b>
To develop positive attitude towards Irish (love for the language)	<b>7</b>
A language parent would love to know. Opportunity parent did not have	<b>7</b>
To enhance self-esteem and confidence	<b>7</b>
Advantage in child's future life, i.e. in the workplace	<b>7</b>
Parent's love for Irish	<b>3</b>
To give child same opportunity as parent	<b>3</b>
Early bilingualism	<b>3</b>
So that child is open to new learning experiences	<b>3</b>
To make education enjoyable	<b>3</b>

*Note.* \* These are exclusive and do not total 100% as some respondents gave more than one reason.

\*\* 43% considered Irish as an identity marker

<b>View: important</b>	<b>Total %* (n=30)</b>
Awareness of Irish heritage/culture	<b>27</b>
Awareness of Irish identity	<b>20</b>
To know one's own language and be fluent in it	<b>17</b>
Bilingualism engenders better performance generally	<b>17</b>
Helps learning more languages	<b>13</b>
To keep Irish alive	<b>7</b>
Gives more opportunities for the future	<b>7</b>
Helps for secondary school/Leaving Certificate	<b>7</b>
Fosters the love of the language for life	<b>3</b>
It is a duty for Irish citizens to be able to speak Irish	<b>3</b>
Gives advantages in life/education (parent's personal experience)	<b>3</b>
Parent never got this opportunity and felt deprived	<b>3</b>

*Note.* \* These are exclusive and do not total 100% as some respondents gave more than one reason.

**Table A16.3: Disadvantages to an Irish-Medium Education (current study)**

Argument	Total %* (N=54)
English may/does suffer	30
Difficult/technical vocabulary in various subjects not covered in English (History, Geography, Science, Maths). Irish version of songs etc., not taught in English	17
It is more difficult for children with learning problems (difficulty with language, Maths or dyslexia)	15
Child slower to learn how to read in English (short term problem)	9
Difficult transition from Irish-medium secondary school to university	7
Because gaelscoileanna are Irish-language oriented it is hard for parents who have no Irish in relation to homework, parental involvement, etc.	7
Lower level in subjects such as Maths and History and Geography. The medium of instruction makes them more challenging	7
Lack of school books/adequate materials (primary and secondary levels)	5
Lower results in English for first few years but can be overcome	4
Difficult transition to an English-medium secondary school	4
Gaelscoilenna are not a government priority. There is not enough funding	4
More difficult to diagnose learning problems in English	2
Irish grammar suffers	2
Rest of the population is learning through English	2
Parent sending child to gaelscoil is viewed as “pushy” or “a freak”	2
Big classes	2
Greater effort from parents required	2
Due to a high concentration on the new language the child may miss out some of the curriculum	2
Need for equal balance between the 2 languages	2
Child feels different with English-speaking friends. He/she is the odd one.	2

*Note.* \* These are exclusive and do not total 100% as some respondents gave more than one reason.

**Table A16.4: Secondary School Choice among Senior Infant Parents (current study)**

School	Irish-medium school %	English-medium school %	Don't know %	Total (N=131)
G0	25	25	<b>50</b>	8
G1	20.8	<b>45.8</b>	33.4	24
G2	<b>83.3</b>	-	16.7	6
G3	<b>58.3</b>	-	41.7	12
G4	<b>53.8</b>	15.4	30.8	13
G5	<b>100</b>	-	-	5
G6	<b>100</b>	-	-	13
G7	<b>82.3</b>	5.9	11.8	17
G8	<b>50</b>	-	<b>50</b>	4
G9	41.7	8.3	<b>50</b>	12
G10	<b>70.6</b>	5.9	23.5	17

**Table A16.5: Secondary School Choice among Sixth Class Parents (current study)**

School	Irish-medium school %	English-medium school %	Don't know %	Total (N=87)
G0	44.4	<b>55.6</b>	-	18
G1	34.8	<b>52.2</b>	13	23
G2	<b>66.7</b>	33.3	-	3
G3	<b>100</b>	-	-	2
G4	<b>50</b>	40	10	10
G5	-	-	-	-
G6	<b>80</b>	-	20	5
G7	<b>100</b>	-	-	1
G8	-	-	-	-
G9	<b>54.5</b>	27.3	18.2	11
G10	<b>85.7</b>	14.3	-	14

## Appendix 17: Use of Irish

**Table A17.1: Frequency of Irish Usage at Home between both Parents according to “Self” Respondents' Ability in Irish (current study)**

	Most of the time	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	NA	No response	Total (n=)
Low ability	-	1	2	10	12	-	25
Middle ability	-	2	12	<b>32</b>	<b>16</b>	1	63
High ability	-	<b>10</b>	<b>24</b>	25	13	2	74
Ability unknown	1	1	4	7	4	2	19
Total	1	14	42	74	45	5	N=181

**Table A17.2: Frequency of Irish Usage at Home between “Self” Respondent and his/her Child according to “Self” Respondents' Ability in Irish (current study)**

	Most of the time	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	NA	No response	Total (n=)
Low ability	-	12	8	4	1	-	25
Middle ability	-	35	<b>22</b>	<b>5</b>	-	1	63
High ability	<b>6</b>	<b>47</b>	15	<b>5</b>	-	1	74
Ability unknown	2	8	8	-	-	1	19
Total	8	102	53	14	1	3	N=181



## ***Appendix 18: Bilingualism and language preference***

**Table A18.1: Comparative Reading between Questionnaire Results and Follow-up Interview Results on the Right Time to Introduce the Teaching of English (current study)**

<b>Time of introduction</b>	<b>Questionnaire results (N=223) %</b>	<b>Follow-up interview results (N=40) %</b>
<b>First term of Junior Infants</b>	<b>37.2</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Second term of Junior Infants</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>12.5</b>
<b>First term of Senior Infants</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Second term of Senior Infants</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>22.5</b>
<b>Don't know</b>	<b>16.1</b>	<b>15</b>

*Note.* This table includes the total surveyed population. 1.8% omitted to complete the question in the survey; 5% of interviewees omitted to answer this question in the survey.

Note that the wording of the reasons/arguments given in the following tables are based on respondents' responses/comments.

**Table A18.2: Reasons for Parents' Language Preference in a Bilingual Ireland (current study)**

Interview participants' answers were brought together according to their language preference. This table synthesises the reasons interviewed parents gave to justify their choices.

Language preference	Reason	Total N=40
<b>Irish only</b>	It is "our own language". It is part of Irish identity, it is therefore natural to speak Irish just as French people would speak French	6
	Irish is a lovely language with its own words and phrases that cannot be put into English	1
<b>More Irish than English</b>	It is "our own language" and has its unique cultural association	4
	English is practical when speaking to foreigners, tourists or people you don't know but Irish would be the language spoken with family and friends	3
	English is still very important (e.g. language of commerce)	2
	Have a love for Irish	1
	English has been used for so long in Ireland that it cannot be discarded.	1
	So as to develop and maintain the Irish language	1
<b>Both Irish and English equally</b>	English is more useful as it's spoken worldwide	7
	So as to maintain a balanced bilingualism	7
	Both languages are part of Irish identity	7
	To be able to communicate with people who have no Irish	4
	It makes you aware of other cultures and makes you respect them	2
	So you are more open to other languages	1

*Note.* A few parents gave more than one reason.

### ***Appendix 19: Attitudes to the promotion of the Irish language***

Note that the wording of the reasons/arguments given in the following tables are based on respondents' responses/comments.

**Table A19.1: Parents' Reasons for Disagreeing with the Statement that Promoting Irish Should not be the Job of the Government but of Voluntary Organisations (current study)**

Reason	Total % (N=36)
Voluntary organisations need government funding to exist	30.5 (n=11)
The government has more power and can implement legislation. Voluntary groups are not influential enough	30.5 (n=11)
It is the government's duty to promote Irish as stipulated in the Constitution. The government represents Ireland and consequently should promote Irish culture and identity	30.5 (n=11)
The only way to keep Irish alive is to promote Irish within the education system (either through mandatory Irish or gael scoileanna)	28 (n=10)
Both government and voluntary organisations should promote Irish	17 (n=6)
Voluntary organisations are not sustainable, they come and go	5.5 (n=2)
The government's efforts have brought a positive change for the Irish language	3 (n=1)

*Note.* Some parents gave several reasons.



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This bibliography is divided into two sections. Section A gives a comprehensive list of references used in the thesis which are arranged alphabetically by authors. In Section B, a number of publications are then grouped according to subject: Linguistics and sociolinguistics (bilingualism; language ideologies; language attitudes; endangered languages, language revival and revitalisation, language policies); education and learning; history, identity and society.

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## SECTION B

### Linguistics and sociolinguistics

#### Bilingualism

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