NAMHAID NA CEIRDE

GAN Í A FHOGHLAIM

A REPORT ON THE LINGUISTIC AWARENESS OF IMMERSION SECTOR PRACTITIONERS

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List of abbreviations

CEFR	The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CLIL	Content & Language Integrated Learning
CnaG	**C***omhairle na Gaelscolaíochta* (Irish Schooling Council)
DE	Department of Education
EA	Education Authority
GTCNI	General teaching council for Northern Ireland
L1	First Language (English)
L2	Second language (Irish)
TPL	Teacher professional learning

The Researcher

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Executive summary

Andrews (2003), Lindahl (2016) and Ní Chathasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh (2021) postulate that the linguistic competence of immersion teachers has a significant impact on their ability to be effective conduits for L2 learning. The educational and linguistic outcomes of immersion students are not only dependent on the teachers' ability to find the balance between linguistic instruction and normal curricular development but on their ability to function as language role-models, as language mediators, as language assessors and as linguistic input providers in the classroom. Within the confines of individual schools, the school ethos, school management, classroom support and the wider school community all impact on whether a school has a culture and skills base conducive to effective l2 learning. The vision, policy and support offered by DE and EA does, of course, directly impact on the ability of schools and individual practitioners to realise the full potential of these aspiring bilingual students.

The majority of practitioners IM schools are themselves L2 learners, living and working in a largely monolingual society and employed in an education system, which unsurprisingly, has been designed for the language of the majority. It is therefore no criticism of the ability, professionalism nor dedication of these practitioners to state that their linguistic awareness, in terms of their own linguistic performance and their knowledge of language pedagogy, is a professional skill, and just like any other skill possessed by effective practitioners, it must be cultivated over time. The key to this lies in initial training and in CPD (TPL).

To design and implement effective linguistic training, we must first survey and analyse the gaps in knowledge and specific barriers to self-improvement currently extant in the sector. It is prudent to take stock of current practices and training opportunities while comparing these to experiences and research findings in other jurisdictions.

In response to this, and in light of recommendations in A *Fair Start Policy Document*, which states "DE should provide additional focused support for the Irish Medium sector in the form of educational resources, Initial Teacher Education, TPL and leadership training" the following project was funded by DE. The research was conducted amongst a sample of practitioners, in a sample of IM schools in the Northern Ireland between November and March 2023 using questionnaire, interview and focus group data.

This report contains a combination of desk research and field research which aims to better our understanding of the baseline competency profile within the sector. Amongst areas covered are initial language training, language culture of schools, language use, attitudes and confidence amongst practitioners, classroom practices including Content and Language Interrelated Learning (CLIL) and language training needs. A set of competency tests, benchmarked to the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR) has been created so that leaders and individual practitioners can baseline their linguistic competency. A self-assessment tool has been created for individual practitioners so they can identify their training needs and be signposted to available training opportunities. Finally, individual practitioners, school leaders, CnaG, EA, DE and 3rd level institutions are provided with recommendations as to how linguistic profiles could be strengthened in schools while detail is given on bespoke training programmes that need to be designed to bridge the current gaps in provision.

Main findings

In IM settings, positive educational outcomes are inextricably linked to successful cultivation of L2 competency. Effective pedagogy in an immersion setting can only be truly effective if the teacher can productively and confidently engage with the learning through the target language of instruction. An ability to speak the language should not be regarded as the sole criteria for linguistic success - one must focus on linguistic awareness in a broader sense. All teachers in IM settings, no matter what subject, must strive to be proficient language users, language analysts and language tutors.

In addition, a student's success in both acquiring and learning L2 is impacted by more than just the teacher. Classroom assistants play a pivotal role in this development, as do school leaders who are charged with creating a culture and vision of language and educational excellence. For this reason, this research speaks of practitioners as opposed to solely teachers in order to analyse the linguistic influences on students more fully.

- **Initial training**
Varied pathways with a varied focus on linguistic competence

Only 1 native *Gaeltacht* speaker was found amongst the respondents. Although not surprising, it highlights that even the most linguistically competent in the sector are, in fact, learners of the language.

This is neither a criticism nor a cause for concern but speaks to the fact that IM practitioners are themselves on a language learning journey which doesn't stop when employed in the IM sector.

There are a range of pathways through which practitioners come to be employed in the sector and these pathways have a direct impact on their linguistic awareness and confidence. Some teachers have specialized in Irish, therefore, have had focussed linguistic training. Others have studied courses with a linguistic element. On the face of it, these courses provide the required linguistic training, however, on analysis, the training is neither continual, intense nor focussed on all areas of linguistic awareness. At the other end of the scale, we have teachers who specialize in a subject other than Irish and who have had no genuine linguistic training. In teaching programmes, such as the PGCE, emphasis, unsurprisingly, is on generic teaching skills with focus on IM teaching very much dependent on the chosen course. 100% of leaders and 69% of teachers surveyed attest to a lack of linguistic training in current courses; 100% of leaders and 39% of teachers claim a lack of emphasis on language pedagogies. 42% of teachers state that they weren't confident in their linguistic abilities on graduating and 54% state that they were not confident to teach the language.

Reported confidence in language abilities amongst classroom assistants is high (74%), with 67% of respondents claiming they are confident in their ability to explain the language to others. This is surprising given that there is a wide variety of qualifications amongst them. This ranges from those who have only GCSE level qualifications to those who have degrees in Irish and other subjects. There is no clear specialised qualification needed to undertake this role with many having achieved their qualifications while already employed.

- **Language culture of schools**
                    Strong commitment to Irish but no unified approach

In light of findings, there can be no doubt as to the commitment of schools, units and Irish language streams to linguistic excellence. Proficiency in Irish is a pre-requisite for employment; however, this isn't normally tested formally with the majority of decisions being based on qualifications or limited interview questions in the language.

The language ethos, vision and approach of schools is encapsulated in the school's language policy. Each school who responded does have a language policy and 60% of leaders claim to discuss it with new

recruits. However, this doesn't concur with the views the staff, as 45% of teachers and classroom assistants surveyed claim that it wasn't discussed with them.

54% of teachers and 84% of classroom assistants state that they were not given a mentor in the beginning and although some claim that their questions were answered and that advice was available, many state that they had to learn as they went due to other staff being too busy to offer mentorship, including linguistic support.

- **Language ability, use and confidence**
  - **Continuum of abilities and confidence**

As could be expected, given that they are working in an immersion environment, 65% of teachers assess themselves highly proficient (C2) or advanced (C1) in accordance with the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR), while 63% of assistants claim C1/C2 level. Notwithstanding that, 81% of teachers and 74% of assistants claim that although fairly confident, they feel they could improve on their linguistic abilities. Over 80% of both state that other practitioners in their schools have a satisfactory level of Irish but suggest that the ability level varies amongst them. 77% of leaders, 74% of teachers and 79% of assistants claim that there are members of the classroom staff who struggle with their linguistic confidence while 42% of the teachers and 58% of the assistants questioned admit to having some difficulty in dealing with parts of the curriculum through Irish.

With regard to specific linguistic challenges, using correct grammar in spoken and written Irish are the most-cited difficulties across the board while 52% of assistants claim to struggle with vocabulary. There are a range of other challenges reported including the ability to explain rules, understanding the difference between standard and dialectical Irish and understanding unfamiliar Irish.

92% of teaching staff surveyed have to create their own Irish resources and 58% of classroom assistants have to write in Irish which suggests that a high-level ability in the language is required. Most respondents claim that there is a spirit of co-operation and peer-review, but this doesn't seem to be the culture across the board and depends on the staff involved and the time available for this. 63% of classroom assistants claim they would correct a colleague's error if they noticed it while 60% of leaders and 68% of teachers state that this would depend on the person and the personality.

- **Classroom practice**

Lack of knowledge of language pedagogy and CLIL

80% of all respondents accept that practitioner ability has an impact on the linguistic outcome of students. Content and Language Integrated Learning is recognised as an effective means of bringing language learning into all subjects across the curriculum and one secondary school is undertaking a promising pilot programme in this regard. However, 69% of teachers claim to have no knowledge or little knowledge of this approach while this rises to 84% amongst classroom assistants. 60% of leaders believe that explicit teaching of language is the best approach while 54% of teachers and 53% of assistants believe a blended approach to be most effective with 92% of all respondents noting that a balance needs to be found between teaching content and teaching language.

- **Training needs**

Justifiable linguistic training needs and practical barriers to TPL/CPD

Interest in additional training is high, however, although 80% of leaders claim that staff are offered regular training opportunities, over 60% of teachers and 68% of assistants questioned claim that they aren't offered sufficient opportunities with 62% of teachers 42% of assistants claiming that the conversation seldom happens.

Over 50% of teachers and assistants claim that they are not aware of the training offered by EA and a large majority of both are not aware of the materials available on the new IM Hub created by EA. There is an opinion that linguistic training doesn't figure highly in EA's training programmes and most agree that they are either not aware of available training opportunities or that they are difficult to find. The reported barriers to training are spread fairly evenly between finding the time, covering the cost, actually being motivated to complete the work and finding suitable courses.

Interest was expressed in a variety of courses with the most sought-after being language enrichment courses, courses on language correctness and courses on teaching grammar with accredited courses being taught face-to-face on site (59%) being strongly favoured followed by asynchronous courses (29%).

Conclusion

The findings emphasise the need to avoid assuming high language awareness based solely on reported ability or qualifications. The linguistic landscape amongst teachers and classroom assistants is varied and understanding practitioners' linguistic backgrounds, learning path and confidence levels is crucial, as they directly influence competencies within and between schools. Language skills require continual nurturing, support and mentorship, with practitioners and leaders actively monitoring their own linguistic attainment. This needs to be underpinned by clear policy and guidance to ensure that practitioners are aware of their role as language role models.

Furthermore, the report highlights the significant impact of practitioners' language competency and the overall language culture in schools on students' linguistic outcomes. Currently, there is a lack of awareness and expertise in implementing Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) effectively. The report also identifies the need for improved strategies for peer-feedback and review and for offering corrective linguistic feedback and this can be achieved through gaining a greater understanding of their role as linguistic analysts and teachers.

Where appropriate, initial training providers should re-assess their emphasis on language competence and language pedagogies. Those already qualified and employed agree that there is a need for improvement and suggest a willingness to undertake training. However, insufficient language-specific training coupled with practical barriers and competing priorities, underscores the urgency for a novel approach to training focusing on creating bespoke IM courses based on actual need rather than assumptions of need.

Recommendations

Individual practitioners, school leaders and EA must show greater cognizance of the importance of language competency in the broader sense as explained in this report. Generic teaching skills are of course vitally important, and EA works hard in that regard, but linguistic competence is a pre-requisite for practitioner competence in this sector so cannot be ignored. Complacency, competing priorities, a lack of suitable opportunities and the perceived barriers to TPL/CPD can result in a laissez-faire, ad hoc, piecemeal approach to linguistic development. Mediocrity in terms of linguistic competence can, as shown, impact directly on the linguistic outcomes of students who rely heavily on the linguistic input offered through the whole-school community.

Linguistic development starts in pre-service training; therefore, it is strongly recommended that aspiring IM practitioners are made aware of the importance of the extra skill set needed to be a successful in the sector. They should, where possible, choose 3rd level providers whose courses contain a strong focus on linguistic proficiency, declarative knowledge of language and language pedagogy. These providers, when creating curricula, need to understand the implications of language learners becoming language role-models and provide the space within courses to give trainees the solid linguistic base from which generic teaching skills can be learnt and then implemented in the classroom.

School leaders and individual practitioners currently working in the sector should help bolster a culture of linguistic excellence in their schools, adding to and drawing on best-practice already available in the sector and elsewhere as detailed in the report. They should use the evaluation tools made available in this report to baseline linguistic abilities and confidence within their schools. For those members of staff who require linguistic development, there should be clear signposts to extant training opportunities and provisions made to mitigate the barriers to undertaking additional training.

As well as providing clear, accredited pathways for linguistic development, EA must also work with CnaG and 3rd level institutions to design bespoke courses and opportunities for linguistic training, based on the evidence of this report. Complete 3rd level programmes are the gold standard in this regard; however, these must be flexible and subsidized to allow practitioners to actually avail of them. For those who are not at that level, other available programmes can place them on this pathway. In the short term, concise, focused, recognised courses should be designed and piloted on site with online expansion material and backup where appropriate.

Rationale, background and context

- **Teacher proficiency in IM settings**

Immersion education is considered to be one of the most effective and powerful language learning methods available. The immersion approach places an emphasis on providing learners with opportunities to experience real-life situations where they must use the target language to communicate. By providing learners with the opportunity to immerse themselves in the target language environment, they can learn to use the language naturally and spontaneously, which leads to more effective communication and overall language proficiency.

The main conduit for creating this environment and providing the culture, input and instruction in these settings is the practitioners. The linguistic competence of the practitioners is therefore critical in the development of immersion language learners and their adaptation to new linguistic environments. Research has shown that teachers with high levels of proficiency in the target language can provide more meaningful and engaging language instruction, as they are better equipped to model native-like language use and provide linguistic support. Additionally, linguistically competent practitioners can help foster a genuine, linguistically rich environment while providing real-time corrective feedback. In immersion settings, the teacher's language proficiency is not merely desirable but a necessity to ensure successful language acquisition.

When teachers are not fully competent in the target language, students may begin to question the authenticity of the immersion experience. They may also develop a sense of scepticism towards the language being taught. Conversely, when teachers are highly proficient in the target language, students feel more comfortable and confident in their ability to communicate. They are more likely to engage in genuine conversations, learn new vocabulary, and develop a better understanding of the culture. This ultimately leads to a more successful immersion experience.

- **IM Schools**

The IM sector is the fastest growing educational sector in Northern Ireland "with a 70% increase in enrolments over the ten-year period from 2011 - 2021. There are approximately 7,500 children educated daily through the medium of Irish and allowing for this pattern of growth, those numbers will continue to rise with over 80 IME providers across Nursery, Primary and Post Primary levels." (CnaG, 2022).

This growth is an indication of the confidence parents are placing in the sector helped by the impressive student outcomes. One of main drawbacks to such rapid growth, however, is the staffing pressures. There are currently 366 teachers employed in the sector and 335 classroom assistants (CnaG, 2023). However, there are shortages across the sector, and this was clearly seen during the COVID 19 pandemic, (see Ó Domagáin, 2022) when one fifth of schools couldn't find suitably qualified teachers so the Engage programme could be implemented. The greatest challenge, at present, is in post-primary as there are a lack of subject specific teachers especially in STEM subjects who can teach through Irish and this is, in turn, impacting on student choice in KS4 and KS5.

- **Rationale for current study**

Andrews (2003), Lindahl (2016) and Ní Chathasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh (2021) postulate that the linguistic competence of immersion teachers has a significant impact on their ability to be effective conduits for L2 learning. The educational and linguistic outcomes of immersion students are not only dependent on the teachers' ability to find the balance between linguistic instruction and normal curricular development but on their ability to function as language role-models, as language mediators, as language assessors and as linguistic input providers in the classroom. Within the confines of individual schools, the school ethos, school management, classroom support and the wider school community all impact on whether a school has a culture and skills base conducive to effective L2 learning. The vision, policy and support offered by DE and EA does, of course, directly impact the ability of schools and individual practitioners to realise the full potential of these aspiring bilingual students.

The majority of practitioners IM schools are themselves L2 learners, living and working in a largely monolingual society and employed in an education system, which unsurprisingly, has been designed for the language of the majority. It is therefore no criticism of the ability, professionalism nor dedication of these practitioners to state that their linguistic awareness, in terms of their own linguistic performance and their knowledge of language pedagogy, is a professional skill, and just like any other skill possessed by effective practitioners, it must be cultivated over time. The key to this lies in initial training and in CPD (TPL).

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- **Overview of research**

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Key concepts and literature review

Most of the literature on language proficiency and awareness focusses solely on the teacher who, of course, has the greatest responsibility in the classroom setting in terms of creating a learning atmosphere, guiding lessons, offering feedback, support and assessing. It must be stressed at the outset, however, that the whole school community have a role to play in providing linguistic input, acting as linguistic role-models and creating settings conducive to language acquisition and learning. Each member of the school community has an impact on the linguistic outcomes of students, therefore, in this current study, the term practitioners is used to include school leaders, teachers and classroom assistants. The linguistic awareness of each will impact directly on student outcomes be that from a school planning and culture perspective in the case of leaders, or classroom input and teaching in the case of teachers and in the case of one-to-one tailored support as offering by classroom assistants. The main areas covered in this literature review are language awareness, practitioner language proficiency versus student outcomes, implementing classroom best-practice through CLIL and teacher training. In each of these areas, reference is made to international perspectives and to research that focusses solely on the IM sector.

- **Practitioners' language awareness**

Shulman (1999) and David (2020) discuss the importance of professionalism amongst teachers and place significant value of subject-specific knowledge. Ball et al. state "most people would agree that an understanding of content matters for teaching. Yet, what constitutes understanding of content is only loosely defined" (2008, 389). Given the ethos and aims of IM education, it is difficult to distinguish between content and language as both must be intertwined, be that in an early years setting where the learning goal is vocabulary development through to post primary where specialized subject knowledge can only be taught to students if both parties (the teacher and the student) have the linguistic capabilities to engage with the subject through the target language. Snow (2001) explains the difficulty of distinguishing between content and language in an immersion setting.

Check (1986) and Polk (2006) analyse the many traits of an effective teacher and one of those traits is effective communication. Communication is at the heart of a quality classroom environment (Levy et al., 1992). A teacher (or classroom assistant) must be an effective communicator in order to engage students, offer clarity to students of various abilities, show flexibility in register, and provide clear constructive feedback (Ní Aogáin & Ó Duibhir, 2021). No more so is this important than in an immersion

setting which at its heart, promotes the acquisition of language through communication in the target language (Hoare, 2001). Linguistic proficiency amongst language teachers is therefore of the upmost importance and this is discussed by, for example, Freeman & Johnson (1998).

Language proficiency alone does not encapsulate the linguistic skills needed to be effective as a language teacher. Andrews (2007) postulates that there are a range of interconnected knowledge bases required in an L2 context:

- **Knowledge of the language:** the practitioner must be an efficient user of the language.
- **Knowledge about the language:** the practitioner must understand how language functions and have a declarative knowledge of the linguistic rules that guides their own linguistic performance (e.g., phonological, grammatical, pragmatic).
- **Knowledge of the learners:** the practitioners must understand how learners learn language and in the case of immersion education how learning and acquisition occur.

Practitioners must be both "linguistically aware" (Andrews & Lin, 2017) and "linguistically responsive" (Lucas & Villegas, 2013) if they are to be successful communicators, role models and teachers. Building on Edge (1988), Wright and Bolitho (1993) and Andrews (2007), Lindahl (2016) offers a useful conceptualization of the linguistic domains pertinent to a practitioner:
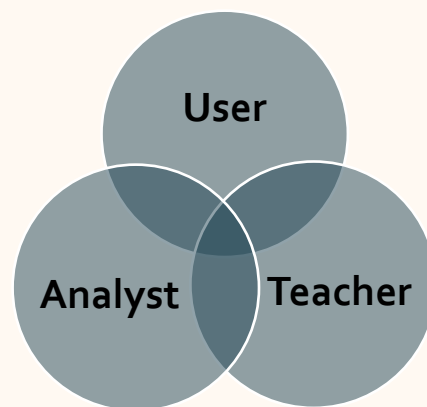
Figure 1: Language awareness framework (Lindahl 2016)

A successful practitioner in an immersion setting must firstly be an effective user of the language. They need to have the communicative competence to speak and write in the language and function as a linguistic exemplar. They also assume the role of language analysist insofar as they are required to have an awareness of metalinguistics and be able to offer judgements as to correct and incorrect language

and be able to explicitly describe this. Thirdly, all practitioners, either formally or informally, take on the role of language teacher. Some will explicitly be tasked with teaching the language while others will be expected to teach the language indirectly, be that as a general subject teacher or a classroom assistant supporting whatever teaching the class teacher is involved in.

Ó Fáthasaigh (2021) offers a useful overview of language awareness in the IM sector and the linguistic difficulties faced by practitioners in the IM sector have been discussed by numerous scholars. e.g., Ní Thuairisg, (2014), Ó Grádaigh (2015), Nic Réamoinn (2017), Ó Treasaigh (2019); Mhic Aoidh (2021), and Ní Chathasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh (2021). Difficulties described in these works include a lack of linguistic self-confidence, a lack of linguistic proficiency, a lack of understanding of how language acquisition works, a disjoint between stated beliefs toward language learning and actual classrooms practices and a lack of sectoral support to deal with these difficulties.

-   Practitioner proficiency versus student outcomes

Although policy makers often suggest that individual practitioners have little impact on student learning (see Rockoff, 2004), there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that there is a direct correlation between the effectiveness of the teacher and the outcomes of their students (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Stronge et al., 2007; Chetty et al., 2014; Burroughs et al., 2019). Although impacted by other factors such as innate student ability, student home life, socioeconomic status and student motivation, the studies detailed above indicate that the students of effective teachers typically achieve higher academic success borne out by higher test scores and the effectiveness of a teacher can be directly linked to the teacher' self-confidence and self-efficacy stemming from subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. There also is proof that in the classroom of effective teachers there is a lesser attainment gaps amongst students resulting in more students having long-term academic and professional success.

In terms of linguistic outcomes in immersion settings, it is understood that many factors impact this, such as the linguistic background of the students, the family language and social language of the students, the length and quality of exposure, policy and language culture of school, the design of the curriculum and the available resources (Ellis, 2012; Cummins and Swain, 2014; Lindholm-Leary & Genesee, 2014).

Among these factors, teacher language efficiency and teacher efficacy are also stated as important (Turnball et al., 2003; Faez et al., 2021). A teacher who has the language awareness as detailed above will we much better placed to create a linguistically rich environment that will provide the students with the input required for effective language learning. The importance of the quality of input is dealt with by Ellis (2009) and Unsworth (2016). Effective teachers will design and teach lessons that promote rich linguistic output from students and will be knowledgeable and confident enough to offer corrective feedback on this output (Ní Aogáin & Ó Duibhir, 2021), therefore increasing the students' outcome in the language.

- **Content and language integrated learning (CLIL)**

It must be understood that not all IM practitioners see their role explicitly as language teachers. Ní Chathasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh (2021, 93) state that the greatest percentage of immersion teachers focus their efforts on teaching subject matter as opposed to language. However, given that they are teaching through L2, it should still be expected that they will embrace the school's aim of language progression across the curriculum. One way this can be achieved is through CLIL which is becoming recognized as best practice in immersion classrooms. CLIL is defined by Coyle et al. (2010) as 'a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language' where 'both language and the subject have a joint role' (Marsh 2002, 58). There has been a growing interest in this subject area, an overview of which can be found in Pérez-Cañado (2012) and Cenoz et al. (2014). A useful framework is laid out by Coyle (2009):
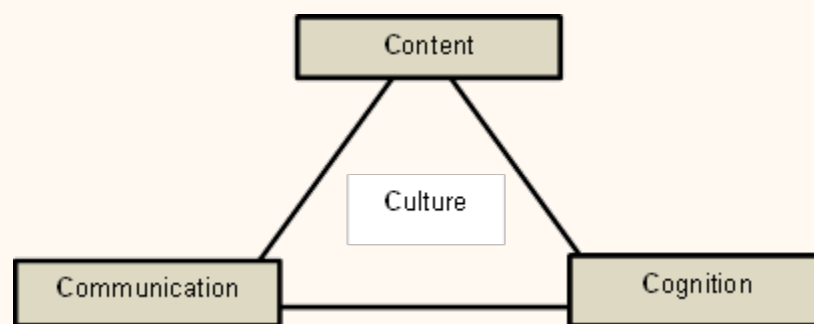
Figure 2: CLIL Framework adopted from Coyle (2009)

He explains how each of these elements are intertwined in a classroom using CLIL. Content relates to the subject specific knowledge that is taught through the medium of L2. Communication refers to the interaction between teacher and student and the development of receptive skills (listening, reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing) as part of the learning process. In parallel to the subject

knowledge and language skills promoted through a CLIL approach, students in a successful CLIL classroom will also acquire higher-level cognition skills such analysis, synthesis and critical thinking and this will be carried out with regard to the cultural backdrop of the subject area being taught and the language through which the teaching is taking place.

Kilmova (2012) and Surmont et al. (2014) discuss the many benefits that CLIL can have in the classroom in terms of increased language contact and authentic use of language in an academic context, increased communication and engagement, increased subject specific knowledge, higher cognitive functioning and an increase in cultural understanding and appreciation for multilingualism.

Case studies in successful implementation of CLIL are becoming more widely available. For example, Coyle et al. (2010) show how to implement CLIL in curriculum design, in classroom activities and in assessment. Doiz et al. (2014) illustrate the positive impact that CLIL has on student motivation while Pérez Cañado (2012) & Lancaster (2016) offer a longitudinal study on the impact of CLIL on oral reception and production, finding that oral production is actually most improved. Ruiz de Zarobe (2015) discusses the practical implementation of CLIL in the classroom and the positive impact it can have while O'Dwyer & De Boer (2015) deal with interaction between teachers and students in the CLIL classroom and offer insights into the language features, instructional strategies, and discourse patterns observed. In the IM sector, the importance of CLIL is starting to be recognized. Harris et al. (2006) look at a case study reaching back as far as the 1980 while more recently Ó Ceallaigh et al. (2015) stress the need for attention to be drawn on closing the gap between language instruction and subject instruction in IM schools and show that effective lesson planning is the key to bridging this gap. Mac Gearailt et. al. (2021) explain the rationale for greater inclusion of the CLIL approach in immersion settings.

Just as language is a skill that must be learned, teaching language and effectively incorporating CLIL in the classroom must be explicitly taught. There has been some significant research in that regard such as Lasagabaster & de Zarobe (2010) who look specifically at how teachers should be trained to use CLIL, and this is built upon by Hillyard (2011) who discusses CLIL modules in pre-teacher training programmes. Pérez Cañado (2018) looks at the innovations and challenges in CLIL teacher training. In an Irish context, the area of CLIL training as been dealt with by, for example, Ó Duibhir (2016) who explains how CLIL has been incorporated in teacher training learning modules and how trainee teachers have received this approach. This is built upon by Cammarata & Ó Ceallaigh, T. J. (2018) who give an overview of the programmes that actually contain this approach.

Immersion Practitioner training

CLIL is only one aspect of training. To fully understand training, we must consider initial training prior to entering employment and in-service training, CPD or TPL once employed in the sector.

Most research on language awareness has focused on initial (pre-service) training for aspiring teachers. Edge (1988), using the teacher language competence framework laid out above (Figure 1) explains that training programmes need to focus on all the three aspects of teacher language awareness; they need to be trained to be independent language users, they need to be able to analyse said language and they need to be specifically trained in language pedagogy. Wright and Bolitho (1993) build on this and propose a methodological framework for achieving this and Wright (2002) lays out a five-stage cycle for language awareness activities: doing; reviewing, making sense, linking and classroom implementation. This is added to by Johnson (2009) who looks at the different communicative genres relevant to teachers. Andrews (2007) expresses the importance of trainee-teacher self-reflection on their linguistic knowledge while Svalberg (2015) focusses on grammar and filling the gaps teachers have in their declarative knowledge of language. Andrews (2017) gives an in-depth overview of the topic arguing that teacher training programmes need highlight the importance of being linguistically aware and states, like Andrews (2007), that the starting point for this is self-reflection.

In the Irish context a number of studies e.g., Ní Chathasaigh (2020); Ní Dhiorbháin & Ó Duibhir (2017); Ní Dhiorbháin et al. (2020); Ó Ceallaigh et al. (2019) and Ó Ceallaigh (2020) have shown the views of trainee teachers and highlight the advantages that can come from focussed linguistic training. Ní Chathasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh & (2021) offer an overview of the extant research in the Irish context and stress the importance of increased research in this area, some of which is covered by this current study, see research questions below (Figure 3).

If initial training programmes can find the right balance between language, subject knowledge, pedagogy and generic teaching skills, many of the problems laid out in this study will be alleviated for future practitioners. However, given the numbers already employed in the sector, in-service training is an important aspect of research.

Freeman (1982), Bullough (2009) and Jahangir et al. (2012) have highlighted the importance of in-service training to bridge gaps in knowledge not covered in initial training programmes; to keep abreast with evolving best practice and policies; to promote reflective practice; to learn about student diversity and special needs; to specialise and add to their skills base; and to document successes to help with promotion and most importantly to address practitioner motivation and job satisfaction. In-service training in Ireland is summarized by Gleeson (2004) who gives on overview of policy and regulations in Ireland. McMillan et al. (2016) build on O'Sullivan et al. (2012) who look at the north-south perspective and show that there is generally a motivation for CPD amongst teachers as they can see the benefits in their own pedagogy. They also lay out the factors that influence engagement in CPD, including the relevance of the available courses, the quality of the instruction, resources and the support and encouragement offered by school leaders. Hagan & Eaton (2020) takes a more critical view; this article discusses the various stakeholders involved in teacher education and their differing perspectives on the purpose, content, and delivery of teacher education programs. It explores the tensions between policymakers' demands for accountability and standardized approaches and the need for flexibility and adaptability in teacher education.

With regard language awareness in service training, Wright & Bolitho (1993) deal with this. They give an overview of extant research, explain the importance of language learning in in-service programmes and give practical ways that this can be implemented. They emphasize the need for teachers to develop metalinguistic awareness, sociolinguistic awareness, and discourse awareness. This includes understanding how language varies in different contexts, the impact of language on social interactions, and the role of language in constructing meaning. By cultivating language awareness, teachers can enhance their pedagogical practices, better support students' language learning, and promote effective communication and language development in the classroom. In the Irish context, this is covered by Ó Duibhir (2000) and extensively by Ni Thuairisg (2014) who, although looking at Gaeltacht teachers in southern Ireland, gives a broad overview of teacher development, assessing the barriers to and challenges of CPD, making recommendations for both pre-service and in-service training while illustrating the need for further research in this area. Ní Chathasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh (2021) build on this, giving an overview of the research carried out on the various challenges that CPD/TLP must try to alleviate.

Research questions

What impact does the linguistic backgound of practitioners have on their linguisitic compentence?

What is the difference between the reported linguistic competency of praticioners and their actual abilty?

How does the language culture within schools impact the lingusitic behavious and confidence of practioners?

What is the relationship between the lingusitic competence of practitioners and the lingusitic outcomes of students?

How does the lingusitic competence of practitioners affect their abilty to delivier content through the medium of L2?

What strategies are employed by practioners to plug their own lingsuitic gaps?

What developmental opportunites exist, which are most effective and what gaps need to be filled?

Figure 3: Research questions

Methodology

| Stage 1: Overview |
| Stage 2: Design and dissemination of surveys |
| Stage 3: Interviews and focus groups |
| Stage 4: Creation of and feedback on benchmarked awareness tests and self-assessment form |
| Stage 5: Qualitative and quantitative analysis |
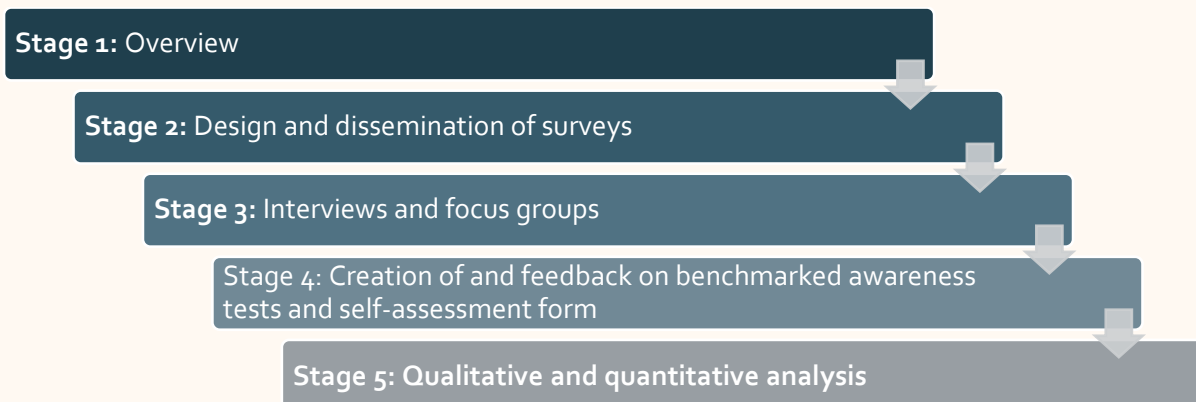
Figure 4: Methodology

Stage 1: Overview: An initial meeting was arranged with representatives from CnaG and EA to help define parameters, discuss research questions and access extant information relating to the research project.

Stage 2: Design and dissemination of surveys: In order to answer the research questions and based on the literature review above, 3 online questionnaires were designed in Microsoft Forms: one for leaders, one for teachers and one for classroom assistants and nursery unit leaders. Although the overarching themes of the questionnaires were purposely similar to allow for cross comparison, the questions were tailored to each party's unique situation and role (See appendices 1-3).

A link to the questionnaires and a cover lever was sent to all practitioners in all schools at nursery, primary and post primary level and this was facilitated by school heads. The questionnaires were sent out on three occasions during this process.

Stage 3: Interviews and focus groups: Building on the themes covered in the questionnaires, to allow for more qualitative discussion, an invitation to partake in a focus group was sent to a sample of ten schools. Due to busy schedules and current industrial action, most schools did not oblige. However, given the literature expressing the acute difficulties faced by specialized subject teachers, 1 interview and 1 focus group was arranged in two post primary settings.

A follow up interview was also arranged with a representative from EA responsible for IM training within the EA's training programme.

Stage 4: Creation of and feedback on benchmarked awareness tests and self-assessment form

Based on The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), a self-assessment grill was compiled focusing on language skills pertinent to the IM sector. Feedback on this was sought from a range of practitioners.

Having surveyed available assessment methods available against CEFR (e.g., Teig.ie), a bespoke set of assessments were designed for the IM sector at 3 CEFR levels, A2, B2, C2. These assessments come in two forms. Firstly, Blackboard Learn was used to create auto-correctable assessments in the areas of aural comprehension, reading comprehension and grammatical knowledge. Oral and written skills assessments were also created in Microsoft Word, but these need an assessor to mark them.

As part of the questionnaires, expression of interest in undertaking the assessments was sought. Due to industrial action, only 8 expressions of interest were received, not enough to create a baseline competency profile. However, the assessments weren't designed for this purpose. They were designed to allow leaders and individuals to assess their competency and decide on appropriate training based on feedback. This work will be ongoing with the researcher willing to assess those tasks that can't be autocorrected.

Stage 5: Qualitative and quantitative analysis: SPSS was used to perform univariable analysis and multivariable analysis (where appropriate) on the quantitative data collected through the questionnaires. With the interviews/focus groups, and the open questionnaires in the questionnaires, the qualitative analysis software, NiVO, was used to code and analyse the qualitative data on a thematic basis.

Ethics

Ulster University's guidelines and procedures were followed for this project which falls into category A of the University's regulations[1]. The researcher was in direct contact with adults on a voluntary basis. All data collected was safely stored on the university's high security system and participants have been anonymized.

Results and discussion

-Overview of results obtained

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[1] A copy of this is available @ https://www.ulster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/123041/Policy-for-the-Governance-ofResearch-involving-human-participants.pdf.

Below we see an overview of the results obtained. Given the short timeframe of the research, the pressures on IM staff and the current industrial action, this is a fair outcome. The breath of informants across school types is suffice to offer a general overview of opinions, experiences and difficulties within the various IM settings, especially when they can be related to extant findings in similar settings elsewhere.

5 Leaders
2 primary
2 post primary
1 primary unit

26 teachers
17 post primary
4 primary
4 primary units
1 post primary stream

19 classroom assistants
4 nursery
5 primary
2 primary units

5 interview/focus groups
2 EA
1 interview
2 focus groups
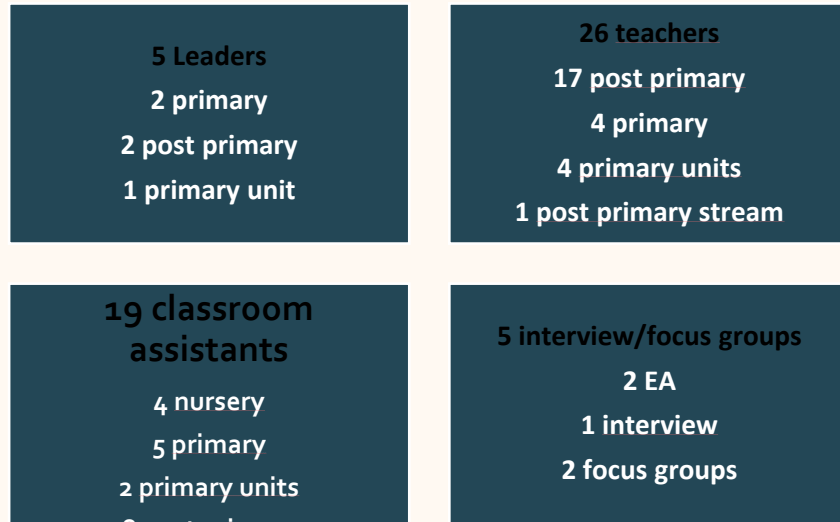
Figure 5: Overview of responses obtained

- **Areas for analysis**

Initial training → Schools' language culture → Use, knowledge and confidence → Classroom practices → Training needs → Initial training
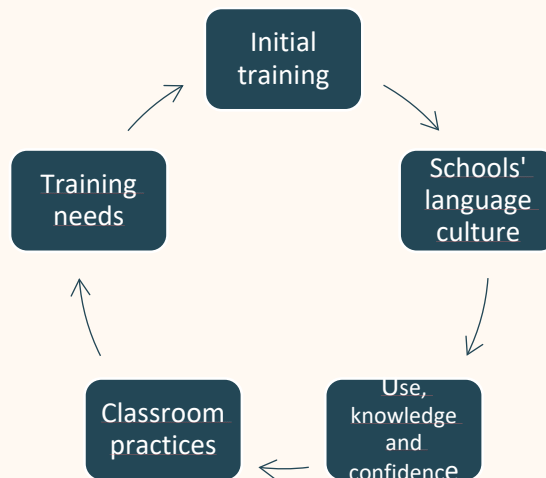
Figure 6: Areas for analysis

Initial training

- **Language background and initial training pathways**
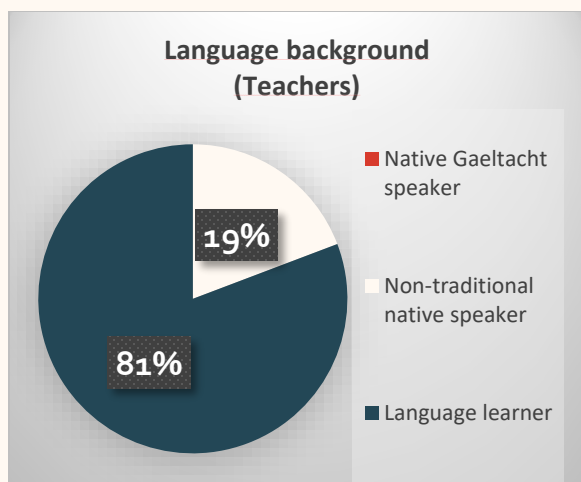
Figure 7: Language background (Teachers)
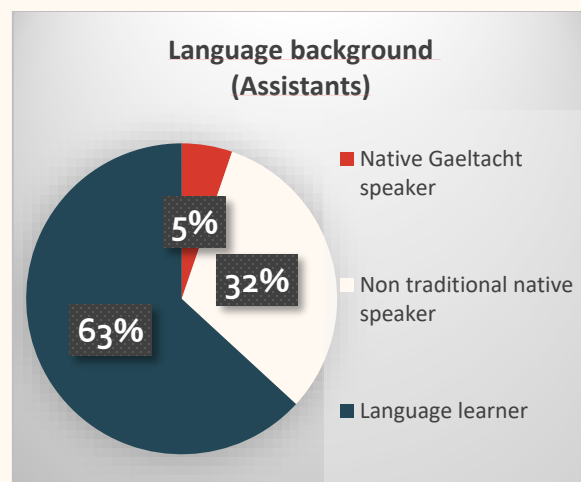
Figure 8: Language background (Assistants)

Only 1 native *Gaeltacht* speaker was found amongst the respondents. Although not surprising, it highlights that even the most linguistically competent in the sector are, in fact, learners of the language. The majority of teachers (81%) and the majority of language assistants (63%) describe themselves as having learnt the language. 19% and 32% respectively, class themselves as non- traditional native speakers. This can be defined as those who have grown up speaking the language as a home-language or who have come through the immersion sector. In most of these cases, they have acquired the language through parents or through teachers who are learners of the language. This is neither a criticism nor a cause for concern but speaks to the fact that IM practitioners are themselves on a language learning journey. For many, an important step in this language learning journey is the course untaken in preparation for working in the sector (Andrews & Lin, 2017, 59).

There are a range of pathways through which practitioners come to be employed in the sector and those detailed by the respondents are laid out in appendix 4. These pathways have a direct impact on their linguistic awareness and confidence of practitioners (Andrews, 2003). Some teachers have specialized in Irish undertaking a full degree in Irish before undertaking the PGCE. Through this route, they have had focussed linguistic training and extensive exposure to the language but only limited exposure to language pedagogy (1 module) during their PGCE. Others have chosen Irish as their specialised subject as part of their primary BEd programme so have had some exposure to Irish and immersion pedagogy, though this is only one element of the course. Due to other modules and school placements, the training is neither continual, intense nor focussed on all areas of linguistic awareness. Others have studied a range of modules on the BEd programme through the medium of Irish and this helps with both exposure to Irish and classroom but has the same issue as above. At the other end of

the scale, we have teachers who specialize in a subject other than Irish and who have had no genuine linguistic training. In teaching programmes, such as a general PGCE, emphasis, unsurprisingly, is on generic teaching skills with focus on IM teaching very much dependent on the institution chosen.

- **Emphasis on Irish**
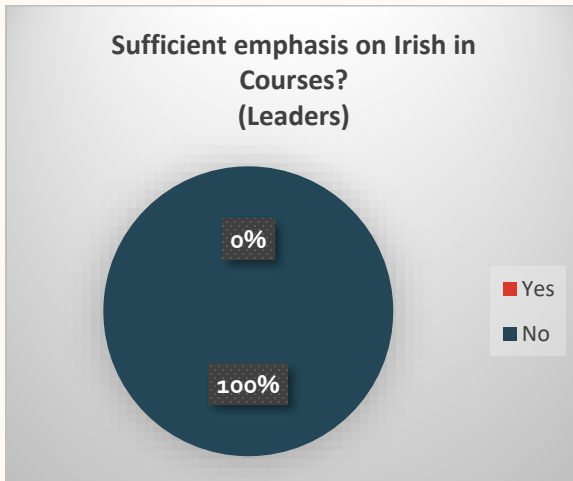
Figure 9: Emphasis on Irish (Leaders)　　**Figure 10:** Emphasis on Irish (Teachers)
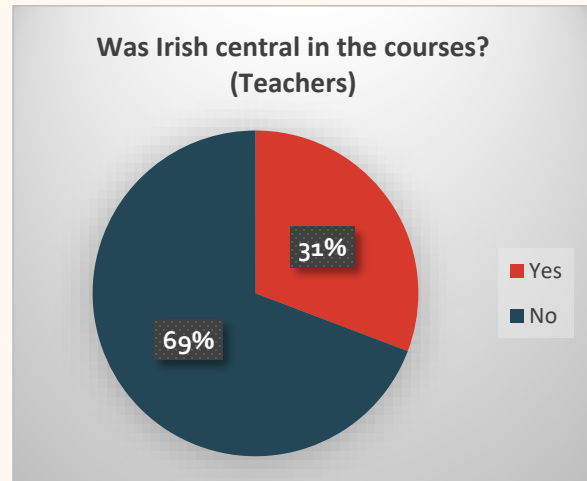
Although the majority of respondents studied courses with an Irish element, the majority claim that this was not the primary focus of the course. In both the BEd and the PGCE programmes, general skills are said to be the major focus. 100% of leaders who responded concur with this and state that they can see the linguistic difficulties faced by new teachers on arrival into the school which can be linked back to their lack of previous exposure. One leader also mentions the lack of a full post primary PGCE with Irish focus which is only available for primary teaching and another mentions that it is left to the individual or the school the bridge any linguistic gaps that become apparent after initial training, while in employment.

Were you confident in your language abilites on completing the course? (Teachers)

42% · 58%

Yes · No
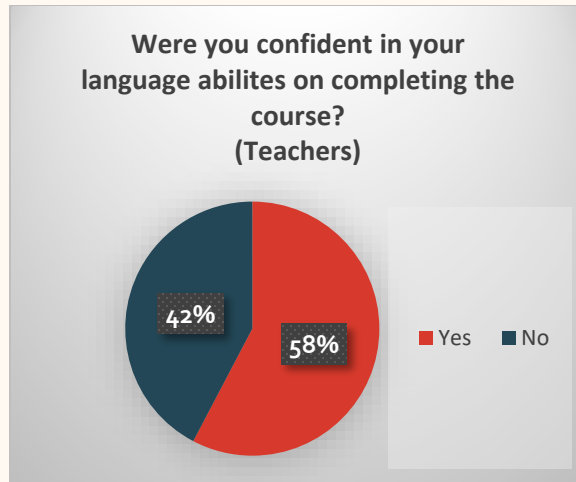
Figure 11: Confidence in language ability on finishing course (Teachers)

Here we see that only 55% of teachers claimed that they were confident in the language abilities on completing their initial training. This concurs will Ní Chathasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh (2021, 7). Amongst those who were confident, some had the opportunity to practice Irish outside of the classroom setting; others had spent time in the Gaeltacht while others had attended other language courses to further their language skills. The fact that 42% state that they were not confident is significant but hardly surprising. Learning a language to the level needed to teach through it takes many years of focussed instruction and exposure and no 3rd level course on its own can hope to achieve this, especially since course curricula cannot focus entirely on this skill. Those who were not confident mentioned their lack of grammatical knowledge, the lack of specialised vocabulary for the classroom (see also Ní Chathasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh (2021) and their tendency to second guess their knowledge of language having forgotten what they learnt in certain language modules (see also Ní Chathasaigh, 2020; Ó Ceallaigh *et al.*, 2019).

Is language pedagogy central to courses? (Leaders)

0% · 100%

Yes · No
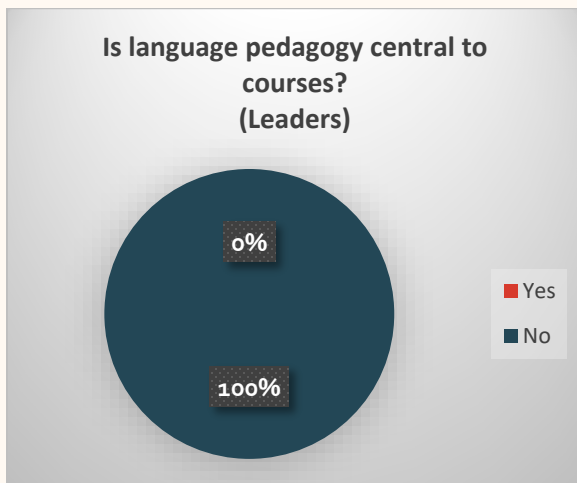
Figure 12: Language pedagogy on courses (Leaders)

Is language pedgogy central to courses? (Teachers)

4% · 38% · 58%

Yes · No · NA
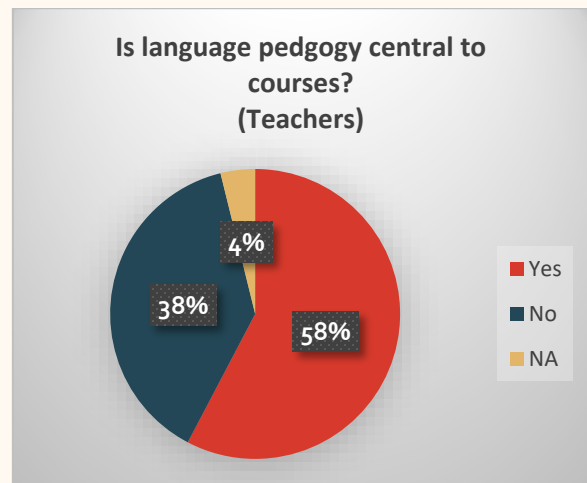
Figure 13: Language pedagogy on course (Teachers)

Based on these results, leaders to not feel that language pedgogy plays a central role in teacher training. Although it may be covered in some modules, it looses out to other areas that are required to be covered by the GTCNI. However, 58% of teachers, those who have come through Irish-based courses in the past few years, offer examples of where language pedagogy was studied as a module or mentioned in other modules, but with 38% claiming that the didn't feel this to be the case suggests that further work could be done in this regard (See also Ó Ceallaigh, 2013; Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghdha, 2017; Ó Ceallaigh *et al.*,2019).

- **Confidence in explaining language (teachers)**
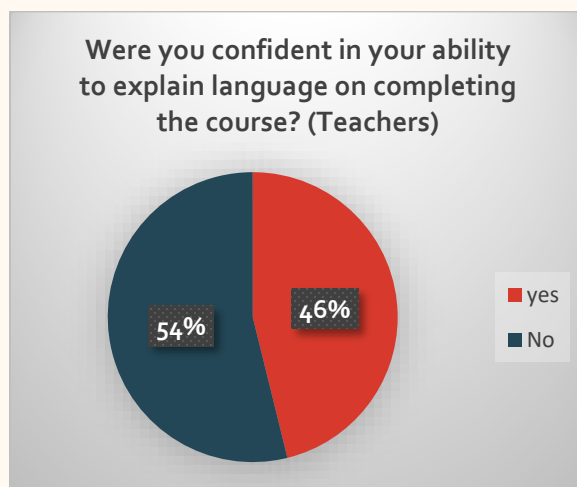
Figure 14: Confidence in ability to explain language on completing course (Teachers)

54% on those teachers who responded claim that they weren't confident in their ability to explain the language to others nor teach it on completing their initial training (see also Ní Chathasaigh, 2020; Ó Ceallaigh *et al.*, 2019). One can have an ability to use the language, but this doesn't always translate into an ability to explain it and to teach it to others (Andrews & Lin, 2017, 59). A few respondents again mention the lack of experience of having to do this part of their initial training while others are of the belief that this is something that is learnt gradually through experience of doing and through learning from others while in that setting (Nassaji, 2012, 1). Others still mention that they have had to work at this in their own time through using grammars and dictionaries or through attending language correctness classes available in the community.

Confidence in abilities (Classroom assistants)

Figure 15: Confidence in language ability on completing course (Assistants)
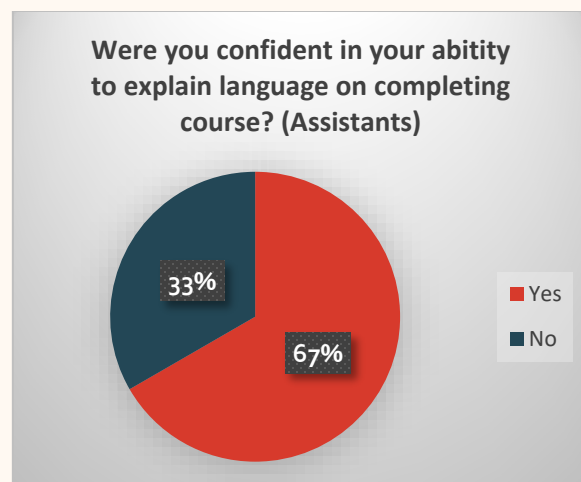
Figure 16: Confidence in ability to explain language on completing course (Assistants)

Reported confidence in language abilities amongst classroom assistants is high (74%), with 67% of respondents claiming they are confident in their ability to explain the language to others. This is surprising given that there is a wide variety of qualifications amongst them (see appendix 4). This ranges from those who have only GCSE level qualifications to those who have degrees in Irish and other subjects. This range stems from the fact that there is no clear specialised qualification needed to undertake this role (see Sharples et al., 2016). Many of the qualifications cited were actually achieved while already employed and the confidence mentioned, based on comments, in many cases, didn't arise as a result of completing a training course but rather having spent some time working in the sector, having been through the sector as a student or having had the chance to speak Irish at home.

- **Initial training: a conclusion**

The findings highlight the varied backgrounds and pathways followed by practitioners. They underscore the importance of providing comprehensive language training and targeted pedagogical instruction for educators prior to them being employed in the sector. It is necessary to understand that linguistic gaps are to be expected and opportunities must be created to address these. In doing so, the sector can further improve the confidence of all practitioners and enhance the quality of instruction.

Schools' language culture

Below we discuss the importance of language culture within schools, as it serves as the foundation for the values expressed by leaders and staff. This culture also shapes the professional practices of practitioners and significantly influences linguistic congruence and the quality of input provided to students.

- **Irish as a criterion for employment**

Was Irish proficiency an important criterion for the job you got? (Teachers)

4%

96%

- Yes
- No

Figure 17: Irish as a job criteria (Teachers)

Was Irish proficiency an important criterion for the job you got? (Assistants)

5%

95%

- Yes
- No

Figure 18: Irish as a job criteria (Assistants)

Is Irish proficiency an important employment criterion? (Leaders)

19%
0%
49%
32%

- Main criteria
- The same as any other criteria
- Is is not the most important criterion
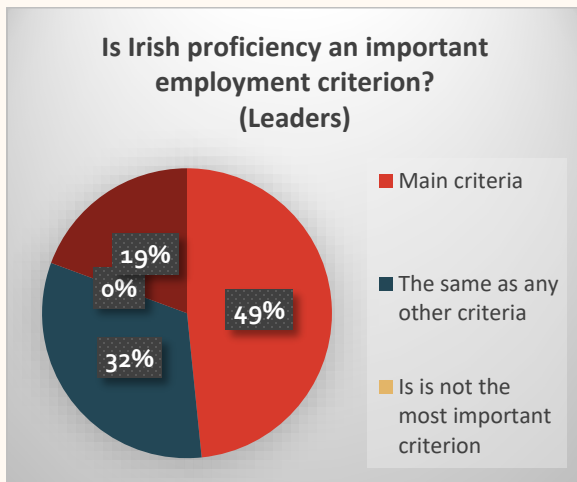
Figure 19: Irish as a job criteria (Leaders)

How is language proficiency assessed during recruitment? (Leaders)

15%
12%
49%
24%

- Question in Irish
- Look at qulaifications
- Exam
- We don't assess

Figure 20: Assessment of proficiency (Leaders)

Not surprisingly, both teachers and assistants claim that Irish was an important criterion when they were applying for their job. For teaching roles, on top of a teaching qualification and experience, proficiency in Irish is a pre-requisite. For classroom assistants, proficiency in Irish or a willingness to achieve proficiency in Irish are often essential criteria. 49% of leaders claim that proficiency in Irish is the main criteria but 32% claim that it has the same weighting as any other criteria. This is understandable given that a specific skillset and experience is needed to be an effective teacher or

classroom assistant and the recruitment process much ensure this (See Webster, 1998). However, with multiple criteria, a candidate with limited Irish may score highly enough against the other criteria to be successful or a school may have no choice but to hire someone with limited Irish due to a lack of suitable candidates (Ó Grádaigh, 2015). Often the qualification the applicant holds in the language is taken as proof of ability in the language which may not actually translate into a candite who is linguistically aware as explained in this research. As part of interviews, many schools (especially units or streams within larger schools) will interview through English. Consequently, a number of respondents mention that they were only asked one or two questions in Irish. One school does mention using a translation test as part of the recruitment process and this could be seen as being a more linguistically rigorous approach even if it doesn't assess ability in other in other aspects of language awareness.

- **Schools' language policy**
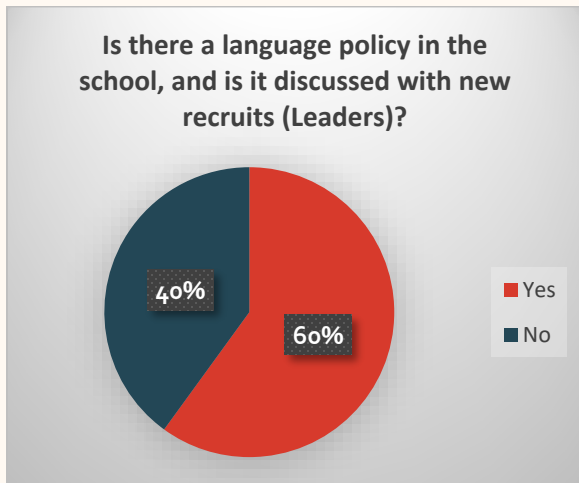
Figure 21: Language policy in school (Leaders)
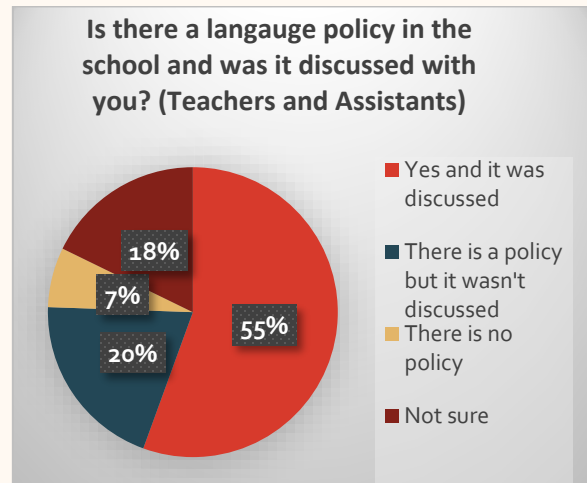
Figure 22: Language policy in school (Teachers and Assistants)
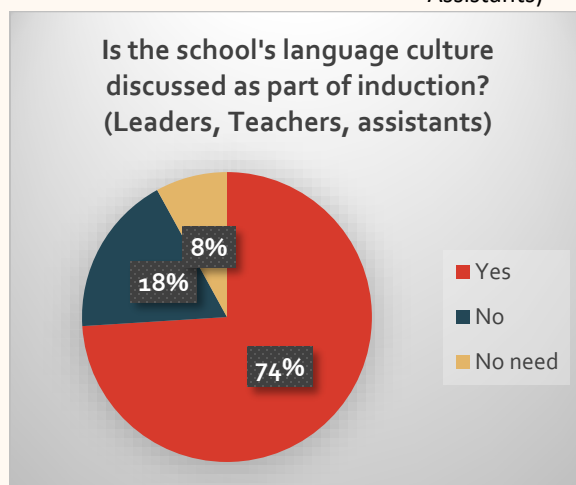
Figure 23: Discussion of language culture (Leaders, teachers, assistants)

A school language policy should encapsulate the language culture of a school, outlining the key principles, objectives and strategies related to language learning, instruction and use as a means for communication within the school (Ó Laoire, 2003; Wiley & García, 2016). A strong policy should contain the school's vision, the approach to language instruction and how this relates to the curriculum, the approach to assessing language proficiency, approach to communication inside and outside the classroom and how the school language community can link into the wider language community and what support should be put in place should a staff member or student need linguistic support. Not only does such a policy give common focus but it is a document that can be referred to should linguistic difficulties arise. However, see (Hoyle & John, 1995; Mac Donncha, 2005) who warn that if not implemented properly, a policy can be used as a stick as opposed to a carrot.

100% of leaders claim that a policy exists and 60% say they discuss it with new recruits. However, this doesn't concur with the views the staff, as 20% of teachers and classroom assistants surveyed claim that it wasn't discussed with them, while 7% claim there is no policy with 18% of respondents aren't sure. These policies, if they do exist, aren't easily found on school websites, or it could be, that they are incorporated in other policies.

In all, 74% of those questioned state that the language culture of the school was discussed during induction, and this is positive.

- **Mentorship**

Mentorship is an important part of induction into any new job especially for those members of staff inexperienced in a role (see Shanks et al., 2022). It helps new staff transition into their role, learn about how the school operates, learn on the job from more experienced colleagues, offers emotional support should staff we struggling to adjust and guide them in areas of professional development and CPD. In an immersion setting, there is the added aspect of offering support in relation to the language policy, be that in terms of the new staff members ability in the language or in their linguistic behaviour (see Cody, 2009; Ó Grádaigh, 2015, 9).

Are new employes given a mentor?
(according to leaders)

20%

80%

Yes
No
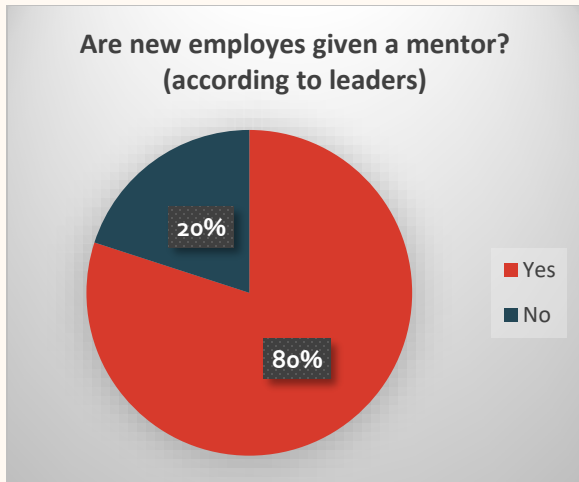
Figure 24: Are new employees mentored?
(according to leaders)

Were you given a mentor?
(according to teachers)

54%

46%

Yes
No
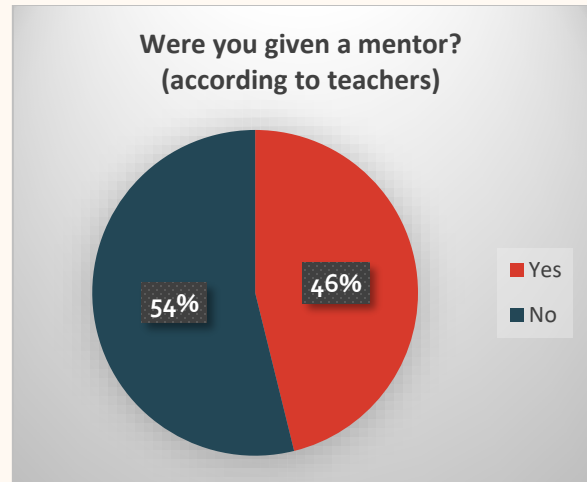
Figure 25: Were you given a mentor? (according to
teachers)

Were you given a mentor?
(according to assistants)

16%

84%

Yes
No

Figure 26: Were you given a mentor? (according to assistants)

80% of those leaders questioned, state that there is a programme of mentorship for new employees, and one mentions that a senior manager is assigned to offer support on those areas outlined above. It is significant that only 46% of teachers surveyed remember having a mentor and this increases to 84% in the case of classroom assistants, many of whom may have never worked in an immersion context previously. One teacher states that given that they are employed in Irish language stream, that the induction is handled by those on the English side, therefore language issues aren't really taken into account. Another mentions a less formal approach of staff room interactions and general discussion. Those who received mentorship claim that they were given some help with language issues, especially in the area of marking students work. Others state that although they didn't have a designated mentor, they felt that they could ask questions of other members of staff. Those who didn't receive mentorship

claim that they had to learn as they went and that the reason for not receiving mentorship is a that other staff were just too busy to offer this type of support.

- **Emphasis on the correct use of Irish**
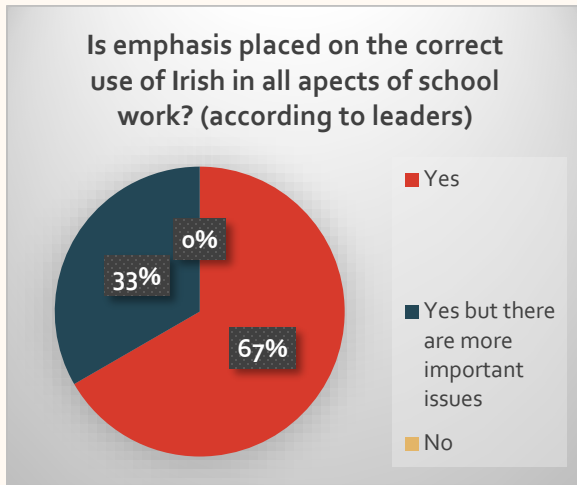
Figure 27: Emphasis on correct use of Irish (according to leaders)
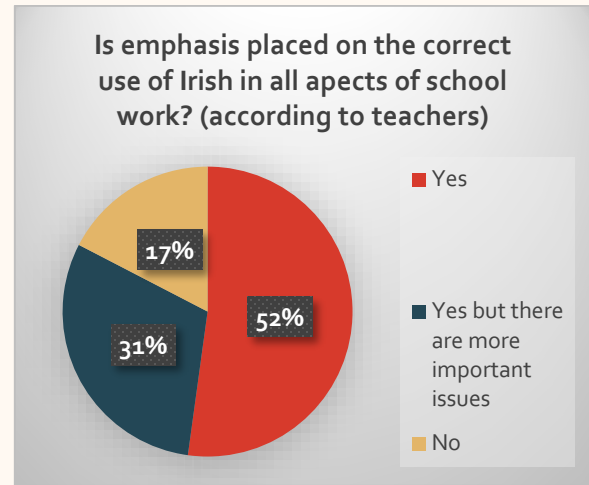
Figure 28: Emphasis on correct use of Irish (according to teachers)
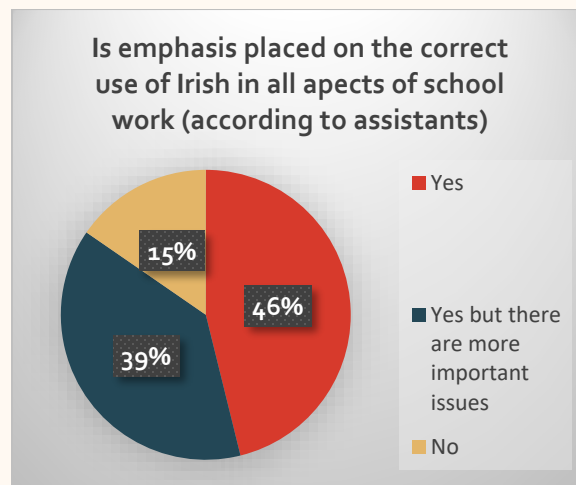
Figure 29: Emphasis on correct use of Irish (according to assistants)

67% of leaders questioned, 52% of teachers and 46% of assistants attest to the importance of the correct use of Irish in all aspects of their school's operations. This is not surprising given that language promotion and bilingual competency are an integral part of the ethos and vision of these schools. Staff seem to understand the importance of the promotion of language correctness insofar as this acts as an exemplar for students (Mhic Aoidh, 2021, 3; Ó Fáthasaigh, 2021, 15). Consciously and unconsciously students will be influenced by the standard of Irish they see and hear from these linguistic role-models,

therefore, it is vitally important that this linguistic output is correct, be it in how Irish is spoken amongst staff and amongst staff and students inside and outside the classroom, the signage and wall displays around the school or the resources, written notes and feedback offered to students. If we think of an English setting, it would not be acceptable nor tolerated if any of these forms of output were to be of a poor standard of English as it is understood that students will in turn be influenced by this.

Contrary to the importance placed by the respondents on correctness, having visited a number of schools, spoken to many practitioners, some of whom have been on courses on which the researcher teaches and having surveyed written correspondence , through this research and through normal dealings with schools, the vision doesn't always match the reality. Many examples of spelling, grammatical and phonological errors could be given. Two possible reasons for these errors can be cited. Firstly, as stated by 33% of leaders, 31% of teachers and 39% of assistants, language correctness issues, although important are not the most important issues facing practitioners. On a daily basis, they have the deal with a multitude of issues in relation to administration, pastoral care and classroom practice and this burden of work is going to result in some slippage caused by creating output in a rush. On top of this, as has been mentioned already and as will be analysed below, those creating the output are on a learning journey of their own and an undeniable part of language learning is mistake-making (Al-Sobhi, 2019). Mistakes can of course happen but the key to resolving is co-operation amongst staff in spotting and rectifying errors and taking responsibility for their own linguistic performance and development where that is required.

- **Co-operation on language issues**
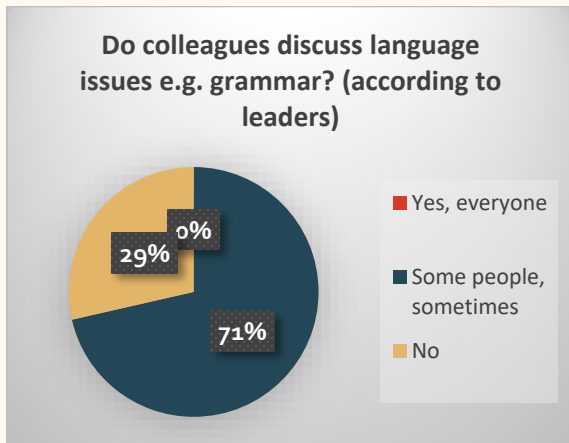
Figure 30 Do colleagues discuss language issues? (according to leaders)
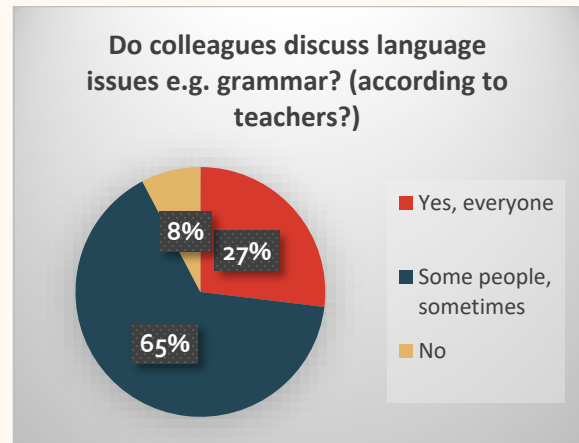
Figure 31 Do colleagues discuss language issues? (according to teachers)
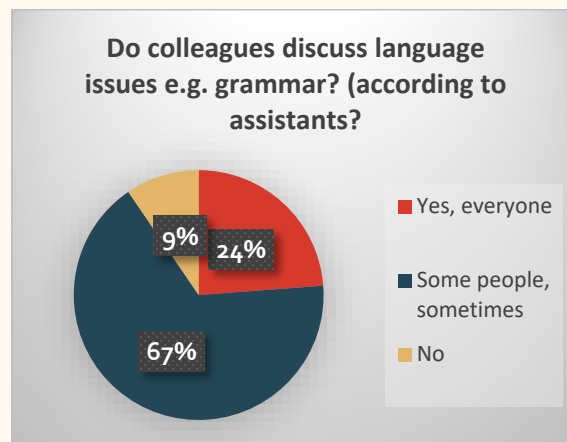
Figure 32 Do colleagues discuss language issues? (according to leaders)

In light of the importance of helping one another spot and fix mistakes and supporting each other's linguistic progression, practitioners were asked about the manner in which they co-operate with each other. 71% of leaders, 67% of teachers and 67% of assistants who responded claim that they do in fact discuss language issues such as pronunciation, grammar and terminology. Some do this in an informal ad-hoc way, for example in the staff room, while others organise support sessions for those who have questions. The overriding sentiment, however, is that this discussion is invaluable but that colleagues are simply too busy to do this on an ongoing basis due to other commitments and more pressing acute discussions that are required on pupil-related issues. There is also a feeling, however, that some staff are open to these discussions more than others. Although language issues should be everyone's concern, some staff members are more motivated in that regard than others either because they see

their role as focussing more on language or that they have a greater interest in language issues and language correctness.

- **Proofing**
-
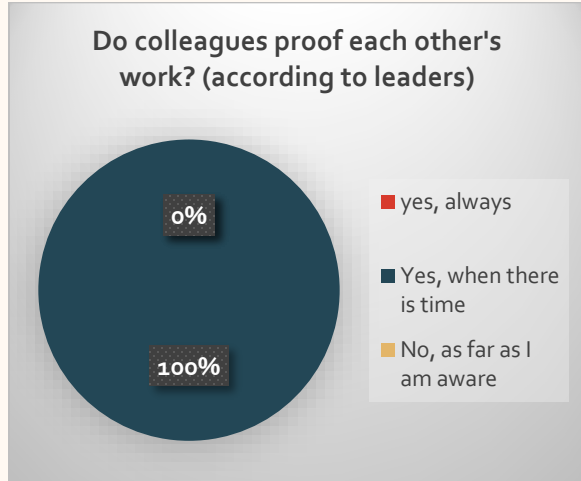
Figure 33: Do colleagues proof each other's work (according to leaders)
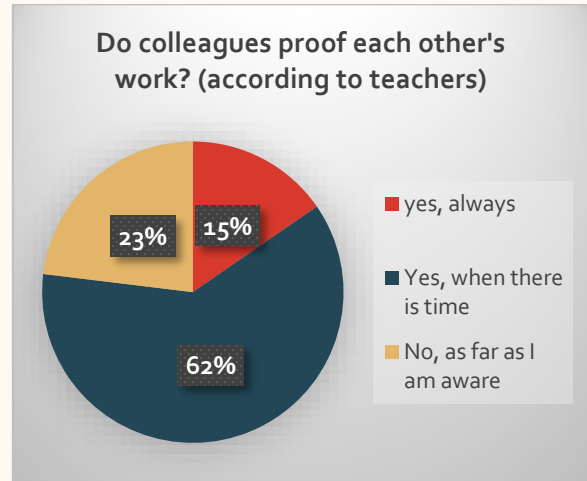
Figure 34: Do colleagues proof each other's work (according to teachers)
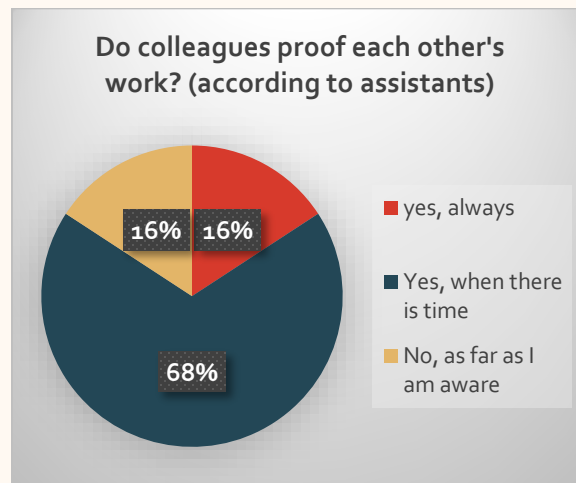
Figure 35: Do colleagues proof each other's work (according to assistants)

According to the survey results, 100% of leaders, 91% of teachers, and 84% of assistants indicated that they would either always ask others to proofread their work or sometimes ask. The significance of proofreading as a professional activity cannot be underestimated. As mentioned earlier, proofreading not only ensures accuracy and consistency but also facilitates peer discussion and peer learning .

It is worth noting that the majority of individuals in each group stated that they engage in proofreading when time permits. Sometimes, due to the need for quick turnaround, there isn't enough time to go

through multiple stages of proofreading and editing. For instance, a letter intended for parents, or a publication meant to be publicly available is more likely to undergo proofreading compared to a set of student notes or written feedback on homework.

Given that it is not always practical or possible to engage in thorough proofreading, it becomes crucial for every staff member who produces written content to possess the requisite language skills and be aware of their personal responsibility to self-check and seek a second opinion, rather than adopting an attitude of "it will do fine."

- **Error correction**

Figure 36: Would you alert a colleague to a language mistake? (Leaders)

Figure 37: Would you alert a colleague to a language mistake? (Teachers)

Figure 38: Would you alert a colleague to a language mistake? (Assistants)

In order to foster a culture of linguistic accuracy, it is crucial to establish an approach where errors in linguistic output are promptly identified and brought to the attention of the individuals involved for rectification. This practice not only ensures linguistic correctness but also enables staff members to address simple typos or identify areas where they may benefit from seeking advice or engaging in self-learning.

Among the leaders and teachers who participated in the survey, a significant majority, comprising 60% and 68% respectively, indicated that deciding to highlight errors would depend on the individual involved. This suggests that some individuals may be more receptive to constructive criticism, while others may exhibit defensiveness when their use of language is challenged. Colleagues also do not wish to portray linguistic snobbery or come across as pedantic or critical. Striking a delicate balance between assisting colleagues in achieving greater accuracy and avoiding confrontation is essential. Additionally, if the subject is not broached with care, there is a risk of undermining the linguistic confidence of those whose work requires correction which may impact their willingness to create language (See Aziz, M. F., & Jayaputri, 2023).

Interestingly, 67% of assistants expressed their willingness to point out mistakes if they notice them. This is surprising considering that the errors may originate from individuals occupying more senior or responsible positions.

- **School's language culture: a conclusion**
A variety of approaches to cultivating a robust language culture can be seen within and amongst schools and amongst different members of staff. A challenge for any leader is to instil the importance of language excellence from the top down and to encourage positive linguistic habits while supporting staff who need assistance without aliening them, impacting on their confidence or creating hierarchies of language users within any single school setting.

Language use, knowledge and confidence

Much of the discussion regarding language culture within schools hinges on the linguistic awareness of the staff. It is essential to understand how practitioners in the IM sector actually utilize the language and assess their own confidence and ability, particularly considering that being employed in this sector does not automatically equate to high competence.

- **Use of Irish**
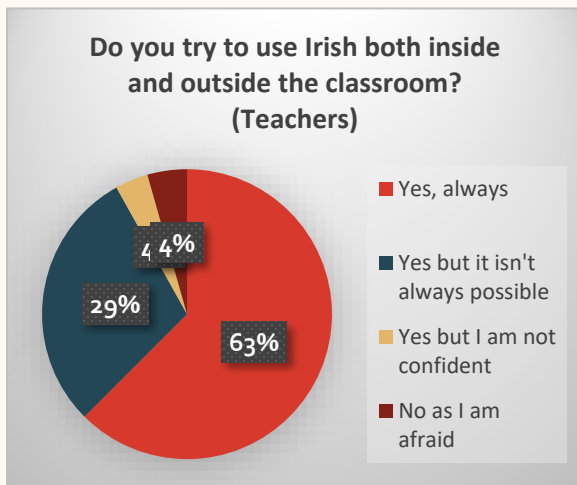
Figure 39: Using Irish inside and outside the classroom (Teachers)
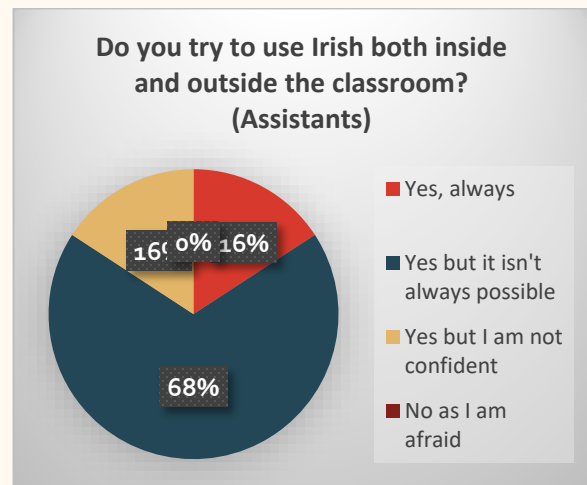
Figure 40: Using Irish inside and outside the classroom (Assistants)

63% of teachers claim to use as much Irish as possible both within the classroom setting and outside it. This is hardly surprising given that they have chosen to work in the IM sector and therefore have an interest in the use and promotion of the language. It is significant, however, that 29% of teachers and 68% of assistants claim that although they would wish to speak Irish at all times that this is not possible. This speaks to a mixed linguistic picture. There are some staff within the school who may not have enough Irish to converse freely in the language, therefore those who can are required to switch to English to accommodate them. Furthermore, in Irish units or streams staff are surrounded by those without Irish or for whom Irish isn't an issue so in order to be part of the larger team, English must be used.

- **Creating Irish**

Do you create your own resources?
(Teachers)

8%

Yes
No

92%

Are you required to write in Irish?
(Assistants)

42%

Yes
No

58%
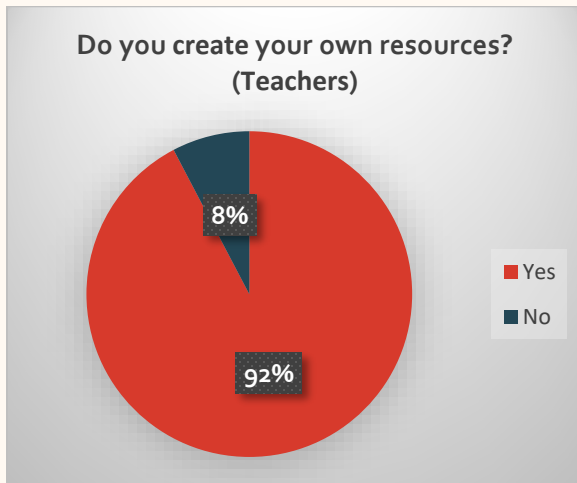
Figure 41: Do you create resources? (Teachers)   **Figure 42:** Are you required to write Irish? (Assistants)
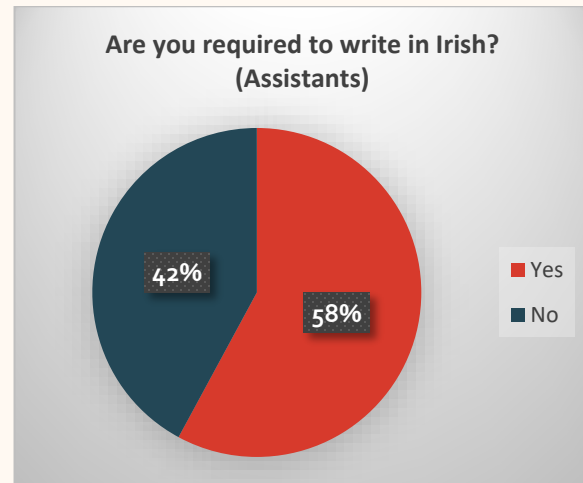
It has been often stated that IM practitioners, more than their counterparts in EM settings, are required to create their own resources due to a lack of bespoke IM resources (See Ó Domagáin 2021). Notwithstanding that, each teacher in every setting will take what is available and tailor it to their own teaching style of their own learner needs. For IM teachers, translating resources based on available English resources or building resources from scratch is not only time-consuming but linguistically challenging (see Stansfield et al, 2022). 92% of teachers are involved in this and when we look at the range of language abilities as evidenced below, and time constraints of proofing as evidenced above, it is conceivable that linguistic errors will occur.

58% of assistants state that they are required to write Irish and again the quality of this writing will depend on their linguistic ability and efforts taken to proof it.

- **Subjective knowledge of Irish: Classroom staff**

Self-assessed CEFR Level (Teachers)

C2, C1, B2, B1, A2, A1

31%
34%
27%
8 0%
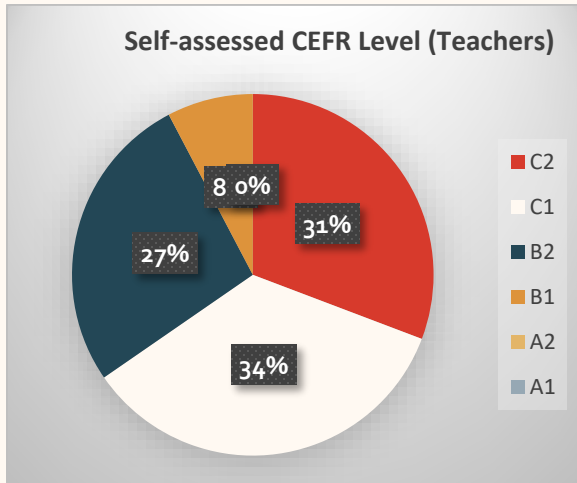
Figure 43: Self-assessed CEFR Level (Teachers)

Self assessed CEFR-level (Assistants)

C2, C1, B2, B1, A2, A1

11%
5 5%
26%
53%
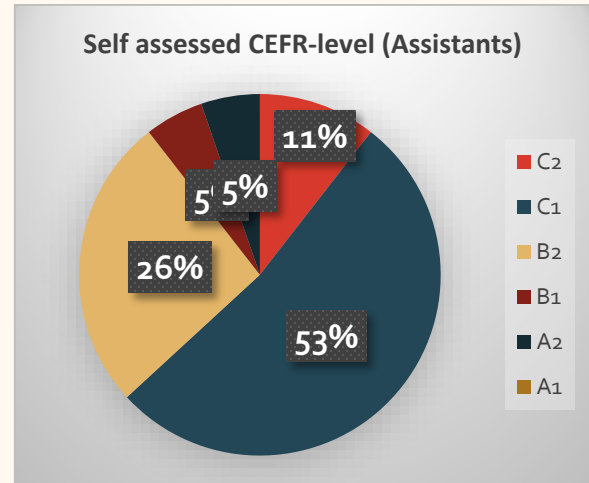
Figure 44: Self-assessed CEFR Level (Assistants)

Content with your level of Irish and confident in it? (Teachers)

Yes fully content
Yes but could improve
No there is work to be done

15% 4%
81%
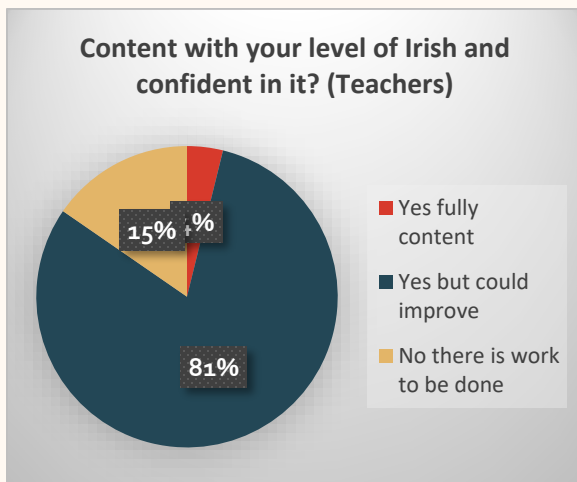
Figure 45: Content with level of Irish and confident (Teachers)

Content with your level of Irish and confident in it? (Assistants)

Yes fully content
Yes but could improve
No there is work to be done

16% 10%
74%
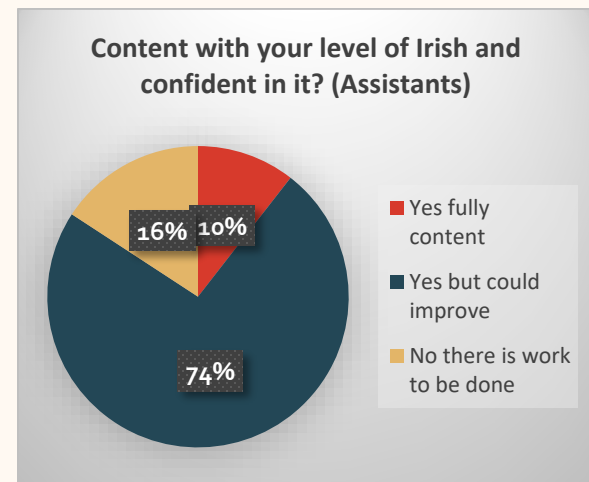
Figure 46: Content with level of Irish and confident (Assistants)

As expected in an immersion environment, a significant portion of teachers (65%) and assistants (63%) assess themselves as highly proficient (C2) or advanced (C1) according to the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR) (see appendix 8). These self-assessed levels indicate a relatively high level of language ability which, if the case, is positive. However, it is important to note that these assessments are subjective and self-reported, which may not necessarily align with formal assessments using the assessment resources developed as part of this project (see appendix 5). See Blue (1994) for a discussion of self-assessed language skills.

Furthermore, a notable percentage of teachers (27%) and assistants (26%) place themselves at the next level below (still indicating a relatively high ability). However, it should be acknowledged that 8% of teaching staff and 10% of assistants consider themselves to be at a level lower than upper intermediate, highlighting the need for linguistic support among some individuals. This need for support chimes with Ní Chathasaigh and Ó Ceallaigh (2021).

Even among those who perceive themselves as having the highest ability, there is a recognition that improvements can be made (Nic Réamoinn, 2017; Ní Chathasaigh, 2020). A significant majority of respondents, comprising 81% of teachers and 74% of assistants, express a sense of confidence in their abilities but also acknowledge room for improvement. This indicates a positive attitude towards self-improvement, but likewise suggests the presence of some linguistic insecurity among some practitioners.

- **Objective knowledge of Irish: Classroom staff**
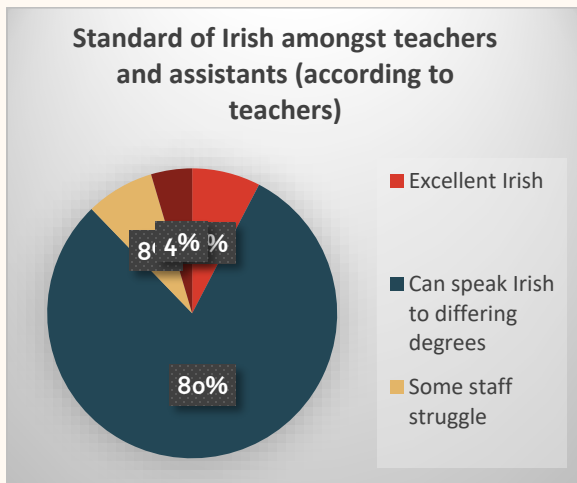
Figure 47: Standard of Irish amongst staff (according to teachers)
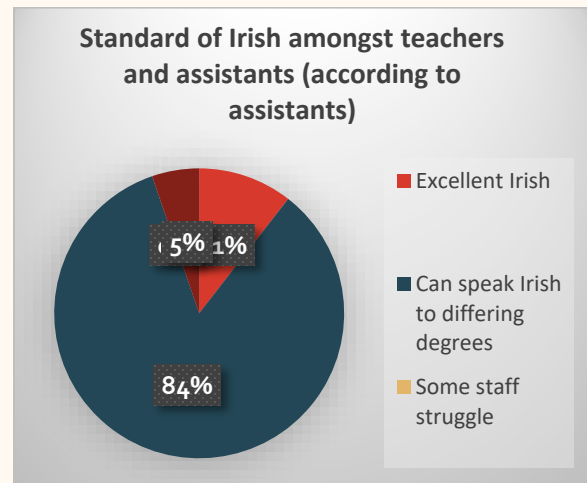
Figure 48 Standard of Irish amongst staff according to (according to assistants)

To provide a more objective perspective, respondents were asked to assess the overall linguistic abilities of classroom staff in general, revealing a less certain picture. The results show that 80% of teachers and 84% of assistants acknowledge that most staff members can speak Irish, but with varying degrees of competency. This variation in proficiency levels is to be expected in any community of speakers, especially when those community members come from diverse linguistic backgrounds (see figure 7/8) and diverse linguistic training pathways (see page 31). It is important to recognize that the language community within

a school is not homogenous, and therefore the linguistic training opportunities provided cannot be one size fits all, but rather should address the specific needs of individuals.

- **Confidence levels: object view of classroom staff**

Figure 49: Do some staff struggle with confidence? (according to leaders)
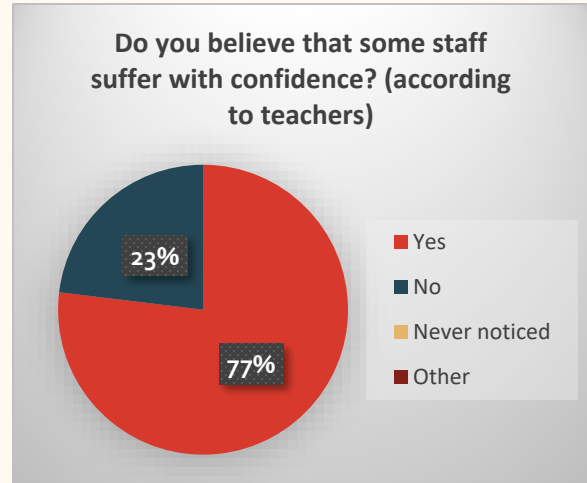
Figure 50: Do some staff struggle with confidence? (according to teachers)

Figure 51: Do some staff struggle with confidence? (According to assistants)

77% of leaders, 74% of teachers and 89% of assistants claim that there are members of the classroom staff who struggle with their linguistic confidence and this correlates with the varying levels of competency as detailed above (Ó Ceallaigh *et al.*, 2020). It is stated that there is a tendency for staff to compare their own linguistic ability with that of others and when they perceive themselves to be weaker, this impacts on their willingness to use the language or to write the language (Ní Chathasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh, 2021, 96). There is no suggestion of linguistic snobbery amongst staff but given that many respondents claim there to be a lack of improvement opportunities for those staff who struggle with

ability or confidence, there is the danger that there could be a chasm, in some schools, between the most linguistically proficient and the staff who could benefit from development.

- **Objective knowledge of Irish: non-Teaching staff**
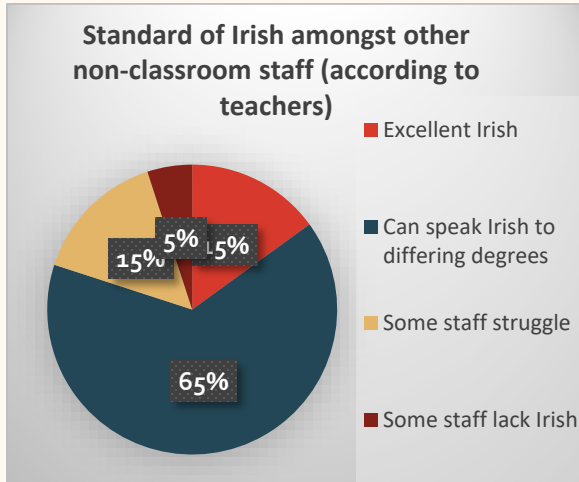
Figure 52: Staff's use of Irish (according to leaders)
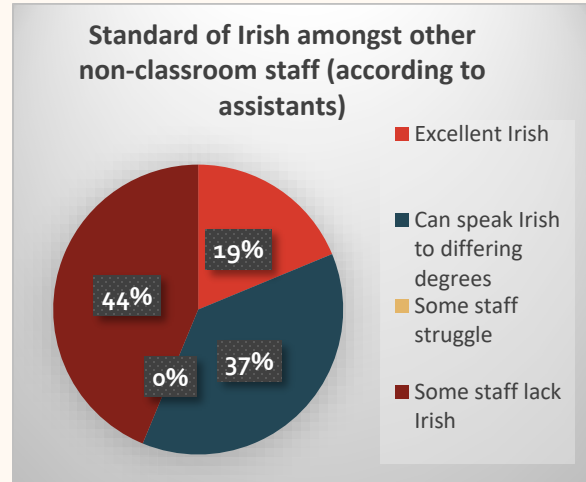
Figure 53: Staff's use of Irish (according to teachers and assistants)

Expanding the analysis to include the entire school community, including non-classroom staff such as administrators, cleaners, and caretakers, provides a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic competencies within the school. While these staff members may not have direct interaction with students or the same level of impact as classroom staff, they still contribute to the overall linguistic community of the school (see Alanis & Rodriguez, 2008). Here, we see a similar picture as above with the majority claiming a mixed ability profile. As expected, the number of those who lack Irish increases especially according to classroom assistants (44%).

It may be worth offering non-classroom staff opportunities for language training as it recognizes their role as members of the school community and acknowledges the importance of fostering a shared language culture across all staff members. It also provides opportunities for increased language use and exposure, as even basic conversational Irish can contribute to creating an immersive language environment within the school. This, in turn, can have a positive impact on students, as they witness consistent language use throughout the school community. It may be the case, however, that the motivation isn't there especially in Irish units or streams where the perceived need for Irish would not be as high.

- **Students' impact on practitioners' Irish**

Do you feel you have to simplify your Irish in class? (Teachers and assistants)

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

4%
16%
80%
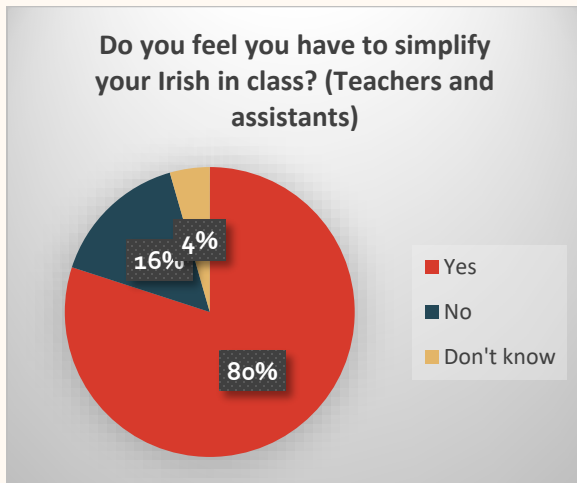
Figure 54: Do you simplify Irish for students? (Teachers and Assistants)

Does the variety of Irish you use in class affect the Irish you use outside class? (Teachers and assistants)

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

15%
29%
56%
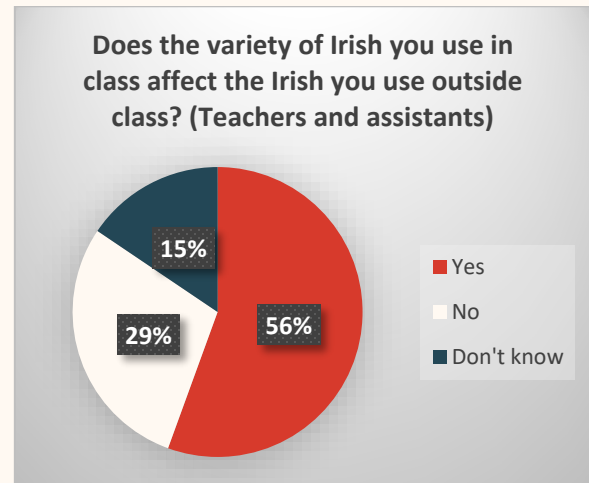
Figure 55: Does the variety of Irish you use in class effect the Irish you use outside class? (Teachers and assistants)

Communication between staff and students is two-way. Practitioners are aware that students may not have fully grasped the language as yet and therefore have to simplify their Irish so that they will be understood and 80% of teachers and 56% of classroom assistants can attest to this. Although this can be regarded as best practice and an integral support in the students' linguistic learning journey, there is the danger that this simplified, restricted register can become internalised (see Goodman and Freeman, 1993; Walsh, 2002). If most of the practitioners spend most of their time in this register, they are not being given the opportunity to broader their linguistic horizon and push the boundaries of their linguistic competence which is an important part of their own learning journey. Take for example, a nursery assistant whose linguistic output is simple words and phrases as that is the level of the children. This setting doesn't allow for them to practice more advanced Irish structures and challenge the boundaries of their own language competence. It is therefore essential for practitioners to strike a balance between simplifying their language for effective communication with students and actively seeking opportunities to enhance their own language skills.

- **Teaching through Irish**
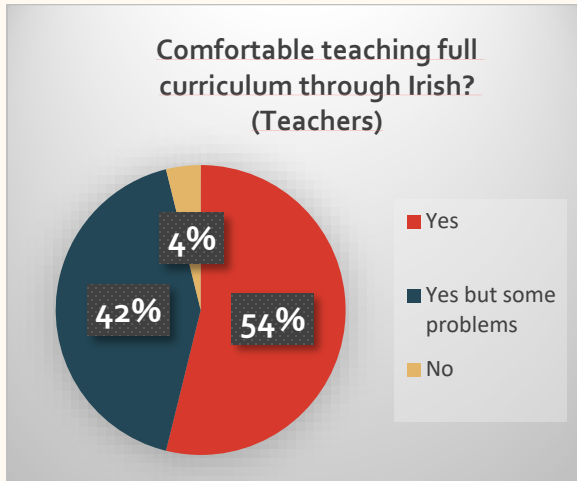
Figure 56: Comfortable teaching complete curriculum through Irish? (Teachers)
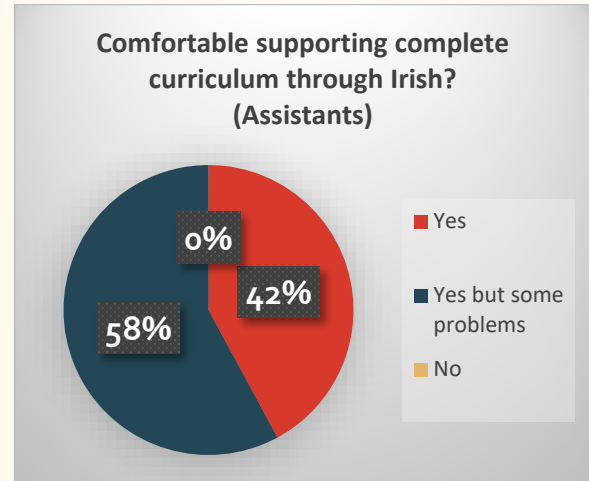
Figure 57: Comfortable supporting complete curriculum through Irish? (Assistants)

This question sheds light on the fact that despite the majority of respondents claiming a high level of ability, they still encounter linguistic difficulties when it comes to certain aspects of the curriculum. Among the respondents, 42% of teachers and 58% of assistants admit to facing such difficulties. These challenges often arise when teaching unfamiliar subject areas.

In some cases, practitioners possess the necessary subject-specific knowledge, but they may have acquired that knowledge through the medium of English. As a result, when they have to teach or support the teaching of the same content in Irish, they may not have encountered or fully mastered the corresponding vocabulary or the subject requires the use of advanced language structure beyond their capability (See Ó Grádaigh, 2015).

A further pedagogical complexity arises from this. Not only might they struggle linguistically with certain parts of the curriculum, but they are required to make the language intelligible to students who may also suffer linguistically as well as conceptually with the subject area. To do this effectively requires a specific skillset.

- **Confidence in explaining Irish**
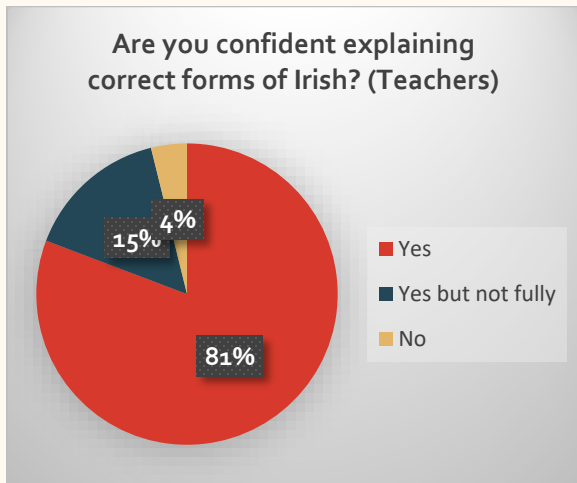
Figure 58: Confident explaining correct forms of Irish (Teachers)
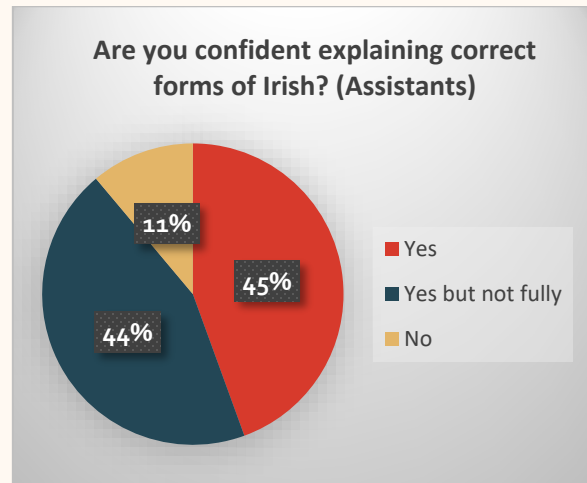
Figure 59: Confident explaining correct forms of Irish (Assistants)

It is worth noting that a significant majority of teachers (81%) express confidence in their ability to explain the correct forms of Irish to students, effectively assuming the roles of language analysts and tutors (Lindahl, 2016). Many teachers consider this aspect of their job as an integral part of their responsibilities. However, some teachers acknowledge that while they are confident in most areas, there is room for improvement in certain aspects of their declarative knowledge, which corresponds to the findings of Ni Chathasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh (2021).

Teachers also highlight the relative ease of explaining mistakes in the earlier key stages where the language requirements aren't as demanding. In key stage 1-3, the language register tends to be simpler, and the same basic language forms are frequently addressed. Nonetheless, it is important to consider that self-reported ability does not necessarily reflect actual performance. Further analysis and assessment, using the language awareness tests created as part of this research (see appendix 9/10), would provide a more accurate evaluation of teachers' proficiency in explaining Irish language concepts.

In contrast, assistants exhibit slightly less confidence in this particular area, with 45% expressing confidence in their ability to explain the correct forms of Irish to students. However, this is still a relatively high figure. The remaining 44% who do not feel fully comfortable may be due to several factors. For instance, the responsibility for explaining language forms might primarily fall on the teacher, or assistants may only encounter difficulties with specific language forms. These difficulties will be further elaborated below.

- **Specific challenges**

Skill	According to leaders	According to teachers	According to assistants
Correct grammar in writing	100%	85%	58%
Correct grammar in speech	80%	54%	63%
Relevant vocabulary	60%	35%	53%
Standard Irish vs Dialectal Irish	NB	35%	19%
Explaining rules	80%	35%	37%
Understanding other dialects	20%	31%	26%
Irish in unfamiliar contexts	60%	31%	47%
Preparing language exercises	NB	23%	NB
Understanding native speakers	40%	15%	26%
Distinguishing between right and wrong	60%	15%	26%
Understanding unfamiliar speakers	20%	8%	42%
Avoiding direct translation from English	60%	8%	26%
The sound system of Irish	20%	15%	16%

Figure 60: Specific challenges

The survey results provide insights, based on self-assessment, into the common difficulties experienced by language practitioners (Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2020).

According to leaders, the most pertinent difficulty is correct grammar in writing, with 100% of them claiming this is a difficulty for staff. This is closely followed by correct grammar in speech and explaining rules reported by 80%. Other challenges identified by leaders include Irish in unfamiliar contexts, distinguishing between right and wrong, and avoiding direct translation from English, which were

mentioned by 60%. Understanding native speakers ranked at 40%, while understanding other dialects, unfamiliar speakers, and the sound system of Irish were both mentioned by 20% .

Similarly, the difficulties expressed by teachers themselves reflect a similar pattern. The majority of teachers, 85%, noted proper grammar in writing as a challenge, while 54% emphasized correct grammar in spoken language. Additionally, teachers identified difficulties with vocabulary, knowing the difference between standard and dialectal Irish and explaining rules (35%). Understanding other dialects and Irish in unfamiliar contexts were significant challenges at 31%, with other difficulties ranking lower.

For classroom assistants, the most cited difficulty was correct grammar in speech, mentioned by 63% of respondents. This was followed by correct grammar in writing at 58% and knowledge of relevant vocabulary at 53%. Irish in unfamiliar contexts was relatively high at 47%, as was understanding unfamiliar speakers at 42%.

It is evident that grammar, both in spoken and written language, poses the greatest linguistic challenge. However, there are slight variations between each group. Leaders have a broader overview of staff in general, while the linguistic requirements of teachers differ slightly from those of classroom assistants. For example, teachers engage in more written Irish, making grammar in writing of greater importance to them. Conversely, teachers may also be more aware of relevant vocabulary compared to assistants through a familiarity with the subject.

It is clear that staff in Irish-medium settings are not a homogeneous group, and each individual has specific linguistic needs. The self-assessment form and language awareness tests developed as part of this project will assist staff in fully understanding where improvements are needed. Signposting to available training or the creation of bespoke training opportunities need to accommodate the variety of linguistic training needs outlined above.

Language use, knowledge and confidence: a conclusion

The data presented highlights a diverse linguistic landscape among practitioners, underscoring the importance of assessing their language skills, confidence, and abilities. While a significant number of teachers and assistants demonstrate a proficient level of Irish and make efforts to

utilize it extensively, they do encounter challenges and acknowledge the need for further enhancement. To facilitate these improvements effectively, customized support must be designed where suitable support isn't already available.

classroom practices

The ability levels, as discussed in the previous section will undoubtably impact on practitioners' language practices in the classroom in terms of their confidence and ability to incorporate language in all their teaching. It must be said, however, that the level of engagement with language teaching in the classroom will also impact on practitioners' language awareness.

- **Practitioner impact on students**
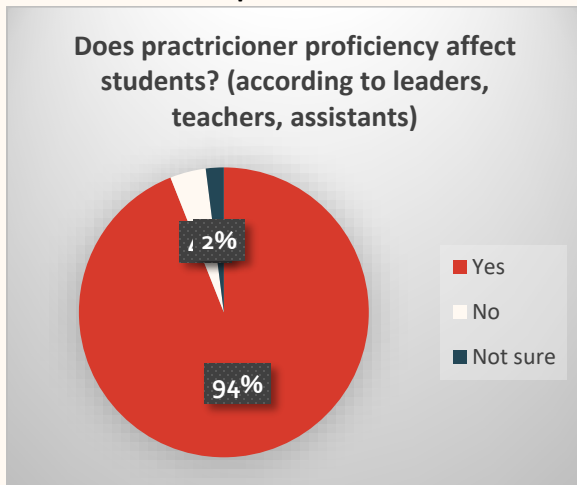
Figure 61: Does practitioner proficiency affect students (according to leaders, teachers and assistants)
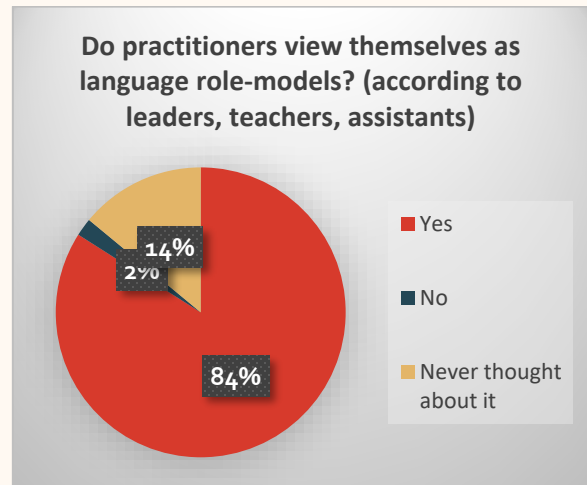
Figure 62: Do practitioners view themselves as linguistic role-models? (according to leaders, teachers and assistants)

When considering all practitioners together, there is a resounding consensus that their own language proficiency directly impacts students (94%). This means that practitioners recognise the crucial role their language skills play in students' learning experience and linguistic outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Moreover, a significant majority (84%) of respondents accept that they have the responsibility of being linguistic role models for their students (Mhic Aoidh, 2021, 3; Ó Fáthasaigh, 2021, 15).

It is natural, therefore, that they will strive to set a positive example according to their own mixed abilities. It is understood that effective teaching in an IM setting is not only about teaching the subject matter effectively but also about fostering proper language usage and communication skills in all learning interactions.

- **Which approach is best?**

Which approach is best? (according to leaders)

Figure 63: Which approach is best? (according to leaders)

Which approach is best? (according to teachers)
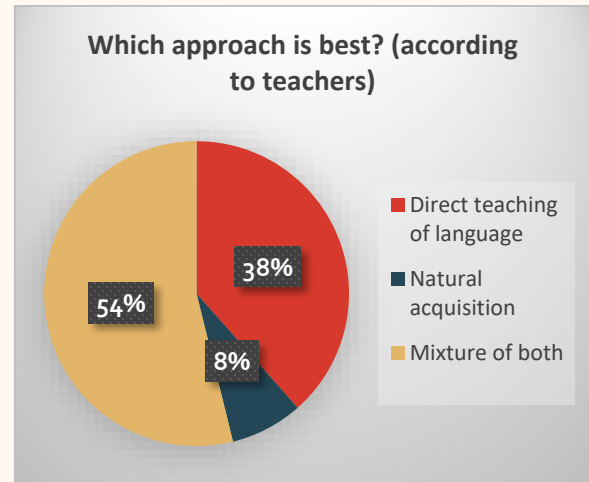
Figure 64: Which approach is best? (according to teachers)

Which approach is best? (according to assistants)
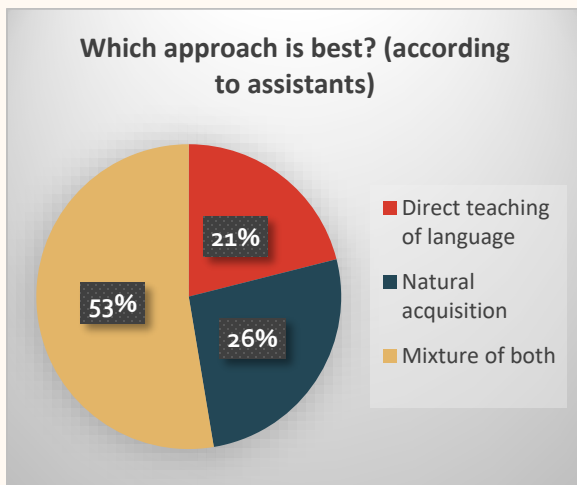
Figure 65: Which approach is best? (according to assistants)

Where should emphasis be placed in classes? (Leaders, teachers, assistants)
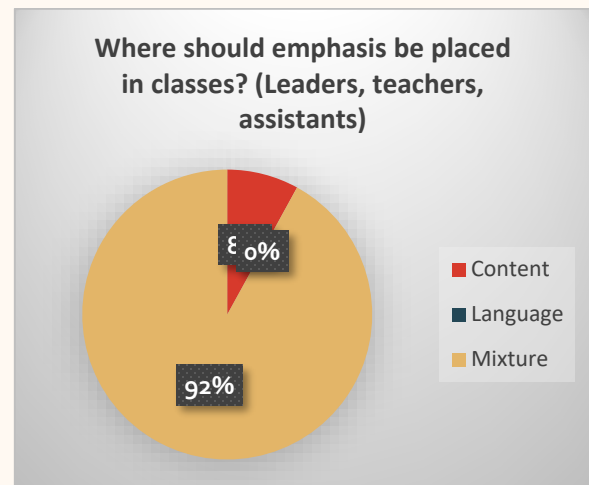
Figure 66: Where should emphasis be placed? (according to leaders, teachers and assistants)

When considering the preferred approach to IM teaching, it is intriguing to note that 60% of leaders believe that students' linguistic competence stems from direct language instruction rather than relying solely on natural acquisition through immersion. In contrast, 54% of teachers and 53% of assistants advocate for a blended approach, combining direct teaching with natural acquisition.

Regarding classroom practices, there is a consensus among all three groups that in an immersion classroom, a delicate balance must be struck between content instruction and language instruction. It is

widely acknowledged that while students are engaged in learning subject matter, equal attention should be given to developing their language skills. This recognition reflects the understanding that language is not only a tool for communication but also a vital component of academic success and overall learning outcomes in an IM setting and specific strategies are needed to achieve this.

- **Use of CLIL in classroom**
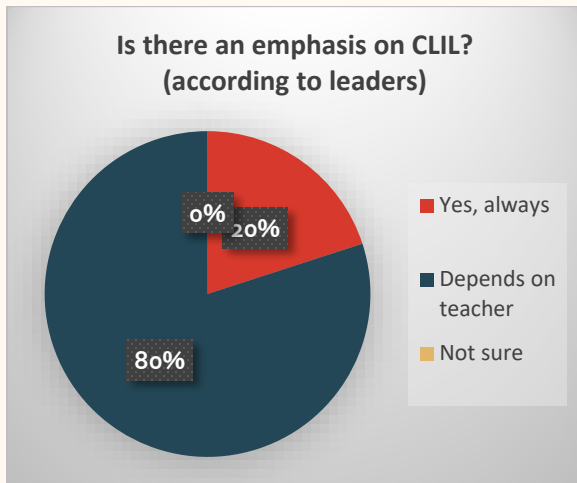
Figure 67: Emphasis on CLIL (according to leaders)
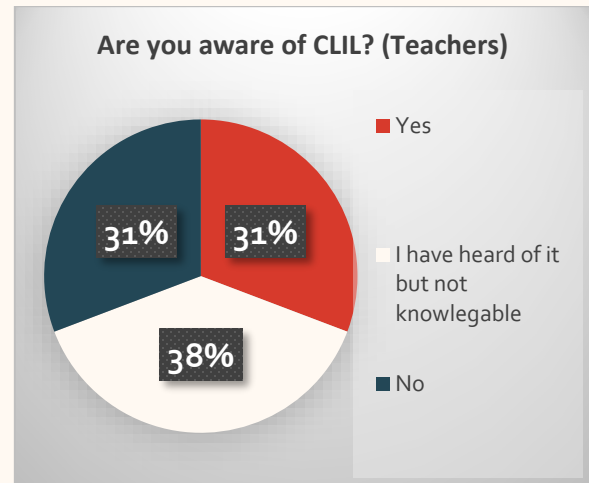
Figure 68: Emphasis on CLIL (according to teachers)
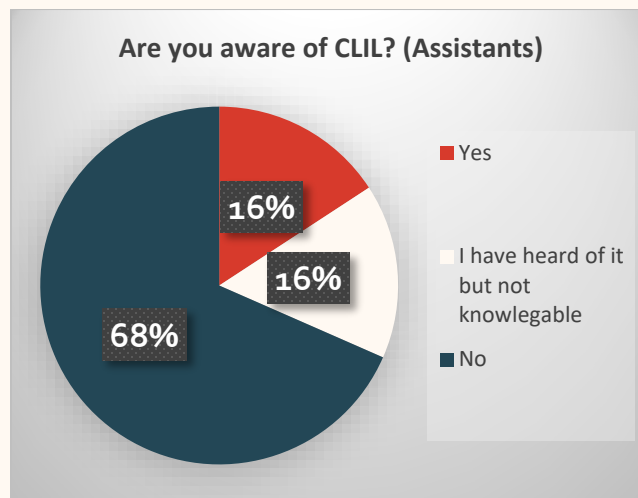
Figure 69: Emphasis on CLIL (according to assistants)

One such educational strategy that is increasingly recognized as best practice in an immersion setting is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Coyle, 2010). The use of CLIL in the classroom, however, appears to be contingent on the teacher and the specific curriculum subject they are teaching, according to 80% of the surveyed leaders. Surprisingly, only 31% of teachers claim to currently implement CLIL, with a slightly higher percentage (38%) indicating awareness of the concept but lacking

in-depth knowledge. It is noteworthy that approximately one-third of teachers (31%) admit to not being aware of CLIL.

Among classroom assistants, 68% are unfamiliar with the concept of CLIL, which is to be expected as it is not their primary responsibility to be well-versed in teaching approaches. Instead, their role is to support the teacher in achieving the learning outcomes of the class, regardless of the chosen approach. Nevertheless, it would be expected that if a teacher consciously adopts a specific approach, such as CLIL, they would discuss its aims with assistants to ensure alignment in their collaborative efforts.

Considering that a majority of teachers (see above) expressed the believe that a combination of content and language should be the foundation of a successful classroom, it is possible that some teachers are implementing a CLIL approach without consciously labelling it as such. However, based on findings by Ó Ceallaigh (2021) in similar educational settings in the South, it is plausible that despite teachers acknowledging the importance of integrating content and language, their actual teaching practices may prioritise content over language development.

- **Correcting students Irish**
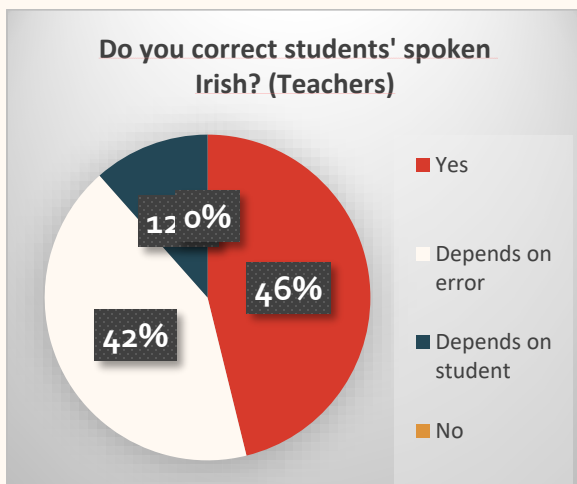
Figure 70: Do you correct students' spoken Irish? (Teachers)
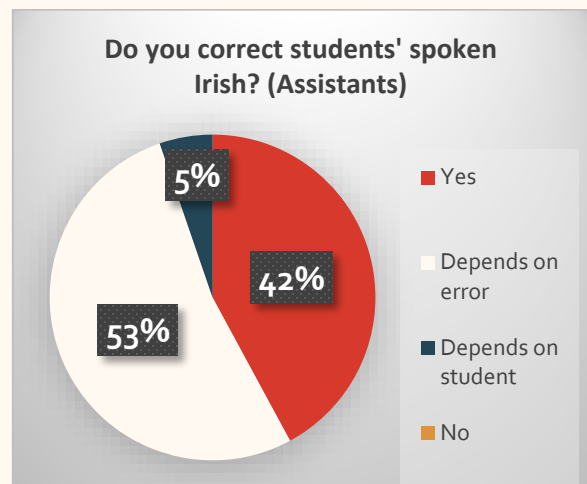
Figure 71: Do you correct students' spoken Irish? (Assistants)

Do you correct students' written Irish? (Teachers)

Yes 42%
Depends on error 35%
Depends on student 11%
No 12%
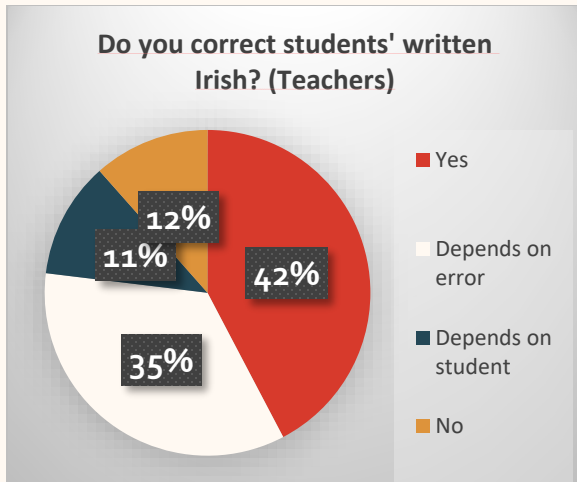
Figure 72: Do you correct students' written Irish? (Teachers)

Do you correct students' written Irish? (Assistants)

Yes 42%
Depends on error 32%
Depends on student 0%
No 26%
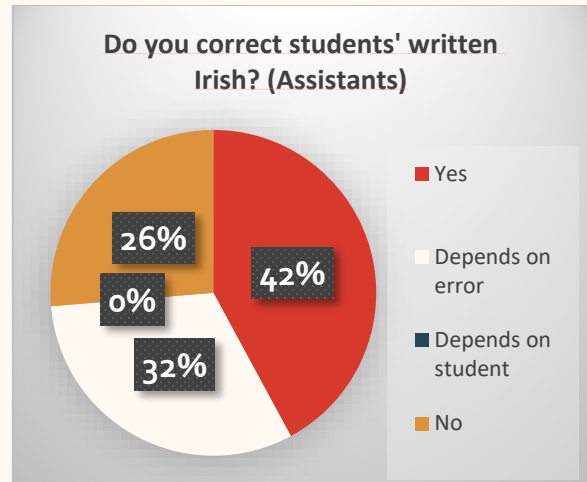
Figure 73: Do you correct students' written Irish? (Assistants)

Assessing whether practitioners correct students' Irish provides valuable insights into their pedagogical approach and their perspective on striking a balance between nurturing student confidence and promoting correct language usage (Ní Aogáin & Ó Duibhir, 2021). While it is expected that teachers whose primary responsibility is language teaching will correct students' Irish as part of their role, it is intriguing to explore the general teachers' approach in this regard. Among all teachers who responded, 46% claimed to correct students' spoken Irish, while 42% claimed to correct their written Irish. A similar pattern emerged for classroom assistants, with 42% stating that they correct both.

Significantly, for both spoken and written Irish, a substantial percentage of teachers and assistants mentioned that their decision to correct students depends on the nature of the error (Walsh, 2007). The principle of "correction with kindness" is often cited, whereby the correct form is provided to the student without making them feel inferior. Some teachers and assistants assert that their role is to promote effective communication, and while they do correct students, they do not correct every mistake as long as the message is understood, in order to prevent students from losing confidence .

- **Value Judgement**
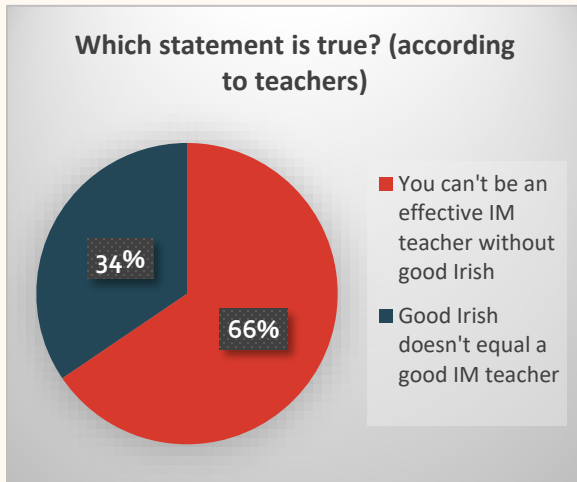
Figure 74: Which statement is true? (according to teachers)
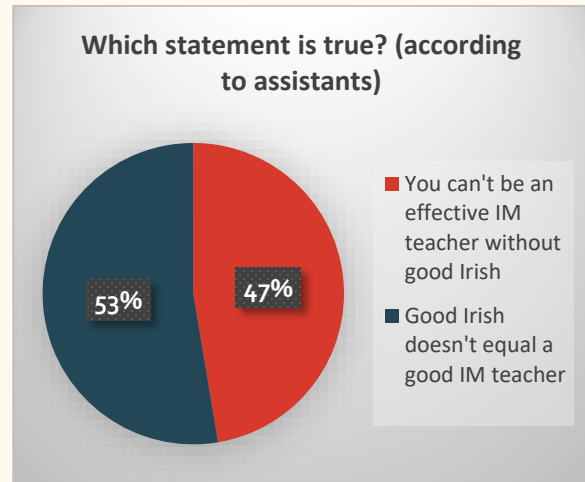
Figure 75: Which statement is true? (according to assistants)

The final question in this section aimed to explore the significance of language proficiency in being an effective IM practitioner. Among the teachers, 66% assert that one cannot be an effective IM teacher without a proficient level of Irish, while 34% believe that language proficiency is not the most crucial factor for effectiveness. The results for assistants were slightly more balanced, with 53% claiming that language proficiency alone is not the sole determinant of effective teaching.

Both perspectives hold some validity. It is undeniably true that in order to fulfil the linguistic objectives of immersion education, it is essential to have a solid grasp of the language in order to serve as a linguistic role model and teacher. Language proficiency enables teachers to effectively scaffold and facilitate language acquisition among students. However, it is important to recognize that an IM teacher is still a teacher, and effectiveness in teaching encompasses various attributes and skills (Shulman, 1999; David (2020). Merely possessing a high level of proficiency in Irish does not guarantee that the teacher will effectively transmit this knowledge to students or create an optimal learning environment.

Effective teaching involves a range of competencies, including pedagogical expertise, instructional strategies, classroom management, rapport building, and the ability to meet the diverse needs of students. While language proficiency is undoubtedly a crucial element in IM instruction, it is not the sole determinant of effectiveness. A balanced approach that considers both language proficiency and

effective teaching practices is necessary to provide quality education in an immersion setting.

These findings highlight the complexity of being an effective IM practitioner and the multifaceted nature of the skills and qualities required. Professional development opportunities and TPL and support can assist teachers and assistants in continuously enhancing their language proficiency, pedagogical strategies, and overall effectiveness as educators in an immersion context.

Classroom practices: a conclusion

Practitioners' language proficiency impacts their classroom practices, and their level of engagement with actually teaching the language will influence their own language awareness. Practitioners acknowledge their influence on students' linguistic progression and strive to be linguistic role models, but this can only be done within the confines of their own linguistic ability and their awareness of language pedagogy both of which could be increased with proper CPD/TPL opportunities.

Training needs

The primary objective of this research is to enhance the understanding of language awareness in relation to CPD/TPL. As training and development are integral to the professional growth of practitioners, it is essential to investigate the prevailing culture of development within schools and the support provided by educational authorities. By aligning training opportunities with the identified developmental needs, we can ensure that practitioners receive targeted support in enhancing their language awareness and pedagogical practices.

- **Discussion of need**

How often are training needs discussed? (according to leaders)

- Once per year or more: 80%
- Every couple of years: 20%
- When it is requested: 0%
- Very seldom

Figure 76: How often are training needs discussed? (according to leaders)

How often are training needs discussed? (according to leaders teachers)

- Once per year or more: 23%
- Every few years: 11%
- When it is requested: 4%
- Very seldom: 62%

Figure 77: How often are training needs discussed? (according to teachers)

How often are training needs discussed? (according to leaders assisstants)

- Once per year or more: 48%
- Every few years
- When requested: 5%
- Very seldom: 42%

Figure 78: How often are training needs discussed? (according to assistants)

It is the responsibility of educational leaders to facilitate discussions, promote, and monitor the professional development of their staff. Among the leaders who participated in this study, 80%

claim to engage in conversations with their staff about professional development at least once a year. However, the frequency of these discussions appears to differ among different roles within schools.

While 48% of assistants agree that they have these conversations at least once a year, 42% state that it seldom occurs. Notably, a significant majority of teachers (63%) claim that such discussions seldom take place. These findings highlight variations in the culture of professional development within different schools and a potential mismatch between what leaders claim to be the case and what practitioners actually encounter.

- **Training opportunities**
-

Figure 79: Are staff given many training opportunities? (according to leaders)
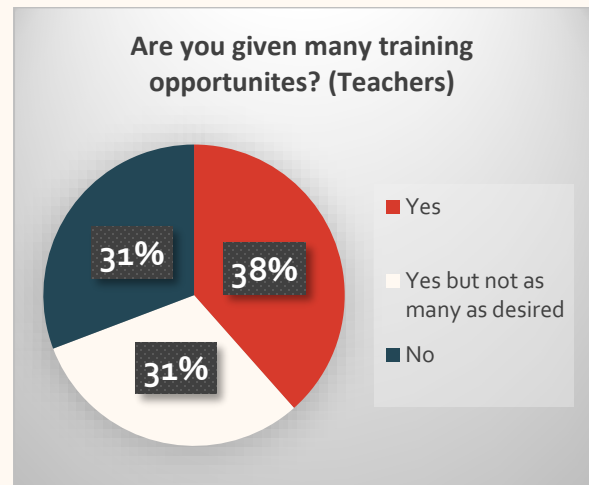
Figure 80: Are you given many training opportunities? (Teachers)

Figure 81: Are you given many training opportunities? (assistants)

A significant portion of assistants (68%) and teachers (61%) claim that they either receive limited training opportunities or fewer than they would desire which doesn't match what leaders report as 80% of claim that staff are given sufficient training opportunities. There seems to be difference in expectation between leaders and practitioners in terms of what constitutes regular training opportunities.

- **Education Authority**
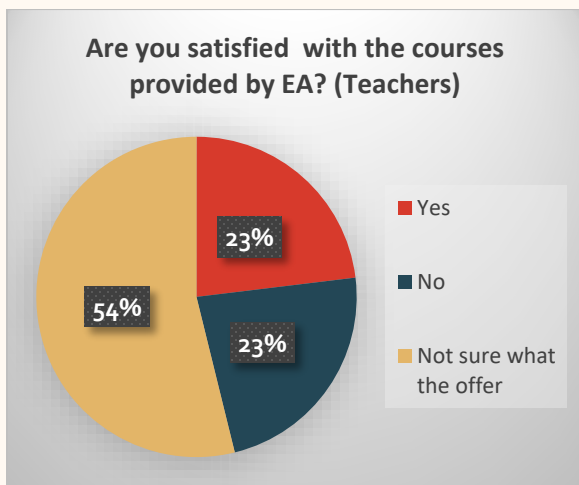
Figure 82: Are you satisfied with EA courses (Teachers)
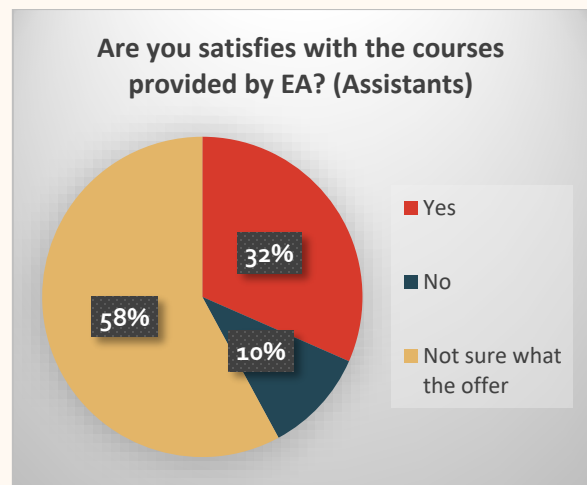
Figure 83: Are you satisfied with EA courses (Assistants)

The EA holds a statutory duty to provide developmental opportunities to staff, and they place great emphasis on their efforts in this regard. They have developed a comprehensive strategy for people development, which includes specific training pathways tailored to different career stages[2]. They offer a range of courses each year, as outlined in Appendix 6, and provide funding for external courses through programs like the Learning Leaders Scheme. The also claim to actively assess need through surveying practitioners and analysing feedback on courses they have organised.

Despite these efforts, it is concerning that a significant percentage of teachers (54%) and classroom assistants (58%) are unsure about the opportunities offered by EA. Additionally, 23% of teachers express dissatisfaction with the current offerings. These findings suggest a disconnect between the authority's efforts and the practitioners experience.

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[2] https://www.eani.org.uk/ea-staff-hub/hr-online/career-development-organisational-development-learning

- **EA'S Linguistic Training**

Does EA place enough emphasis on lingusitic upskilling? (according to leaders)

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure what they provide

20%
80%
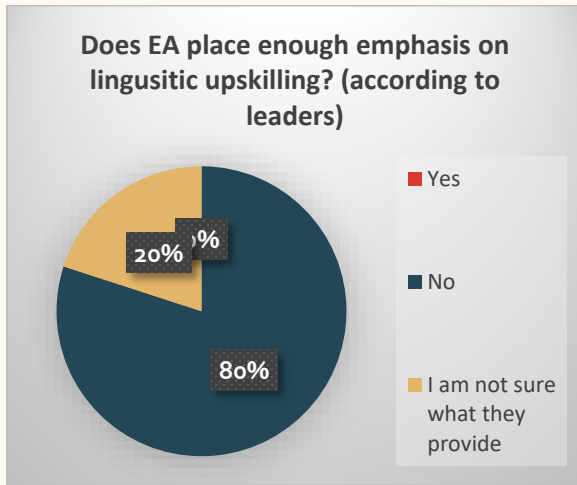
Figure 84: Does EA place enough emphasis on linguistic upskilling? (according to leaders)

Does EA place enough emphasis on lingusitic upskilling? (according to teachers)

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure what they provide

15%
27%
58%
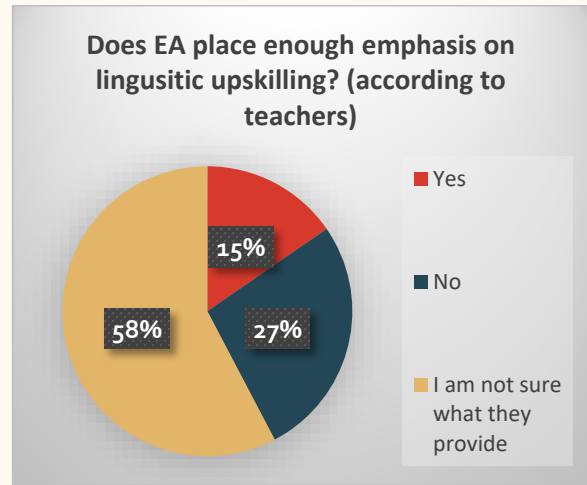
Figure 85: Does EA place enough emphasis on linguistic upskilling? (according to teachers)

Does EA place enough emphasis on lingusitic upskilling? (according to assistants)

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure what they provide

10%
19%
71%
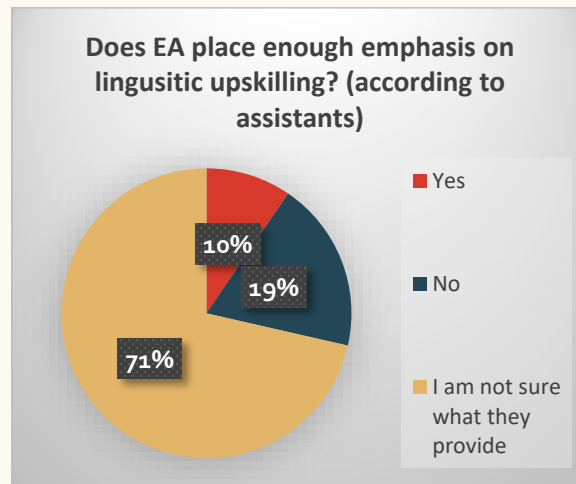
Figure 86: Does EA place enough emphasis on linguistic upskilling? (according to assistants)

The focus of this research is on linguistic competence. The responses above reveal that 80% of leaders believe that there is insufficient emphasis placed on linguistic training in their programs. Similarly, the majority of teachers (58% respondents) claim to be unaware of what linguistic training opportunities are available, with this percentage rising to 71% among assistants.

An examination of the training courses offered by the EA for 2023 (refer to Appendix 6) indicates that linguistic competence is not given high priority. During discussions with representatives from the EA, it

was explained that limited resources necessitate catering to the needs of the majority. There are, however, dedicated, competent personnel for immersion education and a clear willingness to enhance the sector. Efforts are made to incorporate an immersion focus into some of the training. It is worth noting, however, that this often involves training offered through the Irish language rather than training that specifically focuses on enhancing Irish language proficiency.

Furthermore, it was evident from the discussions that linguistic competence was not considered the primary objective in the EA's training strategy. The overarching goal is to train competent practitioners who can effectively operate in any educational setting, with linguistic proficiency being just one aspect of their overall competency.

- **IM Hub**
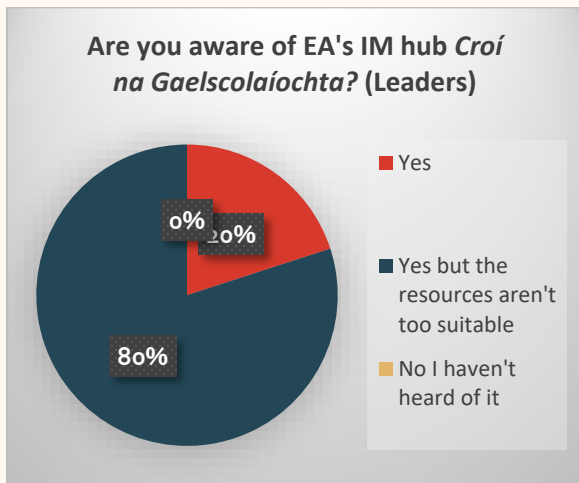
Figure 87: Are you aware of EA's IM hub? (Leaders)
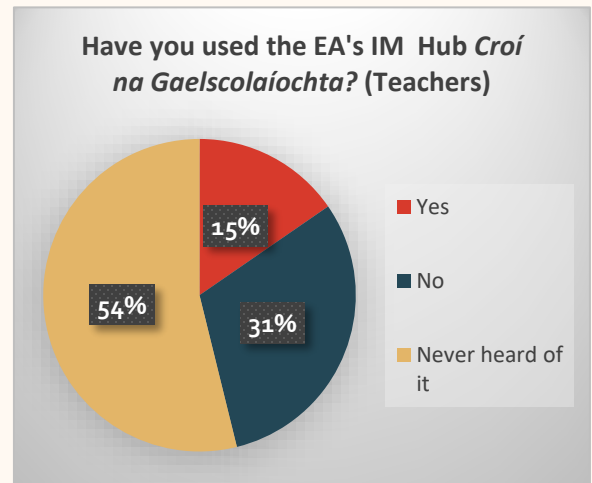
Figure 88: Are you aware of EA's IM hub? (Teachers)
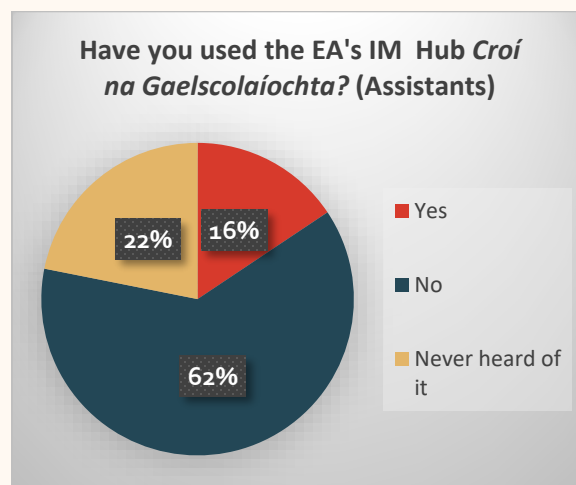
Figure 89: Are you aware of EA's IM hub? (Assistants)

One positive and bespoke innovation introduced by EA is the IM Hub, as outlined in the appendix 7. The IM Hub offers a variety of linguistic training resources for immersion practitioners, covering areas such as grammar and pronunciation. While the IM Hub does not provide a structured curriculum or offer accreditation, it demonstrates the EA's recognition of the need to provide linguistic support to practitioners.

Although the IM Hub is a recent development, the survey results indicate that it has not gained widespread usage among practitioners. A significant majority of teachers (85%) and assistants (84%) have either never heard of it or have not engaged with it. Additionally, 80% of leaders believe that the available materials on the IM Hub are not entirely suitable for their needs.

- **Finding training opportunities**

Figure 90: Is it easy to find training opportunities? (according to teachers)

Figure 91: Is it easy to find training opportunities? (according to assistants)

Practitioners often face a heavy workload, leaving them with limited time to actively search for training opportunities. A considerable percentage of teachers (46%) and assistants (32%) report that finding training opportunities is not easy for them. Moreover, 39% of teachers and 37% of assistants express the need for improved publicizing and visibility of training courses, suggesting that the existing channels for accessing training may not be meeting their needs effectively.

- **Barriers to training**

Barrier	According to leaders	According to teachers	According to assistants
Finding time to undertake course	**100%**	**88%**	**79%**
Finding time to complete work/Having motivation	**40%**	**58%**	**58%**
Cost/funding	**60%**	**50%**	**58%**
Suitability of courses	**80%**	**19%**	**26%**

Figure 92: Barriers to training

61% of teachers and 63% of assistants consider CPD/TPL as a priority. However, several barriers hinder their ability to fulfil this objective. The top barrier identified is the challenge of arranging free time, with 100% of leaders, 88% of teachers, and 79% of assistants stating difficulties in securing cover during the school day or finding time outside of working hours due to family commitments. Additionally, finding time to complete the associated coursework is a barrier for 58% of teachers and 58% of assistants.

Furthermore, 60% of leaders, 50% of teachers, and 58% of assistants claim it is challenging to secure funding. This finding is intriguing considering that the EA does offer funding through schemes such as the Future Leaders scheme. However, it has been observed that the yearly uncertainty about funding levels and delays in advertising and administering the scheme often means many practitioners have to pay for courses upfront, hoping that funding will become available later.

Moreover, 80% of leaders, 19% of teachers, and 26% of assistants identify the availability of suitable courses as a barrier. The higher rating by leaders can be attributed to their responsibility to stay informed about available courses, whereas teachers and assistants previously mentioned their lack of awareness regarding course offerings.

- **Courses of interest**

Barrier	According to leaders	According to teachers	According to assistants
Courses on teaching language	100%	46%	5%
Courses on teaching grammar	80%	69%	26%
Language enrichment courses	80%	96%	31%
Courses on standard Irish	20%	46%	0%
Courses on language correctness	60%	85%	10
Courses on pronunciation	20%	19%	0%
Courses for fluency	40%	19%	26%

Figure 93: Courses of Interest

Some third-level institutions conduct market research on desired courses, but this research is typically focused on the general market rather than specifically targeting the IM sector. The EA claims to survey practitioners to assess their needs, but as mentioned before, these surveys primarily address general courses for the benefit of all teachers rather than focusing on IM teachers and specifically on linguistic training. Above, we see the types of courses that would interest the respondents in this research.

At the top of the list are courses related to language enrichment. These courses would assist practitioners in using more native-like Irish, free from English influence, and would have a focus on correct language usage. The next area of interest is grammar courses. Many practitioners expressed a belief that they could improve their grammatical accuracy in spoken and written Irish. These courses would address this by studying the basic morphological and syntactic rules of the language, identifying them in context, and providing practice in editing, finding, and correcting errors. There was an equal amount of interest in courses related to teaching grammar. Despite claims of confidence in this area, there is an acknowledgment that improvements could be made in declarative knowledge and pedagogical best practices. These courses would aim to make grammar accessible to students and teach the most relevant structures at the appropriate time in the learning process.

Courses on language teaching in general also garnered interest. Since every IM practitioner is, to some degree, a language teacher, it is important to illustrate best practices in this regard, with a focus on CLIL. Other courses of interest include those that explore the differences between standard Irish and dialectal Irish, courses to improve spoken fluency, and courses on pronunciation.

It is encouraging to note the variety of courses that would interest practitioners. However, it is important to emphasize that while creating engaging courses is vital, it is even more crucial to develop courses that effectively address knowledge gaps. The linguistic strengths and weaknesses identified earlier do not completely align with the courses of interest mentioned here, except for the grammar awareness courses. Therefore, it is essential to use this data in conjunction with data on assessed linguistic gaps, which can be obtained using the self-assessment grid and the linguistic competency test created as part of this project (see appendix 8,9).

- **Accreditation of courses**
-
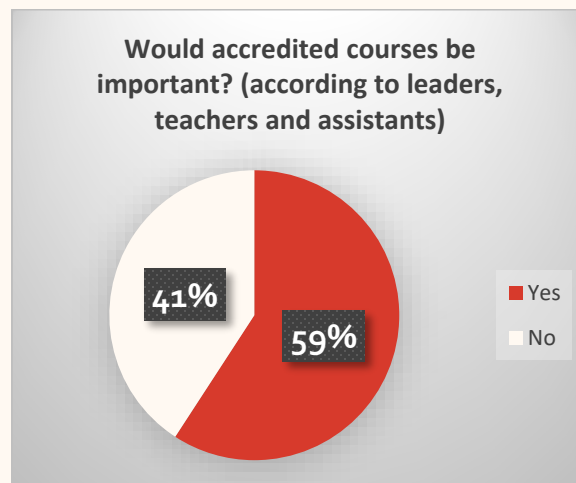
Figure 94: Would accredited courses be important?
(according to leaders, teachers and assistants)

When offering courses, there are two options to consider: standalone non-accredited courses or courses that offer accreditation. Standalone courses are typically shorter in duration, more cost-friendly, offer greater flexibility and require less coursework. The major disadvantage is that their scope is limited, and they do not carry the same recognition as accredited courses outside of the IM sector. On the other hand, accredited courses are considered the gold standard as they provide more in-depth instruction by experts and offer a recognized qualification that holds value beyond the sector. The drawbacks of accredited courses include the time required to complete a full course, inflexibility in provision, and the

cost associated with pursuing the qualification.

It is understandable that 59% of respondents consider accreditation to be important. When individuals invest their time (and sometimes money) in a course, they would like to have something tangible to show for it.

When designing and offering courses, it is crucial to strike a balance between meeting the needs of practitioners, ensuring the courses are affordable and accessible, and providing accreditation options that hold value and recognition.

- **Responsibility for providing training**
-

Figure 95: Who is responsible for providing training? (according to leaders)

The EA holds a statutory duty with regard to training, and 33% of respondents believe that it is their responsibility to create customized pathways for linguistic training. CnaG, as the authority responsible for the IM sector, may not have training explicitly within its remit, but it possesses a unique understanding of the sector's needs, therefore 27% of respondents believe that training should fall under their responsibility.

Third-level institutions have a broader range of course provisions, but they should strive to address the needs of the fastest growing educational sector in the North. 27% of respondents state that they have a responsibility to cater to the IM sector's needs. While private companies do not have a regulatory duty to offer courses to the IM sector, 6% of respondents feel they should be responsible for providing

suitable training.

Interestingly, only 7% of respondents state that they can offer courses internally within their own institutions. This is likely due to resource constraints, such as limited time, resources and funds. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that schools possess unique expertise and the potential to offer courses based on their lived experiences, if feasible.

Each entity has a role to play in addressing the needs of IM practitioners and ensuring that the training provided is relevant, accessible, and meets the sector's specific requirements. Collaboration among these stakeholders could lead to the development of comprehensive and effective training programs which might ensure by-in by practitioners.

- **Mode of study**
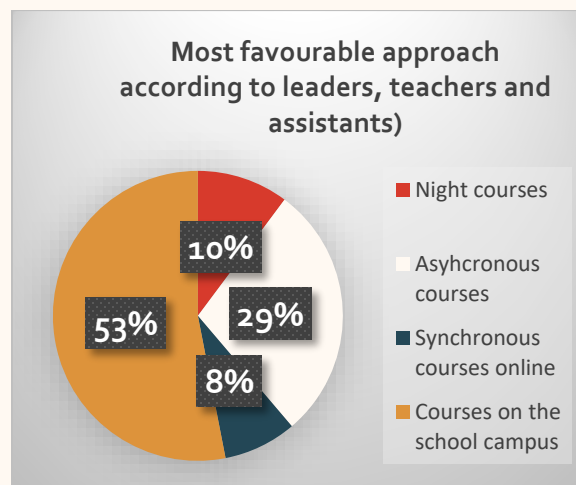
Figure 96: Most favourable mode of study. (according to leaders, teachers and assistants)

Given the barriers to training discussed earlier, the mode of delivery plays a crucial role in the ability to undertake courses. According to the survey results, the majority of respondents (52%) believe that on site courses are the best option. This eliminates the need to travel and allows for convenient scheduling during the term. However, the disadvantages include the limited windows of opportunity to organize courses and the cost associated with running the same course multiple times. One potential solution to this is to bring clusters of schools together at a central location, synchronizing schedules to optimize course offerings.

The second most popular choice (29%) among respondents is asynchronous courses, which offer the

advantage of being available whenever individual practitioners have the time to engage with them. The main disadvantage of this approach is the lack of peer learning and real-time interaction and feedback from the tutor, which can be valuable for professional development.

Around 10% of respondents believe that night courses could alleviate the problem of being excluded from the normal working day. However, it should be noted that even if offered in the evening, travel and other family commitments may limit this option for many practitioners working in the sector.

The least popular option (8%) was synchronous online courses. Although they eliminate travel time, there is a belief among practitioners that face-to-face interaction is the best approach to teaching. Having experienced the technical and pedagogical difficulties of online delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic, it seems practitioners prioritize in-person interactions .

- **Training needs: a conclusion**

There are variations in the culture of professional development across different schools and a chasm between the beliefs of authorities and the experience of practitioners. There are also some clear practical barriers to development which much must be taken into account.

However, by addressing the identified barriers, aligning training programs with practitioners' needs, improving signposting and fostering collaboration among stakeholders, the IM sector, through the EA and CnaG, can promote a culture of CPD/TPL, ultimately enhancing language awareness and pedagogical among practitioners which will in turn have a positive impact on students.

Conclusions

The findings of the study underscore the importance of not relying solely on reported ability or qualifications when assessing language awareness. It is crucial to recognize the diverse linguistic backgrounds and learning paths of teachers and classroom assistants, as well as their confidence levels, as these factors directly impact their competencies within and across schools. In order to maintain and enhance language skills, continuous nurturing, support, and mentorship are necessary, with practitioners and leaders actively monitoring linguistic proficiency. To ensure that practitioners understand their role as language role models, clear policies and guidance should be established.

Additionally, the report emphasizes the significant influence of practitioners' language competency and the overall language culture within schools on students' linguistic outcomes. Currently, there is a lack of awareness and expertise in effectively implementing Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). The report identifies the need for improved strategies for peer-feedback, review, and corrective linguistic feedback, which can be achieved through a better understanding of practitioners' roles as linguistic analysts and teachers.

Initial training providers should reassess their focus on language competence and language pedagogies when appropriate. Those who are already qualified and employed acknowledge the need for improvement and express a willingness to undergo further training. However, inadequate language-specific training, practical barriers, and competing priorities highlight the urgency for a novel approach to training. This approach should prioritize creating bespoke courses based on actual needs rather than assumptions of need and in a mode of delivery that will actually be accessible to already overworked staff.

Research questions review

What impact does the linguistic background of practitioners have on their linguistic competence?
The evidence shows that the linguistic background of practitioners has a significant impact on their linguistic competence. Practitioners with a strong linguistic background, be that through growing up or living up in bilingual environments or having received language awareness education, tend to exhibit higher levels of linguistic competence. On the other hand, practitioners with limited exposure through their pathway to employment will experience linguistic challenges and may exhibit lower levels of

linguistic competence and confidence. To fully understand this, we need to combine self-assessment with objective assessment.

What is the difference between the reported linguistic competency of practitioners and their actual ability?

The reported linguistic competency and behaviours of practitioners may not always accurately reflect their actual ability or their actual practice. Some practitioners may overestimate their linguistic abilities, either due to self-perception biases or a lack of awareness of their limitations. Conversely, practitioners who are modest or lack confidence may underestimate their actual linguistic competency. Therefore, there can be a discrepancy between what practitioners report and their true linguistic abilities as borne out through objective assessment.

How does the language culture within schools impact the linguistic behaviour and confidence of practitioners?

The language culture within schools plays a crucial role in shaping the linguistic behaviour and
     confidence
of practitioners and students alike. A positive language culture, from the top of the school, that values linguistic excellence and provides opportunities for correct, enriched language use and improvement can enhance the whole school community. Conversely, a negative language culture that places little emphasis on linguistic accuracy may inadvertently discourage language development and hinder the linguistic growth and confidence of both practitioners and students. The language culture of a school can be codified in a strong language policy and accompanying language development plan.

What is the relationship between the linguistic competence of practitioners and the linguistic outcomes of students?

The linguistic competence of practitioners has a direct impact on the linguistic outcomes of students. When practitioners possess high linguistic awareness, they can effectively model and facilitate language learning for students. Their ability to provide clear instruction, incorporate language learning throughout the curriculum, offer language support, create suitable language assessments and cultivate a language-rich environment positively influences students' language development and achievement.

How does the linguistic competence of practitioners affect their ability to deliver content through the medium of L2?

The linguistic competence of practitioners significantly affects their ability to deliver content through the medium of L2. Practitioners with high linguistic awareness in L2 are more confident in an immersion atmosphere and better equipped to enliven and explain complex concepts and ideas and engage students in meaningful discussions. Practitioners with limited L2 awareness may lack performative confidence and limit their language use and variety, adhering to an uninspiring register. They may also struggle to convey information effectively, over corrective feedback and engage with the student's unique learning challenges.

What strategies are employed by practitioners to plug their own linguistic gaps?

Motivated practitioners who are given adequate support, guidance and time will employ various strategies to address their own linguistic gaps. These strategies may include self-study, community based language courses or classes, engaging in language practice with peers or native speakers, utilizing available online resources, seeking mentorship or guidance from more linguistically advanced peers and undertaking professional development courses according to their own identified needs.

What developmental opportunities exist, which are most effective and what gaps need to be filled?

There are many general Irish language learning courses available in the community and online. These can help practitioners build confidence before undertaking more structured, intense, qualification-bearing courses e.g., in third level institutions.

Within the IM sector there are some, though limited, language training programs, workshops, seminars, conferences and literature focused on language pedagogy and proficiency which could add to practitioner knowledge and confidence.

Within individual schools there are some leaders and colleagues who are willing to offer mentorship, constructive criticism and support and there seems to be an appetite for collaborate learning communities between schools if this could be facilitated.

However, this report has shown that there are gaps in relation to bespoke training for an IM practitioner in all areas of linguistic awareness, i.e., language proficiency, language analysis and language pedagogy.

Recommendations

- **Practitioners** (if not already doing so)
  - Take personal responsibility for and a proactive language awareness.
  - Set learning-goals and seek TPL/CPD opportunities based on self-assessment form and language awareness test.
  - Become knowledgeable of CLIL and undertake reflective practice to think about how classroom practice and meaningful corrective feedback impacts on students' linguistic outcomes.
  - Engage in professional conversations and collaboration in relation to linguistic awareness.
  - Use own best-practice as case studies and share with colleagues across sector.
  - If needed, find a linguistic mentor within the school – incorporate proofing and feedback in work streams.

- **Leaders (if not already doing so)**
  - Do not take linguistic awareness amongst staff for granted – this needs to be assessed, discussed, monitored and linguistic development must be planned.
  - Strengthen and publicise the school's language policy with the aim of enhancing the overall linguistic culture of the school.
  - Strengthen assessment of candidates and where someone with linguistic problems is employed, link linguistic progression to probation.
  - Seek and promote linguistic development opportunities for staff and try to plan ways to alleviate barriers to undertaking courses.
  - Aim to promote mentorship and critical review amongst staff and facilitate interschool conversations on language teaching.
  - Celebrate staff language development achievements.

- **CnaG (if not already doing so)**
  - Use specialism and knowledge within the organisation to promote linguistic awareness development opportunities.
  - Aid EA in finding bespoke solutions to linguistic challenges that will work in practice.
  - Celebrate and platform strong language role-models and language teachers within the sector.
  - Facilitate intersectoral conversations on language awareness and highlight best practice.

- **DE (if not already doing so)**
  - Understand the impact of practitioner awareness on student outcome in the IM sector. Promoting linguistic excellence should be a policy issue.

- **EA (if not already doing so)**
  - Review emphasis on linguistic awareness training using the expertise that exists internally and externally.
  - Lay out training pathways for practitioners (teachers or assistants) who require linguistic development.
  - Review approach to funding IM practitioners to undertake external courses and publicize this more effectively.

- Gather more meaningful feedback on courses undertaken and share this with relevant parties.
- Collaborate with CnaG and with 3rd level providers to fill the gaps identified in this report.
- Further develop the IM hub and publicize it.
- Assess whether a training hub could be established for IM tutors to house asynchronous courses, track individual staff engagement and document and accredit their completion of courses.

- **Other training providers (if not already doing so)**
  - Where appropriate, review curricula to ensure that the three areas of language awareness are adequately covered in course content.

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Appendix 1

Principal/Leaders' Survey

I would like to thank you wholeheartedly for undertaking this survey of language training needs in the immersion education sector. It is vital that the opinions and experiences of leaders/principals are at the heart of any recommendations made in relation to training courses.

- It should take no more than 20 minutes to answer the questions.

- You will see that there are some optional questions. It would enrich the research if you had the time to answer them.

The researcher declares, herein, that the data given below will be anonymized and hidden as appropriate so that the personal data of no one or any school will be identified in the report. By completing this survey, you confirm that you understand that the information below will be used to write a report.

Background information

1. What immersion setting do you work in?

- Nursery
- All-Irish Primary School
- Primary School Unit
- All-Irish Secondary School
- Secondary Stream

2. What county are you located in?

3. How many years of experience do you have as a principal/leader?

- 0-5
- 5-10
- 10+

Basic training

4. From your experience and knowledge, do you see that a lot of emphasis is placed on language training in the courses undertaken by teachers/assistants?

- It seems to me that there is
- It seems to me that it isn't

5. Please explain your answer.

6. From your experience and knowledge, do you see that a lot of emphasis is placed on language pedagogy in the courses undertaken by teachers?

- It seems to me that there is.
- It seems to me that it isn't.

7. Please explain your answer.

8. Is it clear to you that language training and language pedagogy have developed since you trained as a teacher yourself?

- It is clear that there has been development
- It is clear that there has been no development.
- I do not know

9. Please explain the answer.

10. Did you have any additional language qualifications before starting your career? Please provide details, if desired

The Language Culture of the School

11. Do you give much weight to the language ability of the applicants who apply for teaching jobs in your school?

- It is the main criterion
- It is a criteria like any other.
- It is not the most important criterion.
- It is not an important criterion at all.

12. Please provide details, if desired.

13. Do you give much weight to the language ability of the applicants who apply for assistant jobs in your school?

14. Please provide details, if desired.

15. How do you assess the language quality of the applicants? More than one box may be selected.

- There is a question in Irish in the interview.
- We look at the qualities of the person only.
- We examine the person.
- We do not assess this as part of the interview.

16. Is there a specific language policy in the school?

- Yes
- No

17. Is the language culture of the school discussed as part of the induction?

- Yes
- No

18. As part of settling into the job, are staff given a mentor?

- Yes
- No

19. What sort of support is offered by the mentor? Do language issue play a part?

20. Does the language behaviour have any importance as part of the probation?

21. Do the team members tend to speak Irish together?

- Yes
- No
- It depends of the members and the occasion

22. Please provide details, if desired.

23. Is it important that the correct use of Irish is emphasized in all aspects of the school's work?

- It is very important.
- It is important but there are more major concerns.
- It is not important as long as effective communication is carried out in Irish.

24. Please provide details, if desired.

25. Do you know if there is a discussion between colleagues on language issues; e.g. pronunciation courses, grammar courses, terminology courses?

- Yes, between everyone
- Yes, between some colleagues
- No as far as I know
- I'm not sure

26. Please provide details/examples if you wish.

27. Do you know if the team members proof each other's resources?

- I think they always do this
- I think they do when they have time
- I don't think they do
- I'm not sure

28. If you saw an error in something someone else had written, would you point it out to him/her?

- Yes, certainly
- It would depend on the person
- I wouldn't as I wouldn't like to annoy them
- I wouldn't for fear of being wrong.

29.   Would you welcome a teacher who would alert you to the language behaviour/quality of language of another member of staff?

- I would welcome and it happens
- I would welcome it but it didn't happen
- I would be surprised if it happened.
- I would not. That is not the culture of the school.

30   Do the inspectors refer to the language ability of the teachers/assistant? Please explain.

31   Do the inspectors refer to the language culture of the school? Please explain.

Language use and confidence

32.   In your opinion, what is the number of teaching staff at these different levels below the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)? If you are not familiar with the levels, see https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale

- C2
- C1
- B2
- B1
- A2
- A1

33.   In your opinion, how many of the teaching assistant staff are at these different levels below on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)?

- C2
- C1
- B2
- B1
- A2
- A1

34.   In your opinion, how many support staff (e.g., administration, ministers etc.) are at these different levels below the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)?

- C$_2$
- C$_1$
- B$_2$
- B$_1$
- A$_2$
- A$_1$

35. Do you believe that some members of staff feel inferior in relation to the standard of their own Irish compared to other members of staff in the school?

- I believe so
- I don't believe so
- I never noticed
- Other

36. Which aspects of the language do you think challenge people the most? More than one box can be selected.
- Speaking Irish in contexts you are not used to.
- Use the sounds of Irish.
- Understanding speakers you are not used to.
- Understanding the different dialects.
- Understanding native speakers.
- Have relevant vocabulary for different contexts.
- Grammatical accuracy in speech.
- Grammatical accuracy in writing.
- Not translating literally from English.
- Knowing the difference between right and wrong.
- Knowing the difference between what is dialectal and what is standard.
- Explaining the rules of language.
- None of the above.

37. Do they have any other language challenges that are not on the list?

Classroom practice

38. In your opinion, is emphasis placed on the Integrated Language and Content Learning (FCTÁ) in the classes?

- Yes, in every class
- It depends on the teacher
- I'm not sure.

39.   Do you think that students need specific language instruction, or do they pick up the language naturally when they are immersed in it?

- Specific instruction is required.
- They will pick it up naturally.
- A combination of both is needed.

40.   Do you believe that the members of staff are a language model for the students?

- Yes
- No

41.   Do you believe that the language ability of the teacher/ assistant has an impact on the language ability of the student?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

42.   Where should the emphasis be placed in the classes (not only Irish classes)?

- On curriculum content only.
- On the subject of the curriculum but try to incorporate the teaching of the language.
- It is only the responsibility of language teachers to teach the language.

43.   Would you recommend that a teacher resort to English on occasions in class if the students did not understand?

- Yes, understanding is important
- No, there are other strategies

44.   Do you know if the teachers have to create many resources in Irish from scratch?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

45.   Should every teacher/assistant correct students' Irish?

- Yes
- At times, if fitting
- No, we would not like to discourage them

46.   In your opinion, are the teachers (who are not language teachers) confident and comfortable enough to explain the Irish language correctly to the students?

- Yes
- Some are
- No

47. In your opinion, are the assistants confident and comfortable enough to explain the Irish language correctly to the students?

- Yes
- Some are
- No

48. Which of the statements below do you agree with?

- It is not possible to be a good *Gaelscoil* teacher without having good Irish.
- Good Irish does not necessarily equate to a good *Gaelscoil*.

49. Explain this answer if you wish.

TPL and Training requirement

50. Are the teachers given many opportunities for TPL?

- Yes
- Yes, but not as much as desired
- No

51. Please explain your answer, if you wish.

52. Are assistants given many opportunities for development?

- Yes
- Yes, but not as much as desired
- No

53. Please explain your answer, if you wish.

54. How often is the need for training discussed with the teachers?

- Once or more a year
- Every few years
- When they ask for it

55. How often is the need for training discussed with the assistants?

- Once or more a year.
- Every few years
- When they ask for it

56. Do you inform staff of training opportunities.

- Yes, I send on information when I am informed
- No, they find out themselves.

57. Do you have examples of training courses that have been worthwhile? What was good?

58. Do you have examples of training courses that weren't worth it? What was not good?

59 Is language training a priority for you for the team?

- Yes, I always emphasise the importance of training
- It depends on the person's need
- No, training directly related to the job is more important
- I never thought about it.

60. Do you see that much emphasis is placed on language training in the courses offered by the Education Authority?

- Yes, it seems so
- No, it doesn't seem so
- I am not familiar with what they offer.

61. Are you aware of the *Croí na Gaelscolaíochta* resources (EA hub)?

- Yes. I and other team members use them.
- Yes, but some of the resources aren't suitable.
- No. I have not heard of it.

62. Who is responsible for providing training course? More than one box can be selected.

- EA
- CnaG
- 3rd level institutions
- Private companies
- We can offer training in-house.

63. Do you request feedback on training courses attended by staff?

64. What are the biggest barriers to staff members undertaking additional training? More than one box can be selected.

- Finding the free time for them.
- Covering the costs of the courses.
- Being willing/able to undertake them.
- Appropriate courses to be available.
  Explain any barriers not mentioned above.

65. Choose the types of language courses that you think staff members would like.

- Courses to achieve fluency.
- Courses to learn the sounds of Irish
- Courses to achieve written accuracy.
- Courses to learn the Official Standard.
- Language enrichment courses.
- Courses on methods of grammatical explanation.
- Courses to learn language teaching methods.

66.   Can you think of a language course not mentioned above?

67.   Would it be important, in your opinion, for any course undertaken by team members to be accompanied by an official qualification or recognition?
- Yes
- No

68.   What type of course would be most suitable for staff at your school?

  - Night courses in an external institution
  - Online courses to be taken at their own pace.
  - Online course with others.
  - A course that would be held at the school site

69.   Is there anything else you would like to say about your training needs, or any other aspect covered in this survey?

I sincerely thank you for your time spent on this. For information, I have created a self-assessment form for the staff to access.

Appendix 2

Teachers' Survey

I would like to thank you wholeheartedly for undertaking this survey of language training needs in the immersion education sector. It is vital that the opinions and experiences of teachers are at the heart of any recommendations made in relation to training courses.

- It should take no more than 20 minutes to answer the questions.

- You will see that there are some optional questions. It would enrich the research if you had the time to answer them.

  The researcher declares, herein, that the data given below will be anonymized and hidden as appropriate so that the personal data of no one or any school will be identified in the report. By completing this survey, you confirm that you understand that the information below will be used to write a report.

Background information

1. What immersion setting do you work in?

- Nursery
- All-Irish Primary School
- Primary School Unit
- All-Irish Secondary School
- Secondary Stream

2. What county are you located in?

3. How many years of experience do you have as an IM teacher?

- 0-5
- 5-10
- 10+

4. What sort of teaching are you most involved in?

- Nursey/primary curriculum
- Irish as a post primary qualification
- Another subject, not Irish, on the post primary curriculum

Basic training

5. What teaching qualification did you achieve and where did you achieve it?

6. Would you say that learning Irish was central to the course?

- Yes
- Ni

7. Please explain your answer.

8. Would you say that language pedagogies were central to the course?

- Yes
- No
- NA

9. Please explain your answer.

10. On achieving the qualification, where you confident in your spoken and written ability in Irish?

- Yes
- No

11. Explain your answer, please

12. On achieving the qualification, where you confident in your ability to teach correct forms of Irish.

- Yes
- No

13. Please explain your answer.
14. Had you any other language qualification before starting on your professional. Give details if you wish.

The Language Culture of the School

15. Do you believe Irish was an important criteria for the job you got?

- Yes
- Ni

16. Please provide details, if desired.

17. Are you aware of a specific language policy in the school and was this explained to you?

- There is one and it was discussed with me.
- There is one but it was not discussed with me.
- There is no policy as far as I am aware

- I'm not sure.

  18. Was the language culture of the school discussed as part of the induction?

- Yes
- No
- There was no need

  19. As part of settling into the job, were you given a mentor?
- Yes
- No

  20. If you had a mentor, was advice given to you about language issues? Explain please.

  21. Was your language behaviour discussed as part of the probation?

- Yes
- No
- There was no need as there was no problem

  22. Do the team members tend to speak Irish together?

- Yes
- No
- It depends on the members and the occasion

  23. Please provide details, if desired.

  24. **In your opinion,** which statement below best describes the language standard amongst staff (teachers and assistants)?

- Everyone has great Irish.
- They all have Irish but there are a variety of competencies.
- There are staff members who aren't accurate.
- There are staff member who don't have enough Irish.

  25. Give details if you wish but don't mention names.

  26. **In your opinion,** which statement below best describes the language standard amongst support staff (admin staff and other workers)?

- Everyone has great Irish.
- They all have Irish but there are a variety of competencies.
- There are staff members who aren't accurate.
- There are staff member who don't have enough Irish.

  27. Give details if you wish but don't mention names.

28. Do you believe that some members of staff feel inferior in relation to the standard of their own Irish compared to other members of staff in the school?

- I believe so
- I don't believe so

29. Give details if you wish but don't mention names.

30. Is the correct use of Irish is emphasized in all aspects of the school's work?

- It is very important.
- It is important but there are more major concerns.
- It is not important as long as effective communication is carried out in Irish.

31. Please provide details, if desired.

32. Do you know if there is a discussion between colleagues on language issues, e.g. pronunciation courses, grammar courses, terminology courses?

- Yes, between everyone
- Yes, between some colleagues
- No as far as I know
- I'm not sure

33. Please provide details/examples if you wish.

34. Do you know if the team members proof each other's resources?

- I think they always do this
- I think they do when they have time
- I don't think they do

35. If you saw an error in something someone else had written, would you point it out to him/her?

- Yes, certainly
- It would depend on the person
- I wouldn't as I wouldn't like to annoy them
- I wouldn't for fear of being wrong.

Language use and confidence

36. In your opinion, what level are you at on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)? If you are not familiar with the levels, see https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale

- C2
- C1

- B2
- B1
- A2
- A1

37. What best describes your background in Irish?

- Native *Gaeltacht* speaker
- Non-Gaeltacht native speaker
- Language learner

38. Are you content with your level of Irish and confident in your ability?

- Yes, I have no worries.
- Yes, but I could improve
- No, I have work to do.
   39. Give details if you wish, please.

40. Which aspects of the language do you think challenge people the most? More than one box can be selected.

- Speaking Irish in contexts you are not used to.
- Use the sounds of Irish.
- Understanding speakers you are not used to.
- Understanding the different dialects.
- Understanding native speakers.
- Have relevant vocabulary for different contexts.
- Grammatical accuracy in speech.
- Grammatical accuracy in writing.
- Not translating literally from English.
- Knowing the difference between right and wrong.
- Knowing the difference between what is dialectal and what is standard.
- Explaining the rules of language.
- None of the above.

41. Do they have any other language challenges that are not on the list?

42. Do you believe that you can change your linguistic register in varies contexts, e.g., the type of Irish you use inside and outside class?

- Yes
- No

43. Do you aim to always use Irish inside and outside class?

- Yes, always
- Yes, but it is not always possible because of other people.
- Yes, but I am not confident.
- No as I am afraid of making mistakes in front of other.

44. Give details if you wish, please.

45. Do you use much Irish outside of school?

- Yes, always
- Yes, when I can
- No as it relates to school
- No as the opportunities don't exist.

46. Give details if you wish, please.

Classroom practice

47. Are you aware of CLIL?

- Yes
- I have heard of it, but I am not knowledgeable
- No

48. Do you think that students need specific language instruction, or do they pick up the language naturally when they are immersed in it?

- Specific instruction is required.
- They will pick it up naturally.
- A combination of both is needed.

49. Do you see yourself as a language model for the students?

- Yes
- No
- I never thought about it

50. Do you believe that the language ability of the teacher/ assistant has an impact on the language ability of the student?

- Yes
- No

- Not sure

51. Explain this answer, if you wish, please.

52. Do you believe that you have to simplify Irish in the classroom for the sake of student understanding?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

53. Do you believe that the variety of Irish you use in class impacts the Irish you use outside of class?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

54. Explain this answer, if you wish, please.

55. Where do you place emphasis in your classes?

- On curriculum content only.
- On the subject of the curriculum but try to incorporate the teaching of the language.
- I am only responsible for language teaching.

56. Explain this answer, if you wish, please.

57. Would you say you are completely confident to teach the entire curriculum through Irish?

- Yes
- I am mostly comfortable, but I sometimes have problems.
- No

58. Do you have resort to English on occasions in class?

- Yes, often
- Yes, sometimes
- No and I wouldn't.

59. If you have to resort to English does this happen due to student misunderstanding or due to linguistic problems on your own part.

- Student misunderstanding.
- Language problems on my part
- A mixture of both

60. Do you have to create many resources in Irish?

- Yes
- No

61. Do you ask others to check your Irish?

- Yes, always
- Yes sometimes
- No; that would be embarrassing

62. Do you correct students' spoken Irish?

- Yes, always
- It depends on the error.
- It depends on the person as not everyone would like that.
- No

63. Explain your answer if you wish, please.

64. Do you correct students' written Irish?

65. Explain your answer if you wish, please.

66. Are you confident and comfortable explaining the correct forms of Irish to student?
- Yes
- Yes, but I am not confident
- No

67. Explain your answer if you wish, please.

68. Which of the statements below do you agree with?

- It is not possible to be a good *Gaelscoil* teacher without having good Irish.
- Good Irish does not necessarily equate to a good *Gaelscoil*.

69. Explain this answer if you wish.

TPL and Training requirement

70. Are you given many opportunities for TPL?

- Yes
- Yes, but not as much as desired
- No

71. Please explain your answer, if you wish.

72. How often do you discuss training needs with you principal?

- Once or more a year
- Every few years
- When they ask for it
- I only discuss them seldomly

73. How do you find out about training opportunities and funding?

74. Are you satisfied with the training courses offered by EA?

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure what they offer

75. Explain your answer if you wish, please.

76. Have you any examples of training courses that were worthwhile? What was good about them?

77. Have you examples of training courses that were not worthwhile? What wasn't good about them?

78. Is much emphasis place on linguistic training courses in your school?
- Yes
- No

79. Is linguistic training a priority as part of TPL?

- Yes
- No
- I never thought about it.

80. Do you see that much emphasis is placed on language training in the courses offered by the Education Authority?

- Yes, it seems so
- No, it doesn't seem so
- I am not familiar with what they offer.

81. Did you use the resources on *Croí na Gaelscolaíochta* (EA hub) yet?

- Yes
- No
- No. I have not heard of it.

82. Have you completed additional linguistic training lately?

83. Is it easy to find training opportunities?

- Yes
- Yes, but it could be easier
- No

84.   What are the biggest barriers to undertaking additional training? More than one box can be selected.

- Finding the free time for them.
- Covering the costs of the courses.
- Being willing/able to undertake them.
- Appropriate courses to be available.
  Explain any barriers not mentioned above.

85.   Explain your answer if you wish please.

86.   Choose the types of language courses that you think staff members would like.

- Courses to achieve fluency.
- Courses to learn the sounds of Irish
- Courses to achieve written accuracy.
- Courses to learn the Official Standard.
- Language enrichment courses.
- Courses on methods of grammatical explanation.
- Courses to learn language teaching methods.

87.   Can you think of a language course not mentioned above?

88.   Would it be important, in your opinion, for these courses to be accompanied by an official qualification or recognition?

- Yes
- No

89.   Explain your answer if you wish, please.

90.   What type of course would be most suitable for staff at your school?

- Night courses in an external institution
- Online courses to be taken at their own pace.
- Online course with others.

- A course that would be held at the school site

  91.   Explain your answer if you wish, please.

  92.   Is there anything else you would like to say about your training needs, or any other aspect covered in this survey?

   93. The researcher would like to administer a language competence test. Would you be willing to help? It would take 1.5 hours at school or online at home and you will get feedback and developmental recommendations will be offered.

- Yes, and I will email you.
- No

  I sincerely thank you for your time spent on this. For information, I have created a self-assessment form for the staff to access.

Appendix 3

Classroom assistants' Survey

I would like to thank you wholeheartedly for undertaking this survey of language training needs in the immersion education sector. It is vital that the opinions and experiences of assistants are at the heart of any recommendations made in relation to training courses.

- It should take no more than 20 minutes to answer the questions.

- You will see that there are some optional questions. It would enrich the research if you had the time to answer them.

  The researcher declares, herein, that the data given below will be anonymized and hidden as appropriate so that the personal data of no one or any school will be identified in the report. By completing this survey, you confirm that you understand that the information below will be used to write a report.

Background information

1. What immersion setting do you work in?

- Nursery
- All-Irish Primary School
- Primary School Unit
- All-Irish Secondary School
- Secondary Stream

2. What county are you located in?

3. How many years of experience do you have as an IM assistant?

- 0-5
- 5-10
- 10+

4. What sort of class are you most involved in?

- Nursey/primary curriculum
- Irish as a post primary qualification
- Another subject, not Irish, on the post primary curriculum

Basic training

5. What is the highest (relevant) qualification you have achieved and where did you achieve it?

6. Would you say that learning Irish was central to the course?

- Yes
- Ni

36. Please explain your answer.

37. Would you say that language support strategies were central to the course?

- Yes
- No
- NA

38. Please explain your answer.

39. On achieving the qualification, where you confident in your spoken and written ability in Irish?

- Yes
- No

40. Explain your answer, please

41. On achieving the qualification, where you confident in your ability to explain correct forms of Irish.

- Yes
- No

42. Please explain your answer.
43. Had you any other language qualification before starting on your professional. Give details if you wish.

The Language Culture of the School

44. Do you believe Irish was an important criteria for the job you got?

- Yes
- Ni

45. Please provide details, if desired.

46. Are you aware of a specific language policy in the school and was this explained to you?

- There is one and it was discussed with me.
- There is one but it was not discussed with me.
- There is no policy as far as I am aware

- I'm not sure.

47. Was the language culture of the school discussed as part of the induction?

- Yes
- No
- There was no need

48. As part of settling into the job, were you given a mentor?
- Yes
- No

49. If you had a mentor, was advice given to you about language issues? Explain please.

50. Was your language behaviour discussed as part of the probation?

- Yes
- No
- There was no need as there was no problem

51. Do the team members tend to speak Irish together?

- Yes
- No
- It depends on the members and the occasion

52. Please provide details, if desired.

53. **In your opinion,** which statement below best describes the language standard amongst staff (teachers and assistants)?

- Everyone has great Irish.
- They all have Irish but there are a variety of competencies.
- There are staff members who aren't accurate.
- There are staff member who don't have enough Irish.

54. Give details if you wish but don't mention names.

55. **In your opinion,** which statement below best describes the language standard amongst support staff (admin staff and other workers)?

- Everyone has great Irish.
- They all have Irish but there are a variety of competencies.
- There are staff members who aren't accurate.
- There are staff member who don't have enough Irish.

56. Give details if you wish but don't mention names.

57. Do you believe that some members of staff feel inferior in relation to the standard of their own Irish compared to other members of staff in the school?

- I believe so
- I don't believe so

58. Give details if you wish but don't mention names.

59. Is the correct use of Irish is emphasized in all aspects of the school's work?

- It is very important.
- It is important but there are more major concerns.
- It is not important as long as effective communication is carried out in Irish.

60. Please provide details, if desired.

61. Do you know if there is a discussion between colleagues on language issues, e.g. pronunciation courses, grammar courses, terminology courses?

- Yes, between everyone
- Yes, between some colleagues
- No as far as I know
- I'm not sure

62. Please provide details/examples if you wish.

63. Do you know if the team members proof each other's resources?

- I think they always do this
- I think they do when they have time
- I don't think they do

64. If you saw an error in something someone else had written, would you point it out to him/her?

- Yes, certainly
- It would depend on the person
- I wouldn't as I wouldn't like to annoy them
- I wouldn't for fear of being wrong.

Language use and confidence

36. In your opinion, what level are you at on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)? If you are not familiar with the levels, see https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale

- C2
- C1

- B2
- B1
- A2
- A1

37. What best describes your background in Irish?

- *Native Gaeltacht speaker*
- Non-Gaeltacht native speaker
- Language learner

38. Are you content with your level of Irish and confident in your ability?

- Yes, I have no worries.
- Yes, but I could improve
- No, I have work to do.
    39. Give details if you wish, please.

40. Which aspects of the language do you think challenge people the most? More than one box can be selected.

- Speaking Irish in contexts you are not used to.
- Use the sounds of Irish.
- Understanding speakers you are not used to.
- Understanding the different dialects.
- Understanding native speakers.
- Have relevant vocabulary for different contexts.
- Grammatical accuracy in speech.
- Grammatical accuracy in writing.
- Not translating literally from English.
- Knowing the difference between right and wrong.
- Knowing the difference between what is dialectal and what is standard.
- Explaining the rules of language.
- None of the above.

41. Do they have any other language challenges that are not on the list?

42. Do you believe that you can change your linguistic register in varies contexts, e.g., the type of Irish you use inside and outside class?

- Yes
- No

43. Do you aim to always use Irish inside and outside class?

- Yes, always
- Yes, but it is not always possible because of other people.
- Yes, but I am not confident.
- No as I am afraid of making mistakes in front of other.

44.   Give details if you wish, please.

45.   Do you use much Irish outside of school?

- Yes, always
- Yes, when I can
- No as it relates to school
- No as the opportunities don't exist.

46.   Give details if you wish, please.

Classroom practice

47.   Are you aware of CLIL?

- Yes
- I have heard of it, but I am not knowledgeable
- No

48.   Do you think that students need specific language instruction, or do they pick up the language naturally when they are immersed in it?

- Specific instruction is required.
- They will pick it up naturally.
- A combination of both is needed.

49.   Do you see yourself as a language model for the students?

- Yes
- No
- I never thought about it

50.   Do you believe that the language ability of the teacher/ assistant has an impact on the language ability of the student?

- Yes
- No

- Not sure

51. Explain this answer, if you wish, please.

52. Do you believe that you have to simplify Irish in the classroom for the sake of student understanding?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

53. Do you believe that the variety of Irish you use in class impacts the Irish you use outside of class?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

54. Explain this answer, if you wish, please.

55. Where is the emphasis placed in classes in which you offer support?

- On curriculum content only.
- On the subject of the curriculum but try to incorporate the teaching of the language.
- I am only responsible for language teaching.

56. Explain this answer, if you wish, please.

57. Would you say you are completely confident to support the teaching of the entire curriculum through Irish?

- Yes
- I am mostly comfortable, but I sometimes have problems.
- No

58. Do you have resort to English on occasions in class?

- Yes, often
- Yes, sometimes
- No and I wouldn't.

59. If you have to resort to English does this happen due to student misunderstanding or due to linguistic problems on your own part.

- Student misunderstanding.
- Language problems on my part

- A mixture of both

60. Do you have to write much Irish?

- Yes
- No

61. Do you ask others to check your Irish?

- Yes, always
- Yes sometimes
- No; that would be embarrassing

62. Do you correct students' spoken Irish?

- Yes, always
- It depends on the error.
- It depends on the person as not everyone would like that.
- No

63. Explain your answer if you wish, please.

64. Do you correct students' written Irish?

65. Explain your answer if you wish, please.

66. Are you confident and comfortable explaining the correct forms of Irish to student?
- Yes
- Yes, but I am not confident
- No

67. Explain your answer if you wish, please.

68. Which of the statements below do you agree with?

- It is not possible to be a good *Gaelscoil* teacher without having good Irish.
- Good Irish does not necessarily equate to a good *Gaelscoil*.

69. Explain this answer if you wish.

CPD and Training requirement

70. Are you given many opportunities for CPD?

- Yes
- Yes, but not as much as desired
- No

71. Please explain your answer, if you wish.

72. How often do you discuss training needs with you principal?

- Once or more a year
- Every few years
- When they ask for it
- I only discuss them seldomly

73. How do you find out about training opportunities and funding?

74. Are you satisfied with the training courses offered by EA?

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure what they offer

75. Explain your answer if you wish, please.

76. Have you any examples of training courses that were worthwhile? What was good about them?

77. Have you examples of training courses that were not worthwhile? What wasn't good about them?

78. Is much emphasis place on linguistic training courses in your school?
- Yes
- No

79. Is linguistic training a priority as part of TPL?

- Yes
- No
- I never thought about it.

80. Do you see that much emphasis is placed on language training in the courses offered by the Education Authority?

- Yes, it seems so

- No, it doesn't seem so
- I am not familiar with what they offer.

  81.   Did you use the resources on *Croí na Gaelscolaíochta* (EA hub) yet?

- Yes
- No
- No. I have not heard of it.

  82. Have you completed additional linguistic training lately?

  83. Is it easy to find training opportunities?

- Yes
- Yes, but it could be easier
- No

  84.   What are the biggest barriers to undertaking additional training? More than one box can be selected.

- Finding the free time for them.
- Covering the costs of the courses.
- Being willing/able to undertake them.
- Appropriate courses to be available.
  Explain any barriers not mentioned above.

  85.   Explain your answer if you wish please.

  86.   Choose the types of language courses that you think staff members would like.

- Courses to achieve fluency.
- Courses to learn the sounds of Irish
- Courses to achieve written accuracy.
- Courses to learn the Official Standard.
- Language enrichment courses.
- Courses on methods of grammatical explanation.
- Courses to learn language teaching methods.

  87.   Can you think of a language course not mentioned above?

  88.   Would it be important, in your opinion, for these courses to be accompanied by an official qualification or recognition?

- Yes
- No

  89.   Explain your answer if you wish, please.

90.   What type of course would be most suitable for staff at your school?

- Night courses in an external institution
- Online courses to be taken at their own pace.
- Online course with others.
- A course that would be held at the school site

91.   Explain your answer if you wish, please.

92.   Is there anything else you would like to say about your training needs, or any other aspect covered in this survey?

  93. The researcher would like to administer a language competence test. Would you be willing to help? It would take 1.5 hours at school or online at home and you will get feedback and developmental recommendations will be offered.

- Yes, and I will email you.
- No

I sincerely thank you for your time spent on this. For information, I have created a self-assessment form for the staff to access.

Appendix 4: Qualifications in the sector (amongst informants)

Teachers

Pathway 1 : **Degree** in specialised subject (3 years)

PGCE (St Mary's)
PGCE with specialised subject (QUB; UU: Universitys in south/England)
PGCE in All Irish post Post Primary Education (UU; St Mary's; QUB)

Pathway 2: BEd (with specialized subject): Primary (4 years):

St Mary's; Stranmillis; Universitys in south/England

Pathway 3: BEd (with specialized subject): Post primary (4 years)

St Mary's; Stranmillis; Universitys in south/England)

Classroom assistants/Nursey leaders

GCSE

A-Level

Level 2/3/4/5 qualifications (e.g. Childcare)

Diploma in Irish: Ulster University: NUI Galway

BA Irish: UU; QUB

Degree in other subject: various univeristieꜱ

Other recognized qualifications

Diploma in Irish: UU; NUI Galways

MA in Education: St Mary's (Immersion education); UU

MA in translation and professional language skills: UU

PgDip in Leadership studies: UU

Recognised short course: St Mary's

Gaelchúrsaí courses

European Irish language certificate (TEIG)

Appendix 5: CEFR Levels

|		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
U N D E R S T A N D I N G	Listening	I can recognise familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
	Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
S P E A K I N G	Spoken Interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
	Spoken Production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
W R I T I N G	Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate needs. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

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Appendix 6: EA's IM-specific training 2022/2023

Title	Date & Time	Audience	Facilitator	Overview
IM - Cad é mar atá tú?	08/11/22 3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	All IM Practitioners	EA Shared Education & Sectoral Support Team	Cad é mar atá tú? This workshop has been designed by SESS to support the 'Healthy Happy Minds' initiative. Teachers will be provided with tools and strategies so as to encourage pupils to reflect and express their views on the COVID era and positive health and well-being.
IM - Féile Foghla-ma.	13/12/22 3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	All IM Practitioners	EA Shared Education & Sectoral Support Team	Féile Foghlama. In conjunction with leaders and practitioners from the sector, EA SESS staff will facilitate this workshop to promote the sharing of effective practice re. the recovery of language and learning in IME with examples from the Primary & Post-Primary phases.
IM - Scéal uaibh a údáir?	24/01/23 3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	All IM Practitioners	EA Shared Education & Sectoral Support Team	Scéal uaibh a údáir? An insight into writing for children in Irish. Authors from within, and beyond the sector, share their experience and expertise with IM practitioners as to how they approach their craft and the literary devices which they employ to entice young people to read and enjoy text.
IM - Ar son na ndaltaí.	28/02/23 3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	All IM Practitioners	EA Shared Education & Sectoral Support Team	Ar son na ndaltaí. A workshop to explore and exemplify 'Effective Action Based Research in the Classroom.' The session will support those studying at 3rd level but will also inspire and empower all practitioners in identifying, conducting and analysing the impact of interventions & initiatives to enhance learning.
IM - I mbéal an phobail	14/03/23 3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	All IM Practitioners	EA Shared Education & Sectoral Support Team	I mbéal an phobail This session will focus on promoting Irish both within the school and local community. It will feature contributions from relevant Irish Language organisations and will provide a summary of relevant opportunities to promote fluency and popularisation of the language so that IM pupils access an optimum immersive experience.

Appendix 7: Sample resource from IM hub

Appendix 8:

Language skills for immersion practitioners: Self-assessment form

- Read the statements below and tick the boxes that best represent where you are in terms of these different skills.
- Be honest or this will help you plan your own language training.
- Despite the fact that you may not see this skill as relevant to your own job, evaluate it anyway.

Skill	Statement	I'm not sure. This would need to be assessed	I don't have this skill, or I don't understand what is involved	I need further training	I don't see myself as needing training
Listening comprehension	I understand all kinds of spoken language from the different dialects, both informal and formal.				
	I can extract information from spoken passages and summarize them orally and in writing.				
	I can pick up contextual, grammatical and lexical cues when someone is speaking.				
	I can identify, explain and correct errors in other people's speech.				
Reading comprehension	I understand all kinds of written language from the different dialects, both informal language and formal language and traditional language and contemporary language.				

Skill	Statement	I'm not sure. This would need to be assessed	I don't have this skill, or I don't understand what is involved	I need further training	I don't see myself as needing training
	I can read passages aloud; passages from the various dialects, both informal language and formal language and traditional language and contemporary language.				
	I can extract information from complex prose passages without any difficulty.				
	I can identify, explain and correct errors in other people's writing.				
Speaking	I can handle the Irish sound system and recognize the differences between the Irish and English sound systems.				
	I have an understanding of the natural intonation of Irish and how that can be used to create effective communication.				
	I can instantly create clear and fluent speech with a logical structure.				
	I can speak accurately without making errors.				

Skill	Statement	I'm not sure. This would need to be assessed	I don't have this skill, or I don't understand what is involved	I need further training	I don't see myself as needing training
	I can change the style and tone of my speech according to the context and the listener. This includes explaining topics in an understandable way.				
	I can speak and debate on any topic I know about, especially professional or academic topics.				
	I can correct slips of the tongue in my own speech without difficulty.				
Writing	I can create accurate, clear text with a logical structure.				
	I can write accurately without making errors.				
	I can change the style and tone of my writing according to the context and the reader. This includes explaining topics in an understandable way.				
	I can write on any topic I know about, especially professional or academic topics.				

Skill	Statement	I'm not sure. This would need to be assessed	I don't have this skill, or I don't understand what is involved	I need further training	I don't see myself as needing training
	I can, when writing, follow conventions (e.g., style guides, use of references, use of the Official Standard).				
Language richness	I know and understand idioms, proverbs and have a pragmatic awareness of their use.				
	I have a wide vocabulary for the contexts I am involved in, at work and outside of work.				
	I can make the statements in different ways for the sake of understanding and teaching.				
	I don't have to literally translate from English.				
	I manage not to deviate between the two languages, especially when it comes to the use of discourse markers (e.g., *like, but, so* etc.)				
Knowledge of the language	I understand grammar terminology and can use it to describe the language.				
	I understand the syntax (structure) of the sentence in Irish and I can describe it.				

Skill	Statement	I'm not sure. This would need to be assessed	I don't have this skill, or I don't understand what is involved	I need further training	I don't see myself as needing training
	I understand the major differences between the structure of English and the structure of Irish and I can explain them.				
	I understand morphology (changes at the beginning and end of the word) and can explain the circumstances under which they occur.				
	I understand the major differences between the syntax and morphology of the various dialects, including the Official Standard.				
	I pay attention to language change and new types of language that are emerging.				
	I can understand the major language reference sources (printed and online) and can find specific information in them.				
Professional knowledge	I can summarize and explain complex information from one language, orally and in writing in the other language.				
	I can do an accurate and precise translation between the two languages.				

Skill	Statement	I'm not sure. This would need to be assessed	I don't have this skill, or I don't understand what is involved	I need further training	I don't see myself as needing training
	I can edit texts according to specific conventions.				
	I can design creative language output (e.g., videos, posters, presentations) that is accurate, attractive and understandable.				
	I can give effective language feedback and direct people to support resources.				
	I can answer language questions, give clear explanations and relevant, comprehensible examples.				
	I know the most effective strategies for developing key language skills in others.				
	I can recognize other people's language difficulties.				
	I can intervene when I recognize a language difficulty in another person.				
	I can create a mix of language enhancement lessons and embed them into lessons that are not language focused.				

Skill	Statement	I'm not sure. This would need to be assessed	I don't have this skill, or I don't understand what is involved	I need further training	I don't see myself as needing training
	I understand the different types of learners and the best strategies to influence them.				
	I can effectively assess the language progress of others.				
	I understand the strategies to handle different ability levels in a classroom.				
	I keep abreast of developments in language pedagogy including Computer Assisted Language Learning.				
	I appreciate the theory of language acquisition and how that relates to the immersion context.				
	I understand the benefits of bilingualism and strategies for handling both languages.				
	I can encourage language output and nurture linguistic confidence in people.				
	I look for opportunities to discuss language practices with colleagues.				

Appendix 9

CEFR benchmarked assessments for IM practitioners

Criteria and assessment methods

A2 (Pre-intermediate)

Skill	Criteria	Assessment form	Assessment method
Listening	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g., very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	Auto-corrected online	• Fill in the correct word • Choose correct response
Reading	can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	Auto-corrected online	• Choose the correct response • Find the translation
		Assessor-led	• Read a role-play
Spoken interaction	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	Assessor-led	• Basic conversation about self, family and job in school • Translate simple to orders to students into Irish
Spoken production	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.		
Writing	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate needs. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	Auto-corrected online	• Fill in the correct grammar form.
		Assessor-led	• Write a paragraph • Translate sentences

B2 (Upper Intermediate)

Skill	Criteria	Assessment Form	Assessment method
Listening	can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	Auto-corrected online	• Finish the sentence • Choose the correct response • Find the terminology
Reading	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	Auto-corrected online	• Choose the correct summary • True and false statements • Find the translation
		Assessor-led	• Summarize in own words
Spoken interaction	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	Assessor-led	• Create role-play • Converse about job roles and responsibilities • Give a synonym • Translate school-related sentences into Irish
Spoken production	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.		
Writing	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	Auto-corrected online	• Find and correct the mistake
		Assessor-led	• Email • Describe the picture • Translate sentences

C2 (Proficient)

Skill	Criteria	Assessment form	Assessment method
Listening	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.	Auto-corrected online	• Find implicit and explicit information. • Transcription
Reading	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.	Auto-corrected online	• Interpreting viewpoints • Find the logical fallacies • Give the term based on explanation
		Assessor-led	• Simplify and summarize in own words
Spoken interaction	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.	Assessor-led	• Teach a grammar point. • Debate a student (role-play) • Express in a different way • Simplify and summarize
Spoken production	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.		
Writing	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.	Auto-corrected online/assessor-led	• Find, correct and explain errors
		Assessor-led	• Write a set of instructions • Translate a passage • Describe a scene

Appendix 10

Bespoke courses for IM practitioners

University-accredited courses vs short courses

University accredited courses

Advantages	Disadvantages
Benchmarked to National Qualifications Framework.	University qualifications are expensive for the practitioners/school.
Internal moderation with external oversight.	Courses must be benchmarked to a certain level on the Framework so mixing and matching would be limited.
Detailed courses with a wealth of material.	Qualifications (e.g., cert, diploma) would only be achieved after a certain number of modules.
Use of University systems, resources, community, and access to a variety of specialist teachers.	The Institution would own the courses.
University systems can host and administer online courses.	Not easy to update.
Expert tutor feedback	
Qualifications have a prestige beyond the sector.	

Short courses with an unofficial accreditation

Advantages	Disadvantages
Offer greater flexibility in selecting courses against needs.	Limited resources and tutor oversight and input.
Low cost.	Limited interaction with learning community.
Can be set at different levels.	Accreditation will not be recognized outside sector.
Can be branded in whatever manner deemed most appropriate.	Additional cost of hosting courses.
Choice of platforms.	Lack of depth in material.

Recommendation

Step 1: Pilot in clusters of school (Unofficial accreditation)

Each course will have 2 * 2-hour sessions

Course 1: Understanding and teaching grammar

Course 2: Language enrichment and correctness for classroom

Course 3: CLIL in IM settings
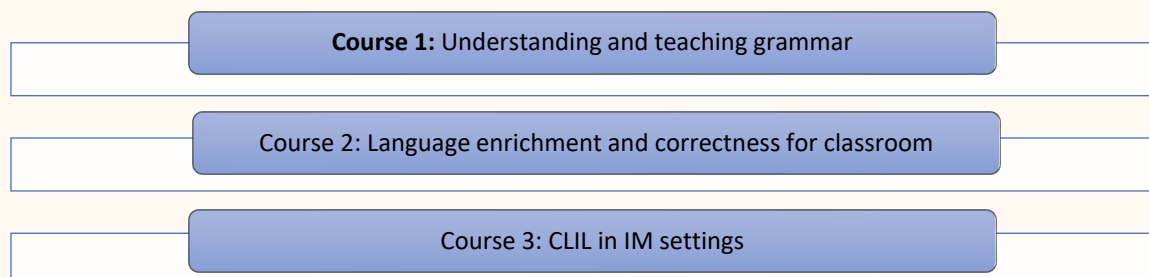
Step 2: PgCert/PgDip/MA in IM practice (accredited course)

(Blended course with standalone CPD modules)

Year	Module	Credit points	Qualification
1 – semester 1	Accuracy and teaching 1	30	
1 – semester 2	Accuracy and teaching 2	30	PG cert (60 pointe)
2- semester 1	Irish in the classroom	30	
2- semester 2	CLIL	30	PD dip (120 pointe)
3. semester 1/2	Dissertation	60	MA (180 pointe)

Step 3: Short courses (Unofficial accreditation)

Online asynchronous (IM training hub)

or

synchronous on site

(Not an exhaustive list)

Understanding and teaching grammar

Title	Description
What is grammar and why do I need it?	An overview of grammar terms and describing basic sentence structure
Which tense and why 1?	Review of tenses and how to explain them
Which tense and why 2?	Review of tenses and how to explain them
On the case 1	Review of cases and how to explain them
On the case 2	Review of cases and how to explain them
It's hard to describe 1	Using adjectives and adverbs
It's hard to describe 2	Using adjectives and adverbs
That's quite the preposition	Understanding the importance of the preposition in Irish.
To be or not to be- that is the copula?	Understanding the difference between 'is' and 'be'
I've got your number 1	An explanation of standard number rules.
I've got your number 2	An explanation of standard number rules.
What the 'h'?	An explanation of why and when to use lenition.
My mistake 1	Rectifying and explaining the most common errors in Irish.
My mistake 2	Rectifying and explaining the most common errors in Irish.

Spoken Irish

Title	Description
What's the word 1?	Vocabulary for school life
What's the word 2?	Vocabulary for school life
You don't say… 1?	Common sentences that are difficult to translate.
You don't say… 2?	Common sentences that are difficult to translate.
That's not Irish 1	Common calques to avoid
That's not Irish 2	Common calques to avoid

Dialect and standard Irish

Title	Description
But we say 1?	Dialect differences and traditional sounds of Irish
But we say 2?	Dialect differences and traditional sounds of Irish
Raising the standard	Differences between dialect and standard
Raising the standard	Differences between dialect and standard

Clil, Language acquisition and promoting language use.

Title	Description
I know, you know 1	Introduction to language teaching methodologies
I know, you know 2	Introduction to language teaching methodologies
The best made plans 1	How to use CLIL in the classroom
The best made plans 2	How to use CLIL in the classroom
Let's test it	Assessing language development
Let's test it	Assessing language development
Just pick it 1	How language acquisition occurs
Just pick it 2	How to facilitate language acquisition
It's better to try and fail than fail to try 1	Promoting language use and building confidence
It's better to try and fail than fail to try 1	Promoting language use and building confidence
The computer says…	Computer-aided language learning