

**“Fí na Teanga” -**

**An exploration of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year post-primary students’ attitude and motivation  
for Irish language learning in a multilingual Ireland**

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**This thesis is being submitted for the  
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Education  
School of Education  
Trinity College Dublin**

2026



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*September, 2025*

## **Summary**

This study examines the attitudes, motivations, and identities of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year post-primary students learning Irish within Ireland's multilingual context. Moving beyond primary-level and immersion research, it focuses on post-primary learners; both L1 and L2, across diverse linguistic settings. Combining large-scale quantitative data with qualitative narratives and policy analysis, it presents a holistic view of how young people engage with Irish as both a subject and a living cultural resource.

Framed by the concept of “Fí na Teanga”, the weaving of language, the study views language learning as an act of connection. It intertwines strands of confidence, identity, access, relevance, diversity, and environment, shaping how learners experience Irish within and beyond school. This metaphor also reflects the research process itself: weaving together student and teacher voices, data, curriculum and policy into one narrative of engagement.

## **Research design and questions**

This exploratory sequential mixed-methods study was guided by six main research questions:

- What are the attitudes of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year post-primary students towards learning the Irish language in a multilingual Irish classroom?
- What are the motivations of these students for learning the Irish language?
- What are the experiences of these students in learning the Irish language?
- How does student identity influence their attitudes, motivations, and experiences in learning the Irish language?
- What factors impact students' engagement and success in learning the Irish language?
- What strategies can improve students' attitudes, motivations, and experiences in learning the Irish language?

To address these questions, the study employed a four-phase design. Phase 1: an AMTB survey (n=1,045) across ten schools (Irish-medium, English-medium, Gaeltacht) examining motivational orientations, self-concept, attitudes, and language anxiety. Phase 2: open-ended responses (n=912) providing emotional and reflective insight. Phase 3: ten student narratives (L1 and L2) capturing lived, relational, and identity-based dimensions.

Phase 4: nine teacher narratives (L1 and L2) on motivation, engagement, and multilingual classroom realities.

## **Findings**

Engagement with Irish proved dynamic and relational, shaped more by emotional, social, and contextual factors than by school type. While many students valued Irish as cultural identity, this rarely produced confidence or everyday use. Motivation declined between first and second year, especially in English-medium (T2/L2) schools, where exam focus and limited communication reduced engagement. Irish-medium (T1/L1) students showed higher motivation overall, though variation across schools highlighted the influence of relationships, classroom climate, and pedagogy. Confidence was pivotal: supportive, communicative settings fostered participation, while correction and anxiety led to withdrawal. Teacher enthusiasm emerged as the strongest motivator. Identity also mattered. Students engaged most when Irish aligned with their sense of self, though multilingual learners varied in their connection to it. Teacher narratives echoed these themes, citing time and curriculum pressures, and a gap between inclusive policy aspirations and practice. Overall, motivation is best understood as participation shaped by Confidence, Access, Identity, Relevance, Diversity, and Environment; the six interdependent elements of the CAIRDE Framework, offering a practical model for fostering inclusion, belonging, and sustained motivation in Irish language learning.

## **Recommendations**

This study emphasises the learner as central to the future of Irish language education. Engagement is not fixed by context or ability but built through confidence, connection, and relevance. The CAIRDE Framework for Engagement; Confidence, Access, Identity, Relevance, Diversity, and Environment, defines the conditions for meaningful participation in Irish learning. Confidence grows in communicative classrooms that value expression and learning through use. Equitable access ensures all learners experience genuine opportunities to use Irish. Engagement deepens when students see Irish as part of their identity and belonging, supported by practices that affirm both Irish and home languages. Relevance depends on connecting Irish to culture and contemporary life, while diversity requires embracing multilingualism and equipping teachers with intercultural skills. Environment foregrounds supportive learning conditions.

Ultimately, Irish language learning thrives when lived as a social and relational experience rather than measured only by performance. The CAIRDE Framework offers a practical guide to fostering motivation, inclusion, and belonging, moving beyond obligation to participation, where Irish is not only learned but lived and shared within Ireland's multilingual reality.

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A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karen Uí Chaiside".

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September 2025

## Acknowledgement

This thesis was carried by the love, patience, and belief of my family. Without external funding and despite some applications dismissed as “controversial”, we kept going. In a field that often favours the “bright side,” we chose the harder path: sitting with complexity, listening closely, and trusting that honest findings matter.

To my husband Colin, my partner since before I began teaching Irish in 2005, thank you for your constant support, from busy school life, to workshops and late-night drafts. Though Irish was never your passion, you backed my decision to raise our children with Irish-medium education and Irish at home. Your family’s roots in Spain kept us true to the multilingual reality of our lives. Thank you for your patience, pragmatism, and belief, always reminding me, “If a PhD was easy, everyone would do it.”

To my three teenage children, Aaron, Ava, and Luca: this is for you, your friends, and your generation. Thank you for the eye-rolls that turned to hugs, the coffee by my desk, and your quiet understanding when deadlines took over. “We’ll have more fun now that this work is done!”

To my parents, true Dubs: Dad, who loved Gaeilge even when it wasn’t “cool,” and Mam, the stalwart who carried us through every challenge, go raibh míle maith agaibh. To my late grandmother, whose French heritage gave us music and language, merci Mamó. To my siblings and extended family, thank you for stepping in and never doubting this would be completed.

To colleagues, mentors, and friends: thank you for every lesson, easy or hard. To school leaders, teachers, and students who shared their time and voices, you are the heart of this study.

To my supervisors, Prof. Ann Devitt and Dr. Noel Ó Murchadha, and my examiners: thank you for your intellectual rigour and humanity, for sharpening this work and valuing a project unafraid of difficult truths. To peers across Irish-medium and English-medium contexts, thank you for your dialogue and dedication, this is how a field moves forward.

This thesis began with family and was sustained by friendship, colleagues and community. The good it carries belongs to all of us.

Buíochas ó chroí libh go léir.



## **Abstract**

This study examines Irish language learning in a multilingual society, focusing on the attitudes, motivations, and lived experiences of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year post-primary pupils across the Republic of Ireland. In the context of increasing linguistic diversity and evolving education policy, it explores how multilingual repertoires, identity negotiations, and socio-educational settings influence engagement with Irish as both a school subject and a heritage language.

Using a mixed-methods design, the research integrates a large-scale pupil questionnaire adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and narrative interviews with pupils and teachers. Over 1,000 students from 10 schools, spanning Irish-medium, English-medium, and Gaeltacht contexts, participated in the survey, providing a robust dataset for both statistical and interpretive analysis.

The findings reveal that while Irish-medium pupils report stronger motivation and more positive orientations than their peers in English-medium schools, multilingualism complicates this picture. Pupils from multilingual homes often expressed enthusiasm for global languages yet weaker identification with Irish, reflecting tensions between heritage and instrumental orientations. A noticeable decline in motivation from first to second year further underscores the challenges of sustaining engagement. Teacher narratives highlight structural, pedagogical, and ideological factors that both support and constrain pupils' experiences of learning Irish.

By situating Irish within Ireland's multilingual educational landscape, the study contributes an original account of how heritage language learning intersects with migration, identity, and educational reform. It offers recommendations for pedagogy and policy aimed at supporting diverse learners and strengthening Irish in a rapidly changing society.

**Key Words:** Irish language education; multilingualism; heritage language; identity; motivation; integration; language policy; post-primary education.

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# **1 Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Overview**

In an era of rapid mobility, shifting identities, and pervasive multilingual contact, research on bilingualism and multilingualism has renewed urgency in applied linguistics. Contemporary perspectives move beyond additive views of “a second language” positioned alongside a monolingual baseline, instead foregrounding dynamic repertoires, identity negotiation, and the politics of language (García & Wei, 2014; Piccardo, 2019). This thesis enters that landscape with a focus on post-primary Irish language education, where Irish, English, and multiple immigrant or heritage languages intersect daily.

For the purposes of this study, several key terms require clarification from the outset. A heritage language learner refers to a learner who has familial, cultural, or community connections to a language other than the dominant societal language, even where proficiency levels vary (Valdés, 2001). In the Irish context, this may include students who speak languages such as Polish, Romanian, Arabic, Lithuanian, Yoruba, or Ukrainian at home while being educated primarily through English or Irish. The term multilingual learner is used to describe learners who engage with and draw upon more than two languages in their daily lives or educational experiences. This reflects contemporary understandings of multilingualism as dynamic and repertoire-based rather than compartmentalised (García & Wei, 2014).

The curriculum specifications T1/L1 and T2/L2 are also central to this thesis. Within Irish educational policy, Gaeilge T1/L1 refers to Irish language specifications designed for learners educated through Irish-medium settings, such as Gaelscoileanna, Gaelcholáistí, or schools located in Gaeltacht areas, where Irish functions as the principal language of instruction and communication. Gaeilge T2/L2 refers to specifications intended for learners in English-medium schools where Irish is taught primarily as a subject rather than used as the main language of schooling (NCCA, 2017, 2023). While these labels originate in curriculum policy, this study recognises that students’ linguistic realities are often more fluid than binary L1/L2 categories imply.

Bilingualism and multilingualism are not only descriptive facts of contemporary societies; they are also resources and sites of tension. As people navigate professional, social, and digital worlds, their orientations toward multiple languages shape communicative competence, belonging, power, and equity (Cenoz, 2013; Jessner, 2008). Within European policy, plurilingual competence, understood as the strategic mobilisation of one's full linguistic repertoire, has gained particular prominence (Council of Europe, 2020).

Ireland occupies a distinctive position in this ecology. Irish enjoys symbolic and constitutional status tied to national identity and revitalisation, while English functions as a global lingua franca and inward migration has diversified home-language practices. The 2022 Census reports that 1,873,997 people have some ability in Irish, a 6% rise since 2016, yet daily use outside education declined slightly (CSO, 2022). More than 750,000 residents now speak a language other than English or Irish at home (e.g., Polish, Romanian, French, Ukrainian), underscoring the multilingual reality in schools and communities (CSO, 2022; EMN Ireland, 2023).

These dual trends, advocacy for Irish alongside accelerating linguistic diversity, create both opportunity and strain for post-primary Irish classrooms. How can curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment respond to learners whose repertoires already span multiple languages? How are motivation and identity shaped when Irish is one resource among many? This thesis uses the Irish post-primary context to probe these questions, contributing to debates on motivation, identity, and power in SLA, while offering evidence with relevance to multilingual and heritage-language education internationally.

### Educational and sociolinguistic contexts of Irish language schooling

To understand the context of this study, it is necessary to outline the different educational settings in which Irish language learning takes place. Participants in this research were drawn from English-medium schools, Irish-medium schools, and Gaeltacht schools. These settings differ significantly in their language ecologies, curricular expectations, and students' opportunities to encounter and use Irish both inside and outside school.

English-medium schools constitute the majority of post-primary schools in Ireland. In these settings, English is the principal language of instruction across subjects, while Irish is taught as a compulsory subject for most students throughout lower and upper post-primary education. Students in these schools generally follow the Gaeilge T2/L2 specification.

Exposure to Irish is therefore often limited to timetabled lessons and particular cultural or extracurricular activities, although students' engagement may vary considerably depending on school ethos, teacher practice, family background, and local community attitudes toward the language.

Irish-medium schools, including Gaelcholáistí at post-primary level, use Irish as the principal language of instruction across the curriculum. Students in these settings generally follow the Gaeilge T1/L1 specification, reflecting their immersion experience and higher expected proficiency levels. Irish-medium education has expanded significantly in recent decades and is frequently associated with positive educational outcomes and strong learner engagement with the language (Ó Duibhir, 2018). Irish-medium education now forms a significant part of the Irish educational landscape. According to Gaeloideachas statistics for the 2023–2024 school year, there are over 250 Irish-medium primary schools (Gaelscoileanna) and more than 70 Irish-medium post-primary schools (Gaelcholáistí) operating across Ireland (Gaeloideachas, 2024). Their continued growth reflects increasing parental and societal interest in immersion education and Irish language acquisition, although access remains uneven across regions and sectors. Nevertheless, Irish-medium education is not evenly accessible across Ireland. Recent research identifies gaps in provision, regional disparities, and infrastructural challenges affecting access to Irish-medium schooling (Ó Duibhir et al., 2024).

The study also includes participants from Gaeltacht schools. The Gaeltacht refers to officially designated Irish-speaking regions where Irish has historically functioned as the community language. However, the linguistic realities of contemporary Gaeltacht areas are increasingly complex. Research by Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) demonstrates considerable variation between Gaeltacht regions regarding daily Irish language use, intergenerational transmission, and community vitality. Some Gaeltacht regions continue to sustain relatively strong Irish-speaking networks and higher levels of daily Irish use, while others have experienced more substantial language shift toward English. Consequently, the term “Gaeltacht” does not represent a uniform sociolinguistic reality, but rather a continuum of differing language ecologies and community practices. Consistent with the findings of Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007), the Gaeltacht schools included in this study are situated within regions characterised by differing levels of community Irish language use, language transmission, and sociolinguistic vitality. Students attending these schools therefore

encounter varying levels of Irish language immersion within their communities and social lives.

These distinctions are significant because students' opportunities to use Irish beyond the classroom influence attitudes, confidence, identity formation, and motivation. Learners in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht contexts may experience Irish as a lived communicative resource, whereas learners in English-medium settings may encounter it primarily as a curricular subject. These differing linguistic ecologies are reflected throughout the findings and discussion chapters of this thesis, particularly in relation to learner confidence, communicative engagement, identity formation, and motivation toward Irish.

At the same time, contemporary Irish classrooms are increasingly multilingual. Newcomer students from diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds now form part of post-primary Irish classrooms across all sectors (CSO, 2022; Devine, 2011). Their experiences complicate traditional assumptions regarding Irish language learning, identity, and belonging within Irish education. Research on multilingual learners in Ireland highlights both the opportunities and challenges associated with participation in Irish language education, including issues relating to linguistic adjustment, educational transition, and inclusion within school communities (Little & Kirwan, 2019). While some newcomer students engage positively with Irish as an additional language and marker of belonging, others may encounter barriers linked to interrupted educational experiences, differing linguistic repertoires, and uncertainty regarding long-term integration within the Irish education system.

The question of exemptions from Irish is also relevant within this context. Under Department of Education Circular 0055/2022, certain students may qualify for exemptions from the study of Irish, including students with identified special educational needs and some newcomer students who have received part of their primary education outside Ireland. While exemptions are intended to support learners in particular circumstances, concerns have been raised regarding the potential long-term implications of exemption practices for students' participation in Irish language learning and aspects of Irish cultural and educational life (Darmody & Daly, 2015). Such debates form part of wider discussions concerning equity, inclusion, and access within Irish education, particularly in relation to multilingual learners and students with additional educational needs.



In addition, recent policy documents have highlighted the continued underrepresentation of students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds within Irish-medium education (An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige, 2025b). This raises important questions regarding inclusivity, access, and how Irish-medium schooling is perceived by multilingual families. Such concerns intersect directly with the present study's focus on motivation, identity, and belonging in post-primary Irish education.

These educational settings should not be viewed as isolated categories but as overlapping sociolinguistic spaces shaped by policy, community practice, migration, and broader societal attitudes toward Irish and multilingualism. Recognising these differences is essential for understanding the varied learner experiences explored throughout this thesis.

## 1.2 Policy, curriculum, and educational transition

Irish language learning in post-primary education sits at the intersection of constitutional symbolism, evolving curriculum policy, and the multilingual realities of contemporary classrooms. The policy landscape surrounding Irish language education has developed through interlinked legislative, curricular, and strategic reforms reflecting changing understandings of language revitalisation, inclusion, and multilingual education (Walsh, 2012). Article 8 of Bunreacht na hÉireann recognises Irish as the first official language of the state and has historically underpinned its compulsory status and symbolic role within education. Although constitutional provisions do not prescribe specific pedagogical or assessment approaches, they continue to shape policy debates concerning the aims, status, and implementation of Irish language education across different educational phases (Walsh, 2012; Ó Duibhir, 2018).

The Education Act (1998) established the statutory foundation for promoting Irish within education, mandating schools to support the language as an expression of national identity and cultural heritage. The *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010–2030* further positioned Irish as both a community and public language, emphasising immersion education, teacher development, and increased daily use across society. More recent policies, including the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017–2022* and the *Gaeltacht School*

*Recognition Scheme*, have strengthened the relationship between education and community language maintenance within officially designated Irish-speaking regions.

In recent years, policy attention has increasingly extended beyond the Gaeltacht. The publication of *Plean Gnímh don Ghaeilge i Scoileanna Meán-Bhéarla* (An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige, 2025a) and the *Policy on Irish-Medium Education Outside of the Gaeltacht* (An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige, 2025b) reflects a growing recognition that Irish language revitalisation requires coherent support across English-medium schools, Gaelscoileanna, Gaelcholáistí, and wider multilingual educational contexts. These policies address issues such as teacher supply, progression pathways, school support structures, communicative language use, and access to Irish-medium education.

At the same time, broader literacy and language strategies increasingly position plurilingual and pluricultural competence as national educational goals. The Primary Language Curriculum (2019), the Primary Language Specifications (2025), and *Ireland's Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024–2033* all promote integrated approaches to language awareness, communication, and multilingual competence rather than narrowly separated models of language learning. Consequently, contemporary Irish language policy is increasingly characterised by plurilingual orientations, even where tensions remain between policy aspirations and classroom enactment.

Since the late 1990s, reform has aligned with European and national moves toward communicative competence, progression, and assessment for learning. Within the Junior Cycle Framework, a major step was the differentiation of Irish specifications for L1/T1 (Gaeilge T1) and L2/T2 (Gaeilge T2), introduced in 2017 and revised in 2023. These outcomes-based specifications embed Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) and align subject assessment with the broader Framework for Junior Cycle (2015).

The Irish specifications place significant emphasis on communicative competence, oral language development, learner agency, and engagement with authentic texts and cultural content (NCCA, 2017, 2023). Students are expected to develop competencies across listening, speaking, reading, writing, and communicative competence, while also engaging with Irish literature, culture, and identity. The T1 specification is intended for learners with higher levels of Irish proficiency and immersion experience, whereas the T2 specification

recognises the differing linguistic experiences of students educated primarily through English-medium settings. Both specifications reflect broader curricular shifts toward communicative and learner-centred language education, seeking to move beyond rote learning toward more meaningful language use (Ó Duibhir, 2018; Walsh, 2012). However, tensions remain between these policy aspirations and the examination-driven realities of classroom practice.

These arrangements are part of a wider policy trajectory influenced by European instruments. Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026: *Languages Connect* further promotes multilingualism as a societal and educational resource, situating Irish within a broader ecology of language learning rather than treating it in isolation. The CEFR (2001) and Companion Volume (2020) broaden proficiency to include mediation, online interaction, and plurilingual/pluricultural competence, categories salient for both Irish-medium and English-medium classrooms. While Ireland does not reproduce CEFR scales directly, outcomes-based design and the emphasis on functional communication reflect convergent policy logics and inform possible directions for assessment.

A second axis of transition concerns Senior Cycle redevelopment. The NCCA Senior Cycle Review Advisory Report (2022) and subsequent Department of Education reform announcements signal movement toward more varied assessment profiles, increased weight for oracy and coursework, and closer alignment with contemporary competence frameworks (NCCA, 2022; Department of Education, 2022).

As noted earlier, the 2022 Census confirms growing linguistic diversity in Ireland, with implications for classroom practice. In this context, tensions persist between revitalisation aims, especially salient for L1 cohorts in Gaeltacht and Irish-medium settings, and predominantly English-speaking sociolinguistic realities. Research shows that students routinely mobilise bilingual repertoires for sense-making, even where policy and assessment traditions have privileged separation or monolingual targets (Ó Duibhir, 2018). The central system challenge, therefore, is coherence: aligning revitalisation goals with pedagogy and assessment that sustain engagement and progression across the primary to Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle pathway.

Post-primary Irish language learning is navigating overlapping transitions: from constitutional symbolism to classroom enactment; from legacy syllabi to outcomes-based L1/L2 specifications; from historically compartmentalised language models toward increasingly communicative and plurilingual orientations; and toward a re-profiled Senior Cycle. While current policies increasingly emphasise multilingual awareness, communicative engagement, and plurilingual competence, this study demonstrates that the lived experience of Irish language learning continues to vary considerably depending on school context, teacher mediation, and opportunities for authentic language use. The task now is to ensure policy ambitions translate into classrooms that reflect learners' multilingual realities and support sustained motivation for Irish.

### 1.3 Aim of study

The aim of this study is to investigate the interrelationship between attitudes, motivation, and identity among post-primary learners of Irish, with particular attention to the critical transition from primary to post-primary education. This transition represents a pivotal juncture in students' linguistic trajectories: it is the moment when children, some having experienced full immersion in *Gaelscoileanna*, others having attended English-medium primary schools where research suggests they often demonstrate lower levels of Irish proficiency than peers educated through Irish-medium settings by sixth class (Murtagh, 2007), enter a more differentiated and assessment-driven environment. Many students also arrive from abroad or from multilingual households, bringing linguistic repertoires and educational experiences that complicate traditional assumptions about Irish language learning. Irish language teachers must therefore renegotiate student orientation toward the subject within increasingly diverse classrooms.

Research internationally demonstrates that such transitional phases often involve shifts in motivation, learner identity, and classroom participation (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). Within the Irish context, evidence indicates that learner motivation frequently declines at post-primary level (Murtagh, 2007; Barnes et al., 2024), underscoring the importance of studying this period in depth.

While Irish enjoys constitutional status as the first official language of the state (*Bunreacht na hÉireann*, Art. 8) and continues to play a central symbolic role in national identity, the

everyday sociolinguistic environment is one of English dominance, layered with growing linguistic diversity (Central Statistics Office [CSO], 2023). In such contexts, Irish functions not in isolation but as part of wider multilingual repertoires in schools and communities. Internationally, research has increasingly conceptualised bilingualism and multilingualism as dynamic and repertoire-based (García & Wei, 2014; May, 2014), but Irish SLA research has not always foregrounded how learners mobilise Irish alongside English and other home or heritage languages. By situating Irish within these multilingual repertoires, this study seeks to capture more fully the ways in which students position themselves in relation to the language, whether as an obligation, a resource, or a marker of identity.

Crucially, this study responds to a persistent gap in the literature. Despite successive curriculum reforms, including the development of differentiated L1/T1 and L2/T2 specifications (NCCA, 2017, 2023), and recent policy emphases on inclusivity and plurilingual competence within Irish education, relatively few studies have foregrounded student voices in understanding Irish learning at post-primary level. Existing research has tended to focus on policy, curriculum, pedagogy, and educational provision within Irish language education (Ó Duibhir, 2018; Ó Duibhir et al., 2024), leaving comparatively less attention devoted to how young people themselves experience Irish across differing educational and sociolinguistic contexts. By centring learners' perspectives on attitudes, motivation, and identity, this study aims to provide insight into how official ambitions and classroom realities intersect in ways that shape linguistic engagement.

In doing so, this study contributes to three strands of scholarship: applied linguistics debates on motivation, affect, and identity (Norton, 2013; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021); Irish language education research focused on revitalisation and curriculum reform (Ó Duibhir, 2018; Barnes et al., 2024); and comparative studies of minority and heritage languages in multilingual societies (Hornberger & Wang, 2008; May, 2014). By combining these perspectives, the research offers an empirically grounded analysis of post-primary learners' experiences that can inform both Irish language policy and wider theoretical debates in second language acquisition.

#### 1.4 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of seven chapters, followed by appendices, and adheres to APA 7th edition referencing conventions. The appendices provide supporting documentation, research instruments, participant materials, ethical documentation, and supplementary methodological detail.

Chapter 1 introduces the study and situates it within the contemporary linguistic, educational, sociocultural, and policy landscape of Ireland. It outlines the rationale for the research and provides contextual information relating to Irish language education across English-medium, Irish-medium, and Gaeltacht educational settings. The chapter defines key concepts relevant to the study, including bilingualism, multilingualism, plurilingualism, heritage language learning, and the distinction between Irish L1/T1 and L2/T2 contexts. It also considers contemporary developments in Irish language policy, curriculum reform, multilingual education, and language revitalisation before outlining the aims, research questions, conceptual framework, and structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 presents a critical review of the literature relevant to bilingualism, multilingualism, plurilingualism, learner motivation, identity, and Irish language education. The chapter traces the evolution of theoretical perspectives from early psycholinguistic and cognitive models towards sociocultural, ecological, translanguaging, and plurilingual approaches to language learning. Particular attention is given to learner motivation, identity, minority-language education, and contemporary debates concerning multilingualism within immersion and revitalisation contexts. The chapter also examines current research on the teaching and learning of Irish at post-primary level, including communicative approaches, learner engagement, enactment of the Junior Cycle Irish specifications, and recent policy developments. It concludes by identifying key gaps within the existing literature, particularly regarding student voice, multilingual experience, and educational context within post-primary Irish language education.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological framework adopted in the study. It explains the philosophical and theoretical foundations of the research, locating the study within a constructivist paradigm and justifying the use of a mixed-methods design. The chapter details the sampling and recruitment procedures, participant profiles, ethical considerations, and administration of the modified Attitude/Motivation Test Battery

(AMTB) questionnaire. It also describes the student and teacher narrative interviews and explains the integration of quantitative and qualitative strands within a convergent parallel mixed-methods design.

Chapter 4 presents the analytical framework employed in the study. It outlines the statistical procedures used to analyse the survey data, including descriptive statistics, reliability testing, inferential analyses, and cross-context comparisons. The chapter also details the qualitative analytical procedures applied to the open-ended survey responses and interview data, including thematic and narrative analysis. Finally, it explains how the quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of students' and teachers' experiences of Irish language learning within multilingual educational contexts.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study. It begins with analysis of the student survey data ( $n = 1,020$ ), examining patterns relating to attitudes, motivation, identity, confidence, and engagement across English-medium, Irish-medium, and Gaeltacht educational contexts. This is followed by analysis of the open-ended student responses ( $n = 912$ ) and student narrative interviews ( $n = 10$ ), which provide deeper insight into learners' experiences of multilingualism, identity, transition, and Irish language learning. The chapter then examines teacher narrative interviews ( $n = 9$ ), offering complementary perspectives on curriculum enactment, communicative language use, learner engagement, and policy-practice tensions. Findings are organised thematically and foreground the voices of both students and teachers throughout.

Chapter 6 discusses the findings in relation to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks established in Chapter 2. Drawing together the quantitative and qualitative strands of the study, the chapter examines themes relating to motivation, identity, multilingualism, communicative engagement, educational context, and language learning experiences. The chapter also introduces the CAIRDE Framework - Confidence, Access, Identity, Relevance, Diversity, and Environment - as a conceptual model for understanding student engagement with Irish within multilingual post-primary contexts. The framework is presented as both an analytical outcome of the study and a practical tool for informing classroom practice, school culture, curriculum development, teacher education, and language policy.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by summarising the principal findings and contributions of the study to Irish language education, multilingual education, second language acquisition, and applied linguistics. The chapter considers implications for policy, pedagogy, language maintenance, and language revitalisation, while explicitly acknowledging the methodological and sampling limitations of the research. It also identifies priorities for future research and discusses potential applications of the CAIRDE Framework across classroom, whole-school, sectoral, and policy contexts.

### 1.5 The research and me

My relationship with the Irish language is shaped by personal experience, professional practice, and academic inquiry. I approach this research not only as a doctoral student, but also as a post-primary teacher of Irish and a participant in wider discussions concerning Irish language education. This positioning provides valuable insight into the educational contexts examined within the study while also requiring careful reflexivity regarding my own assumptions, experiences, and perspectives.

Throughout my teaching career, I have observed the diverse ways in which students engage with Irish. For some learners, Irish represents an important aspect of cultural identity, belonging, and community. For others, it is experienced primarily as a school subject, often shaped by assessment pressures, classroom experiences, and broader societal attitudes towards the language. I have also witnessed how students from increasingly multilingual backgrounds navigate Irish alongside English and other home or heritage languages. These varied experiences prompted my interest in exploring how attitudes, motivation, and identity influence students' engagement with Irish during the transition to post-primary education.

My professional experience has also heightened my awareness of the relationship between curriculum intentions and classroom realities. While recent reforms have sought to promote communicative competence, learner engagement, and meaningful language use, students' experiences of Irish continue to vary considerably across educational contexts. This study emerged from a desire to better understand those experiences from the perspectives of



learners themselves and to examine how policy, pedagogy, and educational context shape their engagement with Irish.

As both a teacher and researcher, I occupy a position that is simultaneously insider and observer. My familiarity with Irish language education provided contextual understanding and facilitated meaningful engagement with participants and the wider research field. However, it also required ongoing reflection to ensure that participants' perspectives were represented faithfully rather than interpreted through my own experiences or beliefs. Throughout the research process, I remained conscious of the need to listen carefully to participants' accounts, particularly where their views differed from dominant educational or language revitalisation narratives.

This study is therefore informed by both professional commitment and scholarly curiosity. While I recognise the cultural and educational significance of Irish, the purpose of this research is not to advocate for a particular position, but rather to explore and understand how students experience Irish language learning within contemporary multilingual Ireland. By foregrounding student voices and experiences, the study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the factors that shape engagement with Irish across diverse educational contexts.

## 1.6 The conceptual framework

This study is guided by a conceptual framework that brings together perspectives from applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and education. At its heart lies the recognition that language learning cannot be understood solely as the acquisition of grammar or vocabulary, but must be viewed as a dynamic process shaped by repertoires, identities, motivations, and power relations.

Several interlocking ideas provide the scaffolding for this framework. The first is the notion of bilingual and plurilingual repertoires, which emphasises that learners draw flexibly on all of their linguistic resources rather than keeping languages in neatly separated compartments (García & Wei, 2014; Council of Europe, 2020). This shifts attention away from monolingual baselines and toward integrated competence, where Irish is positioned within students' wider multilingual repertoires.

A second strand is motivation and investment. Building on the evolution from Gardner's socio-educational model to Dörnyei's self-concept approaches and Norton's theory of investment, this study views motivation not simply as an individual trait but as a socially situated process. It is shaped by how learners perceive Irish as meaningful, valuable, or legitimate within their lives and communities, and by the structures that enable or constrain their participation (Dörnyei, 2009; Norton, 2013).

A third dimension is identity and power. Following poststructuralist and raciolinguistic perspectives, identity is understood as dynamic, negotiated, and deeply implicated in questions of recognition and legitimacy (Block, 2007; Flores & Rosa, 2015). For learners of Irish, identity work is particularly complex: Irish may be experienced as a marker of cultural belonging, a school subject with high-stakes assessment pressures, or a symbolic obligation within a national project of revitalisation. These competing framings underscore the importance of analysing how policy, curriculum, and classroom practice position learners, and how learners themselves navigate such positioning across differing school contexts.

The framework for this study provides a flexible analytical scaffold through which the findings are interpreted. It is not presented as a fixed or uncritical lens, but as a working scaffold that will be continually questioned and refined through the empirical phases of this study (Maxwell, 2013). Its purpose is to guide the research questions, to provide coherence across the chapters, and to ensure that the interplay between student attitudes, motivation, identity, and multilingual experience remains at the centre of the analysis. The detailed elaboration of each strand, repertoires, plurilingual competence, investment, motivation, identity, and power, forms the focus of Chapter 2, which furnishes the theoretical foundation for this thesis.

## 1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the background, aims, and rationale for the study, situating it within the shifting linguistic, educational, and societal landscape of contemporary Ireland. The urgency of this research lies in a convergence of factors. On the one hand, Irish remains a compulsory subject across the post-primary system and a central element of national

identity and policy. On the other, motivation for the language often declines during the transition into post-primary education, particularly outside immersion settings, raising questions about how students experience Irish in increasingly diverse and multilingual classrooms.

The chapter has also outlined the differing educational and sociolinguistic contexts in which Irish language learning takes place, including English-medium schools, Irish-medium schools, and Gaeltacht schools. These settings provide learners with differing levels of exposure to Irish and shape how the language is experienced as a communicative resource, curricular subject, and marker of identity (Ó Giollagáin et al., 2007; Ó Duibhir, 2018). At the same time, increasing linguistic diversity within Irish schools, the experiences of newcomer and multilingual learners, debates surrounding exemptions from Irish, and ongoing concerns regarding equitable access to Irish-medium education contribute to a more complex educational landscape than has traditionally been reflected in Irish language education research (Devine, 2011; Ó Duibhir et al., 2024).

Policy and curriculum reforms over the past decade, including the introduction and subsequent revision of the Junior Cycle Irish L1 and L2 specifications (NCCA, 2017, 2023), have sought to promote communicative competence, cultural engagement, and learner autonomy. These efforts are complemented by broader European frameworks, such as the Council of Europe's (2020) CEFR Companion Volume, which foreground plurilingual and pluricultural competence as essential for citizens in superdiverse societies. Yet, despite these policy advances, there remains a gap between aspirations and lived experiences. Student voices, in particular, are underrepresented in existing research, leaving only a partial understanding of how young people perceive, value, and negotiate Irish within their multilingual repertoires.

This study responds to that gap by foregrounding the attitudes, motivations, and identities of post-primary learners, with a particular focus on the critical transition from primary to post-primary education. By listening to students directly and analysing their experiences in light of policy, curriculum, and theoretical debates, this research seeks to illuminate how Irish is positioned in practice, and what this reveals about the broader challenges of sustaining minority languages in contemporary societies.

The next chapter develops the conceptual scaffolding for this project. It reviews key theoretical perspectives on bilingualism, multilingualism, and plurilingualism; models of bilingual development; evolving understandings of motivation and affect; and critical approaches to language, identity, and power. This review not only situates the present study within established scholarly debates but also highlights the intellectual trajectory that has brought us to the questions at the heart of this thesis.

## **2 Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Research on bilingualism, multilingualism, and second language acquisition (SLA) has undergone substantial conceptual change over the past century. Earlier approaches to bilingualism were largely influenced by psycholinguistic and structuralist traditions that conceptualised languages as separate and bounded systems and frequently evaluated bilingual learners against monolingual norms (Bloomfield, 1933; Haugen, 1953; Macnamara, 1967). Within these traditions, bilingualism was commonly understood in terms of language proficiency, cognitive development, and the degree to which learners approximated idealised native speaker competence. Over time, however, increasing attention has been paid to the social, cultural, ideological, and political dimensions of language learning, contributing to broader shifts toward sociolinguistic, sociocultural, ecological, and repertoire-based understandings of multilingualism (Block, 2007; Cenoz, 2013; May, 2014).

Contemporary multilingual research increasingly recognises that language learning cannot be understood solely as an individual cognitive process detached from context. Multilingual practices are now viewed as socially situated and shaped by interaction, identity, ideology, and access to linguistic and educational resources (Norton, 2013). These developments are reflected in the growing influence of translanguaging, plurilingualism, and sociocultural approaches to multilingual education, all of which challenge earlier deficit-oriented and separationist models of bilingual competence (Council of Europe, 2020; García & Wei, 2014). These developments have also generated important debate within minority-language and immersion education concerning the relationship between multilingual pedagogies and target language maintenance.

These debates are particularly relevant within the Irish educational context. Irish language education exists within a complex multilingual landscape shaped by language revitalisation efforts, educational policy reform, increasing linguistic diversity, and differing school contexts, including English-medium schools, Irish-medium schools, and Gaeltacht settings (Ó Duibhir et al., 2024). Students encounter Irish under markedly different sociolinguistic conditions depending on their educational and community environments, and these differences influence their opportunities for language use, learner identities, and

engagement with Irish language learning. Furthermore, contemporary Irish classrooms are increasingly multilingual, reflecting broader demographic and migratory changes within Irish society (Central Statistics Office, 2023). Current policy and curriculum frameworks also place increasing emphasis on communicative competence, learner engagement, and plurilingual awareness within language education (Council of Europe, 2020; Department of Education and Skills, 2015). Understanding Irish language learning therefore requires engagement not only with traditional bilingual education research, but also with wider international discussions concerning multilingualism, pedagogy, identity, motivation, and language policy.

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to these developments and situates the present study within contemporary debates in bilingualism and language education research. The chapter begins by tracing the progression from early psycholinguistic and cognitive models of bilingualism toward broader sociolinguistic, sociocultural, plurilingual, and ecological perspectives on multilingualism and language learning. It then examines contemporary debates surrounding translanguaging, plurilingualism, and minority-language immersion education, particularly tensions between flexible multilingual pedagogies and minority-language maintenance objectives. Following this, the chapter reviews literature relating to the teaching and learning of Irish in post-primary education, with particular attention to communicative approaches, learner engagement, Junior Cycle Irish, and current pedagogical challenges. Subsequent sections examine theories of motivation, affect, identity, and power in language learning before identifying the principal research gaps addressed by the present study.

This chapter establishes the conceptual and theoretical foundations underpinning the thesis while situating the study within contemporary multilingual research and the specific sociolinguistic realities of Irish language post-primary education.

## 2.2 Section 1: Theoretical perspectives on bilingualism and multilingualism

### 2.2.1 Early psycholinguistic and cognitive models of bilingualism

Early understandings of bilingualism were strongly influenced by structuralist linguistics, behaviourism, and emerging psycholinguistic traditions that conceptualised languages as separate, internally bounded systems within the mind of the speaker (Bloomfield, 1933;

Haugen, 1953; Macnamara, 1967). Within these approaches, bilingualism was generally evaluated according to levels of linguistic proficiency measured against native-speaker norms. As a result, balanced bilingualism was frequently positioned as the ideal form of bilingual competence, while uneven language practices were often interpreted as evidence of incomplete language development (Romaine, 1995; Baker, 2021).

Bloomfield's (1933) influential definition of bilingualism as "native-like control of two languages" reflected broader assumptions within early twentieth-century linguistics that languages existed as distinct and autonomous systems. This perspective aligned closely with structuralist approaches to language, where linguistic competence was conceptualised in terms of mastery of discrete grammatical structures and formal linguistic accuracy. Although later scholars proposed broader definitions of bilingualism, many retained similar assumptions regarding linguistic separation and monolingual benchmarks. Haugen (1953), for example, argued that bilingualism could begin when speakers were capable of producing meaningful utterances in another language, while Weinreich (1953) examined bilingualism primarily through the lens of language contact and interference between systems. Macnamara (1967) later broadened the concept further by suggesting that minimal competence in one linguistic skill could constitute bilingualism. Nevertheless, these approaches continued to conceptualise bilingual speakers according to varying levels of proficiency across separate languages rather than according to patterns of language use or interaction.

These perspectives significantly shaped educational and psychological understandings of bilingualism during the first half of the twentieth century. Early psychological research frequently associated bilingualism with cognitive confusion, reduced intelligence, or linguistic interference, particularly among minority-language and immigrant populations (Saer, 1923; Darcy, 1953). Such findings were later criticised for methodological weaknesses, including failure to account for socioeconomic inequality, educational access, and wider forms of social marginalisation affecting bilingual communities (Cummins, 2000; Baker, 2021). Nonetheless, deficit-oriented assumptions surrounding bilingualism remained highly influential within educational discourse for several decades and reinforced monolingual norms within schooling, assessment, and language policy.

Behaviourist theories of language learning also contributed significantly to early psycholinguistic understandings of bilingual development. Influenced by Skinnerian behaviourism, language acquisition was frequently understood as a process of habit formation in which interference from the first language could obstruct successful acquisition of a second language (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2019). Within contrastive analysis traditions, similarities and differences between languages were believed to predict language learning difficulty and transfer (Lado, 1957). Consequently, language mixing and code-switching were often interpreted negatively as evidence of imperfect language separation or incomplete acquisition rather than as legitimate communicative practices. Such assumptions shaped many early immersion and foreign-language teaching methodologies that prioritised strict language separation and target-language exclusivity within classroom settings.

By the mid-twentieth century, however, psycholinguistic research increasingly challenged deficit-oriented understandings of bilingualism. Peal and Lambert's (1962) influential study demonstrated that bilingual learners possessed strengths in areas such as cognitive flexibility and metalinguistic awareness, contributing significantly to changing perceptions of bilingualism within psychology and education. Subsequent research similarly suggested that bilingualism could support cognitive development under favourable educational and social conditions (Cummins, 1976; Genesee, 1987). These findings played an important role in legitimising bilingual and immersion education internationally and contributed to more positive understandings of bilingual competence within educational research.

The distinction between additive and subtractive bilingualism became particularly influential within bilingual education research during the 1970s (Lambert, 1975; Baker, 2021). Additive bilingualism referred to contexts in which acquisition of an additional language occurred alongside continued development and social valuing of the first language, whereas subtractive bilingualism described situations where learning a dominant language contributed to erosion, marginalisation, or devaluation of a minority or home language (Lambert, 1975; Cummins, 2000). This distinction represented an important shift away from purely cognitive understandings of bilingualism toward greater recognition of the sociopolitical and educational conditions shaping language development (May, 2012; García & Wei, 2014). Increasing attention was therefore given to the role of language status, institutional support, educational policy, and wider societal attitudes in influencing



bilingual outcomes (Baker, 2021; May, 2014). Within minority language education, additive bilingualism became closely associated with language maintenance, revitalisation, and educational equity, while subtractive bilingualism became increasingly linked to linguistic assimilation, social inequality, and loss of minority language competence (Fishman, 1991; May, 2012).

Early second language acquisition (SLA) research similarly reflected psycholinguistic assumptions concerning language learning. Language acquisition was generally interpreted as an individual cognitive process concerned with grammatical competence, linguistic accuracy, and progression toward native-speaker proficiency (Ellis, 1994; Ortega, 2013). Chomskyan perspectives on linguistic competence further reinforced distinctions between idealised linguistic systems and actual language performance (Chomsky, 1965). Consequently, early SLA research prioritised formal linguistic structures while paying comparatively limited attention to social interaction, educational context, ideology, or the sociocultural dimensions of language learning (Block, 2007; Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2019).

Despite later critiques, early psycholinguistic and cognitive models established important foundations for bilingual education and immersion research. Their emphasis on proficiency, literacy development, cognitive processing, and language transfer informed subsequent educational theories concerning bilingual attainment and academic achievement (Cummins, 1976; Genesee, 1987). Although later scholars questioned some of the assumptions underpinning these models, particularly the treatment of languages as discrete and separable systems, they continued to influence immersion pedagogy and language policy throughout much of the twentieth century (Block, 2007; May, 2014). These developments subsequently provided the foundation for influential educational psycholinguistic frameworks concerning bilingual proficiency, academic language development, and cross-linguistic transfer (Cummins, 1979, 2000).

### 2.2.2 Common underlying proficiency, BICS/CALP, and cross-linguistic transfer

Among the most influential educational psycholinguistic frameworks in bilingual education research are Cummins' theories concerning Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP), cross-linguistic transfer, Threshold Theory, and the distinction between Basic

Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1976, 1979, 1981, 2000). These frameworks played a major role in challenging earlier deficit oriented assumptions surrounding bilingual learners and became highly influential within immersion education, minority language schooling, and bilingual education policy internationally (Genesee, 1987; Baker, 2021). Rather than conceptualising bilingualism as a cognitive disadvantage, these models increasingly positioned bilingual development as potentially beneficial for educational attainment and academic achievement under supportive educational conditions.

Cummins' distinction between Separate Underlying Proficiency (SUP) and Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) emerged in response to earlier assumptions that languages functioned as entirely separate cognitive systems (Cummins, 1979). SUP conceptualised bilingual competence as involving two distinct and relatively independent linguistic systems with limited interaction between languages. By contrast, CUP proposed that cognitive, literacy related, and academic skills developed through one language could support development in another language through a shared underlying proficiency (Cummins, 1981, 2000). According to this framework, conceptual understanding, literacy strategies, and higher order cognitive abilities are not entirely language specific and may therefore transfer across languages despite differences in surface linguistic features. This model became particularly influential because it challenged assumptions that bilingualism hindered academic development and instead suggested that bilingual education could facilitate cognitive and educational growth under favourable conditions (Baker, 2021; Genesee, 2008).

Closely associated with CUP was the concept of cross-linguistic transfer. Cummins argued that literacy skills, metalinguistic awareness, conceptual knowledge, and academic strategies acquired through one language may support educational development in another language where sufficient exposure and instructional support exist (Cummins, 1979, 2000). Research in bilingual literacy development subsequently provided evidence supporting aspects of transfer theory, particularly in relation to reading comprehension, phonological awareness, and academic language development across bilingual contexts (August & Shanahan, 2006; Genesee, 2008). Within immersion education, these theories provided an important rationale for sustained minority language instruction because they suggested that

development in the immersion language would not necessarily undermine attainment in the dominant societal language.

Threshold Theory further extended these ideas by proposing that bilingual learners must attain particular levels of competence across languages before cognitive advantages associated with bilingualism can emerge (Cummins, 1976). According to this framework, learners operating below certain thresholds of bilingual competence may experience educational disadvantage, whereas higher levels of proficiency may contribute positively to cognitive flexibility and academic achievement. Threshold Theory became especially influential within debates concerning additive and subtractive bilingualism (Lambert, 1975; Baker, 2021). Additive bilingual contexts were viewed as those in which both languages were educationally supported and socially valued, while subtractive contexts referred to situations where acquisition of a dominant language contributed to erosion or devaluation of a minority or home language. These distinctions highlighted the importance of educational structures, institutional support, and language status in shaping bilingual outcomes.

Cummins' distinction between BICS and CALP became equally influential within bilingual and immersion education research (Cummins, 1981). BICS refers to conversational language skills typically developed through everyday social interaction, whereas CALP refers to the more cognitively demanding academic language associated with literacy, abstract reasoning, and formal educational tasks. This distinction provided educators with a framework for understanding why bilingual learners who appeared orally fluent in a language could still encounter difficulty with academic language demands within schooling contexts (Collier, 1987; Thomas & Collier, 1997). Consequently, the BICS/CALP framework became widely adopted within bilingual pedagogy and educational policy because it highlighted differences between social communicative competence and academic language proficiency.

These psycholinguistic frameworks proved particularly influential within immersion and minority language education because they legitimised bilingual schooling and challenged earlier assumptions linking bilingualism with cognitive confusion or educational delay (Cummins, 2000; Genesee, 1987). Within Irish-medium education, concepts such as additive bilingualism, cross-linguistic transfer, and academic language proficiency

informed approaches to immersion pedagogy, literacy development, and curriculum planning (Hickey, 2007; Ó Duibhir, 2018). The argument that strong literacy and conceptual development in Irish could support broader educational attainment became especially significant within Irish-medium and Gaeltacht educational contexts.

At the same time, however, these frameworks later became the subject of considerable debate within multilingual education research. Critics argued that models such as SUP/CUP and BICS/CALP continued to conceptualise languages as relatively stable and separable systems while focusing predominantly on cognitive and academic dimensions of bilingualism (Block, 2007; May, 2014). More recent plurilingual and translanguaging perspectives questioned whether multilingual practices can be adequately explained through frameworks centred primarily on transfer between discrete languages (García & Wei, 2014). Nonetheless, Cummins (2021) has argued that contemporary multilingual pedagogies should not be interpreted as rejecting the importance of sustained target language development within immersion education. This tension between flexible multilingual practice and the need for dedicated minority language development later became central within debates surrounding translanguaging and immersion pedagogy in minority language educational settings.

Despite subsequent critiques and theoretical developments, CUP, Threshold Theory, BICS/CALP, and cross-linguistic transfer remain highly influential within bilingual education research and continue to shape understandings of immersion pedagogy, academic language development, and minority language education internationally.

### 2.2.3 Sociolinguistic and holistic perspectives on bilingualism

Although psycholinguistic models made important contributions to bilingual education research, later scholarship increasingly questioned approaches that considered bilingualism primarily in terms of cognitive proficiency, language separation, and academic attainment. During the latter half of the twentieth century, sociolinguistic researchers began shifting attention toward the social organisation of language use, the contexts in which bilingualism occurs, and the ways multilingual speakers navigate different linguistic environments in everyday life (Fishman, 1972; Romaine, 1995; Edwards, 2004). This represented an important transition within bilingualism research from predominantly cognitive

understandings of language competence toward broader sociolinguistic and interactional perspectives.

Fishman's work was particularly influential in this regard. Rather than focusing solely on linguistic proficiency or cognitive processing, Fishman (1972) examined how bilingual speakers use languages across different social domains, including family, education, religion, peer networks, and institutional settings. His domain analysis framework demonstrated that language choice is closely connected to social relationships, communicative purpose, and wider sociocultural conditions. From this perspective, bilingualism could not be understood simply as mastery of two linguistic systems, but rather as patterned language use shaped by community practices and social context. Fishman's later work on reversing language shift further highlighted the relationship between bilingualism, community use, and minority language maintenance, particularly within contexts where dominant societal languages exert strong institutional and social pressure (Fishman, 1991; Baker, 2021).

These sociolinguistic perspectives contributed to growing recognition that bilingual competence is rarely balanced or evenly distributed across all contexts of use. Instead, multilingual speakers frequently use different languages for different purposes, with competence varying according to domain, social group, topic, and communicative need (Romaine, 1995; Wei, 2000). Such understandings challenged earlier assumptions that bilingualism should be measured according to fixed or uniform proficiency criteria. Increasingly, bilingualism came to be viewed as socially situated, dynamic, and functionally distributed rather than as the symmetrical mastery of two separate linguistic systems (Edwards, 2004; Baker, 2021).

Grosjean's holistic view of bilingualism further advanced this movement away from monolingual centred perspectives. Grosjean (1989, 2010) argued that bilinguals should not be understood as "two monolinguals in one person," but rather as individuals with integrated and context dependent linguistic repertoires. From this perspective, bilingual competence is shaped by patterns of use and communicative necessity rather than by balanced mastery across languages. Grosjean therefore challenged psycholinguistic assumptions that treated languages as autonomous systems operating independently within

the bilingual mind and instead foregrounded the interaction between language practices, context, and everyday communication.

Central to Grosjean's framework was the complementarity principle, which proposes that bilinguals typically acquire and use languages for different purposes and across different domains of life (Grosjean, 2010). Consequently, multilingual speakers may demonstrate stronger competence in particular topics, literacy practices, or interactional contexts depending on the language involved. For example, one language may dominate within educational settings while another may be used primarily within family or community interaction. The complementarity principle therefore rejects the expectation that bilingual speakers should possess identical competencies across all domains and instead frames bilingualism as functionally differentiated and socially embedded (Grosjean, 2010; Baker, 2021).

These developments also contributed to emerging understandings of bilingual repertoires. Increasingly, multilingual speakers came to be viewed not as users of isolated linguistic systems, but as individuals drawing upon interconnected linguistic resources shaped by social interaction and communicative practice (Wei, 2000; Blommaert, 2010). Such perspectives shifted attention toward the fluidity of language use and the relationship between multilingual practices and broader social identities. Although explicit identity oriented approaches became more prominent later within sociocultural and poststructuralist research, sociolinguistic perspectives on bilingualism helped establish important foundations for examining how language use is connected to legitimacy, belonging, participation, and community membership (Block, 2007; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Norton, 2013).

Within minority language contexts, these sociolinguistic perspectives proved particularly significant because they foregrounded the importance of language ecology, community use, and social domains in shaping language maintenance and revitalisation (Fishman, 1991; May, 2012). In the Irish context, such approaches help explain how students may experience Irish differently across English-medium schools, Irish-medium schools, and Gaeltacht settings depending on opportunities for interaction, peer group practices, and community engagement (Ó Duibhir et al., 2024). These perspectives therefore marked an

important transition away from purely cognitive models of bilingualism toward more socially situated understandings of multilingual experience.

Although sociolinguistic and holistic approaches challenged many assumptions associated with earlier psycholinguistic traditions, they did not fully reject cognitive perspectives on bilingualism. Rather, they broadened the field by foregrounding language use, social context, bilingual repertoires, and communicative practice alongside questions of proficiency and academic development (Block, 2007; Baker, 2021). These developments subsequently created important foundations for later multilingual approaches that further challenged monolingual assumptions surrounding bilingual competence and language use.

#### 2.2.4 Translanguaging and plurilingualism in contemporary language education

During the early twenty-first century, multilingual education research increasingly moved beyond models that framed languages as separate and internally bounded systems. Influenced by broader developments within sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and multilingual education, contemporary perspectives increasingly emphasised the fluid, dynamic, and integrated nature of multilingual language practices (Cenoz, 2013; May, 2014; Ortega, 2014). This shift, often described as part of the “multilingual turn” in applied linguistics, challenged monolingual assumptions underpinning earlier bilingual education models and foregrounded the complex linguistic repertoires multilingual speakers use across contexts (Conteh & Meier, 2014; May, 2014). Rather than viewing languages as autonomous systems that operate independently within the speaker, contemporary approaches increasingly views multilingual communication as flexible, interactional, and socially situated (Blackledge & Creese, 2010).

One of the most influential developments within this tradition has been the emergence of translanguaging theory. Translanguaging was expanded by García (2009) and García and Wei (2014) into a broader theoretical framework for understanding multilingual meaning making and communication. Translanguaging theory challenges the assumption that multilingual speakers operate through separate and autonomous linguistic systems. Instead, it describes multilingual practice as the flexible deployment of an integrated linguistic and semiotic repertoire shaped by communicative purpose, interaction, and context (García & Wei, 2014).

From this perspective, multilingual speakers do not simply alternate between distinct languages, but draw strategically upon interconnected linguistic resources in order to communicate, construct meaning, and participate socially (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Wei, 2014). Translanguaging therefore foregrounds flexibility, mediation, agency, and interaction rather than balanced competence across separate languages (Canagarajah, 2011). Such approaches also challenge deficit oriented assumptions surrounding multilingual learners by recognising language mixing and flexible repertoire use as legitimate communicative practices rather than as evidence of incomplete linguistic competence (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; García, 2009).

Closely related to translanguaging are plurilingual approaches developed through European language policy, particularly within the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and its Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2001, 2020). The CEFR distinguishes multilingualism as the coexistence of multiple languages within societies from plurilingualism as an individual's capacity to mobilise an interconnected repertoire of linguistic and cultural resources according to communicative need. Within plurilingual frameworks, linguistic competence is viewed as partial, dynamic, and uneven rather than as balanced mastery across separate languages (Coste, Moore, & Zarate, 2009; Piccardo, 2017). Plurilingualism therefore frames language learning as an interconnected process in which linguistic knowledge and communicative resources interact across languages and contexts (Piccardo & North, 2019).

Plurilingual approaches place particular emphasis on mediation, intercultural competence, and strategic repertoire use within communication and learning (Council of Europe, 2020; Piccardo, 2017). Rather than conceptualising language learning as the accumulation of isolated linguistic systems, plurilingualism foregrounds the interaction between languages and the ways multilingual speakers draw upon prior linguistic knowledge to support communication and learning across contexts (Coste et al., 2009; Piccardo & North, 2019). Such perspectives have become increasingly influential within contemporary language education because they align with broader understandings of multilingual societies characterised by mobility, migration, and linguistic diversity (Blommaert, 2010; Vertovec, 2007).



Repertoire theory further contributed to these developments by understanding multilingual competence in terms of flexible linguistic resources rather than bounded languages. Scholars such as Busch (2012) and Blommaert and Backus (2013) argue that multilingual repertoires are shaped through lived experience, social interaction, biography, and access to linguistic resources across different contexts. From this perspective, multilingualism is not understood as possession of complete and separate language systems, but as the dynamic mobilisation of available linguistic and semiotic resources in response to communicative demands (Busch, 2012; Blommaert & Backus, 2013). Repertoire based approaches therefore shifted attention away from static models of bilingual competence toward more fluid understandings of multilingual communication and participation.

These developments significantly influenced contemporary language education research and pedagogy. Translanguaging and plurilingual approaches increasingly became associated with learner participation, collaborative meaning making, identity affirmation, and inclusive multilingual classroom practice (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Wei, 2014). Within multilingual educational contexts, such approaches have been viewed as offering opportunities to recognise and legitimise students' full linguistic repertoires rather than privileging monolingual norms or target language exclusivity (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015; Conteh & Meier, 2014). Contemporary multilingual pedagogies therefore increasingly emphasise flexibility, learner agency, and the strategic use of multilingual resources within teaching and learning.

These approaches generated important debate within bilingual and immersion education research, particularly regarding the relationship between flexible multilingual practice and language specific educational goals (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; May, 2014). Questions emerged concerning how translanguaging and plurilingual pedagogies should operate within minority language and immersion contexts where sustained development of a target language remains a central objective.

#### 2.2.5 Translanguaging, separate spaces, and minority language immersion education

While translanguaging and plurilingual approaches have become increasingly influential within multilingual education, their application within minority language and immersion settings has generated significant debate. Much of this discussion centres on the extent to

which flexible multilingual practices can coexist with the specific linguistic goals of immersion education, particularly where sustained target language exposure is necessary for minority language maintenance and revitalisation (Ballinger et al., 2017; Tedick & Lyster, 2020; May, 2012). These tensions are especially relevant within educational contexts such as Irish-medium schooling, where Irish functions simultaneously as a minority language, a language of immersion education, and a central component of broader language revitalisation policy (Ó hIfearnáin, 2013).

Early translanguaging scholarship frequently challenged pedagogical approaches based on strict language separation and target language exclusivity (García & Wei, 2014). From this perspective, multilingual learners benefit when permitted to draw flexibly upon their full linguistic repertoires to support meaning making, participation, comprehension, and identity affirmation (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Wei, 2014). Such approaches have been associated with increased learner engagement, reduced linguistic hierarchies, and more inclusive multilingual classroom practices (Canagarajah, 2011). However, scholars working specifically within immersion and minority language education have argued that these perspectives require careful consideration when applied to contexts where one language possesses substantially less social power and institutional dominance than another (Ballinger et al., 2017; Tedick & Lyster, 2020).

Ballinger et al. (2017), for example, argue that multilingual pedagogies within immersion education should not be understood as eliminating the pedagogical importance of language boundaries altogether. Rather than advocating unrestricted language mixing, they propose approaches that recognise the strategic value of cross-linguistic connections while also maintaining structured opportunities for sustained target language use. Their work highlights the importance of pedagogical intentionality within immersion settings, where learners require meaningful exposure to the minority language in order to develop advanced proficiency, academic language competence, and confidence in language production. In this respect, translanguaging is conceptualised not as the abandonment of immersion principles, but as a pedagogical resource that must operate within clearly defined educational objectives (Ballinger et al., 2017).

Similarly, Tedick and Lyster (2020) caution against interpretations of translanguaging that may inadvertently weaken immersion conditions through excessive reliance on dominant

societal languages. Drawing on research in immersion pedagogy, they argue that minority language learners require sufficiently protected or differentiated spaces in which the target language remains central to communication, interaction, and learning. Such perspectives do not reject multilingualism or cross-linguistic pedagogies outright; rather, they emphasise the need to balance flexible multilingual practices with explicit minority language maintenance objectives (Tedick & Lyster, 2020). Consequently, immersion education increasingly involves negotiating the relationship between multilingual inclusion and sustained target language development.

Cummins (2021) similarly addresses these tensions within contemporary multilingual education. While strongly supportive of multilingual pedagogies and cross-linguistic transfer, Cummins argues that translanguaging should not be interpreted as negating the importance of dedicated target language instruction or immersion environments. He contends that some interpretations of translanguaging risk oversimplifying the role of language-specific input in minority-language development, particularly where learners have limited exposure to the immersion language beyond school settings (Cummins, 2021). Cummins therefore advocates approaches that integrate multilingual pedagogies alongside sustained opportunities for minority language engagement, literacy development, and cognitively demanding target language interaction.

These debates are particularly significant within minority language revitalisation contexts where educational institutions often function as key sites of language transmission and maintenance (Fishman, 1991; May, 2012). In many immersion settings, the minority language possesses comparatively weaker social, economic, and institutional status outside school, while dominant societal languages continue to shape peer interaction, media consumption, and everyday communication (Tedick & Lyster, 2020). Consequently, unrestricted multilingual practices may risk reinforcing existing linguistic inequalities if the dominant language increasingly displaces opportunities for meaningful minority-language use within educational settings (May, 2012; Ballinger et al., 2017).

Within Irish-medium education, these tensions are especially complex. Irish-medium schools seek simultaneously to support high levels of Irish language proficiency, foster positive learner identities, and respond to increasingly multilingual student populations (Ó Duibhir, 2018). Students often navigate linguistic repertoires involving Irish, English, and

additional home or heritage languages, while opportunities for sustained Irish-language interaction outside educational settings may vary considerably across English-medium schools, Irish-medium schools, and Gaeltacht contexts (Ó Duibhir et al., 2024). In such contexts, plurilingual and translanguaging pedagogies may support learner participation, inclusion, and identity affirmation, yet concerns remain regarding how Irish can continue to function as a meaningful language of communication and immersion rather than becoming marginalised within broader multilingual repertoires.

The concept of differentiated or separate spaces has therefore become increasingly important within discussions of minority language immersion education. Rather than conceptualising multilingual pedagogies and target language maintenance as mutually exclusive, contemporary immersion research increasingly advocates balanced approaches in which multilingual strategies are used purposefully alongside protected opportunities for sustained minority language interaction and academic development (Ballinger et al., 2017; Tedick & Lyster, 2020; Cummins, 2021). Such perspectives recognise that minority language learners benefit both from drawing upon their broader linguistic repertoires and from engaging deeply with the immersion language in cognitively and socially meaningful ways.

These debates hold particular relevance for the present study because they reflect broader tensions surrounding Irish language learning within contemporary multilingual Ireland. Questions concerning how students experience Irish across different educational settings, how multilingual practices intersect with language maintenance goals, and how learners position Irish within broader linguistic repertoires remain central to understanding Irish language engagement at post-primary level. Consequently, examining the relationship between multilingual pedagogies, learner participation, and minority language development represents an important theoretical foundation for the study.

#### 2.2.6 Ecological, sociocultural, and integrated frameworks

More recent developments in bilingualism and multilingualism research have gradually sought to move beyond rigid divisions between psycholinguistic and sociocultural understandings of language learning (May, 2014; Ortega, 2014). Rather than understanding cognitive and social perspectives as competing paradigms, contemporary frameworks

increasingly view multilingual development as emerging through the interaction of cognitive processes, social participation, educational experience, and sociocultural context (Cenoz, 2013; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). These developments contributed to more integrated approaches capable of accounting for the complexity, variability, and contextual nature of multilingual experience across differing educational and sociolinguistic environments (de Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2019).

Ecological models played an important role in this shift. Hornberger's (2003) Continuum of Biliteracy framework framed bilingualism and biliteracy development as multidimensional processes shaped through interaction across linguistic, social, cultural, and educational continua. Rather than treating language learning as isolated cognitive acquisition, ecological approaches emphasise the interrelationship between learners, communities, institutions, literacy practices, and wider sociopolitical conditions (Hornberger, 2003; Hornberger & Hult, 2008). From this perspective, multilingual development is shaped not only by proficiency and exposure, but also by access to educational opportunities, language ideologies, community participation, and broader structures of social power (Hornberger, 2003; May, 2014).

Ecological perspectives also foreground the importance of context in shaping multilingual practices and opportunities for language use. Language learning is therefore understood as occurring within interconnected systems involving home, school, peer interaction, policy, and community engagement (van Lier, 2004; Hornberger & Hult, 2008). Such approaches proved particularly influential within minority language education because they highlighted the relationship between educational practice, language maintenance, and broader sociolinguistic environments (May, 2012; Cenoz & Gorter, 2015). In contexts where minority languages possess unequal social or institutional status, ecological frameworks emphasise the importance of creating environments that support meaningful opportunities for participation and language use.

Sociocultural theory similarly expanded understandings of language learning beyond individual cognitive processing. Drawing on the work of Vygotsky (1978), sociocultural approaches conceptualise learning as socially mediated through interaction, collaboration, and engagement with cultural tools (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Within this framework, language learning is understood as emerging through communicative

participation and social activity rather than solely through internal acquisition of linguistic structures. Concepts such as mediation, scaffolding, and the Zone of Proximal Development became highly influential within language education research because they foregrounded the relationship between social interaction and cognitive development (Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2011; Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2019).

Sociocultural perspectives also contributed to broader understandings of learner agency and participation within multilingual education. Language learners increasingly came to be viewed not simply as recipients of linguistic input, but as active participants who construct meaning through interaction and collaborative activity (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Swain et al., 2011). Such perspectives aligned closely with emerging understandings of multilingualism as socially situated and interactional rather than as the accumulation of isolated linguistic systems.

Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice further contributed to these developments by defining learning as increasing participation within social communities. From this perspective, language learning involves negotiation of belonging, legitimacy, and participation within particular social and educational contexts (Wenger, 1998; Block, 2007). Communities of practice frameworks therefore shifted attention toward how learners engage with languages through shared practices, peer interaction, and participation within communities rather than solely through individual language acquisition processes. These perspectives also strengthened connections between multilingualism, identity, and social participation by emphasising that language learning is closely linked to learners' experiences of inclusion, recognition, and legitimacy within educational settings (Norton, 2013; Wenger, 1998).

Dynamic systems theory introduced an additional dimension to contemporary multilingual research by describing language development as nonlinear, adaptive, and constantly evolving over time (de Bot et al., 2007; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). Rather than viewing bilingual competence as stable or fixed, dynamic systems approaches emphasise the interaction between cognitive, social, contextual, and experiential factors within language learning trajectories (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). Multilingual development is therefore understood as fluid and variable, shaped by changing experiences, educational

environments, motivation, participation, and opportunities for language use across time (Verspoor, de Bot, & Lowie, 2011).

Importantly, these contemporary frameworks do not entirely reject earlier psycholinguistic understandings of bilingualism concerning proficiency, transfer, literacy, and cognitive development (Cummins, 2000; Genesee, 2008). Instead, current research increasingly seeks to integrate cognitive insights with sociocultural, ecological, interactional, and contextual perspectives on language learning (May, 2014; Ortega, 2014). Contemporary multilingual research therefore increasingly conceptualises bilingualism and multilingualism as simultaneously cognitive, social, dynamic, and contextually situated processes rather than as isolated linguistic competencies alone (Cenoz, 2013; Larsen-Freeman, 2019).

These integrated perspectives provide an important theoretical foundation for the present study. In the context of Irish post-primary education, language learning is designed not only around proficiency development and educational attainment, but also by participation, school context, opportunities for language use, multilingual experience, and broader sociolinguistic conditions. Ecological, sociocultural, and integrated frameworks therefore provide a useful lens for examining how students experience Irish language learning across English-medium schools, Irish-medium schools, and Gaeltacht settings within an increasingly multilingual Ireland.

## 2.3 Section 2: Motivation, affect, and language learning

### 2.3.1 Overview

Motivation and affect are widely recognised as central influences on second language acquisition (SLA), shaping learners' engagement, persistence, participation, and achievement. Research in this field has evolved from relatively static and individualised models toward more dynamic and context-sensitive understandings of language learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Larsen-Freeman, 2019). Early work was dominated by Gardner's socio-educational model (1985, 2010), which distinguished between integrative and instrumental orientations and emphasised the role of attitudes toward the target language community in shaping learner motivation. Although highly influential, this

framework was later criticised for its reliance on binary distinctions and assumptions concerning stable target-language communities (Hennebry-Leung & Lamb, 2004; Yashima, 2009).

Subsequent research increasingly focused on learners' self-concepts and future identities. Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System reframed motivation in terms of learners' imagined future selves, particularly the Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience. This model broadened understandings of motivation by recognising the importance of both long-term aspirations and immediate classroom experiences in shaping engagement with language learning (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Taguchi et al., 2009).

Alongside developments in motivational theory, increasing attention was also paid to affective dimensions of language learning. Research on foreign language anxiety, willingness to communicate, enjoyment, and resilience highlighted the extent to which emotional experiences shape participation and achievement within language classrooms (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre et al., 1998; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). More recent dynamic systems perspectives further conceptualise motivation and affect as fluid, context-dependent, and constantly evolving processes influenced by interaction, classroom experience, and broader educational environments (Dörnyei et al., 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2019).

These developments are particularly relevant within Irish post-primary education, where learners' engagement with Irish is shaped by classroom experience, confidence, assessment pressures, opportunities for meaningful language use, and wider attitudes toward the language. Research in Ireland has demonstrated that students' attitudes toward Irish are strongly influenced by school context, classroom interaction, and opportunities for communicative engagement with the language (Murtagh, 2007; Barnes et al., 2024). Contemporary research therefore increasingly views motivation and affect not as fixed learner traits, but as dynamic and socially situated dimensions of language learning experience.



### 2.3.2 Gardner's socio-educational model (1960s-1990s)

Gardner's socio-educational model was one of the earliest and most influential frameworks for understanding motivation in second language acquisition (SLA), positioning learner motivation as a major influence on language learning success (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985, 2010). Developed within the Canadian English–French bilingual context, the model examined how learners' attitudes toward the target language and its speakers shaped engagement with language learning. A major distinction within the framework was between integrative and instrumental orientations. Integrative orientation referred to learners' interest in connecting with the target language community and culture, whereas instrumental orientation focused on practical goals such as examinations, employment, or educational progression (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

This distinction became highly influential within SLA research and informed extensive empirical work across educational settings during the latter half of the twentieth century (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Gardner developed the model through the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), which measured motivational intensity, attitudes toward the target language community, language anxiety, and integrative orientation (Gardner, 1985). Research using the AMTB frequently reported positive relationships between integrative orientation and long-term language achievement, particularly where learners had opportunities for meaningful engagement with target-language communities (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Gardner, 2010).

One of the socio-educational model's major contributions was its recognition that language learning is influenced not only by cognitive ability, but also by learners' attitudes, emotions, and perceptions of the target language community (Gardner, 1985, 2010). At a time when SLA research was largely dominated by structuralist and cognitive paradigms, Gardner's work foregrounded the importance of social and affective dimensions of language learning (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Motivation was therefore understood as closely connected to broader questions of intercultural orientation, attitudes toward language groups, and willingness to engage socially with the target language (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

Despite its influence, the socio-educational model later became the subject of considerable critique. One criticism concerned its cultural specificity. Because the framework emerged

from the Canadian bilingual context, the notion of integrative motivation assumed the existence of a relatively identifiable and bounded target-language community (Clément & Kruidenier, 1983). In many foreign-language contexts, however, learners may have limited opportunities for direct interaction with target-language speakers, reducing the relevance of integrative orientation as originally conceptualised (Hennebry-Leung & Lamb, 2004; Yashima, 2009). This critique became increasingly significant with the globalisation of English and the recognition that languages are often used for international communication rather than integration into a single linguistic community (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Ushioda, 2012).

The integrative-instrumental distinction was also criticised for oversimplifying the complexity of learner motivation. Researchers argued that learners' motivations are often overlapping, dynamic, and context-dependent rather than easily separated into binary categories (Noels et al., 2000; Ushioda, 2012). Learners may simultaneously pursue academic, social, professional, and cultural goals, while motivations can fluctuate over time according to educational experiences and social context (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Additionally, reliance on self-report survey instruments such as the AMTB was criticised for providing limited insight into the evolving and situated nature of learner motivation (Ushioda, 2011, 2012).

These limitations are particularly evident within the Irish post-primary context. Research on attitudes towards Irish has frequently shown that learners' motivation is shaped by school context and by the position of Irish as a core subject within the education system, with post-primary learners in English-medium settings often reporting less favourable attitudes towards Irish than their peers in Irish-medium settings (Murtagh, 2007; Barnes et al., 2024; Darmody & Daly, 2015). Although some learners express integrative motivations connected to Irish identity, heritage, or culture, these orientations are often shaped by limited opportunities for meaningful language use beyond the classroom (Ó Riagáin, 1997; Ó hIfearnáin, 2013). Murtagh (2007), for example, found that many students associated Irish primarily with academic obligation rather than everyday communication, illustrating how structural conditions, including compulsion, examination pressure, and restricted domains of use, may negatively influence learner engagement.

Recent Irish research further highlights the importance of educational context in shaping learner attitudes and motivation. Barnes et al. (2024) found that students attending Irish-medium schools generally reported more positive attitudes toward Irish than students in English-medium settings, suggesting that opportunities for sustained interaction and meaningful language use influence learner engagement. However, variation also existed within immersion settings, with some learners expressing uncertainty regarding the relevance of Irish outside school contexts. Such findings reinforce the importance of school environment, language practices, and educational experience in shaping motivation toward Irish language learning.

Despite subsequent critiques, Gardner's socio-educational model established important foundations for later motivation research within SLA. The model legitimised the study of motivation and affect within language education research and highlighted the importance of attitudes, learner experience, and social context in shaping language learning engagement (Gardner, 2010; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Later motivational frameworks would build upon these foundations while seeking to account more fully for the dynamic and context-dependent nature of learner motivation.

### 2.3.3 Self-concept models (2000s-present)

By the early 2000s, limitations associated with Gardner's socio-educational model contributed to the emergence of alternative perspectives on second language (L2) motivation that placed greater emphasis on learner identity, self-concept, and future orientation (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). Among the most influential of these developments was Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), which reframed motivation in relation to learners' imagined future selves rather than attitudes toward a target-language community (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Drawing on Markus and Nurius's (1986) theory of possible selves and Higgins's (1987) self-discrepancy theory, Dörnyei argued that motivation arises partly from the discrepancy between learners' current self-perceptions and their desired future identities as successful language users.

The L2 Motivational Self System consists of three interrelated components: the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience (Dörnyei, 2009). The Ideal L2 Self refers to the learner's aspirational image of themselves as a competent user of the target

language. Learners who can vividly imagine themselves communicating successfully through another language are considered more likely to sustain long-term motivation and effort (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). The Ought-to L2 Self refers to externally mediated expectations and responsibilities associated with language learning, including parental expectations, institutional pressures, or examination requirements (Dörnyei, 2009). The L2 Learning Experience concerns the situated and immediate dimensions of motivation, including classroom environment, teacher support, peer interaction, and learners' affective responses to language learning experiences (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). These components broadened motivational theory by integrating long-term identity aspirations with present educational experiences and classroom engagement.

| The L2MSS is built on three interrelated constructs:        |                                                                                                                      |                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Construct                                                   | Description                                                                                                          | Key Focus                                                 |
| <b>Ideal L2 Self</b>                                        | The learner's desired future image of themselves as a successful L2 user.                                            | Aspirations, future identity, personal goals              |
| <b>Ought-to L2 Self</b>                                     | Attributes learners believe they should possess due to external expectations or obligations.                         | Social pressure, responsibility, achievement expectations |
| <b>L2 Learning Experience</b>                               | The situated and immediate dimensions of language learning shaped by classroom environment and learning experiences. | Teacher support, classroom interaction, task engagement   |
| Adapted from Dörnyei (2005, 2009) and Dörnyei & Ryan (2015) |                                                                                                                      |                                                           |

**Table 1 Core constructs of the L2 motivational self-system (L2MSS)**

Unlike Gardner's integrative orientation, which relied heavily on the concept of a target-language community, the L2MSS accommodated increasingly globalised and multilingual contexts in which learners may not seek integration into a single bounded linguistic group (Yashima, 2009; Henry, 2015). This shift proved particularly significant within contexts

shaped by global mobility and multilingual communication, where languages are often used as resources for intercultural interaction rather than solely for integration into monolingual communities (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). The model therefore aligned more closely with contemporary understandings of multilingualism as fluid, dynamic, and socially situated.

The L2MSS has been widely validated across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. Taguchi et al. (2009), for example, found strong empirical support for the predictive power of the Ideal L2 Self among learners in Japan, China, and Iran, while Kormos and Csizér (2008) demonstrated significant relationships between future self-guides and persistence in language learning among Hungarian learners. Meta-analytic research by Al-Hoorie (2018) further confirmed that the Ideal L2 Self represents one of the strongest predictors of motivated learning behaviour across international contexts, although the influence of the Ought-to L2 Self appears to vary according to sociocultural expectations and educational pressures. Research also demonstrated the importance of the L2 Learning Experience, with classroom interaction, task engagement, teacher support, and peer relationships all shaping motivational trajectories over time (Lamb, 2017; Hiver & Papi, 2020).

Ushioda's (2002) work on learner autonomy and self-regulation anticipated many later developments associated with self-concept approaches to motivation. Drawing on research involving secondary-school learners and the European Language Portfolio, Ushioda argued that motivation should be understood not simply in terms of attitudes toward a language community, but also through learners' capacity for reflection, agency, and personal goal-setting. Her work highlighted the importance of learner-centred and context-sensitive understandings of motivation, particularly within educational settings where language learning is strongly shaped by curriculum structures and institutional expectations (Ushioda, 2002, 2011). These perspectives proved especially relevant within Irish language education, where learner engagement may be influenced not only by attitudes toward Irish, but also by examination pressure, classroom experience, and opportunities for meaningful language use.

Despite its influence, the L2MSS has also been subject to critique. One recurring criticism concerns its emphasis on individual psychology and internal self-concepts. Scholars such as Ushioda (2011, 2016) argued that motivational processes cannot be fully understood without considering the broader sociocultural and institutional conditions shaping learners'

experiences. Similarly, Norton (2013) contended that learners' ability to realise imagined future identities depends not only on personal aspiration, but also on access to linguistic resources, social legitimacy, and opportunities for participation. Such critiques highlighted the importance of integrating questions of identity, power, and social context into motivational research.

Researchers have also questioned the extent to which the L2MSS can consistently capture the complexity of lived motivational experience. Boo et al. (2015), for example, noted considerable variation in how the model has been operationalised empirically, with some studies reducing its theoretical richness to relatively narrow attitudinal measures. These critiques reflected broader concerns within SLA research regarding the challenge of balancing large-scale quantitative measurement with more context-sensitive and dynamic understandings of learner motivation (Ushioda, 2011; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015).

Nevertheless, the L2 Motivational Self System remains one of the most influential motivational frameworks within contemporary SLA research (Csizér & Henry, 2017). Its emphasis on future identity, learner vision, and situated classroom experience significantly expanded earlier motivational models and contributed to growing recognition that language learning motivation is dynamic, contextually shaped, and closely connected to learners' evolving sense of self.

#### 2.3.4 Affect and emotions in language learning

Attention to affect within second language acquisition (SLA) grew significantly as researchers increasingly recognised the importance of emotional experience in shaping learner engagement, persistence, and achievement (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele et al., 2019). Earlier cognitive approaches had often treated emotion as secondary to aptitude and linguistic processing, whereas later work positioned affect as integral to classroom participation and language development (Pavlenko, 2013; Mercer & MacIntyre, 2014). Emotional experiences such as anxiety, confidence, enjoyment, and willingness to communicate consequently became understood as closely connected to learners' perceptions of competence, classroom relationships, and opportunities for meaningful interaction (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; MacIntyre et al., 1998).

One of the earliest influential frameworks addressing emotion in language learning was Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis. Krashen proposed that emotional variables such as anxiety, confidence, and motivation mediate the extent to which learners are able to process and acquire language input. According to this model, negative affective states may raise the "affective filter," thereby limiting language acquisition, while positive emotional conditions facilitate greater receptiveness to input (Krashen, 1982). Although subsequently criticised for lacking explanatory precision and empirical measurability (Ellis, 2008; Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2019), the framework played an important role in foregrounding affective dimensions of SLA.

Research attention later shifted toward the specific role of anxiety in language learning. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) introduced the concept of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), defining it as a situation-specific form of anxiety associated with language learning contexts. They identified three principal dimensions of FLA: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). The development of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) subsequently enabled extensive quantitative investigation of anxiety across educational settings. Studies consistently demonstrated that elevated levels of FLA are associated with lower levels of oral participation, reduced communicative confidence, and lower language achievement (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Phillips, 1992; Liu & Jackson, 2008). Research also indicated that anxiety frequently emerges most strongly during speaking activities and oral assessment tasks (Cheng, 2002; Teimouri, Goetze, & Plonsky, 2019).

Meta-analytic evidence further confirmed the significance of anxiety within SLA. Teimouri et al. (2019), synthesising findings across 97 independent samples, identified a consistent negative relationship between FLA and language achievement, particularly in relation to oral communication. At the same time, more recent research increasingly depicts anxiety as dynamic and context dependent rather than as a fixed learner trait (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; Larsen-Freeman, 2019). Learners' emotional responses may fluctuate according to classroom environment, peer interaction, teacher feedback, assessment practices, and perceptions of communicative success (Mercer & MacIntyre, 2014).

Alongside research on negative affect, increasing attention has been paid to the role of positive emotions within language learning. Influenced by developments in positive

psychology, SLA research increasingly examined how enjoyment, resilience, confidence, and wellbeing shape learner engagement and persistence (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Oxford, 2016). One of the most influential constructs emerging from this work is Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE), introduced by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), which refers to positive emotional experiences associated with challenge, accomplishment, participation, and supportive classroom interaction. Research has linked FLE to greater classroom engagement, willingness to communicate, communicative confidence, and academic achievement (Dewaele & Li, 2020; Jin & Zhang, 2021). Importantly, anxiety and enjoyment are not understood as simple opposites; learners may experience both simultaneously depending on contextual and interactional factors (Boudreau, MacIntyre, & Dewaele, 2018).

Another influential construct linking affect and participation is Willingness to Communicate (WTC) (MacIntyre et al., 1998). WTC refers to the probability that learners will initiate communication in the target language within a specific context and at a particular moment. The model integrates affective, cognitive, interpersonal, and situational dimensions of language learning, highlighting how confidence, anxiety, peer relationships, and classroom atmosphere shape communicative participation (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Peng, 2014). Research consistently demonstrates that supportive classroom climates, collaborative interaction, and positive teacher relationships significantly increase learners' willingness to communicate (Cao, 2014; Lee & Drajati, 2019). Such findings have proved particularly influential within communicative language teaching approaches, where oral participation and meaningful interaction are central pedagogical goals.

Recent research increasingly understands affect within ecological and dynamic systems perspectives on language learning (Dörnyei, MacIntyre, & Henry, 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2019). From this perspective, emotional experiences are viewed as fluid, nonlinear, and shaped through ongoing interaction between learners and their educational environments. Studies employing real-time and longitudinal methodologies demonstrate that learners' anxiety, enjoyment, and communicative confidence may fluctuate significantly across lessons, tasks, and interactional contexts (Boudreau et al., 2018; Elahi Shirvan & Talebzadeh, 2020). Affect is therefore increasingly understood not as a stable learner characteristic, but as an evolving and socially situated dimension of language learning.



Within Irish post-primary education, affective dimensions of language learning remain particularly significant. Research has identified links between students' motivation, confidence, perceptions of difficulty, classroom interaction, assessment experiences, and limited opportunities to use Irish beyond the classroom (Murtagh, 2007; Ní Dhiorbháin et al., 2022; Barnes et al., 2024; Burke et al., 2025). Studies also indicate that communicative and interaction-focused pedagogies may positively influence learners' confidence, enjoyment, and willingness to use Irish meaningfully (Ní Chróinín et al., 2016). Furthermore, learner engagement with Irish has been shown to vary considerably according to school context, classroom environment, and opportunities for participation in meaningful language use (Barnes et al., 2024).

Contemporary research therefore increasingly positions affect as a multidimensional, socially situated, and dynamic component of language learning closely connected to participation, communicative engagement, and learner identity (Mercer & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele et al., 2019). These perspectives provide an important framework for understanding how learners experience Irish across differing post-primary educational contexts and how emotional dimensions of learning may shape ongoing engagement with the language.

### 2.3.5 Dynamic systems and temporal perspectives

The emergence of Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST) contributed to a major shift in understandings of motivation and affect within second language acquisition (SLA), moving away from models that treated learner characteristics as relatively stable or predictable over time (Dörnyei, MacIntyre, & Henry, 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2019). Drawing on CDST, researchers increasingly conceptualised language learning as the product of ongoing interaction between cognitive, emotional, social, and contextual factors operating across different timescales (de Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2007; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). Motivation, confidence, engagement, and anxiety consequently came to be understood as fluctuating processes shaped by learners' experiences within particular educational and interactional environments rather than as fixed psychological traits (Ushioda, 2015; Mercer & MacIntyre, 2014).

Within CDST approaches, language learning trajectories are regarded as nonlinear and adaptive (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; de Bot et al., 2007). Small classroom experiences, such as positive teacher feedback, communicative success, peer interaction, or assessment pressure, may produce significant shifts in learner motivation and engagement (Waninge, Dörnyei, & de Bot, 2014; Hiver & Papi, 2020). Motivation is therefore understood as emerging dynamically through interaction between the learner and their surrounding environment rather than as a stable internal disposition (Ushioda, 2015; Dörnyei et al., 2015). Such perspectives challenge earlier linear models of language learning progression and instead emphasise variability, unpredictability, and individual developmental trajectories across time (Larsen-Freeman, 2019; Henry, Davydenko, & Dörnyei, 2015).

Dynamic approaches also foreground the temporal and situated nature of affective experience. Research demonstrates that emotions such as enjoyment, anxiety, confidence, and frustration frequently fluctuate across lessons, activities, and interactional contexts rather than remaining constant (Boudreau, MacIntyre, & Dewaele, 2018; Elahi Shirvan & Talebzadeh, 2020). Learners may simultaneously experience both positive and negative emotions depending on task demands, peer relationships, communicative confidence, and classroom atmosphere (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). Consequently, affective dimensions of language learning are increasingly understood as relational and context dependent rather than as fixed learner attributes (Mercer & MacIntyre, 2014; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

Methodological developments within CDST research have also contributed to more fine-grained understandings of learner experience. Approaches such as ecological momentary assessment (EMA), longitudinal interviewing, and classroom-based micro-analysis allow researchers to examine how motivation and affect evolve in real time across interactional contexts (MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Boudreau et al., 2018). These methods highlight the extent to which learner engagement may fluctuate within individual classroom activities and across broader educational trajectories (Elahi Shirvan & Talebzadeh, 2020; Hiver & Papi, 2020). Such work has reinforced the importance of examining language learning as a lived and evolving process shaped by ongoing participation and experience (Ushioda, 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2019).

Dynamic perspectives also align closely with ecological and sociocultural approaches to multilingualism and language learning (van Lier, 2004; Mercer & MacIntyre, 2014). From this perspective, motivation and affect cannot be understood independently of classroom interaction, peer relationships, institutional structures, opportunities for participation, and broader sociolinguistic conditions (Ushioda, 2015; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). Learners' engagement with a language is therefore shaped not only by internal psychological processes but also by the educational environments and social contexts within which language use occurs (Mercer & MacIntyre, 2014; van Lier, 2004).

These perspectives hold particular relevance within Irish post-primary education, where learners' engagement with Irish may vary considerably across educational settings, peer cultures, classroom practices, and opportunities for meaningful language use (Barnes et al., 2024). Experiences of confidence, anxiety, participation, and communicative engagement are likely to fluctuate across English-medium schools, Irish-medium schools, and Gaeltacht contexts depending on the nature of interaction and opportunities for authentic language use (Barnes et al., 2024; Ó hIfearnáin, 2013). Dynamic systems perspectives therefore provide a useful framework for understanding Irish language learning as an evolving and contextually situated process shaped by ongoing interaction between learners, schools, pedagogy, and wider sociolinguistic environments (Ushioda, 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2019).

## 2.4 Section 3: Identity, power, and language learning

### 2.4.1 Overview

Identity-oriented perspectives grew in importance within second language acquisition (SLA) following broader sociocultural and poststructuralist developments that challenged narrowly cognitive accounts of language learning (Block, 2007; Norton, 2013). Rather than viewing language learning primarily as an individual process of linguistic development, these approaches foregrounded the relationship between language, social interaction, and learner positioning across educational and sociocultural contexts (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Norton & Toohey, 2011). This shift emerged alongside what Firth and Wagner (1997) described as the “social turn” in SLA, which called for greater attention to context, discourse, and interaction within language learning research.

Research expanded beyond questions of individual learner identity to examine how participation, agency, legitimacy, and multilingualism shape language learning experiences across differing contexts. Scholars increasingly explored how learners negotiate access to participation and symbolic resources, how institutional and ideological structures influence linguistic legitimacy, and how multilingual identities are constructed across increasingly mobile and diverse societies (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Vertovec, 2007). These developments contributed to more socially and politically grounded understandings of language learning that foreground questions of recognition, belonging, and unequal access within educational environments (May, 2014; Kubota & Miller, 2017).

Such viewpoints proved particularly significant within multilingual and minority-language contexts, where language learning is closely connected to broader issues of authenticity, symbolic value, and cultural affiliation (May, 2012). In Ireland, learners encounter Irish not only as a school subject, but also as a language shaped by histories of language shift, revitalisation, national identity, and differing opportunities for use across educational and community settings (Ó hÍfearnáin, 2013). Identity-oriented perspectives therefore provide an important framework for understanding how learners position themselves in relation to Irish and how wider sociolinguistic discourses influence engagement with the language across different educational contexts.

#### 2.4.2 The identity turn in SLA

For much of the twentieth century, second language acquisition (SLA) research was dominated by cognitive and psycholinguistic approaches concerned primarily with linguistic input, processing, aptitude, and the development of communicative competence (Block, 2007; Norton, 2013). Although these models contributed significantly to understanding language acquisition, they were criticised for treating learners largely as isolated individuals while giving comparatively limited attention to the wider social conditions in which language learning occurs (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Norton & Toohey, 2011). By the late 1990s, researchers increasingly questioned whether language learning could be adequately explained without considering interaction, context, and learners' relationships with the communities around them (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Block, 2007).

A major turning point emerged through Firth and Wagner's (1997) critique of mainstream SLA research, which challenged the dominance of narrowly cognitive explanations and argued for greater recognition of communication, discourse, and contextual experience. Their intervention contributed to what later became known as the "social turn" in SLA, where attention shifted toward the social dimensions of language learning and use (Block, 2007). Learners were no longer viewed simply as individuals acquiring abstract linguistic systems, but as people navigating particular educational, cultural, and institutional environments (Norton & Toohey, 2011; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004).

Poststructuralist and sociocultural theories strongly influenced these developments by challenging fixed understandings of identity and language. Rather than treating identity as stable or singular, poststructuralist perspectives conceptualised identity as fluid, multiple, and continually produced through discourse and social experience (Norton, 2013; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Language learning therefore came to involve more than the acquisition of linguistic competence alone; it also concerned how learners understood themselves, related to others, and navigated positions of inclusion and exclusion within different contexts (Block, 2007; Norton & Toohey, 2011).

Research associated with the identity turn also drew attention to broader processes such as migration, mobility, and globalisation, all of which complicated earlier assumptions concerning language, culture, and belonging (Block, 2007). Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), for example, demonstrated how multilingual speakers negotiate competing identities across educational and community settings shaped by unequal power relations and conflicting language ideologies. Such work highlighted that learners' experiences are inseparable from wider social and political conditions influencing how languages and speakers are valued within society.

The identity turn consequently expanded SLA beyond predominantly cognitive explanations of language learning and established the foundations for later research on participation, investment, legitimacy, and multilingual identity formation across diverse sociolinguistic contexts.

### 2.4.3 Investment, agency, and participation

Following the social turn in SLA, scholars began examining how language learning is connected to learners' relationships with the social worlds in which languages hold symbolic, cultural, and material value (Wenger, 1998; Darvin & Norton, 2015). Attention increasingly shifted toward issues of belonging, recognition, and access, particularly within educational settings where opportunities for participation are unevenly distributed (Block, 2007; Norton, 2013). Rather than treating learners as individuals developing linguistic competence in isolation, this work explored how engagement with language learning is influenced by broader social relationships and institutional conditions.

A major contribution to this area came through Norton Peirce's (1995) concept of investment, developed in response to limitations within traditional motivational frameworks. Norton argued that learners who appear motivated may still resist interaction in contexts where participation risks marginalisation or undermines their sense of self (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2013). Investment therefore shifted attention away from motivation as an internal psychological trait and toward the social conditions shaping learners' willingness to engage with language learning. Learners invest when participation is associated with access to valued resources such as educational opportunity, social recognition, economic mobility, or imagined future identities (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Norton, 2013).

Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice further reinforced the importance of participation within learning processes. Rather than viewing learning primarily as the accumulation of knowledge, Wenger emphasised involvement in shared social practices through which individuals develop relationships, identities, and forms of membership. Opportunities for participation, however, are not equally available to all learners. Classroom interaction, institutional expectations, and wider social hierarchies influence whose voices and language practices are recognised as legitimate within particular settings (Norton & Toohey, 2011; Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Interest in imagined communities extended these discussions by highlighting learners' orientation toward future social and professional worlds beyond their immediate environment (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2013). Learners may engage with language learning because they associate the target language with future educational, cultural, or

transnational opportunities that hold personal or symbolic significance (Darvin & Norton, 2015). This perspective highlighted the importance of aspiration and future self-positioning within language learning experiences.

Research examining learner participation illustrated how opportunities for engagement are shaped by unequal access to interaction and social recognition within educational settings. McKay and Wong's (1996) study of Chinese immigrant students in California, for example, demonstrated how learners negotiated competing identities across peer networks, schools, and wider social environments. Although students recognised the value of English, opportunities for engagement were often constrained by racialised positioning and unequal access to socially valued forms of communication (McKay & Wong, 1996). Similarly, Norton and Toohey (2011) demonstrated how classroom interaction and institutional practices influence learners' opportunities to contribute, participate, and establish meaningful positions within educational environments.

These orientations repositioned language learning as closely connected to participation, recognition, and access within socially structured contexts. Learners were therefore understood not simply as acquiring linguistic competence, but as navigating opportunities for inclusion, affiliation, and engagement across different educational and sociocultural environments.

#### 2.4.4 Language ideologies and linguistic legitimacy

Debates surrounding participation and access also prompted greater attention to the ideological conditions that influence which language practices are recognised, valued, or marginalised within educational and social settings (Kubota & Miller, 2017; Flores & Rosa, 2015). Rather than treating language as a neutral means of communication, scholars argued that judgments concerning "appropriate," "standard," or "correct" language use are closely connected to broader relations of power and social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1991; Alim, Rickford, & Ball, 2016). Learners' experiences are therefore shaped not only by linguistic proficiency, but also by whether their language practices align with dominant institutional expectations and norms (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Kubota & Miller, 2017).

One influential area of scholarship examined standard language ideology, referring to the belief that one form of language represents the legitimate or superior standard against which other varieties are measured (Lippi-Green, 2012; Milroy & Milroy, 2012). Within educational environments, such assumptions frequently privilege dominant language varieties while positioning regional, minority, heritage, or multilingual practices as less appropriate or academically valuable (Bourdieu, 1991; Kubota & Miller, 2017). Learners whose language practices diverge from institutional norms may therefore encounter correction, marginalisation, or deficit positioning within classroom settings (Alim et al., 2016; Kubota & Miller, 2017). These hierarchies influence not only academic evaluation, but also learners' confidence, participation, and sense of belonging within educational spaces (Lippi-Green, 2012; Bourdieu, 1991).

Flores and Rosa's (2015) work on raciolinguistic ideologies extended critique of language standardisation by demonstrating how evaluations of language are shaped by racialised perceptions of speakers. They argued that even when racialised bilingual learners approximate dominant linguistic norms, their language practices may still be interpreted as deficient because perceptions of linguistic appropriateness are influenced by broader assumptions concerning race, identity, and belonging (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Linguistic legitimacy therefore depends not solely on proficiency, but also on whether speakers themselves are recognised as legitimate users of particular language varieties (Alim et al., 2016; Flores & Rosa, 2015).

This scholarship also highlighted the relationship between language and symbolic power. Learners may internalise perceptions that certain accents, varieties, or multilingual practices are less valuable or less appropriate within academic environments, influencing both self-perception and classroom engagement (Bourdieu, 1991; Flores & Rosa, 2015). Attention consequently turned toward how institutions reproduce broader social inequalities through assessment practices, classroom interaction, and dominant norms surrounding acceptable language use (Kubota & Miller, 2017; Alim et al., 2016).

These approaches broadened understandings of language learning by demonstrating how linguistic value and legitimacy are shaped through wider ideological and institutional structures. Language learning therefore came to involve not only the development of communicative competence, but also navigation of unequal systems of recognition,



authority, and social valuation across educational and societal contexts (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Kubota & Miller, 2017).

#### 2.4.5 Multilingualism, mobility, and hybrid identity

Growing levels of migration, global mobility, and linguistic diversity prompted researchers to reconsider earlier assumptions concerning fixed relationships between language, culture, and national identity (Vertovec, 2007; May, 2014). As multilingualism became increasingly characteristic of contemporary societies, identity research turned toward how learners navigate multiple linguistic and cultural affiliations across diverse social environments (Block, 2007; Blackledge & Creese, 2010). Rather than identifying with a single bounded language community, multilingual learners frequently move across overlapping networks shaped by differing linguistic practices, cultural expectations, and forms of belonging (Conteh & Meier, 2014; May, 2014).

The notion of superdiversity became particularly influential in explaining the increasing complexity of multilingual experience within contemporary societies (Vertovec, 2007). Superdiversity refers to changing patterns of migration and communication that produce highly diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes extending beyond traditional ethnic or national categories. From this perspective, identities emerge through interaction across multiple social and linguistic networks rather than through stable or singular affiliations (Blommaert, 2010; Vertovec, 2007). Educational institutions consequently came to be viewed as environments where learners encounter varied linguistic repertoires, cultural experiences, and forms of social affiliation (Conteh & Meier, 2014).

This work also challenged deficit-oriented understandings of multilingual learners that evaluated linguistic diversity according to monolingual norms (May, 2014; Blackledge & Creese, 2010). Multilingual speakers were instead recognised as drawing flexibly upon complex linguistic resources across differing contexts and interactions (Conteh & Meier, 2014). Such scholarship questioned assumptions that legitimate language use depends upon native-speaker competence or singular language affiliation, highlighting instead the fluid and adaptive nature of multilingual communication (Blommaert, 2010; May, 2014).

Attention additionally turned toward the hybrid and negotiated character of multilingual identity formation. Rather than moving between separate and stable identities linked to individual languages, learners navigate overlapping linguistic, cultural, and social experiences shaped by context, interaction, and mobility (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Block, 2007). Identity was therefore increasingly viewed as emerging through ongoing negotiation across multiple environments rather than existing as a fixed characteristic attached to one language or community (Conteh & Meier, 2014; May, 2014).

Recognition and inclusion also became important concerns within multilingual identity research. Learners' experiences are influenced by whether their linguistic practices are accepted and valued within educational and social environments (Conteh & Meier, 2014; Block, 2007). Tensions may arise where home, school, peer, and societal language practices differ, requiring learners to navigate competing expectations and forms of affiliation across contexts (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; May, 2012). Such experiences are further shaped by broader sociopolitical conditions that influence which languages and identities are legitimised within particular institutional and social spaces (Blommaert, 2010; Vertovec, 2007).

This scholarship repositioned multilingualism as a lived social experience closely connected to mobility, diversity, and changing forms of belonging. Rather than treating multilingualism simply as the acquisition of additional languages, researchers increasingly examined how learners navigate overlapping linguistic and cultural worlds across contemporary multilingual societies (May, 2014; Conteh & Meier, 2014).

#### 2.4.6 Identity and minority language learning

Minority language education is closely connected to questions of identity, legitimacy, and symbolic value, particularly within contexts where languages carry historical, cultural, and political significance beyond their communicative function (May, 2012). In such settings, language learning is shaped by broader issues of cultural affiliation, authenticity, and social value, as minority languages often occupy contested positions within society and education (Ó hIfearnáin, 2013). Learners' engagement with minority languages is therefore influenced not only by classroom experience, but also by wider societal discourses

concerning national identity, belonging, and the perceived relevance of the language within contemporary social life (Murtagh, 2007).

In the Irish context, the position of Irish as both a minority and national language creates a particularly complex sociolinguistic environment for learners (Ó Riagáin, 1997). Although Irish retains considerable symbolic importance within state policy, education, and constructions of national identity, opportunities for sustained everyday use vary significantly across educational and community settings (Ó hIfearnáin, 2013). Learners therefore frequently encounter tensions between the cultural and symbolic significance of Irish and its more limited communicative role within many aspects of contemporary social life (Murtagh, 2007).

Authenticity and speaker legitimacy continue to influence how learners relate to the Irish language (Ó hIfearnáin, 2013). Research suggests that students may experience uncertainty regarding what counts as “real” or authoritative Irish, particularly where traditional native-speaker ideologies and strong associations with Gaeltacht communities inform perceptions of linguistic authenticity (Ó hIfearnáin, 2013). Such discourses may affect learners’ confidence and willingness to use Irish meaningfully, especially where opportunities for sustained interaction outside the classroom are limited (Barnes et al., 2024). Learners therefore negotiate not only language proficiency, but also broader issues of ownership, recognition, and affiliation within the Irish-speaking community (May, 2012; Ó hIfearnáin, 2013).

Research has also identified tensions associated with the position of Irish as a compulsory/core subject within post-primary education. In subject-only post-primary contexts, learners’ motivation and use of Irish have been shown to be shaped by instructional setting, perceived proficiency, and opportunities to use Irish beyond school (Murtagh, 2007). Although many students recognise the cultural and symbolic value of Irish, research on attitudes to Irish as a school subject points to continuing tensions around perceived difficulty, examination-oriented learning, and meaningful communicative use, which can contribute to disengagement or less positive learner positioning (Darmody & Daly, 2015; Darmody & Smyth, 2016; Ní Dhiorbháin et al., 2022; Burke et al., 2025). Such findings illustrate how institutional structures and educational practices influence learners’

relationships with minority languages and shape whether participation is experienced as meaningful, restrictive, or alienating (Ó Riagáin, 1997; Murtagh, 2007; Barnes et al., 2024).

Educational context further shapes how learners position themselves in relation to Irish language learning. Research indicates that students attending Irish-medium schools often report stronger identification with Irish and more positive orientations toward language use than learners in English-medium settings, largely due to increased opportunities for interaction and participation through Irish (Barnes et al., 2024). However, variation also exists within immersion contexts, with some learners expressing ambivalence regarding the relevance of Irish beyond school environments (Barnes et al., 2024). These findings reinforce the importance of school culture, peer interaction, and opportunities for meaningful language use in shaping learner identity and engagement with Irish (Ó hIfearnáin, 2013).

Engagement with Irish is closely connected to how learners interpret the language's cultural relevance, social positioning, and place within contemporary Irish society (Ó hIfearnáin, 2013). Experiences of learning Irish are therefore influenced not only by classroom achievement, but also by learners' perceptions of authenticity, ownership, and opportunities for meaningful participation across different educational and sociolinguistic settings (May, 2012; Barnes et al., 2024). These perspectives draw attention to the complex relationship between minority language education, institutional practice, and wider societal attitudes toward language maintenance and identity in contemporary Ireland.

## 2.5 Section 4: Irish language education at post-primary level

### 2.5.1 Overview

Research on Irish language teaching and learning has long highlighted the importance of spoken-language development, while more recent post-primary research has focused on students' experiences of classroom participation, communication, motivation, and opportunities for active language use (Harris et al., 2006; Murtagh, 2007; Ní Dhiorbháin et al., 2022; Burke et al., 2025). Recent scholarship has examined how classroom interaction, spoken Irish, learner engagement, and communicative participation influence students' relationships with Irish across differing educational contexts (Murtagh, 2007; Burke et al., 2025). Particular attention has been given to the role of meaningful communication in

supporting learners' confidence, familiarity with spoken Irish, and willingness to participate through the language (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011).

Recent research has also explored how current developments in Irish language education seek to support greater communicative engagement within post-primary classrooms. Areas of focus have included oral language development, learner participation, collaborative interaction, multilingual classroom contexts, and pedagogical approaches intended to create more meaningful opportunities for students to use Irish during everyday educational activity (Ní Dhíorbháin, 2021; Tedick & Lyster, 2020). At the same time, studies of Junior Cycle Irish have identified continuing variation in how communicative and participation-focused approaches are experienced across school settings (McGarr et al., 2024).

The following subsections examine reform priorities within contemporary Irish language education, communication and participation in Irish classrooms, pedagogical approaches associated with meaningful Irish use, the enactment of Junior Cycle Irish, and current challenges surrounding learner engagement and participation within post-primary Irish language learning.

#### 2.5.2 Reform priorities in contemporary Irish language education

Recent reform in post-primary Irish language education has centred on redefining the aims of Irish within the Junior Cycle curriculum (NCCA, 2017). The revised specifications place increased emphasis on the integrated development of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and interaction, with particular attention given to students' active use of Irish within communicative classroom contexts (NCCA, 2017). Communication and language use are therefore positioned as central outcomes of Irish language learning at lower post-primary level.

The introduction of separate Junior Cycle Irish T1 and T2 specifications also reflected efforts to recognise differing learner profiles and linguistic contexts within Irish language education (NCCA, 2017). The specifications outline differentiated pathways for students learning through Irish and students learning Irish as an additional language within English-medium settings. This distinction reflects broader recognition that Irish language learning

takes place across varied educational and sociolinguistic environments rather than within a single uniform model of provision (NCCA, 2017).

Current curriculum priorities additionally place stronger emphasis on oral language development, spoken interaction, and learner participation. The specifications identify self-expression, communicative competence, and interaction as important components of students' language learning experience (NCCA, 2017). Curriculum reform has therefore reflected a broader movement towards purposeful language use, oral interaction, and communicative engagement, while continuing to acknowledge the role of accuracy and written language development within broader communicative competence (NCCA, 2023; Ní Dhíorbháin et al., 2022).

These developments align with wider European trends in language education that foreground learner agency, plurilingual awareness, and communicative participation across diverse linguistic contexts (Council of Europe, 2020). Within Irish language education, such priorities have contributed to increased curricular and pedagogical attention toward active participation, interaction, and the development of learners' confidence in using Irish meaningfully within authentic contexts (Burke et al., 2025).

### 2.5.3 Communication and participation in Irish language classrooms

Irish language learning has long been associated with learners' opportunities to develop competence in spoken Irish, including listening, speaking and meaningful language use (Harris et al., 2006). Learners' experiences of Irish are shaped not only by exposure to the language, but also by whether classroom environments support participation through discussion, questioning, and everyday spoken use of Irish (Murtagh, 2007). Attention has increasingly focused on how communicative participation influences learners' engagement with Irish within classroom settings (Murtagh, 2007).

Regular use of spoken Irish during classroom activity may support greater confidence and familiarity with the language (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011). Students may be more likely to perceive Irish as meaningful where they are encouraged to exchange opinions, contribute to discussion, and participate actively through Irish rather than engaging primarily with written exercises or isolated language forms (Murtagh, 2007; Burke et al., 2025).

Opportunities for verbal participation may also support learners' willingness to communicate, particularly for students whose opportunities to use Irish outside school are limited (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Murtagh, 2007).

The relationship between classroom participation and learner confidence has also received considerable attention within Irish language education. Interaction-rich classroom environments may encourage students to contribute more comfortably through Irish, while limited opportunities for spoken participation can contribute to hesitation, anxiety, or disengagement from the language (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Harris et al., 2006; Murtagh, 2007). Regular use of Irish during classroom activity may therefore influence not only language development, but also how learners experience themselves as users of Irish within educational settings.

Learner engagement has similarly been associated with opportunities for authentic communication during Irish lessons. Students may respond more positively where Irish is used for discussion, collaboration, and routine classroom interaction rather than solely for formal language tasks (Murtagh, 2007; Mac Gearailt & Ó Duibhir, 2023). Opportunities for communicative participation consequently play an important role in shaping learners' confidence, engagement, and relationship with Irish within post-primary education.

#### 2.5.4 Pedagogical approaches in contemporary Irish language education

In response to longstanding concerns regarding limited spoken use of Irish within post-primary settings, greater emphasis has been placed on approaches that incorporate interaction, collaboration, and communicative classroom activity into everyday teaching practice (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011). Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has received increasing attention within language education because of its emphasis on purposeful communication through meaningful classroom tasks (Ellis, 2003; Littlewood, 2007). Rather than organising learning primarily around the sequential teaching of grammatical structures, TBLT focuses on learners using the target language to complete communicative activities that mirror authentic language use (Ellis, 2003; Van den Branden, 2006). Tasks typically require learners to exchange information, solve problems, negotiate meaning, or work toward shared outcomes through interaction in the target language (Ellis et al., 2019; Ahern, 2025).

Within Irish language education, TBLT has increasingly been associated with efforts to support more sustained spoken interaction and communicative participation during classroom activity (Ahern, 2025). Task-based approaches generally organise learning around structured communicative activities completed through Irish, including information-gap tasks, collaborative problem-solving, role-play, and discussion-based interaction (Ahern, 2025). Greater emphasis is therefore placed on learners using Irish actively throughout the learning process rather than focusing solely on the production of correct linguistic forms.

Alongside task-based approaches, increased attention has also been given to creating classroom environments where Irish is used more consistently during routine interaction and everyday communication. Interaction-focused practices such as collaborative dialogue, peer discussion, and informal classroom communication may help normalise spoken Irish within classroom settings while supporting greater learner participation (Burke et al., 2025). Greater use of incidental and informal Irish during routine classroom activity has similarly been associated with increased familiarity and confidence in spoken language use, particularly where learners encounter Irish regularly as part of everyday classroom interaction rather than solely during formal language tasks (Mac Gearailt & Ó Duibhir, 2023).

Immersion-supportive pedagogies continue to play an important role within Irish-medium and bilingual educational contexts, particularly in supporting sustained exposure to Irish across classroom interaction, subject learning, and everyday school communication (Tedick & Lyster, 2020). Within Irish-medium education, immersion approaches seek to create learning environments where Irish is used consistently as a medium for participation, collaboration, and engagement across school life rather than solely as a subject of study. Ó Duibhir's work has been particularly influential in examining instructional models, language acquisition, assessment, and language-supportive teaching approaches within Irish-medium and Gaeltacht education (Ó Duibhir, 2018; Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012). Dunne has similarly explored the role of immersion pedagogy in supporting language and literacy development within minoritised language education, while Ní Dhíorbháin's work has drawn attention to plurilingual approaches and the experiences of multilingual learners and families within Irish-medium settings (Ní Dhíorbháin, 2021).



Greater attention has also been given to how immersion-supportive pedagogies can promote inclusion and participation across increasingly diverse Irish-medium classrooms (Ní Aogáin & Dunne, 2025). Ní Aogáin and Dunne's work on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) highlights the importance of designing immersion environments that provide flexible and accessible opportunities for engagement, communication, and language development for learners with differing linguistic, educational, and additional learning needs (Ní Aogáin & Dunne, 2025). Such approaches reflect growing recognition that contemporary Irish-medium education must increasingly support multilingual learners, second or additional language learners, and students requiring differentiated learning supports within immersion contexts.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approaches have similarly influenced aspects of Irish-medium educational practice by integrating language development with subject-based learning (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). CLIL typically involves students learning curricular content through the target language while simultaneously developing language proficiency. Within Irish language education, Ó Ceallaigh (2013) has examined how integrated language and content approaches may support increased classroom interaction, form-focused instruction, and communicative use of Irish during learning activities. Mac Gearailt, Mac Ruairc, and Murray (2023) have also explored the implementation of CLIL within post-primary Irish-medium education, particularly in relation to communicative classroom practice and the role of Irish within subject teaching (Mac Gearailt, Mac Ruairc, & Murray, 2023). Additional Irish research has examined language-responsive teaching, digitally supported learning and the relationship between CLIL and teacher language awareness within Irish-medium educational settings (Fahey, 2022). These approaches seek to support more sustained and meaningful use of Irish across broader educational experiences rather than limiting the language primarily to discrete language lessons.

Digital and technology-assisted approaches have received growing attention within Irish language education, particularly in relation to supporting learner interaction, communicative participation, and access to Irish beyond the traditional classroom environment (Ní Chiaráin & Ní Chasaide, 2020; O'Toole, 2024). Developments in Irish-language digital platforms, computer-assisted language learning tools, speech technologies,

and assistive communication systems have sought to create additional opportunities for students to engage actively with Irish across educational settings (Ní Chasaide et al., 2022; Ní Chasaide et al., 2019). Ní Chiaráin and Ní Chasaide discuss the potential of text-to-speech synthesis and digitally supported feedback within Irish-language learning platforms, particularly in supporting spoken language development, literacy, and learner self-correction through interaction with Irish-language content (Ní Chiaráin & Ní Chasaide, 2020). Within Irish-medium and bilingual contexts, digitally supported learning has additionally been linked to broader efforts to support language maintenance, accessibility, dialect inclusion, and participation among diverse learner populations (Ní Chasaide et al., 2022; Lonergan et al., 2023). Such developments reflect increasing recognition of the role that digitally mediated learning environments may play in supporting meaningful engagement with Irish within contemporary multilingual educational contexts (O'Toole, 2024).

These pedagogical approaches reflect broader efforts within contemporary Irish language education to create more participatory, interaction-rich, and communicatively meaningful learning experiences across diverse educational settings.

#### 2.5.5 Enactment and assessment in Junior Cycle Irish

Studies examining the enactment of Junior Cycle Irish have highlighted variation between the communicative intentions of curriculum reform and the realities of classroom implementation across differing educational settings (Mac Gearailt & Ó Duibhir, 2023; Ní Dhiorbháin & O'Grady, 2025). While the revised specifications place strong emphasis on interaction, oral language development, and active learner participation, evidence suggests that implementation has been uneven across schools and classroom contexts (Ní Dhiorbháin & O'Grady, 2025).

Teacher perspectives have drawn attention to a range of challenges associated with curriculum enactment, including variability in incoming student proficiency, time constraints, workload demands, and the practical realities of supporting communicative approaches within mixed-ability classrooms (Mac Gearailt & Ó Duibhir, 2023; Ní Dhiorbháin & O'Grady, 2025). Teachers have also reported difficulties balancing communicative classroom practice with preparation for assessment requirements that

continue to place considerable emphasis on reading and writing skills (Ní Dhíorbháin & O’Grady, 2025).

Particular attention has focused on the role of oral language assessment within Junior Cycle Irish. Although the specifications prioritise spoken interaction and communicative competence, concerns have been raised regarding the absence of a summative oral Irish examination at Junior Cycle level (Ní Dhíorbháin & O’Grady, 2025). Teacher and stakeholder feedback has suggested that this may contribute to continued prioritisation of written performance and examination preparation within classroom practice despite broader curricular emphasis on communication and interaction. Recent consultation reports have therefore advocated greater assessment recognition for spoken Irish in order to strengthen alignment between curriculum intentions, classroom practice, and assessment structures (Ní Dhíorbháin et al., 2025).

Implementation challenges have also been linked to broader institutional and structural factors. Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs), oral tasks, and active learning approaches associated with Junior Cycle reform have introduced additional planning, assessment, and administrative demands for teachers (Circular 0028/2023; McGarr et al., 2024). At the same time, longitudinal research on Junior Cycle reform has indicated that teachers of Irish report comparatively high levels of dissatisfaction regarding workload, reform implementation, and assessment pressures within post-primary education (McGarr et al., 2024).

More specifically, recent NCCA-commissioned research conducted by the SEALBHÚ research centre at Dublin City University has examined the enactment of Junior Cycle Irish T1 and T2 specifications across post-primary settings (Ní Dhíorbháin et al., 2025). This work has highlighted ongoing tensions between the communicative and interaction-focused aims of curriculum reform and the practical realities of classroom implementation, including variability in learner proficiency, uneven opportunities for spoken Irish, assessment demands, and differing school contexts (Ní Dhíorbháin et al., 2025). Teacher perspectives within the study additionally identified challenges associated with balancing communicative classroom practice alongside preparation for written assessment requirements and supporting mixed-ability learner groups within increasingly multilingual classrooms (Ní Dhíorbháin et al., 2025).

Variation across educational settings has emerged as an important factor influencing enactment. Research suggests that differences in school context, learner proficiency, access to Irish beyond the classroom, and availability of language-supportive environments may shape how communicative and interaction-focused approaches are implemented in practice (Ní Dhíorbháin & O’Grady, 2025; Burke et al., 2025). Teachers in English-medium schools, in particular, have reported challenges associated with limited student confidence in spoken Irish, uneven progression from primary school, and balancing communicative approaches with examination-oriented expectations (Ní Dhíorbháin et al., 2025).

These studies suggest that while Junior Cycle reform has introduced significant curricular emphasis on communication, interaction, and learner participation, the enactment of these priorities remains shaped by assessment structures, institutional constraints, teacher workload, and variation across educational contexts. Recent policy and strategic developments, including *Plean Gnímh don Ghaeilge* (2025), have also acknowledged many of these implementation challenges and identified the need for increased support for oral language development, learner engagement, teacher professional learning, and meaningful opportunities for students to use Irish across educational settings.

#### 2.5.6 Emerging priorities in Irish language education

Irish language education research is increasingly engaging with the changing linguistic, educational, and sociocultural realities shaping students’ experiences of Irish within post-primary education (Ó Duibhir et al., 2024; Ní Dhíorbháin et al., 2025). Greater attention has been given to learner diversity, multilingual classrooms, inclusion, and variation across educational settings, particularly in relation to how students encounter and engage with Irish across differing school and community contexts (Ní Dhíorbháin, 2021; Ní Aogáin & Dunne, 2025). Questions surrounding learner voice, educational experience, participation, and access to meaningful opportunities for language use have consequently become increasingly prominent within Irish language education research (Burke et al., 2025; Ó Duibhir et al., 2024).

Educational context has also emerged as an important area of investigation. Research suggests that students’ experiences of Irish may differ considerably across Irish-medium, English-medium, and Gaeltacht settings due to variations in opportunities for communication, language exposure, peer interaction, and engagement with Irish beyond

the classroom (Mac Gearailt & Ó Duibhir, 2023; Ó Duibhir et al., 2024). Increasing recognition has therefore been given to the importance of examining Irish language learning across differing sociolinguistic and educational environments rather than treating learner experiences as uniform across contexts (Burke et al., 2025; Ní Dhíorbháin et al., 2025).

Growing linguistic diversity within Irish schools has additionally contributed to increased interest in multilingualism, inclusion, and participation within Irish language education (Ní Dhíorbháin, 2021; Ní Aogáin & Dunne, 2025). Recent scholarship has highlighted the experiences of multilingual learners, newcomer students, and students with additional educational needs within both Irish-medium and English-medium settings (Ní Dhíorbháin, 2021; Nic Aindriú & Ó Duibhir, 2023). These developments have encouraged broader discussion concerning how Irish can be positioned within increasingly multilingual school communities while supporting both language revitalisation goals and inclusive educational practice (Ó Duibhir et al., 2024; Ní Aogáin & Dunne, 2025).

These developments are also reflected in contemporary curriculum and policy frameworks. Recent initiatives, including the Primary Language Curriculum (Department of Education and Skills, 2019), the Primary Language Specifications (Department of Education and Youth, 2025), *Plean Gnímh don Ghaeilge i Scoileanna Meán-Bhéarla* (Department of Education and Youth, 2025a), and the *Policy for Irish-medium Education* (Department of Education and Youth, 2025b), place increasing emphasis on communication, learner engagement, multilingual awareness, and cross-linguistic learning. In line with broader European policy developments (Council of Europe, 2020), contemporary Irish language education policy increasingly reflects a plurilingual orientation, recognising learners' interconnected linguistic repertoires while continuing to support the development and maintenance of Irish as a minority and national language.

Consequently, attention has expanded beyond curriculum implementation and pedagogical reform alone towards understanding how students experience Irish across diverse linguistic, educational, and sociocultural contexts. Examining how identity, motivation, multilingualism, and educational experience intersect within Irish language learning has therefore become an increasingly important priority within contemporary Irish language education research (Ó Duibhir et al., 2024; Burke et al., 2025).

## 2.6 Section 5: Research Gap

Despite the research on Irish language education, important gaps remain in understanding how post-primary students experience learning Irish within increasingly multilingual and socially diverse educational contexts. Existing research has generated valuable insights into Irish language policy, immersion education, bilingual development, and curriculum reform (Ó Duibhir, 2018; Harris & Murtagh, 1999). More recent studies have also examined communicative pedagogy, learner engagement, and enactment of the Junior Cycle Irish specifications within post-primary settings (Mac Gearailt & Ó Duibhir, 2023; Ní Dhiorbháin & O’Grady, 2025; Burke et al., 2025). However, comparatively little research has focused directly on how students themselves experience, interpret, and negotiate Irish language learning across differing multilingual school contexts in contemporary Ireland.

This gap is increasingly significant given the changing sociolinguistic realities of Irish education. Irish classrooms are now shaped by growing linguistic diversity associated with migration, heritage languages, and broader plurilingual repertoires alongside Irish and English (Central Statistics Office, 2023; Little & Kirwan, 2019). Students therefore encounter Irish within highly varied linguistic and educational environments that differ considerably from the more traditional Irish-English frameworks underpinning much earlier Irish language education research. While policy increasingly emphasises communicative competence, plurilingual awareness, and learner-centred approaches within language education (Council of Europe, 2020; Department of Education and Skills, 2015), less is known about how students experience these developments across Irish-medium, English-medium, and Gaeltacht settings.

Much existing Irish research concerning attitudes and motivation toward Irish has relied primarily on quantitative attitudinal surveys and large-scale statistical analyses (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Murtagh, 2007). Although these studies have provided important evidence concerning learner attitudes and motivational trends, they offer comparatively limited insight into students’ lived educational experiences or how learners themselves explain their relationship with Irish within everyday school life. Internationally, second language acquisition research has increasingly adopted more socially situated understandings of motivation, identity, affect, and learner investment (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021; Norton,

2013; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Within Irish language education, however, relatively few studies have integrated these perspectives through research foregrounding student voice at post-primary level.

Limited research has also explored how experiences of Irish differ across educational pathways and linguistic backgrounds. Students entering post-primary education from Irish-medium primary schools, English-medium schools, Gaeltacht settings, and multilingual homes may encounter Irish under substantially different sociolinguistic and pedagogical conditions. Existing studies frequently focus on single educational sectors or immersion contexts in isolation, making comparative insight across settings more limited. This is particularly significant given evidence that opportunities for communicative participation, classroom interaction, and meaningful language use may strongly influence learner engagement with Irish (Ó Duibhir, 2018; Barnes et al., 2024).

Recent curriculum reform has further intensified the need for research examining students' experiences of Irish language learning. Junior Cycle Irish places increased emphasis on communication, interaction, learner agency, and authentic language use. Emerging studies, however, suggest continuing tensions surrounding communicative participation, oral confidence, assessment pressures, and enactment across differing post-primary settings (Mac Gearailt & Ó Duibhir, 2023; Ní Dhíorbháin & O'Grady, 2025). While recent research has given greater attention to learner perspectives within Irish language education (Ní Dhíorbháin et al., 2025; Burke et al., 2025), comparatively less research has explored how post-primary students experience Irish across differing educational pathways, linguistic repertoires, and multilingual school contexts within contemporary Ireland.

Debates surrounding translanguaging, plurilingualism, and minority-language education also remain comparatively underexplored within Irish post-primary learner research. International scholarship increasingly emphasises flexible multilingual practices and plurilingual repertoires within language education (García & Wei, 2014; Council of Europe, 2020). At the same time, minority-language immersion research highlights the importance of supporting dedicated target-language spaces within immersion and revitalisation contexts (Ballinger et al., 2017; Tedick & Lyster, 2020; Cummins, 2021). Although these debates are highly relevant within Irish education, relatively limited research has examined how post-primary students themselves perceive multilingual

practices, communicative opportunities, and the role of Irish within their broader linguistic repertoires.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining first- and second-year post-primary students' attitudes, motivation, experiences, and perspectives on Irish language learning across Irish-medium, English-medium, and Gaeltacht contexts within multilingual Ireland. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data, the study foregrounds student voice while examining how motivation, identity, multilingualism, communicative opportunity, and educational context shape engagement with Irish language learning at post-primary level.

## 2.7 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature relevant to understanding Irish language learning within contemporary multilingual post-primary education. Drawing on research from bilingualism, multilingualism, second language acquisition, motivation, identity, and Irish language education, the chapter established the conceptual and theoretical foundations underpinning the present study.

Section 1 examined major theoretical perspectives on bilingualism and multilingualism. It traced the progression from early psycholinguistic and cognitive models, which frequently conceptualised languages as separate systems and evaluated bilingual learners against monolingual norms, towards more sociolinguistic, ecological, sociocultural, plurilingual, and repertoire-based understandings of multilingualism. Particular attention was given to contemporary debates surrounding translanguaging, plurilingualism, and minority-language immersion education. These discussions highlighted ongoing tensions between flexible multilingual pedagogies and the need to maintain dedicated opportunities for minority-language development within immersion and revitalisation contexts.

Section 2 explored the evolution of motivation and affect research within second language acquisition. Gardner's socio-educational model, Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System, and more recent dynamic systems perspectives demonstrated how motivation has increasingly been understood as a complex, socially situated, and context-dependent



phenomenon. The review also highlighted the importance of affective variables, including anxiety, confidence, enjoyment, and willingness to communicate, in shaping learners' participation and engagement with language learning. Within the Irish context, these factors have been linked to classroom experiences, assessment pressures, opportunities for meaningful language use, and broader perceptions of the language.

Section 3 examined developments in research concerning identity, power, and language learning. Poststructuralist, sociocultural, and critical perspectives challenged static understandings of identity and instead conceptualised learners as active agents whose identities are continually negotiated through participation, interaction, and access to linguistic resources. Concepts such as investment, agency, legitimacy, and language ideology highlighted the extent to which language learning is shaped by social relationships and wider structures of power. These perspectives are particularly relevant to Irish language education, where questions of belonging, cultural affiliation, language status, and multilingual identity intersect in complex ways.

Section 4 focused specifically on Irish language education at post-primary level. The review examined contemporary curriculum reform, communicative approaches to language teaching, learner participation, assessment practices, and implementation challenges associated with Junior Cycle Irish. Particular attention was given to recent research highlighting variation across Irish-medium, English-medium, and Gaeltacht educational settings, as well as growing interest in multilingualism, inclusion, learner voice, and educational context. The literature suggests that opportunities for communication, meaningful language use, and participation are central influences on students' engagement with Irish.

Section 5 identified key gaps within the existing literature. While substantial research has examined Irish language policy, curriculum reform, immersion education, and language pedagogy, relatively little attention has focused on how post-primary students themselves experience Irish across different educational and multilingual contexts. In particular, limited research has examined the intersections between motivation, affect, identity, multilingualism, and educational setting within students' lived experiences of learning Irish. Student voice remains comparatively underrepresented within Irish language education research, particularly at post-primary level.

The literature reviewed in this chapter points to three overarching conclusions. First, bilingualism, multilingualism, motivation, and identity are increasingly understood as dynamic, socially situated, and contextually shaped phenomena. Second, students' experiences of language learning are influenced not only by individual characteristics but also by educational environments, opportunities for participation, language ideologies, and broader sociolinguistic conditions. Third, the Irish educational context provides a distinctive setting in which to explore how learners negotiate language learning, identity, participation, and multilingualism within a minority-language and language revitalisation framework.

These insights provide the theoretical and conceptual foundation for the present study. Building on the literature reviewed in this chapter, the following chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted to investigate students' attitudes, motivation, experiences, and perspectives on Irish language learning across differing post-primary educational contexts in multilingual Ireland.

### **3 Chapter 3: Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the design of the study which consists of four sections. Section one, this introductory section, provides an overview of the chapter and lists the philosophical underpinnings of the study. Section two gives an account of the objectives of this study and the different methods used in the research. This is followed in Section three by a description of the participant pupils and schools, the way they were selected, and the underlying rationale for this selection. Finally, section four reports on the data gathering instruments employed in the study.

This research sought to develop a comprehensive understanding of post-primary pupils' attitudes towards, and motivations for, learning and using the Irish language, with particular attention to the experiences of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Situated within the sociolinguistic context of contemporary Irish post-primary education, the study aimed to explore the complex relationships between identity, attitudes, motivation, and experiences of Irish language learning. By examining how students perceived themselves in relation to the Irish language, how identity shaped their engagement with Irish, and how these factors intersected with their educational experiences, the study sought to contribute to a deeper understanding of Irish language learning within multilingual educational contexts. Ultimately, the research was designed to generate insights capable of informing curriculum development and supporting more responsive approaches to the diverse linguistic experiences of pupils in contemporary Irish society.

#### **3.2 Philosophical underpinnings of the study**

##### **3.2.1 Related approaches and paradigms**

This study adopts a comprehensive mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies to investigate the diverse linguistic experiences of students in learning the Irish language. Guided by a constructivist paradigm recognising knowledge co-construction (Crotty, 1998), the research aims to uncover the lived experiences and socio-cultural contexts shaping language education. The student survey introduces a quantitative dimension, embracing a positivist paradigm to quantify variables such as

language motivation and attitudes towards language learning (Dalton, 2016; Flynn, 2014; O'Duibhir, 2009; O'Toole, 2023).

Concurrently, the narrative inquiry component, focusing on student and teacher narratives, aligns with phenomenological perspectives (Creswell, 2013), delving into the subjective perceptions and experiences of educators and pupils. This dual-methods approach acknowledges the complementarity of diverse methodologies, allowing for a nuanced exploration of both subjective experiences and quantifiable factors. The integration of these approaches within a mixed-methods framework seeks to provide a more holistic understanding of the intricate dynamics surrounding Irish language education for diverse linguistic backgrounds of pupils.

### 3.2.2 Constructivist paradigm

This study is grounded in a constructivist paradigm, which holds that knowledge is not discovered but constructed through human interaction with the world (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2000). Constructivism posits that reality is multiple and subjective, shaped by individuals' experiences, social contexts, and meaning-making processes. This worldview is particularly suited to research in education and language learning, where learners' attitudes, motivations, and identities are deeply influenced by their personal, cultural, and institutional environments (Vygotsky, 1978; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000).

The use of student questionnaires to examine attitudinal and motivational factors aligns with constructivist thinking, as it aims to understand how students interpret their experiences of learning Irish within specific sociolinguistic contexts. While surveys are often associated with positivist approaches, in this study they are used to support a broader interpretive goal, to reveal patterns in students' constructed understandings of Irish as a school subject and cultural symbol (Taber, 2013).

The narrative interviews with both students and teachers further reinforce the constructivist orientation. These narratives allow participants to share their lived experiences and the meanings they attach to them, facilitating deeper insight into the interplay between identity, motivation, and language learning (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Norton, 2000). As Denzin

and Lincoln (2018) note, constructivist research acknowledges that reality is co-constructed between researcher and participant through dialogue and reflection.

The study embraces the co-construction of knowledge by valuing participants' voices as central to the research process. Teachers and students are not treated as passive data sources but as active contributors whose insights shape the findings and interpretations. This relational and reflexive stance reflects the constructivist emphasis on contextual and negotiated meanings (Charmaz, 2014).

The constructivist paradigm offers a strong conceptual foundation for this research by enabling an exploration of both individual meaning-making and broader patterns of identity and motivation in Irish language learning. Informed by the works of Crotty (1998), Clandinin and Connelly (2000), and Denzin and Lincoln (2018), this approach allows for a rich, context-sensitive understanding of the educational experiences of diverse linguistic learners and their teachers.

### 3.2.3 Epistemology and ontology

This study is grounded in an interpretivist ontological and epistemological framework, which assumes that reality is socially constructed, plural, and contextually shaped by individual experiences. From an ontological perspective, the research recognises that there is no single objective reality in language learning; rather, there exist multiple, equally valid realities as perceived and lived by students, teachers, and school communities (Creswell, 2014; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Interpretivism holds that meaning is constructed through social interaction and embedded within cultural and institutional contexts, making it particularly suitable for exploring the complex dynamics of identity, motivation, and language attitudes in Irish language education.

In terms of epistemology, the study adopts an interpretive approach, wherein knowledge is viewed as co-constructed through interaction between the researcher and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This approach aligns with the view that understanding human behaviour, particularly in educational and linguistic settings, requires engaging with participants' subjective meanings and lived experiences (Schwandt, 2000). In doing so, the research resists positivist tendencies toward generalisation or detached observation, and

instead values depth, nuance, and context as essential to the production of knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

This framework is particularly relevant in the study of language learning and identity, where learners' motivations, attitudes, and self-perceptions are fluid and socially mediated (Norton, 2000; Ushioda, 2009). The interpretive lens allows the study to explore how learners construct meaning in relation to Irish, especially in multilingual environments where cultural, linguistic, and educational ecologies interact (Block, 2003; Barkhuizen, 2016). Teachers, too, are understood not as neutral transmitters of knowledge but as participants in the co-construction of language learning experiences shaped by institutional policies, community norms, and personal beliefs (Varghese et al., 2005).

Overall, by embracing an interpretivist ontology and epistemology, this study is positioned to highlight the subjective, context-sensitive realities of Irish language learning in post-primary schools. It seeks to capture not only what students and teachers do or say, but how they make sense of their linguistic identities, institutional constraints, and social environments, insights that are essential for informing both theory and practice in language education.

### 3.2.4 Qualitative and quantitative approach

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed in successive phases (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative phase preceded the qualitative phase and informed the development of the narrative interview schedules used with students and teachers.

The quantitative strand consisted of a large-scale questionnaire administered to post-primary students across Irish-medium, English-medium, and Gaeltacht settings. Statistical analyses examined patterns and differences across variables including educational setting, year group, language background, attitudes towards Irish, and experiences of Irish language learning (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The qualitative strand comprised narrative interviews with students and teachers. Interview schedules were developed from themes emerging from the questionnaire findings, enabling issues identified in the survey to be explored in greater depth. The interviews generated detailed accounts of participants' experiences of Irish language learning and teaching across differing educational contexts (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014; Riessman, 2008).

Narrative interviews were guided by recognised principles of qualitative interviewing, including preparation, rapport building, the use of open-ended prompts, probing and clarification, and reflective closure (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). While common prompts based on the quantitative findings, ensured consistency across interviews and participants were free to shape the direction and content of their responses.

Interview data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) six-phase model of thematic analysis. This involved familiarisation with the data, coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and reporting. NVivo software was used to support the organisation, coding, retrieval, and comparison of qualitative data. Student and teacher datasets were organised around a shared set of higher-order meta-themes. This allowed similarities and differences across participant groups to be examined while retaining the distinct perspectives of students and teachers.

Integration occurred during analysis and interpretation. Quantitative findings identified patterns across participant groups, while qualitative findings helped explain how those patterns were experienced and understood by students and teachers. This approach is consistent with explanatory sequential mixed-methods research, where qualitative data is used to elaborate on quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006). The quantitative and qualitative findings informed the overall interpretation of students' and teachers' experiences of Irish language learning across contemporary educational settings.

### 3.3 Methodological rationale

#### 3.3.1 Which methodology and why?

This study uses a mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) to link breadth (a large-scale student survey) with depth (student/teacher narratives). The survey identifies patterns in attitudes, motivation, and identity and narrative interviews explain mechanism and meaning. Integration goes beyond triangulation through planned convergence/divergence/expansion checks and joint displays/side-by-side comparisons in the analysis chapters. Philosophically, the design aligns with the constructivist–interpretivist stance set out in 3.2, treating knowledge as co-constructed while allowing limited positivist inference in the quantitative strand.

Methodological Framework for the Study

| Methodology                                                    | Description                                                                                                                                          | Rationale                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Mixed-Methods Research</b><br>(Creswell & Creswell, 2017)   | Integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding.                                                      | This mixed-methods approach integrated quantitative trends from the student survey with qualitative teacher and student insights to explain and expand observed patterns.                                           |
| <b>Phenomenological Inquiry</b><br>(Creswell, 2013)            | Exploring multilingual students' and teachers' lived experiences of learning and teaching Irish.                                                     | Phenomenology was well-suited for capturing the subjective perspectives and meaning-making processes of individuals, providing in-depth insights into their experiences.                                            |
| <b>Contextual Case Referencing</b><br>(adapted from Yin, 2018) | Although not a formal case study, the analysis uses school type, region, and participant background to contextualise student and teacher narratives. | This allowed the study to attend to contextual factors (e.g., Gaelcholáistí vs. English-medium schools) that may shape motivation, confidence, or identity, without the constraints of a bounded case study design. |
| <b>Survey Research</b><br>(Bryman, 2016)                       | Using structured questionnaires to gather quantitative data on students' attitudes, motivation, and experiences with learning Irish.                 | This method identified broad trends, group differences, and variable relationships, enabling statistical analysis and generalisation.                                                                               |

Table 2 Methodological framework for the study



The rationale for adopting a mixed-methods design lay in its capacity to address the complexity of Irish language learning as both a measurable and lived phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Quantitative data from the student survey offered generalisable insights into patterns of attitude and motivation, while qualitative narrative interviews provided the depth and contextual interpretation necessary to explain those patterns. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data enabled patterns identified within the survey to be explored in greater depth through student and teacher narratives, strengthening interpretation of the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Greene, 2007). This design reflects Greene’s (2007) argument that mixed methods generate richer explanatory power through the interplay of complementary evidence. Reflexive practices and systematic documentation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) ensured coherence and rigour, supporting a comprehensive understanding of how pedagogical and personal factors converge in shaping engagement with Irish.

Rationale for the Mixed-Methods Design in the Study

| Criterion                                | Rationale                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comprehensive Understanding</b>       | A mixed-methods design combined quantitative and qualitative data to deepen understanding, enhance validity, and explain statistical patterns through lived narratives and contexts. (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Greene, 2007). |
| <b>Triangulation of Data</b>             | Combining quantitative and qualitative data enabled triangulation, reducing bias, strengthening validity, and revealing divergences for deeper analysis. (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Creswell & Creswell, 2017).              |
| <b>Exploration of Complexity</b>         | Given the complexity of multilingual language learning, a mixed-methods approach enabled holistic exploration of both measurable and contextual factors. (Creswell, 2013).                                                      |
| <b>Practical Implications</b>            | The study sought to inform curriculum and promote inclusive Irish language education through findings that combined broad trends with narrative depth. (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).                                             |
| <b>Constructivist Paradigm Alignment</b> | Aligned with a constructivist paradigm, the design recognised knowledge as co-constructed and context-bound, valuing participants’ subjective experiences. (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln et al., 2011).                                |

|                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Balancing Objectivity and Subjectivity</b> | The questionnaire provided quantitative breadth, while teacher and student narratives added interpretive depth, contextualising statistical trends. (Bryman, 2016; Norton, 2000). |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**Table 3 Rationale for the mixed-methods design in the study**

### 3.3.2 Objectives

The objectives of this study formed an integrated framework combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the interrelated dynamics of attitude, motivation, and identity in Irish language learning among post-primary students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

#### (1) AMTB Student Questionnaire:

Develop and administer an adapted version of the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Gardner, 1985) for the Irish post-primary context to measure students' attitudes, motivations, and identity-related orientations. Drawing on established Irish adaptations (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, 2009), the survey generated quantitative data to identify trends across school types and learner profiles, providing a foundation for comparison and subsequent qualitative interpretation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009).

#### (2) Student Narratives:

Conduct narrative interviews with post-primary students to explore their lived experiences of learning Irish, focusing on the interconnections between motivation, identity formation, and learner agency (Norton, 2000; Pavlenko, 2007; Barkhuizen, 2011).

#### (3) Teacher Narratives:

Undertake narrative interviews with Irish language teachers to capture pedagogical perspectives on students' motivation, confidence, and identity, thereby linking classroom realities with the broader attitudinal and motivational patterns observed in the survey (Clarke & Collins, 2007; Varghese et al., 2005).

### 3.3.3 Intersectionality analysis

In the context of this research, intersectionality analysis seeks to explore the relationships among the various dimensions of students' identities and seeks to unravel the intricate relationships and interconnections among various elements that constitute students' identities in the realm of Irish language learning (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Hancock, 2007; Baker, 2011; Cummins, 2000).

By blending quantitative and qualitative data, this approach facilitated a holistic exploration of the ways in which identity factors intersect with and influence each other (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; McCall, 2005; Baker, 2011; Gardner, 1985). This study sought to understand how a student's cultural background may intersect with their language attitudes and, in turn, impact their motivation to engage with the Irish language (Dörnyei, 2009; Gardner, 1985).

Similarly, it explored how educational experiences may intersect with aspects of linguistic identity, shaping the overall trajectory of language learning (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Bowleg, 2012; Cummins, 2000). This integrated analysis is designed to provide a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay of identity factors in the multifaceted landscape of language learning.

This study recognises that identity is not a monolithic construct but rather a dynamic, fluid interweaving of various elements that are influenced by, and, in turn, influence one another (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Collins, 2000; Norton, 2000; García, 2009). The research aims to move beyond simplistic categorisations and offer a more sophisticated portrayal of how identity shapes and is shaped by the experiences of students learning the Irish language in order to contribute to a richer, more contextualised understanding of the factors influencing language learning outcomes and experiences for linguistically diverse student populations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Collins, 2000; García, 2009).

## 3.4 Research design

### 3.4.1 Research instruments

An account is given in this section of the research instruments used to gather data in the study. The following instruments were used:

- pupil questionnaire for L1 and L2 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year post-primary students.
- narrative interviews with 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year post-primary L1 & L2 students.
- narrative interviews with post-primary Irish language teachers in L1 & L2 schools.

The study employed three principal research instruments: a modified Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) questionnaire, narrative interviews with post-primary students, and narrative interviews with post-primary Irish language teachers. The questionnaire constituted the main quantitative component of the study and was administered to students who had provided assent and whose parents/guardians had provided informed consent, where required. Student and teacher interviews formed the qualitative component of the research and were conducted to explore participants' perspectives on attitudes, motivation, identity, and experiences of Irish language learning and teaching.

### 3.4.2 Pupil questionnaire

A 78-item questionnaire was developed to measure attitudinal and motivational dimensions of post-primary pupils' engagement with Irish. Grounded in the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Gardner, 1985) and adapted for the Irish context (Harris & Murtagh, 1999), the instrument was further refined to reflect current classroom realities and sociolinguistic diversity. It combined AMTB-derived and additional scales addressing demographic background, language use, motivation, integrativeness, anxiety, perceived support, and personal perceptions, providing a comprehensive profile of learners' orientations toward Irish language learning. The questionnaire was structured as follows:

#### 1. Non-AMTB Scales

- Demographic Information and Language Use (11 items): To capture pupils' linguistic backgrounds, home language practices, and exposure to Irish and other languages.
- Irish-Ability Self-Concept (5 items): To assess pupils' beliefs about their own competence in speaking, understanding, and using Irish (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, 2009).
- Supporting Irish Language Learning (7 items): Newly developed scale informed by questions from the Growing Up in Ireland study by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, to examine perceived support from home, school, and peers (Government of Ireland, 2021).

## 2. Other Scales

- Instrumental Orientation to Irish (3 items): Gauging practical motivations, such as future career or examination relevance (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, 2009).
- Irish Lesson Anxiety (5 items): Measuring emotional responses and anxiety associated with classroom language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986; Harris & Murtagh, 1999).
- Parental Encouragement (7 items): Assessing the perceived level of encouragement from parents/guardians regarding Irish language learning (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, 2009).

## 3. Integrativeness Scales

- Attitudes to Irish Speakers (7 items): Exploring pupils' perceptions and social evaluations of people who speak Irish (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, 2009).
- Integrative Orientation to Irish (4 items): Measuring the desire to identify with or be part of the Irish-speaking community (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, 2009).
- Interest in Foreign/Second Languages (7 items): Broader language interest, contextualising Irish within students' general linguistic orientations (Harris & Murtagh, 1999).

## 4. Motivation Scales

- Desire to Learn Irish (7 items): Capturing pupils' emotional and attitudinal commitment to Irish language learning (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, 2009).
- Motivational Intensity (5 items): Reflecting effort and persistence in learning Irish (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, 2009).
- Attitude to Learning Irish (8 items): Overall affective response to learning Irish in school (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, 2009).

## 5. Personal Response

Open-Ended Write-In Item Prompt: “*What would make your experience of learning Irish better?*”, included to provide space for student voice and individual reflection, supporting the qualitative strand of the study (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, 2009).

### 3.4.3 Research context and participant selection

The study involved post-primary L1 & L2 pupils from classes ranging from 1<sup>st</sup> Year and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year, boys and girls about 11-15 years of age. The student participants are drawn from five English-medium post-primary schools with one of these schools containing an ‘Aonad’ (Irish-medium Unit) and five Irish-medium post-primary schools, two of which are Gaeltacht schools, in order to represent a spectrum of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The inclusion of students from varied contexts aimed to capture a comprehensive understanding of their experiences with Irish language learning.

On the other hand, teacher participants consisted of educators actively engaged in teaching the Irish language to linguistically diverse pupils in L1 & L2 post-primary schools in Ireland. Teachers were invited to bring a wealth of pedagogical experiences and perspectives, which offered valuable insights into the challenges and successes encountered in the Irish language learning process.

The participant selection emphasised inclusivity, ensuring representation from various schools and classrooms to enrich the inquiry with a broad range of stories and perspectives that contribute to a more holistic understanding of the complexities and opportunities involved in facilitating the learning of L1 & L2 Irish, among linguistically diverse pupils.

### 3.4.4 Population and sample of schools

The study sought to explore students’ experiences of learning Irish across a range of post-primary educational contexts in Ireland, with particular attention to differences between Irish-medium (L1/T1) and English-medium (L2/T2) educational settings. The target population comprised 1st and 2nd Year students attending post-primary schools across the Republic of Ireland. This cohort represents a particularly significant stage in language learning, as attitudes, motivation, confidence, and language-related identities are often shaped during the transition from primary to post-primary education (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Dörnyei, 2005; Norton, 2000).

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure representation from schools operating within differing linguistic, educational, and socio-economic contexts. Such an

approach is consistent with mixed-methods research, where the objective is not statistical representativeness but the inclusion of diverse contexts capable of generating meaningful comparison and rich insight (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). A national call for participation was disseminated through social media and email invitations to post-primary school management bodies. Interested schools registered through a Trinity College Dublin-hosted Qualtrics platform and were subsequently provided with further information regarding participation.

Following school registration, recruitment proceeded through an agreed gatekeeper process. Principals or nominated school leaders granted institutional permission for participation and, where appropriate, identified a link teacher to facilitate the study. This process was consistent with the approved ethical protocol and ensured that participation complied with school procedures, ethical requirements, and data protection obligations.

Ten schools agreed to participate in the study. These schools represented a range of educational contexts, including English-medium schools, DEIS schools, an English-medium school containing an Aonad Lán-Ghaeilge, Irish-medium schools outside the Gaeltacht, and Gaeltacht schools. The inclusion of both immersion and non-immersion settings enabled comparison across distinct Irish language learning environments and reflected the diversity of contemporary Irish language education provision (Cummins, 2000; Ó Duibhir, 2018).

Schools were drawn from all four provinces of Ireland, in the counties of Dublin (Leinster), Monaghan and Donegal (Ulster), Galway and Clare (Connacht), and Cork and Kerry (Munster). This geographical spread provided regional, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity across urban, suburban, rural, Gaeltacht, DEIS, and non-DEIS contexts. Such variation was considered important given the study's focus on how educational and sociolinguistic environments shape students' experiences of learning Irish (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cummins, 2000).

The following table presents the distribution of participating schools and survey respondents across the six researcher-coded educational contexts used throughout the study.

| School Context                                          | n            | %            |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| English-medium non-DEIS (EM)                            | 508          | 49.8         |
| English-medium DEIS (EMD)                               | 86           | 8.4          |
| English-medium with Aonad Lán-Ghaeilge DEIS (EMAD)      | 16           | 1.6          |
| Irish-medium outside the Gaeltacht (Gaelcholáiste) (IM) | 321          | 31.5         |
| Gaelcholáiste sa Ghaeltacht (Gaeltacht)                 | 73           | 7.2          |
| Gaelcholáiste sa Ghaeltacht DEIS (GaeltachtD)           | 16           | 1.6          |
| <b>Total</b>                                            | <b>1,020</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

**Table 4 Distribution of survey participants across school contexts (N = 1,020)**

For descriptive purposes, these six contexts were subsequently grouped into three broader educational categories: English-medium schools (n = 610), Irish-medium schools outside the Gaeltacht (Gaelcholáistí; n = 321), and Gaeltacht schools (n = 89). This broader classification was used to summarise participant demographics, while the six-context classification was retained for the more detailed school-level comparisons presented in the findings chapters.

While the participating schools cannot be considered statistically representative of all post-primary schools in Ireland, the sample achieved considerable diversity in terms of educational context, linguistic environment, geographical location, and socio-economic profile. Such variation was considered important in enabling meaningful comparison across differing Irish language learning settings and aligns with methodological approaches that prioritise contextual depth, variation, and analytical insight over statistical generalisation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

### 3.4.5 Variables on which schools differ

To capture contextual variation influencing student motivation, identity, and attitudes toward Irish, schools were selected across several dimensions recognised as significant in language learning research (Dörnyei, 2005; Norton, 2000; Harris & Murtagh, 1999). Although the study did not aim for formal comparative analysis, attention to variation enabled exploration of potential patterns across learning contexts (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).



### 1. Language Medium of Instruction

The primary differentiating factor among participating schools was the language of instruction. In Irish-medium (L1) schools, Irish served as the main medium of communication and teaching, while in English-medium (L2) schools, it was taught as a discrete subject within an English-dominant environment. Previous research shows that immersion contexts enhance linguistic confidence and identity formation (Ó Duibhir, 2018; Cummins, 2000), and this variable provided insight into how differing levels of exposure influence learner motivation.

### 2. Linguistic Composition of the Student Body

Variation was also anticipated in students' home language backgrounds. Some schools enrolled significant numbers of pupils who spoke languages other than Irish or English, particularly in urban settings. Research highlights that multilingual students experience distinct challenges and affordances in additional language learning (O'Rourke, 2011; Little & Kirwan, 2019). Examining how these backgrounds intersect with Irish language learning offered a lens into the relationship between multilingual repertoires, identity, and motivation.

### 3. Institutional Ethos and Support for Irish

Differences were also expected in how schools promoted Irish beyond classroom instruction. Irish-medium schools typically embody an Irish-language ethos embedded in daily routines and extracurricular life (Cummins & Ó Duibhir, 2012), whereas English-medium schools vary in symbolic and practical support for Irish. Prior studies suggest that whole-school culture, including language use by staff, signage, and public events, strongly influences learners' perceptions of a language's value and status (Baker, 2011; Harris & Murtagh, 1999).

### 4. Language Support and Inclusion Structures

Finally, variation was anticipated in the provision of language support for students with English as an Additional Language (EAL). Although the study focused on Irish, the presence of broader linguistic support services was considered relevant, as such provision can shape multilingual learners' confidence and engagement (Cummins, 2000; DES & Office of the Minister for Integration, 2010; DE, 2024). Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) underscores how navigating multiple linguistic systems may impose additional

demands on learners, highlighting the importance of institutional scaffolding for equitable participation.

Attending to these contextual variables provided a multidimensional understanding of the environments in which Irish language learning occurs, recognising that school culture, linguistic diversity, and institutional practices collectively shape learner experience.

#### 3.4.6 Invitation to participate in the study

All participants; students, parents/guardians, and teachers, were formally invited to take part in the study of Irish language learning in a multilingual Irish society. The invitation and assent/consent process was designed in accordance with Trinity College Dublin's Research Ethics Policy and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to ensure informed, voluntary, and ethically compliant participation.

Information and assent/consent materials were distributed to 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year post-primary pupils in both Irish-medium and English-medium schools engaged in Irish language learning. Students received an age-appropriate Participant Information Leaflet and Assent Form outlining the study's purpose, procedures, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any stage. The assent form included specific assent for participation in both the questionnaire and, where relevant, a recorded interview.

Parents and guardians were provided with a corresponding Informed Consent Form and Information Leaflet detailing the study's aims, expected duration, potential benefits, and the voluntary nature of participation. The documents emphasised that refusal or withdrawal would have no impact on the student's education and outlined participants' data protection rights, including access to, correction of, or deletion of personal data under GDPR. Assent/consent from both the pupil and their parent/guardian was required before participation.

Irish language teachers and school leaders were also invited to participate in narrative interviews exploring their professional experiences of teaching Irish in multilingual classrooms. They received parallel information and consent documentation explaining the voluntary nature of participation, data protection procedures, and the measures employed

to protect participant confidentiality through pseudonymisation. Teacher narrative interviews were conducted either online or in person, following ethical approval and with informed consent secured prior to commencement.

All participant data were securely stored and pseudonymised, with access restricted to the researcher and academic supervisors. Participants were informed that findings could be disseminated through academic publications, conference presentations, and policy reports, but that all data would be reported using pseudonyms and without the disclosure of identifying information.

This ethically robust and transparent recruitment process upheld the principles of informed assent/consent, voluntariness, confidentiality, and respect for participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018; BERA, 2018). It ensured that students, parents, and teachers could engage with the research confidently, with a clear understanding of its purpose, scope, and contribution to Irish language education.

### 3.5 Pilot phase and instrument development

#### 3.5.1 Pilot phases of the study

Pilot studies were conducted prior to the main phases of data collection to test the clarity, reliability, and appropriateness of the research instruments and procedures. Piloting is considered an essential step in educational and social research to improve methodological rigour, identify potential ethical concerns, and refine instruments for full deployment (Cohen et al., 2018; Bryman, 2016). Piloting allowed the researcher to trial the student survey, the narrative interview protocols for both students and teachers, and all supporting ethical and procedural documentation.

#### Aims of Piloting

The pilot phases aimed to assess the construct validity and internal consistency of the student survey in measuring constructs such as motivation, self-concept, anxiety, and language identity (Dörnyei, 2005). Piloting also assisted the researcher in identifying potential ambiguities in wording, issues of survey length or fatigue, and to ensure accessibility for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year post-primary participants. The researcher aimed to evaluate the logistical workflow including assent/consent, information sheet

comprehension, digital access, and data storage. Piloting was utilised to test the interview questions for tone, relevance, and the ability to draw rich qualitative data related to linguistic diversity and Irish language learning. The pilot phases also aimed to reflect on potential ethical and power-related dynamics that may influence participation or responses, especially among multilingual and minoritised students (Holmes, 2020; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

### Pilot Participants

A purposive sample of 10 post-primary students and 4 teachers participated in the pilot phase, recruited from both L1 and L2 post-primary schools not included in the main study. The schools were chosen based on their linguistic diversity and accessibility, and reflected key characteristics of the larger sample. Participants included students from 1st and 2nd Year (ages 11–15), from English-only, Irish-only, multilingual, and bilingual households and teachers with experience teaching Irish across different ability levels and school types. All student participants provided written informed assent, and their guardians provided consent. Teacher participants were fully briefed and consented. The ethical procedures reflected those of the main study and adhered to REAMS approval requirements.

### 3.5.2 Survey instrument evaluation

The student survey was delivered via the Trinity College Dublin licensed Qualtrics digital platform, closely simulating the main data collection process. Minor modifications were made following the pilot. Several items required simplification for age-appropriate understanding. The average completion time was 12–15 minutes which confirmed survey length was reasonable, though page instructions were revised to prevent confusion during navigation. Items involving self-evaluation and comparison with peers (e.g., I am better than most pupils in my class at speaking Irish) were flagged by students as sensitive. The survey instructions were updated to remind students that all questions were voluntary, and they could skip any that felt uncomfortable. The quantitative survey items were based on established scales that have demonstrated reliability in previous research on language motivation and learner self-concept. In particular, scales were adapted from studies by Harris and Murtagh (1999), Ó Duibhir (2009), and others using the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) framework. Given their successful application in similar Irish school contexts with 6th class students aged 11/12, the use of these validated instruments was

considered appropriate for this study. Feedback from the pilot phase further supported their clarity and internal coherence for the 1st and 2nd Year age group and post-primary setting. The multilingual variable was also successfully coded and visualised using colour-based categorisation, which facilitated later comparative analysis (e.g., T-Tests between language groups).

### 3.5.3 Interview protocols and qualitative refinement

Four student and four teacher interviews were piloted. Narrative interviews were designed to explore themes of motivation, identity, classroom experience, and support structures, particularly through the lens of multilingualism. Key observations from the pilot included metaphor-based prompts (e.g., “*If your ideal Irish class existed, what would it be like?*”...) were effective in eliciting reflective and emotionally rich responses, particularly among younger students (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview flow was revised to encourage early rapport-building and conclude with open-ended reflection. Teachers expressed the need for greater specificity in prompts about learning support, leading to a reordering of questions to distinguish peer, teacher, and systemic supports. Audio recordings were transcribed, pseudonymised, and coded using thematic analysis informed by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase framework. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants using pre-defined naming conventions to maintain consistency and protect identity.

The pilot phases of the study were critical steps in refining the research instruments and procedures to ensure clarity, age-appropriateness, and methodological rigour. Insights from both the survey and interviews informed minor adjustments that improved the overall accessibility and coherence of the tools. Feedback from participants also validated the thematic relevance of the questions, particularly in relation to language identity and learner confidence. Ethical standards were upheld throughout the pilot, in line with approved institutional protocols. The process ultimately enhanced the reliability and contextual sensitivity of the main study, ensuring that the experiences, identities, and language learning journeys of students from diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds could be meaningfully captured during the full research phase.

### 3.6 Ethical considerations

Marshall and Rossman (2016), as cited in Cohen et al. (2017), describe ‘virtue ethics’ as being concerned with the quality of relationships in research, particularly between the researcher and participants, stakeholders, institutions, and the broader research community. In this study, ethical considerations were addressed both procedurally and relationally, in line with the dual framework of procedural ethics (ethics approval, data protection, pseudonymity) and virtue ethics (respect, reflexivity, transparency, and power awareness).

#### 3.6.1 Procedural ethics: Approval, assent, consent and data protection

Ethical approval was sought and granted through the Research Ethics Approval Management System (REAMS) at Trinity College Dublin. Approval was received on September 2, 2024, for data collection involving post-primary students (ages 11–15) and school staff. Given that minors were included, the project met the criteria for Level 2 ethical clearance, and appropriate child protection and data handling protocols were followed throughout.

The researcher completed the required Research Integrity and Good Research Practice training, alongside Data Protection training, to ensure compliance with both institutional and legislative obligations (e.g., GDPR 2018). All relevant documentation, participant information leaflets, assent/consent forms, and interview protocols, were submitted for review and is provided in the Appendices.

Participants aged under 18 were given clear, accessible information sheets written in age-appropriate language. These were co-signed by guardians prior to participation. In all interviews involving minors, a guardian or teacher was present, and informed assent was obtained from each student. For survey participation, parental opt-out protocols were respected, and participation was strictly voluntary.

Data was fully pseudonymised. Survey data did not collect any personal identifiers and was pseudonymised at the point of submission. In the qualitative strand, pseudonyms were used systematically. Student participants were randomly coded by L1 participant 1-5 and L2 participant 1-5. Teacher participants were represented using Irish counties and L1/L2 teaching experience.

All pseudonyms were randomly allocated from a pre-approved list to reduce the risk of researcher bias, while also symbolically representing locations and people significant to the researcher's educational journey. This method of pseudonymisation preserved identity integrity without reinforcing gendered or socio-political assumptions.

### 3.6.2 Virtue ethics and power dynamics

As the researcher holds an educational background and has interacted with some participants' school types professionally, special care was taken to reflect on issues of power, privilege, and positionality. As noted by Bachrach and Baratz (1970, cited in Lukes, 2005), systems of power are embedded in institutional practices and "rules of the game," often privileging dominant voices while marginalising others. This study explicitly sought to surface the perspectives of multilingual students, whose voices are often underrepresented in national policy and practice.

To mitigate power imbalances, participation was entirely voluntary, with clear statements that individuals could decline, withdraw, or skip any question without penalty. A reflective journal was maintained by the researcher to monitor personal bias. Participants were offered the opportunity to review and verify their interview transcripts as part of a member-checking process. No incentives were offered, thereby avoiding undue influence on decision-making.

All interviews were audio-recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim, and pseudonymised. Audio files were deleted once transcripts were verified. Transcripts were securely stored in password-protected, encrypted folders accessible only to the research team. Survey responses were analysed only in aggregate form, ensuring no individual could be identified.

### 3.6.3 Minimising risk and promoting participant dignity

Although this study posed minimal risk, it did involve potentially sensitive topics such as linguistic identity, exclusion, and confidence. Interview participants were reminded of their right to stop at any point. In alignment with child protection guidelines, any disclosure that suggested harm or risk would have been referred to the appropriate Designated Liaison

Person in line with Trinity College's child protection policy, although no such events occurred.

The pilot phase also adhered to all ethical standards outlined above. Participants in the pilot study received the same age-appropriate information sheets, assent/consent procedures, and assurances of confidentiality as those in the full study. As the purpose of the pilot was to refine instruments and not to produce publishable findings, participation was voluntary and no data was retained for analysis beyond its methodological utility. By integrating procedural standards and relational sensitivity, this ethics protocol ensured that the study upheld the dignity, autonomy, and privacy of all participants, particularly the youth and multilingual learners at its heart.

### 3.7 Student AMTB questionnaire

#### 3.7.1 Rationale for quantitative method: Pupil questionnaire

The pupil questionnaire was designed to gather data from pupils on their attitude and motivation to learning and using Irish. The use of a questionnaire allowed for the gathering of structured information from a large sample of pupils that would be statistically analysed (Coolican, 2004). The Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) is a validated instrument that has been used with primary school pupils studying Irish in L1 & L2 schools previously and was deemed to be suitable for the purposes of the present study also (Dalton, 2016; Harris & Murtagh, 1999; O'Duibhir, 2009; O'Toole, 2023). The use of a modified version of the original Gardner AMTB (1985) allowed for the assessment of aspects of student identity, such as cultural background, linguistic identity, and the importance of Irish language proficiency to their overall identity and the impact of identity on their Irish language attitudes and motivations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

#### 3.7.2 Theoretical framework and rationale

The rationale for adopting the AMTB lies in its robust theoretical grounding in socio-educational models of second language acquisition (Gardner, 1985; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). The framework suggests that integrativeness, attitude toward the learning situation, and motivation interact to shape language learning behaviour. These affective variables,



while not causally linked to language attainment, are vital in maintaining sustained engagement over time (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Dörnyei, 1994).

In adapting the AMTB to the Irish context, this study followed the precedent set by Harris and Murtagh (1999), who demonstrated the importance of contextualising attitudinal instruments in line with national language policies, educational practices, and the sociolinguistic realities of pupils. While some pupils may wish to achieve communicative competence in Irish, they may lack the sustained motivation required to attain proficiency, especially when Irish is not used in daily life or at home (Ó Duibhir, 2018).

Importantly, the study recognised that motivation is not static but dynamic and context-sensitive. As Ushioda (1996) argues, motivation evolves over time and is shaped by learners' perceptions of their environment and self-identity. In this context, the questionnaire data served to capture the early-stage motivational profiles of 1st and 2nd Year pupils, offering insight into their evolving relationship with Irish language learning.

### 3.7.3 AMTB questionnaire use in the Irish context

As seen in Chapter 2, the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery which was developed by Gardner (Gardner, 1985), was firstly adapted in the Irish context by Harris and Murtagh in the 1980s in the nationally representative *Twenty Classes Study* (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). More recently, it was adapted by Ó Duibhir for use in a Gaelscoil context (Ó Duibhir, 2009).

The Irish language AMTB (Harris & Murtagh, 1999) is a revision of the Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Gardner et al., 1979; Gardner 1985), which was initially designed for the Canadian context, has been adapted several times for use in the Irish language learning context, which showed its' strength from the outset (O'Toole, 2023). These adaptations will be outlined below and illustrated in the chart provided.

| Year | Researcher         | Research Title                                                                                                            | Cohort                                                                                                                                           | AMTB Adaptations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1999 | Harris and Murtagh | Twenty Classes Study                                                                                                      | 6 <sup>th</sup> Class Students                                                                                                                   | <p>A 5-point Likert type format, opposed to Gardners' 7-point Likert format</p> <p>Items were read aloud to pupils opposed to participants reading items quietly</p> <p>Wording of items was adapted for the different sociolinguistic context</p> <p>Eight semantic differential scales in the original AMTB were developed to assess the students' attitude to the learning context</p> <p>Irish version and English version of the questionnaire was available</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 2009 | Pádraig O'Duibhir  | The spoken Irish of sixth-class pupils in Irish immersion schools                                                         | Pilot phase of the study – 4th to 6th, boys and girls about 9-12 years old, main study – 6th class pupils, boys and girls about 11-12 years old. | <p>A 5-point Likert type format, opposed to Gardners' 7-point Likert format</p> <p>The Irish version questionnaire was used in this study, as every school was an all-Irish school</p> <p>Where clarification was sought the item was explained using different terminology in Irish or was translated into English where it was deemed necessary</p> <p>There were write-in items that allowed the pupils to express views about learning Irish in their own words</p> <p>The following items were reported in greater detail; (1) Pupils' integrative motivation to learn Irish (2) Support pupils receive from their parents (3) Pupils' perceptions of their ability in Irish (4) Pupils' long-term goal in terms of the degree to which they aspire to native-speaker norms and the level of grammatical accuracy desired.</p> |
| 2014 | Colin Flynn        | Relationships between identity and attitudes to the achievement of                                                        | 157 adults responded to the phase 1 Adult Questionnaire                                                                                          | Adult Questionnaire (19 background information items and 50 attitude/motivation scale items).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|      |                    | native speaker norms in adult L2 learners of Irish.                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                  | <p>3 scales altered - the wording of individual items to make them appropriate for the adult learner context</p> <p>Omission of certain items that did not suit the context</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 2016 | Gene Dalton        | Gaeilge Gaming: Using Technology to Learn Irish in the Primary School                                                     | 4 <sup>th</sup> Class Pupils; 25 participants aged 10 years & 17 participants aged 10 years (2 <sup>nd</sup> intervention)                       | <p>A 44-item AMTB was developed based on Harris and Murtagh's original Irish language AMTB but also included some of Ó Duibhir's amendments</p> <p>The AMTB was reduced to address any issue of questionnaire fatigue among a two year younger student cohort</p> <p>The number of items used to assess each scale was shortened</p> <p>Two scales were omitted – the use of Irish at home and the interest in learning second/foreign languages</p> <p>The instrumental orientation was not a focus of this study as participants were younger</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 2023 | Jane O'Toole       | Is Tusa an Múinteoir: Engaging Children and Parents as Learners of the Irish Language in an English-Medium Primary School | DEIS Band 1 suburban primary school. The study involved children at <b>fourth class</b> level and their parents.                                 | <p>A 5-point Likert type format, opposed to Gardners' 7-point Likert format</p> <p>Wording of statements was adapted in response to the sociolinguistic context in Ireland</p> <p>A differential scale that was used in several questions in the Canadian model was omitted and replaced with three open questions relating to the pupils' learning in the Irish classroom and society of 2013</p> <p>The reading of the statements slowly and clearly to a younger cohort of pupils completing the questionnaire</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

**Table 5 Adaptations of Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) in Irish language education research**

The *Twenty Classes Study* modelled its own pupil questionnaire on the version of the AMTB which was designed particularly for a Canadian context, with English-speaking students learning French in mind (Gardner et al., 1979, Gardner, 1985). Gardners' AMTB was standardised and validated on samples of 1,000 anglophone Canadian participants in

grades 7 to 11. Items or scales which were not applicable for the different context of children learning the Irish language, or which were not formatted for primary school students, are not included in the present Pupil Questionnaire. Sixty five items were used to create nine attitude-motivation scales which were based on the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) described previously (Gardner et al., 1979). Aside from the difference in the Irish language being referred to, there are four other clear distinctions between the attitude-motivation items and scales utilised in Gardners' AMTB and those used in the *Twenty Classes Study* Pupil Questionnaire:

- (A) A five-point Likert type format was used throughout, whereas the Gardner AMTB uses either a seven-point Likert format or a multiple-choice format. The changes were made because pilot testing showed that the AMTB format was difficult for some primary school students (Harris & Murtagh, 1999).
- (B) The original AMTB items are normally read quietly by the pupils themselves. Each item was read aloud by the Inspector administering the *Twenty Classes Study* Pupil Questionnaire as well as being printed in the pupil's booklet. Given the children's age, this amendment was necessary in order to eliminate the possibility of any reading difficulties interfering with responses (Harris & Murtagh, 1999).
- (C) The wording of individual items was changed and adapted for the different sociolinguistic context in the case of Irish, the variety of English spoken here, and consideration of the age of the pupils involved (Harris & Murtagh, 1999).
- (D) Eight semantic differential scales in the original AMTB were developed to assess the students' attitude to the learning context i.e. their reaction to their French teacher and the French course. These scales were not utilised in the *Twenty* study. Instead, three 'write-in' items at the end of the questionnaire gave students the opportunity to express their responses to the learning context in a more informal way (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). Two examples below from the original AMTB, illustrate how the attitude motivation items were modified for the Pupil Questionnaire:

|                                                                                               |                        |                      |                   |                   |                     |                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Original <i>AMTB</i> items:                                                                   |                        |                      |                   |                   |                     |                   |
| 'English Canadians should make a greater effort to learn the French language.'                |                        |                      |                   |                   |                     |                   |
| Strongly<br>Disagree                                                                          | Moderately<br>Disagree | Slightly<br>Disagree | Neutral           | Slightly<br>Agree | Moderately<br>Agree | Strongly<br>Agree |
| 'If there were French-speaking families in my neighbourhood, I would:'                        |                        |                      |                   |                   |                     |                   |
| (a) never speak French with them                                                              |                        |                      |                   |                   |                     |                   |
| (b) speak French with them sometimes                                                          |                        |                      |                   |                   |                     |                   |
| (c) speak French with them as much as possible                                                |                        |                      |                   |                   |                     |                   |
| <i>Pupil Questionnaire</i> version:                                                           |                        |                      |                   |                   |                     |                   |
| 'People in our country who only speak English should try harder to learn the Irish language'. |                        |                      |                   |                   |                     |                   |
| Strongly<br>Disagree                                                                          | Slightly<br>Disagree   | Neutral              | Slightly<br>Agree | Strongly<br>Agree |                     |                   |
| 'If there were Irish-speaking families living near me, I would like to speak Irish to them.'  |                        |                      |                   |                   |                     |                   |
| Strongly<br>Disagree                                                                          | Slightly<br>Disagree   | Neutral              | Slightly<br>Agree | Strongly<br>Agree |                     |                   |

**Table 6 Comparison of original *AMTB* Items and adapted Irish pupil questionnaire**  
(Harris & Murtagh, 1999)

Two scales; (1) motivational intensity to learn Irish and (2) desire to learn Irish, were amended versions of the original scales (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). Gardner et al., (1979) used a multiple-choice format for these two scales but the *Twenty Classes Study* used a Likert type format as seen in the examples above. Items on this scale in the initial Canadian *AMTB* made reference to 'another country', 'another language' or 'a foreign language', however no specific language was ever mentioned.

The other 15 items on the *Twenty Classes Study* Pupil Questionnaire were broken down into three other scales which were not based on the *AMTB* at all. Nine of these items formed two new scales: an Irish-ability self-concept scale (6 items) and a nonattitudinal scale, Use of Irish at home (3 items) (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). A Miscellaneous scale, containing three items, sought background information on pupil self-assessed ability in Mathematics and in English Reading, and on their observations of how proud their parents are of the amount of Irish they as students, had learned at school (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). The last three items on the pupil questionnaire (items 78, 79 and 80) sought responses to (a) what the pupils liked in the Irish lesson, (b) what the pupils disliked in the Irish lesson and, (c) how the pupils would like to change the Irish lesson (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). The last

three items were ‘write-in’ open-ended items, developed to prompt spontaneous reactions from students in relation to the Irish lesson (Harris & Murtagh, 1999).

Certain Likert scales contained a combination of positively and negatively worded items. In order to evaluate a total score for each scale, a change to the orientation of scores on negatively worded items was required (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). Therefore, a score of 5 which indicated ‘strongly agree’ on a negatively worded item was changed to a score of 1, a score of 4 on the same item was converted to 2 etc. in order to make them equal to positively worded items (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). The items on the Irish-lesson anxiety scale were not changed as these were all negative in relation to the student’s experience in learning of Irish, e.g. ‘I get nervous and mixed up when I am speaking in my Irish class’, (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). Scores on these items were totalled to give a scale score with the objective of estimating the strength of this negative factor.

Unlike the original AMTB developed by Gardner et al. (1979) which uses either a seven-point Likert type format or a multiple-choice format, a 5-point response format ranging from ‘Easaontaím go mór’ (‘strongly disagree’) to ‘Aontaím go mór’ (‘strongly agree’) was used in the Ó Duibhir study (2009) following the approach adopted by Harris and Murtagh (1999) (Ó Duibhir, 2009). The Harris and Murtagh (1999) AMTB was divided in two sections (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). Section one contained 77 items of the 5-point Likert type response format (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). Section 2 contained three open-ended responses where students could give their opinions of the learning context (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). The *Twenty Classes study* used an Irish version and an English version of the questionnaire depending on whether it was an English-medium or an Irish-medium school (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). The Irish version was used in the Ó Duibhir study, as all of the schools were all-Irish schools (Ó Duibhir, 2009). The students could look for clarification if they did not understand any item (Ó Duibhir, 2009). On the occasion that clarification was sought, the item was explained using different terminology in Irish or was translated into English where necessary (Ó Duibhir, 2009). An English version of the AMTB was referred to in such instances to ensure consistency of translation (Ó Duibhir, 2009).

Harris and Murtagh’s (1999) pupil questionnaire was designed to survey attitudinal and motivational factors in primary school pupils as Irish language learners (Harris & Murtagh,

1999). Three of the scales from the *Twenty Classes Study* questionnaire were adapted by Flynn (2014) for an adult questionnaire; Attitude to Irish speakers, Integrative orientation to Irish and Instrumental orientation to Irish (15 Likert items in total) (Flynn, 2014). The wording of individual items in these scales were altered to make them suitable for the adult learner context (Flynn, 2014). Items that did not suit the context were omitted, including the Instrumental orientation to Irish scale, where one item was omitted and the Attitude to Irish speakers scale, where two items were omitted (Flynn, 2014). A scale was developed using items from Gatbonton, Trofimovich and Segalowitz's Ethnic Group Affiliation Questionnaire (Gatbonton, Trofimovich, & Segalowitz, 2011). This scale was labelled the Cultural Activities and Preferences scale and included 5 items (Flynn, 2014). Remaining scales in the questionnaire were developed specifically for the purposes of the study: Self confidence in speaking (11 items), Identity/Self-concept (4 items), Proficiency aims and goals (4 items) and Attitudes to learning dialects of Irish (5 items) (Flynn, 2014). Six miscellaneous items were also included which sought learners' opinions relating to similar issues (Flynn, 2014).

The AMTB was also used in research by Dalton (2016) to assess children's attitudes towards the Irish language, in order to ensure that the participants of this study were relatable to the earlier nationally representative study by Harris and Murtagh (1999). The original AMTB was used in the piloting phase of the study, but subsequently Dalton (2016) developed a 44-item AMTB based on Harris and Murtagh's original Irish language AMTB but also included some of Ó Duibhir's amendments (Dalton, 2016). The AMTB was reduced following the piloting phase of the study in an effort to address any issue with questionnaire fatigue (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010) as the participants in this research were two years younger than those in previous studies (Dalton, 2016). The 80-item original questionnaire was found to be too long for the younger age group of children in the piloting process (Dalton, 2016). Most of attitude/motivation scales assessed in the AMTB were maintained, but the number of items used to assess each scale was shortened. Two scales were omitted – the use of Irish at home and the interest in learning second/foreign languages (Dalton, 2016).

As well as being reduced, another difference between the AMTB developed for this study and Harris and Murtagh's AMTB was that instrumental orientation was not a focus of this study (for instance; motivation to learn the language in order to get a job), as the participants

in this study were younger than those in the *Twenty Classes Study* (Dalton, 2016). Harris and Murtagh highlight that “the pragmatic rewards of learning a second language may appear quite remote to young learners” (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 79), so this element of the AMTB was not considered as relevant for young children and therefore limited to a one question item, “I think it's important for me to learn Irish because it may be useful to me someday in getting a good job” (Dalton, 2016 p.166).

O'Toole (2023) preserved the original Likert 5-point scale as per the *Twenty Classes Study* by Harris and Murtagh (1999). Wording of statements was adapted however, in response to the sociolinguistic context in Ireland. A differential scale that was used in several questions in the Canadian model was omitted and replaced with three open questions relating to the pupils' learning in the classroom and society of 2013. For instance, one statement included the Irish language and performing arts event, *Slógadh*, for school children in earlier decades. *Slógadh* was replaced with *Seachtain na Gaeilge* - an annual national two week festival which involves students and schools nationwide every March. Another addition to the AMTB as used in the *Twenty Classes Study*, was the reading of the statements slowly and clearly to the pupils when completing the questionnaire. The respondents in this study were fourth class pupils, not sixth class pupils and extra attention to reading was necessary to ensure that reading ability did not influence the pupils' ability to respond. the *Twenty Classes Study* was different in that when reading the items aloud to the pupils, the examiner was asked to “use a normal speaking rate and tone. Proceed to the next item briskly once the last pupil has marked his or her answer. In the case of the first one or two practice items, the examiner should say both the item statement and the answer options aloud. For the remainder of the items, however, only the statement is said aloud. The assumption is that even very poor readers will know the left to right order of the answer options by then” (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 383).

#### 3.7.4 Evolution of the questionnaire for this study

The evolution of the questionnaire combined the established structure of Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) with modifications designed to reflect the specific realities of Irish post-primary education. The AMTB has been widely employed in second language research since the 1980s and remains a benchmark instrument for exploring language attitudes and motivation (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2005). Its strength

lies in its multidimensionality, capturing both integrative and instrumental orientations as well as attitudes to learning, motivational effort, and the role of parental encouragement. These dimensions were considered central to the current study, given their relevance to the Irish context where learners encounter Irish as both a heritage language and a compulsory curriculum subject.

In constructing the instrument, six scales were drawn directly from the original AMTB with only minor adaptations to wording for accessibility. These included Attitudes Towards Learning Irish, Desire to Learn Irish, Motivational Intensity, Integrative Orientation, Instrumental Orientation, and Parental Encouragement. The decision to retain these scales was underpinned by their strong track record in international studies, where they have repeatedly demonstrated conceptual robustness and, in many cases, high reliability (Gardner, 2010; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

However, the adaptation process also recognised the limitations of applying AMTB constructs directly to minority language settings. For example, prior Irish studies have found that while integrative motivation often emerges as a stable and meaningful construct, measures of instrumental orientation can be less consistent, reflecting the contested status of Irish as a language of both identity and utility (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, 2018). Similarly, motivational intensity has proved difficult to measure with internal consistency in cohorts where attitudes towards compulsory school subjects may diverge sharply from broader language orientations. With these challenges in mind, the present study adopted a forward-looking approach: while these scales were retained, their performance was expected to vary, and reliability testing was planned as a critical first step in analysis. Cronbach's alpha thresholds of  $\alpha \geq .70$  were set as acceptable (Hinton, 2004), with lower values treated cautiously and discussed in light of theoretical and contextual considerations.

Alongside the six AMTB-derived scales, three further scales were adapted from related motivational and attitudinal instruments used in multilingual education research. These additions broadened the scope of the instrument to include constructs particularly relevant to minority language contexts, such as language anxiety, identity, and peer influence (MacIntyre, 2002; Clément & Kruidenier, 1985). In addition, two new scales were designed specifically for this study to address dimensions not adequately covered in existing



frameworks. The most significant of these was Supporting Irish Language Learning, which captured pupils' perceptions of structural and contextual support for Irish both inside and outside school. This innovation reflected the recognition that in minority language contexts, institutional and community factors play a central role in shaping motivation (Baker, 2011; Cummins, 2000).

The evolution of the questionnaire thus balanced continuity with innovation. By drawing on validated AMTB scales, the instrument retained international comparability and theoretical rigour. By incorporating adapted and newly developed scales, it addressed gaps in the original framework and ensured contextual relevance to Irish post-primary education. At the same time, the design was explicit in anticipating that not all scales would perform equally well in terms of internal consistency. This transparency was important: the aim was not simply to replicate AMTB findings but to test how its constructs operated in a minority language setting, where integrative and attitudinal factors may remain robust but where instrumental and effort-based dimensions often require reconceptualisation. In this way, the study positioned itself to contribute both to the applied linguistics literature on motivation and to the ongoing debate about how best to measure orientations towards Irish in contemporary classrooms.

### 3.7.5 Structure and format

The questionnaire comprised 65 items in total, organised into five broad sections, each containing established AMTB-based measures, adapted scales, or newly developed items tailored for this study. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Negatively worded items were reverse-coded to ensure consistency in interpretation.

#### 1. Background and Self-Concept

- Demographic Information and Language Use (not included in item count for scales)
- Irish-Ability Self-Concept (5 items)
- Supporting Irish Language Learning (7 items – newly developed)

#### 2. Instrumental and Anxiety Scales

- Instrumental Orientation to Irish (3 items)
- Irish Lesson Anxiety (5 items)

- Parental Encouragement (7 items)

### 3. Integrativeness Scales

- Attitude to Irish Speakers (7 items)
- Integrative Orientation to Irish (4 items)
- Interest in Second/Foreign Languages (7 items)

### 4. Motivation Scales

- Desire to Learn Irish (7 items)
- Motivational Intensity (5 items)
- Attitude to Learning Irish (8 items)

### 5. Open-Ended Response

- a. “What would make your experience of learning Irish better?” (1 item)

All Likert-scale items were presented in a five-point response format, consistent with previous Irish adaptations of the AMTB (e.g., Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, 2009; Dalton, 2016). Positively and negatively worded items were counterbalanced and scored accordingly to maintain reliability. The final open-ended item invited pupils to articulate their own thoughts on how the Irish learning experience could be improved, thereby adding a qualitative dimension to the instrument.

#### 3.7.6 Incorporation of a new element: Supporting Irish language learning

The Supporting Irish Language Learning scale incorporates items from the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) survey, Cohort '98 at age 13, Young Person's Questionnaire, (Government of Ireland, 2021). These adapted items probe the ecological supports for learning Irish, for example, how often positive teaching practices occur (GUI Q5b) and whether a pupil has received extra help in Irish (GUI Q9). Question 7 of the GUI instrument also asks pupils to rate the difficulty of subjects including Irish. Grounding this scale in these proven GUI questions, ensures alignment with existing measures of classroom support and subject-specific perceptions. In doing so it captures not only cognitive and affective factors, but also the structural and social influences on Irish learning, the support (or lack thereof) offered by teachers, family and peers. This reflects a broad “multiple ecology” view of

language motivation, moving beyond individual attitudes to include contextual factors (Ushioda, 2009). As discussed in Chapter 2, key influences on Irish-learning include socioeconomic and educational background, learner identity, and cognitive load and prior knowledge.

Skopek and Passaretta (2021) show that while schooling raises achievement for all children, it does not reduce gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged groups. In other words, students from lower-SES backgrounds may continue to struggle more or require extra support in learning. This aligns with items in the scale addressing difficulty and need for help. If schooling alone doesn't equalise learning, pupils with fewer resources may feel Irish is harder. The GUI-derived items on subject difficulty and extra help effectively tap into this inequality dimension.

Norton's identity and investment framework emphasises that a learner's sense of self and group membership shape their language experiences (Norton & Toohey, 2001). For example, Norton notes that even a highly motivated student can feel "excluded from the language practices of a classroom, and in time positioned as a 'poor' or unmotivated language learner" (Norton & Toohey, 2001). In practical terms, a pupil who compares themselves to fluent peers or feels marginalised may perceive Irish as especially difficult. By including items about feeling "no good" at Irish or lacking understanding, the scale picks up on these identity-linked challenges.

Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory (1988) suggests that when students have limited prior knowledge, learning new material can overload working memory. In classroom terms, if a pupil lacks background Irish, watching peers answer questions may create a heavy cognitive load and a sense of falling behind. The items on perceived difficulty and lack of understanding mirror this idea. Without firm foundations, learning Irish may feel harder. Recognising this, teachers can scaffold instruction. Similarly, the scale's inclusion of help-related items (e.g. extra tutoring) reflects this cognitive challenge.

Research highlights substantial variation in learners' experiences of language learning, with outcomes influenced by a complex interaction of individual, educational, linguistic, and contextual factors (Dörnyei, 2005; Ellis, 2008). Learners differ in their confidence, motivation, prior experiences, and access to support, resulting in diverse patterns of

engagement and achievement. Consequently, experiences of difficulty in learning Irish cannot be assumed to be confined to any single group of students. The scale's questions relating to help, support, and perceived difficulty were therefore designed to be broadly applicable across the participant cohort. They capture the extent to which students experience Irish as challenging or accessible and allow for variation in learner experiences, confidence, and support needs.

These insights validate the scale's items by linking them to established theory and evidence. By drawing on GUI questions (updated 18 May 2021) relating to classroom practices, additional support, and subject difficulty, the scale taps into the broader social and educational supports surrounding the learner. Norton (2000, 2013) highlights the relationship between perceived difficulty, identity, and social positioning, and Sweller (1988; Sweller, Ayres, & Kalyuga, 2011) explains how cognitive load can influence learners' perceptions of challenge and success. These perspectives suggest that experiences of difficulty in learning Irish are shaped by a complex interaction of individual, linguistic, educational, and contextual factors rather than by any single learner characteristic. Therefore, the Supporting Irish Language Learning scale broadens the motivation instrument to capture these ecological dimensions, examining how family, school, and peer supports (or their absence) influence students' experiences of learning Irish. This aligns with calls for more context-sensitive second language learning instruments and offers a more holistic understanding of learner motivation, engagement, and challenge.

### 3.7.7 Alignment with prior Irish applications

The final instrument represents a hybrid of prior validated AMTB frameworks and novel, context-responsive innovations. It preserves core motivational constructs from Gardner's model, integrative and instrumental orientations, attitudes toward the learning situation, and motivational intensity, while adapting these to suit the Irish sociolinguistic environment. The structure and logic of the Harris and Murtagh (1999) version remain influential throughout, especially in format, scale design, and age-appropriate presentation.

At the same time, the instrument incorporates methodological learning from subsequent adaptations. Like Dalton (2016), this study prioritised respondent accessibility and instrument length, ensuring that the 78 items remain manageable for younger post-primary

students. Similarly, the open-ended response component reflects Flynn's (2014) and O'Toole's (2023) emphasis on giving students space to articulate their own voices, offering complementary qualitative data to deepen the analysis. In contrast to Ó Duibhir (2009), the student survey developed for this study is completed in English by all participants.

### 3.7.8 Participant selection for questionnaire

The selection of participants for the questionnaire was informed by the dual aim of achieving both breadth and depth within the sample. On the one hand, the study sought to obtain a sufficiently large number of respondents to enable robust statistical analysis. On the other, it aimed to capture the diversity of educational, linguistic, and socio-economic contexts that shape students' experiences of learning Irish within post-primary education. A target sample of over 1,000 students was established in advance, providing sufficient statistical power for subgroup comparisons, reliability testing, and the examination of patterns across multiple learner groups (Bryman, 2016).

The study focused on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year students (typically aged 12–14 years), corresponding to the early years of Junior Cycle. This stage was selected for both theoretical and empirical reasons. Research has shown that language learning motivation frequently changes during early adolescence (Dörnyei, 2005; Csizér & Kormos, 2009), while the transition from primary to post-primary education represents a particularly significant period in the development of language attitudes, confidence, and learner identity within the Irish context (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Norton, 2000). Including both year groups therefore provided an opportunity to examine learner experiences during a key stage of educational and linguistic development.

In total, 1,045 students attempted the questionnaire and 1,020 completed it sufficiently for inclusion in the final dataset. Participation was voluntary and was contingent upon parental/guardian consent and student assent in accordance with the approved ethical protocol. Participants were drawn from the ten participating schools described previously and represented a broad range of educational, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Students were asked to identify the type of secondary school they attended (Q11). Responses indicated that 592 students (58.0%) identified their school as English-medium, 415 students (40.7%) identified their school as Irish-medium, and 13 students (1.3%) did not respond.

| Response                                                                                              | N            | %            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| English-medium secondary school                                                                       | 592          | 58.0         |
| Irish-medium secondary school (including Gaelcholáistí, Scoileanna Gaeltachta and Aonad Lán-Ghaeilge) | 415          | 40.7         |
| Missing response                                                                                      | 13           | 1.3          |
| <b>Total</b>                                                                                          | <b>1,020</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

**Table 7 Student-reported type of secondary school attended (Q11)**

Although thirteen participants did not respond to Q11, school context was available for all respondents through researcher-coded school identifiers. Consequently, all 1,020 participants could be assigned to an educational context for analytical purposes. While Q11 provided a useful student-reported measure of school type, the response option combined Gaelcholáistí, Scoileanna Gaeltachta, and Aonaid Lán-Ghaeilge within a single category. Researcher-coded school classifications were therefore used in subsequent analyses to distinguish between English-medium schools, Irish-medium schools outside the Gaeltacht, and Gaeltacht schools.

The sample was also designed to capture linguistic diversity. While English remains the dominant home language for most students in Ireland, increasing numbers of learners use additional languages within the home environment (CSO, 2022). Capturing this variation was important given the study's focus on Irish language learning within a multilingual society and the potential influence of linguistic repertoires on learner attitudes, motivation, identity, and engagement (Cummins, 2000; Baker, 2011).

The following table presents participants' home language backgrounds across the three educational contexts.

| Home Background                      | Language | English-medium | Irish-medium (Outside Gaeltacht) | Irish-medium (Gaeltacht) | Total N |
|--------------------------------------|----------|----------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------|
| Only English                         |          | 416            | 203                              | 16                       | 635     |
| English and Irish                    |          | 40             | 80                               | 56                       | 176     |
| Mainly English and Other Language(s) |          | 86             | 34                               | 9                        | 129     |
| Mainly Other Language(s) and English |          | 44             | 1                                | 1                        | 46      |

|                                  |            |            |           |              |
|----------------------------------|------------|------------|-----------|--------------|
| <b>Non-English Language Only</b> | 19         | 0          | 0         | 19           |
| <b>Only Irish</b>                | 2          | 1          | 7         | 10           |
| <b>Missing response</b>          | 3          | 2          | 0         | 5            |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>610</b> | <b>321</b> | <b>89</b> | <b>1,020</b> |

**Table 8 Home language background by educational context (N = 1,020)**

The study captured learners from a wide range of linguistic backgrounds. While English-only homes constituted the largest group across all educational contexts, substantial numbers of participants reported bilingual and multilingual home environments. Notably, ten participants reported using Irish exclusively in the home, seven of whom attended Gaeltacht schools. The inclusion of students from English-speaking, bilingual, and multilingual households was considered important in light of the study's focus on Irish language learning within an increasingly multilingual Ireland.

Participant selection was designed to support meaningful comparison across key variables including educational context, year group, linguistic background, socio-economic setting, and school type. Such diversity was important in supporting the study's comparative focus and provided a strong foundation for the analyses presented in Chapter 4 and the findings reported in Chapter 5, allowing for examination of how differing educational and linguistic experiences influence engagement with Irish language learning.

### 3.7.9 Distribution and administration procedures

The administration of the questionnaire was designed to achieve three core aims: consistency across participating schools, protection of participants' rights, and integrity of the data collected. In keeping with best practice in educational research, careful attention was given to balancing methodological rigour with the practical realities of school-based fieldwork (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018; Bryman, 2016).

Following agreement by participating schools to take part in the study, Participant Information Leaflets and consent/assent documentation were distributed to parents/guardians and students through the designated school gatekeepers and link teachers. The information provided outlined the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, procedures relating to pseudonymity and confidentiality, data management

practices, and participants' rights. As all participants were under 18 years of age, parental/guardian consent was required prior to participation.

Once parental/guardian consent had been obtained, students were invited to participate in the questionnaire. Before commencing the survey, students were provided with age-appropriate information about the study and were required to indicate assent, confirming their willingness to participate. Students were reminded that participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. These procedures were implemented in accordance with the ethical approval granted through Trinity College Dublin's Research Ethics Approval Management System (TCD REAMS).

Following completion of the consent and assent process, the questionnaire was administered using a digital-only format. The questionnaire was hosted on Qualtrics and accessed by students using school laptops, computer room facilities, tablets, or personal mobile devices, depending on the resources available within each participating school. The decision to use a digital format was informed by several considerations. First, it ensured standardisation of administration across all participating sites. Second, it enhanced efficiency and accuracy by allowing responses to be recorded directly into a secure database, thereby reducing the potential for transcription errors and data loss. Third, it supported ethical and data protection requirements through secure storage and pseudonymisation procedures in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (European Union, 2016/679), the British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines (BERA, 2018), and principles of socially responsible educational research (Mertens, 2015).

The questionnaire was designed to take approximately 15 minutes to complete and was generally administered during regular class periods in order to minimise disruption to teaching and learning. Administration occurred in one of two ways. In some schools, the researcher visited the school and administered the questionnaire directly to participating students. In other schools, a nominated link teacher facilitated administration on the researcher's behalf using standardised instructions supplied in advance. This approach ensured consistency across participating schools while accommodating differing logistical arrangements.



Standardised instructions were used in all settings to ensure that students received the same information regarding the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, pseudonymity, and confidentiality. Students were also reminded that there were no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers and were encouraged to respond honestly. Such procedures are recommended in language attitude and motivation research as a means of reducing social desirability bias and encouraging authentic responses (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010).

Responses were submitted immediately upon completion and stored securely within the Qualtrics platform. No personal identifiers were collected, ensuring that responses were pseudonymised at the point of submission. Where incomplete questionnaires occurred, these were flagged during data preparation and addressed using established statistical procedures during the analysis phase, as outlined in Chapter 4.

The distribution and administration procedures were designed to ensure consistency, ethical integrity, and methodological rigour across all participating schools. The combination of standardised administration procedures, digital data collection, parental/guardian consent, student assent, and secure data management provided a strong foundation for the quantitative analyses presented in Chapter 4 and the findings reported in Chapter 5.

### 3.8 Student narrative interviews

#### 3.8.1 Rational for qualitative inquiry

Student narrative inquiry offers a profound avenue for understanding the intricate dynamics of attitude, motivation, and identity in the context of Irish language learning (Creswell, 2013; Riessman, 2008). Through personal stories and lived experiences, these narratives provide a nuanced exploration of how students with diverse linguistic backgrounds perceive and engage with the Irish language (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The narratives unveil the multifaceted nature of their identities, shedding light on how cultural backgrounds intersect with language learning experiences (Creswell, 2013; Pavlenko, 2005). By delving into motivational aspects, these narratives elucidate the sources of inspiration and the goals that drive students in their Irish language journey (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2015).

Moreover, the inquiry explores the transformative potential of language learning on their personal growth and self-discovery (Creswell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1995). This approach, anchored in the individual narratives of students, goes beyond quantitative measures, offering a rich tapestry of insights that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of their linguistic and cultural integration (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin, 2013). It aligns with the constructivist paradigm, recognising the co-construction of knowledge through the subjective lens of each student, and emphasises the importance of individual narratives in shaping educational practices and policies (Crotty, 1998; Creswell, 2013).

### 3.8.2 Qualitative insights into student narratives

Narrative interviews (Dörnyei, 2007; Norton, 2000) were conducted to explore the personal experiences and identity-related perceptions of post-primary pupils with diverse linguistic backgrounds learning Irish. While a flexible interview schedule guided the conversations (Dörnyei, 2007), participants were encouraged to share extended personal narratives about their language learning journeys, consistent with Norton's (2000) approach to identity and narrative in language learning.

The interviews were scheduled to take place online via Microsoft Teams at a time convenient to the schools involved. Ten students agreed to be interviewed and to share their narrative stories. This group included five students from English-medium schools and five from Irish-medium schools, allowing for a balanced representation of diverse linguistic learners from different language learning environments.

Participants were provided with a Participant Information Leaflet and an Assent Form to ensure they were fully aware of the format of the interview and the topics that would be discussed. Participant Information Leaflets were also issued to Parents/Guardians and Parental/Guardian consent was obtained. An estimate of the time commitment was clearly communicated in advance. The issue of confidentiality was addressed with all participants, and assurances were given that no information would be disclosed to any third party without consent/assent. All data was securely stored, and identifying details were removed or altered in order to protect participants' identities and safeguard their privacy. Written consent/assent was obtained after ensuring that participants (and their parents/guardians)

had a full understanding of the study and their involvement in it. Students were also informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence (Appendix 2-7).

These interviews were conducted through English following the completion and analysis of the survey data, with the aim of adding depth to the findings by exploring linguistically diverse students' lived experiences, perspectives, and identities in relation to Irish language learning.

### 3.8.3 Development of interview protocol

The development of the student interview protocol was informed by the study's constructivist orientation, which recognises learners as active agents in co-constructing knowledge and meaning from their educational experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Charmaz, 2014). Narrative interviews were chosen to create space for students to articulate their personal stories of learning Irish, including their motivations, challenges, and perspectives on classroom practices.

Narrative interviewing with students emphasises their role as meaning-makers in education, enabling them to voice their experiences in ways that extend beyond the scope of survey responses (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014; Riessman, 2008). The narrative format provided a balance between comparability across interviews and the flexibility to pursue unanticipated but meaningful insights.

The interview guide was designed around thematic domains relevant to the student experience: language learning histories; motivations and goals in learning Irish; experiences of inclusion and exclusion; classroom practices and pedagogies; peer dynamics; and broader perceptions of Irish language and identity. These themes were informed by existing scholarship on learner identity, motivation, and plurilingualism (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Norton, 2013).

The guide underwent piloting with a small group of students to refine wording, reduce cognitive and linguistic load, and ensure accessibility across both L1 and L2 learners. Adjustments included simplifying phrasing, incorporating open prompts, and revising

sequencing to ease students into more reflective or sensitive topics. Ethical sensitivity was central to the protocol design. Questions were carefully worded to avoid placing students under pressure or reinforcing deficit perspectives about linguistic diversity. The protocol emphasised student autonomy, encouraging participants to share experiences at their own pace and to decline answering any question if preferred.

#### 3.8.4 Interview design

The narrative interviews with students sought to elicit narrative accounts that highlighted both the challenges and opportunities of learning Irish in linguistically diverse settings. This design acknowledged that students' experiences are deeply situated within social and institutional contexts, shaped by factors such as peer interactions, school ethos, and wider societal attitudes to Irish (Bourdieu, 1991; Norton, 2013).

The structure of the interviews was guided by a set of open-ended prompts that encouraged reflective storytelling rather than short responses. For example, students were invited to recount their first experiences of learning Irish, describe moments that felt inclusive or exclusive, and discuss how their own linguistic background influenced their engagement with the subject. Such prompts supported the co-construction of rich, detailed accounts while leaving space for student-led themes to emerge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This approach ensured that students were not positioned merely as respondents to researcher-led questions, but as narrators of their own lived experiences of Irish language learning.

#### 3.8.5 Conducting and recording interviews

Following completion of the questionnaire phase, participating schools were invited to assist with the recruitment of students for the narrative interview stage of the study. School gatekeepers and designated link teachers circulated information about the study to eligible students and their parents/guardians. Students who expressed an interest in participating were provided with Participant Information Leaflets outlining the purpose of the research, the nature of participation, data management procedures, confidentiality measures, and participants' rights.

As all participants were under 18 years of age, written parental/guardian consent was obtained prior to participation. Students were also provided with age-appropriate

information about the study and completed an assent process confirming their willingness to participate. Before each interview commenced, participants were reminded that participation was entirely voluntary, that they could decline to answer any question, and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. These procedures were implemented in accordance with the ethical approval granted through Trinity College Dublin's Research Ethics Approval Management System (TCD REAMS).

Once consent and assent had been obtained, interviews were scheduled at a time convenient to participants. All student interviews were conducted and audio-recorded online via Microsoft Teams. The platform was selected due to its accessibility, familiarity to students, and ability to facilitate secure online recording and transcription. The online format also enabled flexible scheduling outside of class time and supported the creation of a comfortable, low-pressure environment in which students could discuss their experiences openly and in their own words.

Audio recordings were stored securely on password-protected and encrypted devices in accordance with university data management procedures and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements. Initial transcription was completed using Microsoft Teams' automated transcription function and subsequently checked manually by the researcher to ensure accuracy. All transcripts were pseudonymised through the removal of identifying information, including personal names, school names, teacher names, and geographical locations. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants prior to analysis.

Reflexivity was maintained throughout the interview process. As an experienced teacher of Irish and a researcher working within the field of Irish language education, the researcher remained mindful of the potential influence of their own professional background on data collection and interpretation. Particular attention was paid to the power dynamics inherent in adult-student interactions. Efforts were made to adopt a supportive, non-judgemental, and empathetic interviewing stance that encouraged participants to share their experiences honestly. Reflective field notes were maintained during and following the interviews to record contextual observations, methodological reflections, and emerging insights that informed subsequent stages of analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

### 3.8.6 Participants and context

The narrative interview sample comprised ten 2nd Year post-primary students (aged 13-14 years) drawn from two contrasting educational contexts. Five participants attended an Irish-medium non-DEIS post-primary school in Dublin, while five attended an English-medium non-DEIS post-primary school in Cork. The inclusion of students from both contexts was intended to provide insight into experiences of learning Irish across differing educational settings and language learning environments.

The sample reflected a range of educational pathways into post-primary Irish language learning. Most participants ( $n = 8$ ) had attended Irish-medium primary schools (Gaelscoileanna) prior to entering post-primary education, while two participants had attended English-medium primary schools. One of these students subsequently attended an Irish-medium post-primary school and the other attended an English-medium post-primary school. These participants provided additional perspectives on educational transition and language learning pathways. However, the sample remained weighted towards students with prior immersion experience, a factor that should be considered when interpreting comparisons across participant groups.

The participants also reflected linguistic diversity within contemporary Irish classrooms. Home language backgrounds included English-only households, English-Irish bilingual homes, and multilingual households incorporating languages such as Russian, Spanish, and Italian. In addition to Irish and English, students were studying a range of modern foreign languages, including French, German, and Spanish. These characteristics aligned with the study's focus on Irish language learning within a multilingual Irish society and provided an opportunity to explore how students' linguistic repertoires intersected with their experiences of learning Irish.

While the sample was not intended to be statistically representative of all post-primary students, it provided a diverse range of linguistic, educational, and language-learning experiences. Consistent with the principles of narrative inquiry, the emphasis was placed on obtaining rich, contextualised accounts of participants' experiences rather than achieving representativeness (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Barkhuizen, 2011). The diversity represented within the sample enabled exploration of how students experienced, interpreted, and engaged with Irish across contrasting educational contexts.

The following table presents an overview of the narrative interview participants and their educational and linguistic backgrounds.

| Participant | School Context      | Primary Education | Home Language Background  | Modern Foreign Language (MFL) |
|-------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| L1-S1       | Irish-medium Dublin | English-medium    | English, Spanish, Italian | German                        |
| L1-S2       | Irish-medium Dublin | Gaelscoil         | Russian, English, Irish   | German                        |
| L1-S3       | Irish-medium Dublin | Gaelscoil         | English, Irish            | German                        |
| L1-S4       | Irish-medium Dublin | Gaelscoil         | Spanish, English          | Spanish                       |
| L1-S5       | Irish-medium Dublin | Gaelscoil         | English                   | Spanish                       |
| L2-S1       | English-medium Cork | Gaelscoil         | English                   | French                        |
| L2-S2       | English-medium Cork | Gaelscoil         | English, Irish            | French                        |
| L2-S3       | English-medium Cork | Gaelscoil         | English, Irish            | German                        |
| L2-S4       | English-medium Cork | Gaelscoil         | English                   | German                        |
| L2-S5       | English-medium Cork | English-medium    | English, Italian          | French                        |

**Table 9 Student narrative interviews - participant education and language background**

### 3.9 Teacher narrative interviews

#### 3.9.1 Rationale for teacher-focussed inquiry

Teacher narrative inquiry, as a qualitative research approach, provides a powerful means for educators to articulate their lived experiences, pedagogical beliefs, and classroom practices through the telling of personal stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly &

Clandinin, 1990). Within the context of this study on Irish language learning among linguistically diverse students, teacher narratives offer a critical lens into the complexities of language instruction in varied school settings.

Narrative inquiry is grounded in the understanding that knowledge is constructed through experience and that storytelling is a primary mode through which educators make sense of their professional lives (Clandinin et al., 2007). By engaging Irish language teachers in narrative interviews, this study sought to capture the depth and nuance of their insights regarding student motivation, identity formation, and the challenges of teaching Irish in both Irish-medium (L1) and English-medium (L2) contexts.

Teachers' narratives provide rich, context-specific accounts of classroom realities, including strategies used to support multilingual learners, perceptions of institutional language culture, and reflections on their own identities as language educators (Barkhuizen, 2011; Farrell, 2015). These stories reveal how teachers navigate curricular demands, sociolinguistic diversity, and policy expectations, while also illuminating their professional agency and the values that guide their pedagogical choices (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Riessman, 2008).

Furthermore, narrative inquiry situates teacher experience within broader socio-cultural and policy frameworks, acknowledging that individual stories are embedded in institutional and historical contexts. For example, teachers' reflections may highlight tensions between language policy and classroom practice, or reveal how evolving societal attitudes toward the Irish language shape their work and their students' engagement.

By foregrounding teacher voices, this study aligns with a constructivist and interpretivist paradigm that values the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participant (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The insights drawn from these narratives contribute not only to a deeper understanding of Irish language education, but also to the ongoing dialogue around inclusive, responsive, and context-aware language teaching in multilingual learning environments.



### 3.9.2 Qualitative insights into teacher narratives

To gain qualitative insights into the experiences of teaching Irish to linguistically diverse learners, narrative interviews were conducted with nine post-primary Irish language teachers across both L1 and L2 contexts. These interviews were designed to explore teachers' perspectives on pedagogy, inclusion, language ideology, and classroom practice. Conducted in English via Microsoft Teams, the interviews complemented the earlier quantitative survey findings by offering in-depth accounts of teachers' lived experiences. A detailed account of the interview process, including the development of the protocol and ethical procedures, is provided in this chapter.

### 3.9.3 Development and interview protocol

The development and design of the teacher interview protocol were guided by the study's constructivist paradigm, which values the co-construction of knowledge and the exploration of meaning through participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Charmaz, 2014). Aligned with this orientation, narrative interviews were chosen as the primary method to engage teachers in reflective, open-ended dialogue about their professional lives, language ideologies, and classroom practices within linguistically diverse contexts.

Narrative interviewing supports a view of teacher knowledge as not merely technical, but personal, experiential, and socially situated (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Barkhuizen, 2011). It allows participants to frame their experiences on their own terms while enabling the researcher to probe key areas relevant to the study. A narrative format provided a guiding framework, ensuring consistency across interviews, while also allowing flexibility to pursue emergent themes and participant-led storytelling (Dörnyei, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The interview guide was developed to elicit responses across thematic domains including: professional pathways and identity; pedagogical experiences in L1 and L2 Irish classrooms; strategies for engaging migrant and plurilingual students; reflections on motivation, inclusion, and language attitudes; and interpretations of curriculum and policy. These domains were informed by prior research in language education, teacher cognition, and

sociolinguistics (Borg, 2006; Hornberger & Johnson, 2007), with attention to the unique sociopolitical positioning of the Irish language (Ó Laoire, 2012).

The design process incorporated a pilot phase involving experienced Irish language teachers, which resulted in revisions to question phrasing, the addition of more flexible prompts, and improved sequencing of topics to reduce cognitive load. Feedback also ensured that the guide was inclusive of different teaching contexts (e.g., Gaeltacht, urban DEIS, and multicultural settings).

Ethical considerations were embedded in the design. Prompts were carefully worded to avoid bias or pressure, and participants were supported in articulating their views with autonomy and confidence. The researcher maintained a stance of empathy and respect throughout, recognising the emotional and professional weight of the issues under discussion (Seidman, 2013).

### 3.9.4 Conducting and recording interviews

Prior to each interview, participants provided informed consent and were reminded of the voluntary nature of their involvement. Teachers were informed that they could decline to answer any question and could withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. These procedures were implemented in accordance with the ethical approval granted through Trinity College Dublin's Research Ethics Approval Management System (TCD REAMS).

Once consent had been obtained, interviews were scheduled at a time convenient to participants. All teacher interviews were conducted and audio-recorded online via Microsoft Teams. The platform was selected due to its accessibility, familiarity to participants, and capacity to facilitate secure online recording and transcription. Conducting interviews online also enabled participation from teachers working in geographically dispersed school contexts across Ireland while minimising disruption to their professional responsibilities (Archibald et al., 2019).

The interviews followed a narrative interview approach, encouraging participants to reflect on and recount their experiences of teaching Irish in increasingly multilingual educational settings. Teachers were invited to discuss their experiences of teaching Irish, their observations of students' attitudes, motivations, identities, and learning experiences, and their perspectives on factors influencing student engagement and success. Participants were

also encouraged to reflect on strategies that may support Irish language learning within contemporary multilingual classrooms. These areas of discussion were informed by the study's research questions and provided an opportunity for teachers to share their experiences in their own words. While a common interview protocol was used to ensure consistency across participants, teachers were encouraged to respond freely and to develop their narratives in ways that reflected their own professional experiences and perspectives. This approach facilitated the emergence of rich accounts of classroom practice, language learning, curriculum implementation, learner diversity, and professional identity (Riessman, 2008; Barkhuizen, 2011).

Audio recordings were stored securely on password-protected and encrypted devices in accordance with university data management procedures and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements. Initial transcription was completed using Microsoft Teams' automated transcription function and subsequently checked manually by the researcher to ensure accuracy. All transcripts were pseudonymised through the removal of identifying information, including personal names, school names, and geographical locations. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants prior to analysis.

Researcher positionality was considered throughout the interview process. As an experienced teacher of Irish and a researcher working within the field of Irish language education, the researcher remained mindful of the potential influence of their own professional background on data collection and interpretation. Particular attention was paid to fostering a collaborative and respectful interview environment in which participants could discuss both opportunities and challenges associated with contemporary Irish language education. Reflective field notes were maintained during and following interviews to document contextual observations, methodological reflections, and emerging insights that informed subsequent stages of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Narrative interviews provided an opportunity for participants to articulate their experiences in their own words and to reflect upon the complexities of teaching Irish within diverse educational contexts. The resulting narratives offered insight into teachers' perceptions of multilingualism, student engagement, language use, curriculum implementation, assessment practices, and the evolving role of Irish within contemporary post-primary education.

### 3.9.5 Participants and teaching context

The narrative interview sample comprised nine post-primary Irish language teachers drawn from a range of educational settings across Ireland. The sample included teachers working in Gaeltacht, Irish-medium, and English-medium school contexts, as well as DEIS and non-DEIS settings. These contexts represented a broad spectrum of contemporary Irish language education and provided insight into the opportunities and challenges associated with teaching Irish across diverse educational environments.

The participating teachers represented a wide range of professional experiences and educational backgrounds. While all participants were qualified teachers of Irish, their professional pathways varied considerably. Several participants had experience teaching across both Irish-medium and English-medium settings, while others had taught in Gaeltacht schools, summer Irish-language colleges, adult Irish-language education programmes, and third-level settings. In addition, some participants taught modern foreign languages, including French and Spanish, alongside Irish. These varied experiences enabled participants to reflect on Irish language teaching from multiple educational and linguistic perspectives.

The sample included teachers working in a Gaeltacht school, Irish-medium schools outside the Gaeltacht, English-medium schools, and an English-medium school containing an Aonad Lán-Ghaeilge. Of particular relevance to the study were two teachers working within a DEIS post-primary school that included an Aonad Lán-Ghaeilge. Both teachers taught across the T1 and T2 Junior Cycle Irish specifications, providing insight into the implementation of Irish language education across different curricular pathways within the same school setting.

The participating teachers were drawn from schools located in Galway, Cork, Dublin, Monaghan, and Clare. These locations provided representation across urban, suburban, rural, Gaeltacht, and socio-economically disadvantaged contexts. The range of educational settings and professional experiences represented within the sample enabled exploration of teachers' perspectives on student engagement, multilingualism, language use, curriculum implementation, assessment practices, and the evolving role of Irish within a multilingual Irish society.

The following table presents an overview of the teacher participants and their educational and professional backgrounds.

| Current Educational Context                 | County   | Languages Taught | Relevant Teaching Experience                                             |
|---------------------------------------------|----------|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Gaeltacht DEIS                              | Galway   | Irish            | English-medium post-primary schools; third-level Irish-language teaching |
| Irish-medium outside the Gaeltacht          | Dublin   | Irish, Spanish   | English-medium and Irish-medium post-primary schools                     |
| Irish-medium outside the Gaeltacht          | Dublin   | Irish            | Irish-medium post-primary education                                      |
| Irish-medium outside the Gaeltacht          | Monaghan | Irish            | Irish-medium post-primary education                                      |
| English-medium non-DEIS                     | Cork     | Irish            | Adult Irish-language education; summer college teaching                  |
| English-medium non-DEIS                     | Cork     | Irish            | English-medium post-primary education                                    |
| English-medium non-DEIS                     | Dublin   | Irish            | English-medium post-primary education                                    |
| English-medium DEIS with Aonad Lán-Ghaeilge | Clare    | Irish, French    | Gaeltacht post-primary school; teaching across T1 and T2 specifications  |
| English-medium DEIS with Aonad Lán-Ghaeilge | Clare    | Irish, French    | Teaching across T1 and T2 specifications                                 |

**Table 10 Teacher narrative interview participants: educational and professional backgrounds**

While the sample was not intended to be statistically representative of all teachers of Irish in Ireland, it provided a breadth of professional perspectives across differing educational, linguistic, and socio-economic contexts. Consistent with narrative inquiry, the emphasis was placed on generating rich accounts of professional experience and contextual understanding rather than achieving representativeness (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Barkhuizen, 2011).

### 3.9.6 Teacher recruitment process

Recruitment of teacher participants occurred following completion of the questionnaire phase and student narrative interview phase of the study. As the research adopted a sequential mixed-methods design, the narrative interviews were intended to provide deeper

insight into the experiences and perspectives that may underpin patterns identified within the quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Irish language teachers within the participating schools were invited to participate in the qualitative phase of the study. Information regarding the narrative interview component was circulated through the schools involved in the quantitative phase. Interested teachers were provided with a Participant Information Leaflet outlining the purpose of the study, the nature of participation, confidentiality procedures, data management arrangements, and participants' rights.

Participation was entirely voluntary. Teachers who wished to participate contacted the researcher directly and were provided with further information regarding the interview process. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to interview. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any question and could withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. These procedures were implemented in accordance with the ethical approval granted through Trinity College Dublin's Research Ethics Approval Management System (TCD REAMS).

The recruitment procedures were designed to ensure that participation remained voluntary, ethically informed, and consistent with the principles underpinning narrative inquiry. By inviting teachers to share their experiences in their own words, the qualitative phase provided valuable contextual insight into Irish language education across a range of educational settings and complemented the quantitative findings generated through the questionnaire phase of the study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

## **4 Chapter 4: Data Analysis**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the analytical phase of the study, drawing together quantitative, qualitative, and policy data in order to examine pupils' and teachers' orientations towards Irish at post-primary level. The purpose of this chapter is not only to detail the procedures undertaken in analysing the data but also to situate these choices within the broader research questions of the study. By combining statistical analysis of large-scale survey data with thematic and critical discourse approaches to interview and policy texts, the analysis seeks to illuminate both the measurable trends in motivation and the lived experiences and ideological contexts that shape them.

The structure of the chapter reflects the convergent mixed-methods design adopted for the study. Section 4.1 outlines the quantitative strand, which is based on the pupil questionnaire adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). Here, the analytical framework, demographic profile, and statistical tools are described in detail, with attention to reliability issues, subgroup comparisons, and within-group variation across schools. Section 4.2 presents the qualitative strand, encompassing thematic analysis of student and teacher interviews alongside a critical discourse analysis of language policy documents. This framework allows for the exploration of personal narratives, classroom experiences, and the ideological underpinnings of curriculum and assessment reform. Section 4.3 then explains how these strands were integrated within a convergent parallel design, emphasising that integration was not confined to triangulation but extended to the explanation of mechanisms, the illumination of contradictions, and the contextualisation of statistical patterns.

Throughout the chapter, particular emphasis is placed on the interplay between macro-level discourses and micro-level experiences, as well as on subgroup contrasts that have been shown in prior literature to be critical to minority language motivation, such as year-level transitions, multilingual household backgrounds, and socio-economic contexts. By foregrounding these lenses at the analytic stage, the chapter prepares the ground for the presentation of findings in Chapter 5, where broader implications for Irish language education policy and practice are drawn out.

## 4.2 Quantitative data analysis framework

This section presents the quantitative findings from the pupil questionnaire on attitudes and motivation towards Irish. Adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), the instrument was designed to capture a nuanced picture of learners' orientations across both Irish-medium (L1) and English-medium (L2) post-primary schools. The focus of this strand is to explore how pupils' attitudinal and motivational profiles vary across linguistic contexts, socio-economic settings, and demographic characteristics, and how these orientations shape engagement with Irish.

As outlined earlier, integrative and instrumental motivations are central constructs in second language learning (Gardner, 1985), while attitudinal factors play a critical role in sustaining long-term motivation (Harris & Conway, 2002). The analysis presented here examines these orientations across ten schools and situates the findings within the wider Irish and international research literature (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, 2018).

### 4.2.1 Overview of survey design

The questionnaire consisted of 78 items, grouped into 11 scales. Six were drawn from the original AMTB, three were adapted from related attitude/motivation instruments, and two were newly developed for this study to reflect the Irish multilingual post-primary context. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with negatively worded items reverse-coded to ensure interpretive consistency. The analytical framework was threefold:

Reliability testing: Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of each scale, with a threshold of  $\alpha \geq .70$  regarded as acceptable (Hinton, 2004). In line with previous AMTB-based studies, several scales returned strong to excellent reliability. However, others produced weaker or even problematic coefficients, notably the Motivational Intensity scale ( $\alpha$  sometimes  $< .60$ ) and the Instrumental Orientation scale, which generated inconsistent and in one case negative values. These results suggested that, while constructs such as integrative motivation and attitudes were measured robustly, other dimensions were less stable in this cohort, reflecting both the complexity of motivation in Irish language contexts and the challenges of adapting AMTB constructs for minority language learning. This issue is revisited in the presentation of findings.



Descriptive statistics: Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated across all scales, first at whole-sample level, then disaggregated by L1 versus L2 school context. Descriptive work was also extended to examine variation across key subgroups including gender, year level, home language, and country of birth, given the importance of these demographic and contextual lenses in shaping attitudes to minority languages (Baker, 2011; Cummins, 2000).

Comparative analysis: Independent-samples t-tests, Kruskal–Wallis tests, and cross-tabulations were employed to explore statistically significant differences between schools, linguistic backgrounds, and pupil subgroups (e.g., year level, home language, gender, country of birth). Special attention was given to within-group variation (e.g., differences among L1 schools, or among L2 schools), since earlier studies often emphasised the broad L1/L2 divide without probing the diversity of outcomes inside each group.

This stepwise framework provided both breadth and depth, allowing for the identification of overall trends while also accounting for subgroup- and school-level variation. In addition, by explicitly addressing scale reliability issues, the framework recognised the importance of interpreting quantitative results with caution, especially in relation to constructs like instrumental orientation that may be context-sensitive or contested in minority language education.

#### 4.2.2 Participant demographics and school profiles

The survey was administered to over 1,000 1st and 2nd Year pupils across ten post-primary schools. Five schools were classified as L1-medium (Irish-medium or Gaeltacht settings), and five as L2-medium (English-medium settings, including DEIS-designated schools and one with an Irish-medium Aonad). This distribution provided a balanced sample that enabled both cross-context and within-context comparisons.

**Age and Year Group:** Pupils ranged from 11 to 15 years of age, spread across Junior Cycle Year 1 and Year 2. Previous research suggests that attitudes and motivation towards minority languages often weaken at the transition from primary to post-primary (Little et al., 2013), a trend also consistent with wider evidence of an adolescent motivational

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| dip in second language learning (Dörnyei, 2005; Csizér & Kormos, 2009). This study therefore treated year group as a central comparative lens, allowing the analysis to track whether a similar dip emerged here.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Linguistic backgrounds:</b> While most participants came from English-speaking homes, a notable minority were from multilingual households using a variety of other home languages. This diversity allowed comparison between English-only and multilingual backgrounds in shaping orientations toward Irish. Multilingualism was treated as a key analytic dimension, given evidence that multilingual learners often demonstrate enhanced metalinguistic awareness (Cummins, 2000). |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Socio-economic diversity:</b> The sample included DEIS and non-DEIS schools, capturing the influence of school context and peer norms. DEIS status was not assumed to predetermine outcomes, but rather treated as a contextual factor whose effects might vary depending on school ethos, resourcing, and community engagement.                                                                                                                                                      |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Geographic spread:</b> The ten schools included both urban and rural contexts, including Gaeltacht areas. While Gaeltacht location might be expected to correlate with stronger Irish use, the sample design acknowledged that non-Gaeltacht Irish-medium schools can sometimes produce equally strong, if not stronger, motivational outcomes.                                                                                                                                       |

**Table 11 Participant profile and key sampling variables**

This demographic and contextual range allowed the study to capture the full spectrum of post-primary Irish language learning environments. Crucially, it enabled nuanced subgroup analyses that could disentangle the effects of age, school type, home language, socio-economic setting, and geographic location on pupils' orientations to Irish. These factors are not treated merely as background variables but as key dimensions through which motivational and attitudinal patterns are structured, interpreted, and explained in later chapters.

#### 4.2.3 Analytical tools (descriptives, t-tests, cross-tabs, reliability testing)

The quantitative analysis employed a range of statistical tools to ensure robustness and interpretive depth.

Reliability testing was the first step, assessing the internal consistency of each scale using Cronbach's alpha. The majority of scales demonstrated high reliability, with values typically between 0.83 and 0.95. These included constructs such as attitudes to Irish speakers, overall attitude to learning Irish, and parental encouragement, which were measured consistently across the sample. However, some scales returned weaker or problematic values. For example, Motivational Intensity sometimes fell below the .70 threshold ( $\alpha = .49-.59$  across subsamples), raising questions about whether the construct operates in the same way in minority language settings as in the original AMTB context. Even more strikingly, Instrumental Orientation produced negative coefficients in some groups, suggesting that responses to its items were highly inconsistent. These findings underline that while integrative and attitudinal constructs remain stable, instrumental and effort-based measures require caution in interpretation and may need reframing for the Irish post-primary context.

Descriptive statistics provided the baseline picture of pupils' attitudes, motivations, and orientations. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for all scales, first at whole-sample level and then by L1 versus L2 school context. Descriptives were also disaggregated by subgroup characteristics such as year group, gender, home language, and country of birth. This approach acknowledged that orientations to Irish are not evenly distributed but intersect with demographic and contextual factors, and it ensured that later findings could be linked back to underlying population profiles.

Comparative analyses built on these descriptive findings through independent-samples t-tests, Kruskal-Wallis tests, and cross-tabulations. These analyses facilitated the identification of statistically significant differences across schools, educational contexts, and student subgroups. While the distinction between Irish-medium (L1) and English-medium (L2) schooling produced the clearest contrasts, with Irish-medium pupils generally reporting more positive attitudes, stronger motivation, higher self-concept, and lower anxiety, it was equally important to examine variation within these broader categories. For example, some Irish-medium schools outside the Gaeltacht recorded outcomes that

matched or exceeded those observed in Gaeltacht schools, while some DEIS schools reported comparatively positive attitudes and motivational orientations towards Irish. Attention to this within-group variation avoided oversimplified interpretations and highlighted the importance of local context, school culture, and educational practice alongside medium of instruction.

Particular emphasis was placed on two subgroup lenses. First, year-level contrasts, since early adolescence is a critical stage when motivation and self-concept may decline. Comparing 1st and 2nd Years provided insights into whether this motivational dip was evident for Irish, with implications for retention and engagement strategies. Second, multilingual households, since one aim of the study was to test whether multilingual pupils, often described as “language-positive,” would display similarly strong orientations to Irish. As the findings demonstrate, this was not necessarily the case.

This multi-layered framework ensured that the analysis was not limited to broad averages but was sensitive to differences within and across groups. By combining reliability testing, descriptive profiling, and comparative analyses, it became possible to build a nuanced statistical account of how pupils’ orientations to Irish are patterned by school type, age, gender, home language, socio-economic context, and identity factors.

#### 4.3 Qualitative data analysis framework

The qualitative data analysis framework for this study was designed to capture the complexity of participants’ lived experiences and the discursive construction of language policy. Anchored in a constructivist paradigm, the framework combined thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Thematic analysis was applied to student and teacher interview transcripts to identify recurring patterns of meaning, while CDA was employed to interrogate the policy texts for their underlying ideologies and power relations. This dual strategy enabled the integration of micro-level narratives with macro-level discourses, thereby offering a holistic understanding of how Irish language education is shaped by both individual experiences and institutional structures (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fairclough, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

#### 4.3.1 Thematic analysis of student narratives

The narrative student interviews were analysed thematically using the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This framework offered both flexibility and rigour, allowing for a systematic progression from raw transcripts to higher-order themes that captured patterns across participants. Thematic analysis was chosen because of its suitability for exploring subjective experiences and for identifying recurring issues across a diverse cohort of learners, while remaining sensitive to individual variation.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim through the Microsoft Teams transcription applications and imported into NVivo to facilitate systematic coding and retrieval. Familiarisation involved multiple readings of the transcripts, memo-writing, and note-taking to capture initial impressions and recurrent phrases in students' own words. During the initial coding phase, segments of data were coded inductively, with descriptive labels closely reflecting students' language (e.g., "afraid of being wrong," "Irish is only for school," "exams cause stress"). This bottom-up approach was crucial in ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in participants' accounts rather than pre-determined categories.

As coding progressed, related codes were grouped into broader categories through constant comparison. For example, codes relating to "fear of mistakes," "embarrassment," and "lack of confidence speaking" were clustered under a broader category of communicative anxiety, while codes such as "liking Irish culture," "seeing Irish as part of identity," and "feeling proud of heritage" were grouped under identity and belonging. Iterative cycles of reviewing and refining these categories helped ensure that they captured coherent patterns across the dataset, while still allowing space for nuance and divergence. Through this iterative process, a set of five meta-themes was constructed to organise the student narratives. These meta-themes, which are presented in detail in Chapter 5, represent higher-order patterns that cut across individual accounts:

|                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Communicative Confidence and Classroom Interaction: capturing issues of self-concept, oral participation, and the 1 <sup>st</sup> Year to 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year dip in confidence. |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Identity, Culture, and Real-World Irish: encompassing symbolic attachments, cultural belonging, and tensions between personal and national identity.                                    |
|                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Assessment Alignment: reflecting students' experiences of teaching methods, the dominance of exams, and calls for more interactive learning.                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Foundations, Transitions, and Differentiation: covering prior exposure in primary school, continuity into post-primary, and variation across school types.                              |
|                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Engagement, Media, and Modern Input: highlighting the perception of Irish as a “school-only” language and students' desire to see Irish linked to youth culture, media, and technology. |

**Table 12 Thematic dimensions emerging from student data analysis**

The move from initial codes to these five meta-themes was not linear but cyclical. Themes were repeatedly tested against the data to ensure that they were both comprehensive and distinct. For instance, while “confidence” and “identity” were initially considered within the same category, they were later separated to reflect students' emphasis on these as different dimensions of their experience. Similarly, issues of pedagogy and assessment were initially dispersed across different categories but were consolidated into a single theme to reflect their interdependence in shaping classroom experience.

Throughout the process, analytic decisions were documented through memos, and peer debriefing with academic colleagues was used to test the coherence of emerging themes and to guard against researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This reflexive approach enhanced the credibility and transparency of the analysis, ensuring that the final set of meta-themes represented a faithful yet interpretive account of the student data.

The five student meta-themes therefore provide the organising structure for the presentation of findings in Chapter 5. While each theme is developed in detail there, the purpose of outlining them here is to demonstrate how systematic thematic analysis enabled the identification of recurring patterns across the student narratives, while retaining sensitivity to individual voices and contextual variation.

#### 4.3.2 Thematic analysis of teacher narratives

Teacher interviews were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, following the same systematic and iterative approach adopted for the student data. Transcripts were transcribed verbatim, imported into NVivo, and coded inductively in order to capture teachers' own language, perspectives, and priorities. Familiarisation involved repeated readings, memo-writing, and analytic note-taking, which allowed early codes to reflect the concerns teachers raised about pedagogy, motivation, and policy in their own terms.

Initial coding produced a large set of descriptive codes, such as "oral confidence," "exam pressures," "identity connection," and "curriculum mismatch." These were gradually clustered into broader categories through iterative comparison and refinement. For example, codes relating to "building students' confidence," "fear of speaking Irish," and "classroom anxiety" were combined into a category of communicative confidence, while codes such as "exam-driven teaching," "assessment demands," and "lack of resources" were grouped under curriculum and pedagogy.

A crucial step in the analysis was the decision to align the teacher data with the same five overarching meta-themes identified in the student narratives. This was not imposed from the outset, but emerged inductively during the process of categorisation. As codes and categories were refined, it became clear that teachers and students were often speaking to overlapping issues, albeit from different vantage points. For example, while students described their own anxieties about speaking Irish, teachers framed this as a challenge of fostering oral confidence in their classrooms. Similarly, students' accounts of Irish as a "school-only" language were mirrored in teachers' reflections on the limited visibility of Irish beyond school and their efforts to connect the language to students' everyday lives. On this basis, the analysis was organised around the same five higher-order themes, but interpreted through the professional and pedagogical lens of teachers. These meta-themes, presented in detail in Chapter 5, are:

Communicative Confidence and Classroom Interaction: focusing on how teachers perceive and support students' oral participation and self-concept.

|                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Identity, Culture, and Real-World Irish: exploring teachers' views on Irish as a cultural resource and its positioning within wider identity discourses.         |
|                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Assessment Alignment: examining teachers' perspectives on curriculum reform, assessment pressures, and pedagogical practice.           |
|                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Foundations, Transitions, and Differentiation: considering how teachers experience and respond to differences across school types, stages, and learner profiles. |
|                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Engagement, Media, and Modern Input: addressing teachers' reflections on connecting Irish to youth culture, technology, and authentic domains of use.            |

**Table 13 Thematic dimensions emerging from teacher data analysis**

The decision to parallel the student meta-themes with teacher meta-themes allowed for comparability between the two datasets while also recognising the distinctiveness of teacher perspectives. Teachers were not merely validating students' accounts; rather, they provided professional insights into the structural, pedagogical, and policy-related mechanisms that underpin the learner experiences. This analytic alignment enabled a multi-perspectival account of the same core issues, ensuring that the voices of both students and teachers could be placed in dialogue in the findings and discussion chapters.

As with the student data, the teacher analysis was iterative and reflexive. Memos documented analytic decisions, peer debriefing with academic colleagues supported the coherence of the meta-themes, and constant comparison between teacher and student datasets enhanced the transparency and credibility of the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The result was a set of five teacher-focused meta-themes that mirror the student themes in structure but differ in emphasis and content. This dual framework provides the basis for Chapter 5, where teacher and student narratives are presented side by side to highlight both convergences and divergences in their perspectives on Irish language learning.



#### 4.3.3 Policy document analysis (Critical Discourse Approach)

To complement the interview data, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach was employed in the examination of policy documents. CDA is particularly suited to exploring the relationship between language, power, and ideology in texts (Fairclough, 2013). Documents including the Primary Language Curriculum (2019), the Junior Cycle Framework, and relevant Department of Education circulars were analysed. This process sought to uncover implicit assumptions, policy framings, and discursive strategies surrounding Irish language education in a multilingual Ireland.

The analysis followed Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse analysis, which involves examining the textual features, the discursive practice (production, distribution, and consumption of texts), and the wider social practice. This framework allowed for the identification of recurring discourses, such as the tension between instrumentalist and identity-based rationales for learning Irish, and the ways these discourses shaped policy implementation. CDA highlighted the ideological nature of curriculum reform and how official discourses both enable and constrain teachers' and students' engagement with Irish (Tollefson, 2013; Ricento, 2006).

In the analysis of policy documents, CDA was enriched with intertextual and interdiscursive analysis to trace how Irish language education was framed across different texts and time periods (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Particular attention was given to identifying shifts in the ideological framing of Irish, from heritage-based rationales to more instrumentalist, skills-based discourses. This shift mirrors broader global educational trends towards neoliberalism and market-oriented language policies (Block, Gray, & Holborow, 2012).

To ensure analytic transparency, each document was coded not only for explicit references to language learning outcomes but also for implicit assumptions about identity, integration, and national belonging. Reflexivity was maintained throughout this process, with the researcher acknowledging their positionality as both an academic and a participant in Irish educational discourses. This reflexive stance was crucial in mitigating potential biases and in recognising the interpretive nature of CDA (Van Dijk, 2008).

#### 4.4 Integration of Mixed Methods (Convergent Parallel Design)

The integration of mixed methods in this study followed a convergent parallel design, which is widely employed in educational research to capitalise on the complementary strengths of quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In this design, quantitative and qualitative strands were conducted independently but with equal priority, and were then integrated during the interpretation phase. The rationale for adopting this approach was to generate a holistic understanding of pupils' and teachers' orientations towards the Irish language, while simultaneously interrogating the ideological framing of Irish in policy documents. By analysing each strand separately and subsequently merging the results, the study was able not only to triangulate findings and corroborate evidence but also to explain mechanisms behind observed patterns, providing a depth of interpretation not possible through a single-method design.

The quantitative strand established broad patterns across more than one thousand pupil participants from diverse school settings, showing contrasts by medium of instruction, gender, year group, and multilingual background. These results provided a generalisable map of orientations towards Irish. The qualitative strand then added interpretive richness, revealing how these patterns were lived and narrated by students and teachers. For instance, the statistical finding of a decline in motivation from 1st to 2nd Year was explained in interviews by students' accounts of increased assessment pressures, reduced enjoyment of lessons, and perceptions of Irish as a difficult subject. In this way, qualitative insights contextualised and gave explanatory force to quantitative trends.

Policy discourse analysis formed a crucial third strand, situating both survey and interview findings within the wider ideological terrain of Irish education. While students and teachers questioned the instrumental value of Irish, CDA revealed how policy texts continue to shift between identity-based rationales and more instrumentalist framings aligned with plurilingual European goals. This comparative layering demonstrated how macro-level discourses shape micro-level practice and pupil motivation.

Integration was carried out through both side-by-side comparison and joint displays (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013). For each major theme, motivation, identity, and policy mediation, tables juxtaposed survey results with illustrative extracts from student and teacher interviews, making explicit where the two strands converged, diverged, or

elaborated upon each other. These displays were not merely additive but interpretive: they highlighted, for example, how the weaker orientations of multilingual pupils in survey data contrasted with individual interview narratives of plurilingual pride, underscoring the risk of overgeneralisation from quantitative data alone.

Equal priority was given to both quantitative and qualitative strands in design, though at the interpretation stage qualitative accounts frequently provided the deeper explanatory dimension. This aligns with Greene's (2007) argument that the value of mixed methods lies in generating nuanced explanations, not only in validating trends. Reflexivity was embedded throughout integration: the researcher acknowledged the interpretive work involved in weaving together survey statistics, interview narratives, and policy discourses, and sought to avoid privileging one strand over the others inappropriately. Peer debriefing and supervisory consultation supported this reflexive stance and strengthened the trustworthiness of interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

By combining statistical breadth with narrative depth and policy analysis, the convergent design offered a multi-layered account of Irish language education. Integration thus moved beyond confirmation to illumination, showing not only what patterns exist but also why they take shape, and how they are framed by institutional and ideological contexts.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the analytical frameworks employed to interrogate the quantitative, qualitative, and policy data gathered in this study. The quantitative strand combined reliability testing, descriptive statistics, and comparative analyses to produce a detailed profile of pupils' attitudes and motivations across ten schools, while remaining attentive to subgroup variation by school type, year group, home language, gender, and socio-economic context. Particular caution was exercised in interpreting scales where internal consistency was weak, such as Motivational Intensity and Instrumental Orientation, highlighting the need to reconsider how such constructs operate within minority language settings.

The qualitative strand employed thematic analysis of student and teacher interviews alongside a critical discourse approach to policy documents. This dual framework ensured that micro-level experiences of classrooms and learners were set in dialogue with the wider ideological and structural conditions shaping Irish language education. The parallel identification of five overarching meta-themes across both student and teacher narratives provided a shared organising structure that still allowed for the recognition of distinct perspectives. Policy analysis, meanwhile, situated these experiences within the shifting rationales and contested discourses underpinning curriculum and assessment reform.

Integration of the quantitative and qualitative strands was achieved through a convergent parallel design. This approach facilitated not only triangulation but also deeper explanation, enabling statistical patterns, such as the motivational dip between Year 1 and Year 2, or the weaker orientations of multilingual pupils, to be contextualised through personal narratives and institutional discourses. Joint displays made visible the points of convergence, divergence, and elaboration across strands, while reflexive practices ensured that integration remained transparent and balanced.

The analysis provided both breadth and depth: breadth in capturing large-scale patterns across a diverse sample of over 1,000 pupils, and depth in exploring the lived realities and policy framings that underpin those patterns. By combining numerical trends with thematic insights and ideological critique, the analysis created a multi-layered foundation on which the findings can be presented. The next chapter moves from framework to evidence, outlining in detail the quantitative results, the qualitative themes, and the ways in which these illuminate each other in shaping understandings of Irish language motivation at post-primary level.

## **5 Chapter 5: Quantitative & Qualitative Findings**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of the study, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data collected from students across Irish-medium, Gaeltacht, and English-medium post-primary schools. The chapter is organised into four sections, each of which illuminates a different dimension of students' attitudes, motivations, and experiences of learning Irish within a multilingual educational landscape. The purpose of the chapter is descriptive and analytical: to outline the evidence generated by surveys and open-ended responses, to highlight patterns and contrasts across groups, and to identify themes that will subsequently be interpreted in the discussion chapter. By combining large-scale survey data with rich qualitative accounts, the findings aim to provide a comprehensive and nuanced picture of the factors shaping young people's engagement with Irish.

The first section reports on the results of the questionnaire adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). Completed by more than 1,000 first- and second-year students across ten schools, the instrument explored pupils' attitudinal and motivational orientations towards Irish, as well as related factors such as parental encouragement, language self-concept, and lesson-related anxiety. After outlining the demographic profile of participants, the section presents reliability analyses of the scales, compares mean scores across Irish-medium and English-medium schools, and highlights significant between-school differences. These results provide a broad statistical overview of how pupils position Irish within their linguistic repertoires and educational experiences.

The second section shifts to the qualitative dimension of the survey, analysing students' written responses about what would make their experiences of learning Irish better. A thematic analysis identified ten recurring threads, including calls for more fun and interactive methods, concerns about the limited real-life use of Irish, and reports of insufficient foundational support. While the themes echo several of the quantitative patterns, they also bring to light the affective and contextual dimensions of language learning, revealing how classroom practices, curriculum structures, and broader sociolinguistic realities shape student engagement.

The third section draws together the survey scales and thematic responses to examine areas of convergence and divergence. By comparing statistical trends with students' own voices, this section highlights how motivational orientations, levels of anxiety, and identity-related factors manifest in practice. The integration provides a richer account of the data, demonstrating how numerical patterns are grounded in lived experiences and how student testimony helps explain the mechanisms underlying quantitative results.

The final section extends the analysis by considering how demographic and contextual variables, such as school type, year group, home language background, gender, and country of birth, intersect with pupils' attitudes and experiences. Independent sample tests and cross-school comparisons reveal how these variables shape orientations to Irish in nuanced ways. This section thus situates individual and school-level findings within the broader educational and sociolinguistic landscape, providing a bridge to the interpretive discussion that follows.

## 5.2 Section 1: Quantitative findings: Student AMTB survey (n = 1,020)

This section presents findings from the questionnaire on pupils' attitudes and motivation towards Irish, adapted from the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and administered across ten post-primary schools. The instrument examined the nature and strength of learners' attitudinal and motivational orientations towards Irish. As outlined in the Chapter 2 Literature Review, both integrative and instrumental orientations are central to second language motivation (Gardner, 1985). While a causal link between attitude and proficiency cannot be assumed, studies have found significant correlations (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). Attitudinal factors are thus important for sustaining the long-term motivation needed to achieve higher competence in Irish (Harris & Conway, 2002).

Previous research shows that while learners often make strong initial progress, development can plateau, with non-target features persisting (Ó Duibhir, 2018; Harris & Murtagh, 1999). This study extends beyond immersion-only contexts by including both L1- and L2-medium post-primary schools, capturing a wider range of bilingual and multilingual settings. This allows analysis of how motivational orientations vary across linguistic environments and how multilingual repertoires shape engagement with Irish. Results can

also be compared across the ten schools (five Irish-medium, five English-medium) and with earlier Irish and international AMTB-based studies.

Over 1,000 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year pupils completed the questionnaire, which comprised 78 items across 11 scales (six AMTB-based, three adapted Other-Scales, two Non-AMTB). Responses used a five-point Likert scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” Negatively worded items were reverse-coded so that higher scores indicated stronger endorsement.

Findings are presented in three stages. First, the internal reliability of the scales is assessed. Several scales were adapted from prior AMTB-based studies, while one, Supporting Irish Language Learning, was newly developed using items from the Growing Up in Ireland survey to reflect the post-primary, multilingual context. Second, mean scores are compared across Irish-medium and English-medium schools to explore contextual differences in attitudes and motivation. Finally, item-level results are analysed to provide a detailed profile of response patterns across the sample.

#### 5.2.1 Participant demographics

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the demographic characteristics of the students who participated in the study on Irish language learning in a multilingual society. The data was drawn from Questions 2 to 12 of the survey instrument and offer insight into the diverse sociolinguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds of the student cohort. Presenting this demographic profile is important because such factors can influence students’ attitudes, motivation, and opportunities to engage with language learning (Baker, 2011; Cummins, 2000). Situating students within their broader linguistic and educational contexts also allows for meaningful interpretation of their responses in the context of existing research on multilingualism and minority language education (García & Wei, 2014; Harris & Murtagh, 1999).

##### Gender (Q2)

Students in this study represented a range of gender identities. The majority identified as female (n=521), followed closely by male students (n=461). A smaller number identified as non-binary or as a third gender (n=11), while 18 students preferred not to disclose their

gender and 9 students did not provide a response. This relatively balanced gender distribution means that the perspectives of students across genders are represented in the data.

Previous research has suggested that female students often report more positive attitudes and higher achievement in school-based language subjects (Carr & Pauwels, 2006; Williams et al., 2002). However, gender differences are not universal and can be shaped by broader social and educational contexts (Baker, 2011). The near gender balance in this sample reduces the risk of gender-related bias and enhances the representativeness of findings on students' attitudes to Irish.

#### Age (Q3)

Students ranged in age from 11 to 15 years ( $M = 13.3$ ;  $SD = 0.67$ ), with a median age of 13. Most students were aged 13 or 14, which aligns with the expected ages for early post-primary education in Ireland.

Adolescence is often considered a pivotal period for the development of language learning attitudes, as motivation and identity become more salient (Dörnyei, 2005). Some studies have found that students in this age group may experience a decline in positive attitudes toward school languages, particularly minority languages, unless learning is supported by strong social or community incentives (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Laoire, 2007). It is therefore important to interpret their engagement with Irish within this developmental context.

#### Year Group (Q4)

The sample consisted of 517 first-year students and 496 second-year students, with 7 students not stating their year group. This near-even split allows for the comparison of perspectives across two adjacent stages of post-primary education.

The transition from primary to post-primary school has been associated with changes in attitudes to language learning, including potential declines in motivation for minority languages (Little et al., 2013). Including both first- and second-year students makes it possible to explore how attitudes to Irish may shift during this crucial early period.



### Country of Birth (Q5)

Most students were born in Ireland (n = 927). Smaller numbers were born in the United Kingdom (n = 10), South Africa (n = 10), the United States (n = 6), India (n = 6), Iceland (n = 4), Italy (n = 4), and a wide range of other countries (n = 41). Twelve students did not state their country of birth. This breadth of birthplaces reflects the multicultural composition of the cohort.

Students' country of birth may shape their prior exposure to Irish and their broader linguistic repertoires (Cummins, 2000; Little et al., 2013). Those born outside Ireland may bring valuable multilingual resources but have had less opportunity to encounter Irish, while Irish-born students are more likely to have been introduced to the language in primary school (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). This diversity is an important contextual factor when interpreting students' experiences and attitudes.

### How Long Have You Lived in Ireland? (Q6)

Most students had lived in Ireland all their lives (n=944), while 47 students had lived in Ireland for less than 10 years and 23 students for less than 5 years. Six students did not respond.

Length of residence has been linked to language acquisition opportunities and cultural integration (García & Wei, 2014). Students who have lived in Ireland for shorter periods may have had less exposure to Irish, both in school and in the community, which could influence their engagement and confidence with the language.

### Main Languages Used at Home Every Day (Q7)

Most students spoke only English at home (n=635), while 176 spoke both English and Irish. Other groups included students who spoke mainly English with some other languages (n=129), mainly other languages with some English (n=46), a non-English language only (n=19), and only Irish (n=10). Five students did not respond.

Home language is a key influence on students' language identities and attitudes to language learning (Baker, 2011; O'Rourke, 2011). Students from multilingual households may develop strong metalinguistic awareness and positive orientations towards learning new languages (Cummins, 2000). Although few students reported speaking Irish at home, these

students may benefit from intergenerational transmission, which plays a crucial role in sustaining minority languages (Harris & Murtagh, 1999).

#### Other Languages Used in the Home (Q8)

Students were invited to list any other languages used in their homes in addition to the main languages captured in Q7. In the dataset provided for analysis (both the Numeric and Original sheets), no responses were recorded for Q8 (0 out of 1,020 entries). As a result, no quantitative or qualitative summary of additional languages can be presented here. This absence may reflect that students left the optional open-ended item blank. The interpretation of home language use in this report therefore relies on the closed-response categories in Q7.

#### Irish Use in the Home (Q9)

Students responded to the statement “No one at home ever speaks Irish” using a five-point Likert scale, where higher scores indicate stronger agreement. Scores ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with a mean of 3.62 (SD = 1.38) and a median of 4. This distribution suggests that a substantial proportion of students reported that Irish is rarely or never spoken in their homes.

This finding is consistent with national patterns indicating that Irish is infrequently used in the home outside Gaeltacht areas (Ó Giollagáin & Charlton, 2015). Limited exposure to Irish in informal family contexts can constrain opportunities for authentic language use, which in turn may affect motivation and confidence (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Cummins, 2000). As home language practices are known to influence language attitudes and identity (Baker, 2011; O’Rourke, 2011), the low reported use of Irish in students’ homes is an important contextual factor for interpreting their engagement with the language at school.

#### Type of Primary School Attended (Q10)

Over half of the students had attended English-medium primary schools in Ireland (n=546), while 418 students had attended Gaelscoileanna (Irish-medium primary schools). Nineteen students had attended primary school abroad and in Ireland, 19 students selected 'other', and 6 had attended primary school abroad only. Twelve students did not respond.

Attending an Irish-medium primary school is often associated with higher proficiency in Irish and more positive attitudes towards the language (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). By contrast, students from English-medium schools may begin post-primary education with lower oral proficiency, which can influence their confidence and engagement (Little et al., 2013).

#### Type of Secondary School Attended (Q11)

Most students attended English-medium secondary schools (n=592), while 415 students attended Irish-medium secondary schools (including Gaelcholáistí). Thirteen did not respond.

The medium of instruction at secondary school has a major influence on students' exposure to Irish. Students in Irish-medium schools experience immersion in Irish, while those in English-medium schools generally encounter the language primarily as a subject (Ó Laoire, 2007). This difference in exposure may contribute to variations in students' attitudes and achievement.

#### County of Residence (Q12)

The largest group of students lived in Dublin (n=473), followed by Cork (n=263), Monaghan (n=86), Kerry (n=71), and Donegal (n=48). Smaller numbers lived in Galway (n=19), Clare (n=16), and Kildare (n=1), while 43 students did not report their county.

Geographical location can influence the extent to which students encounter Irish outside school. Students in or near Gaeltacht areas may have greater access to Irish in the community, while those in more urbanised areas may experience the language mainly within the school setting (Ó Giollagáin & Charlton, 2015). This variation offers valuable context for interpreting students' experiences of Irish.

This student cohort displays considerable diversity in terms of gender identity, age, home languages, country of birth, educational backgrounds, and geographic distribution. While most students were Irish-born, lifelong residents who speak English at home, the presence of students from multilingual and international backgrounds contributes to the richness of the dataset. These demographic factors provide essential context for understanding students' experiences and attitudes toward learning Irish within a multilingual society.

### 5.2.2 Scale reliability and mean scores

Mean scores and reliability values for each scale were calculated separately for L1 pupils, L2 pupils, and the combined dataset. Across the study as a whole, the majority of scales demonstrated good to excellent reliability, particularly those relating to pupils' attitudes towards Irish speakers, their overall attitude to learning Irish, and the level of parental encouragement reported. Cronbach's Alpha values for these scales typically ranged from 0.83 to 0.95, indicating that the items within them were highly consistent in capturing pupils' orientations.

By contrast, a small number of scales returned lower reliability coefficients. Most notably, the scale measuring Motivational Intensity to Learn Irish produced alpha values below the 0.70 threshold, especially for L2 pupils ( $\alpha = 0.59$ ). Similarly, the new Supporting Irish Language Learning scale showed weaker internal consistency in both L1 and L2 contexts ( $\alpha = 0.62$ – $0.70$ ). These lower values may reflect the smaller number of items in these scales, the modifications made from earlier AMTB versions, or the more diverse backgrounds of pupils in the current study compared with previous Irish or Canadian contexts.

Mean scores also revealed interesting contrasts. L1 pupils consistently reported stronger positive orientations, with higher scores on scales such as Attitude to Irish Speakers ( $M = 32.7$ ) and Attitude to Learning Irish ( $M = 31.5$ ), whereas L2 pupils' averages were noticeably lower on the same measures ( $M = 26.9$  and  $M = 22.5$  respectively). This pattern was also evident for Desire to Learn Irish, where L1 pupils' mean ( $M = 25.4$ ) contrasted with L2 pupils' lower mean ( $M = 18.7$ ). At the same time, both groups showed high reliability on the Parental Encouragement scale ( $\alpha = 0.80$ – $0.86$ ), with mean scores indicating that parents are generally perceived as supportive of their children's Irish learning.

The Instrumental Orientation to Irish scale was less consistent ( $\alpha$  values below 0.60 across groups), and in some cases produced negative reliability coefficients, suggesting that pupils' responses were more varied and possibly influenced by different interpretations of instrumental benefits. This finding aligns with international work showing that instrumental

orientations tend to fluctuate with contextual affordances and pressures, whereas more identity-driven motivations are often more stable (Lamb, 2004; Taguchi et al., 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021).

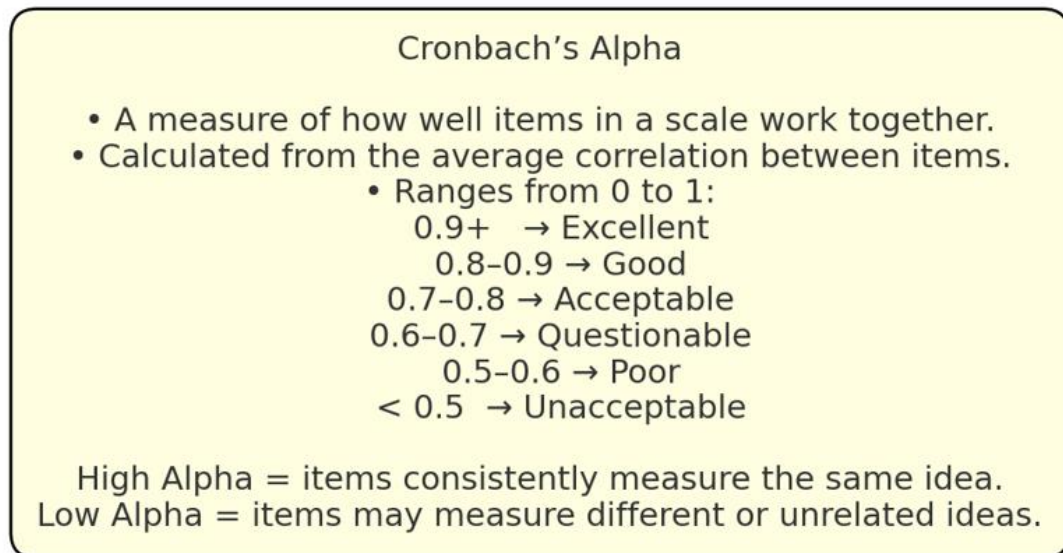


**Figure 1 Interpretation of Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients**

### All Pupils

| Scale                                 | N pupils | N items | Item mean (1–5) | Min, max scores | Mean | SD  | Reliability ( $\alpha$ ) |
|---------------------------------------|----------|---------|-----------------|-----------------|------|-----|--------------------------|
| <b>Integrativeness Scales</b>         |          |         |                 |                 |      |     |                          |
| Attitude to Irish speakers            | 982      | 8       | 3.66            | (8,40)          | 29.3 | 7.2 | 0.91                     |
| Integrative orientation to Irish      | 979      | 4       | 3.40            | (4,20)          | 13.6 | 4.3 | 0.89                     |
| Interest in 2nd/Foreign Languages     | 982      | 7       | 3.84            | (7,35)          | 26.8 | 5.9 | 0.87                     |
| <b>Motivation Scales</b>              |          |         |                 |                 |      |     |                          |
| Desire to learn Irish                 | 981      | 7       | 3.06            | (7,35)          | 21.4 | 6.8 | 0.83                     |
| Motivational intensity to learn Irish | 976      | 5       | 3.07            | (5,25)          | 15.3 | 3.8 | 0.57                     |
| Attitude to learning Irish            | 961      | 8       | 3.27            | (8,40)          | 26.2 | 9.5 | 0.95                     |
| <b>Other Scales</b>                   |          |         |                 |                 |      |     |                          |

|                                           |      |   |      |        |      |     |       |
|-------------------------------------------|------|---|------|--------|------|-----|-------|
| <b>Instrumental orientation to Irish</b>  | 996  | 3 | 3.12 | (3,15) | 9.4  | 1.9 | -0.31 |
| <b>Irish-Lesson Anxiety</b>               | 989  | 5 | 3.28 | (5,25) | 16.4 | 5.2 | 0.86  |
| <b>Parental encouragement</b>             | 990  | 7 | 3.54 | (7,35) | 24.8 | 6.3 | 0.85  |
| <b>Non-AMTB Scales</b>                    |      |   |      |        |      |     |       |
| <b>Irish-ability self-concept</b>         | 1000 | 5 | 3.28 | (5,25) | 16.4 | 4.7 | 0.87  |
| <b>Supporting Irish Language Learning</b> | 992  | 7 | 3.41 | (7,35) | 23.9 | 5.1 | 0.70  |

**Table 14 Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) for all pupil scales**

While the study sample includes 1,020 students, the effective sample size (N) varies slightly by scale. This is because scale scores could only be calculated for pupils who provided valid responses to all items within that scale. As a result, pupils with missing data on one or more items were excluded listwise from that specific scale calculation. The table below summarises the effective Ns for each of the key scales.

| <b>Scale</b>                                 | <b>Total possible (N)</b> | <b>Effective N used</b> |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Attitude to Irish Speakers</b>            | 1020                      | 982                     |
| <b>Attitude to Learning Irish</b>            | 1020                      | 961                     |
| <b>Desire to Learn Irish</b>                 | 1020                      | 981                     |
| <b>Motivational Intensity to Learn Irish</b> | 1020                      | 976                     |
| <b>Parental Encouragement</b>                | 1020                      | 990                     |
| <b>Supporting Irish Language Learning</b>    | 1020                      | 992                     |
| <b>Instrumental Orientation to Irish</b>     | 1020                      | 996                     |

**Table 15 Effective sample sizes (N) for key attitudinal and motivational scales**

When the aggregated mean item scores are compared with earlier Irish research, such as Ó Duibhir (2009) and Harris and Murtagh (1999), pupils in the present study, particularly those in L1-medium schools, display broadly similar or more positive orientations. However, pupils in L2-medium schools often report less favourable means, which lowers the overall averages when both groups are combined. This contrast highlights the importance of including both contexts in the present study, as the L2-medium strand reveals

motivational profiles that are distinct from both the all-Irish immersion pupils studied previously and the wider Canadian research base on which the AMTB was originally built.

## L1 Pupils

| Scale                                 | N pupils | N items | Item mean score (1-5) | Min, max scores | Mean | SD  | Reliability Cronbach's Alpha - This study | Alpha range (Ó Duibhir L1 students) | Alpha range (Canadian students learning French) |
|---------------------------------------|----------|---------|-----------------------|-----------------|------|-----|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Integrativeness Scales</b>         |          |         |                       |                 |      |     |                                           |                                     |                                                 |
| Attitude to Irish speakers            | 396      | 8       | 4.09                  | (8,40)          | 32.7 | 5.5 | 0.87                                      | 0.7                                 | .84-.88                                         |
| Integrative orientation to Irish      | 394      | 4       | 3.93                  | (4,20)          | 15.7 | 3.3 | 0.85                                      | 0.76                                | .78-.85                                         |
| Interest in 2nd/Foreign Languages     | 397      | 7       | 3.94                  | (7,35)          | 27.6 | 5.3 | 0.85                                      | N/A                                 | N/A                                             |
| <b>Motivation Scales</b>              |          |         |                       |                 |      |     |                                           |                                     |                                                 |
| Desire to learn Irish                 | 399      | 7       | 3.63                  | (9,35)          | 25.4 | 5.2 | 0.75                                      | 0.68                                | .77-.87                                         |
| Motivational intensity to learn Irish | 398      | 5       | 3.29                  | (5,25)          | 16.4 | 3.4 | 0.49                                      | 0.37                                | .71-.85                                         |
| Attitude to learning Irish            | 391      | 8       | 3.94                  | (8,40)          | 31.5 | 6.6 | 0.91                                      | 0.8                                 | .91-.95                                         |
| <b>Other Scales</b>                   |          |         |                       |                 |      |     |                                           |                                     |                                                 |
| Instrumental orientation to Irish     | 403      | 3       | 3.34                  | (3,15)          | 10.0 | 1.7 | -0.52                                     | 0.34                                | .51-.56                                         |
| Irish-Lesson Anxiety                  | 401      | 5       | 3.62                  | (5,25)          | 18.1 | 5.2 | 0.87                                      | N/A                                 | N/A                                             |
| Parental encouragement                | 400      | 7       | 3.84                  | (7,35)          | 26.9 | 5.3 | 0.8                                       | 0.76                                | .89-.91                                         |
| <b>Non-AMTB Scales</b>                |          |         |                       |                 |      |     |                                           |                                     |                                                 |
| Irish-ability self-concept            | 406      | 5       | 3.77                  | (9,25)          | 18.9 | 3.0 | 0.75                                      | .65                                 |                                                 |
| Supporting Irish Language Learning    | 402      | 7       | 3.72                  | (13,35)         | 26.1 | 4.3 | 0.62                                      | *New Item                           |                                                 |

**Table 16 Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) for L1 pupils, with comparative Alpha ranges**

## L2 Pupils

| Scale                                 | N pupils | N items | Item mean score (1–5) | Min, max scores | Mean | SD  | Reliability Cronbach's Alpha – This Study | Alpha range(20 Classes Study-L2 Pupils learning Irish) | Alpha range (Canadian students learning French) |
|---------------------------------------|----------|---------|-----------------------|-----------------|------|-----|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Integrativeness Scales</b>         |          |         |                       |                 |      |     |                                           |                                                        |                                                 |
| Attitude to Irish speakers            | 586      | 8       | 3.36                  | (8,40)          | 26.9 | 7.3 | 0.90                                      | 0.79                                                   | .84-.88                                         |
| Integrative orientation to Irish      | 585      | 4       | 3.05                  | (4,20)          | 12.2 | 4.3 | 0.88                                      | 0.73                                                   | .78-.85                                         |
| Interest in 2nd/Foreign Languages     | 585      | 7       | 3.76                  | (7,35)          | 26.3 | 6.2 | 0.87                                      | 0.81                                                   | N/A                                             |
| <b>Motivation Scales</b>              |          |         |                       |                 |      |     |                                           |                                                        |                                                 |
| Desire to learn Irish                 | 582      | 7       | 2.68                  | (7,35)          | 18.7 | 6.3 | 0.80                                      | 0.82                                                   | .77-.87                                         |
| Motivational intensity to learn Irish | 578      | 5       | 2.91                  | (5,25)          | 14.6 | 3.9 | 0.59                                      | 0.67                                                   | .71-.85                                         |
| Attitude to learning Irish            | 570      | 8       | 2.81                  | (8,40)          | 22.5 | 9.5 | 0.95                                      | 0.93                                                   | .91-.95                                         |
| <b>Other Scales</b>                   |          |         |                       |                 |      |     |                                           |                                                        |                                                 |
| Instrumental orientation to Irish     | 593      | 3       | 2.98                  | (3,14)          | 8.9  | 2.0 | -0.18                                     | 0.59                                                   | .51-.56                                         |
| Irish-Lesson Anxiety                  | 588      | 5       | 3.04                  | (5,25)          | 15.2 | 4.9 | 0.83                                      | 0.77                                                   | N/A                                             |
| Parental encouragement                | 590      | 7       | 3.33                  | (7,35)          | 23.3 | 6.6 | 0.86                                      | 0.88                                                   | .89-.91                                         |
| <b>Non-AMTB Scales</b>                |          |         |                       |                 |      |     |                                           |                                                        |                                                 |
| Irish-ability self-concept            | 594      | 5       | 2.94                  | (5,25)          | 14.7 | 4.9 | 0.88                                      | ***Different items                                     |                                                 |
| Supporting Irish Language Learning    | 590      | 7       | 3.20                  | (7,35)          | 22.4 | 5.0 | 0.68                                      | *New items                                             |                                                 |

**Table 17 Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) for L2 pupils, with comparative Alpha ranges**

The reliability trends indicate that most scales performed strongly in capturing attitudes and motivations among post-primary learners. Where weaker results were observed, these may highlight the need to refine or expand certain measures to account for the diversity of pupils' multilingual repertoires and the differences between L1-medium and L2-medium educational settings.



### 5.2.3 Cross-school mean score comparison

Mean scale scores were compared across the ten participating schools to explore variation in motivation and attitudes by school setting, followed by item-level comparisons for selected scales.

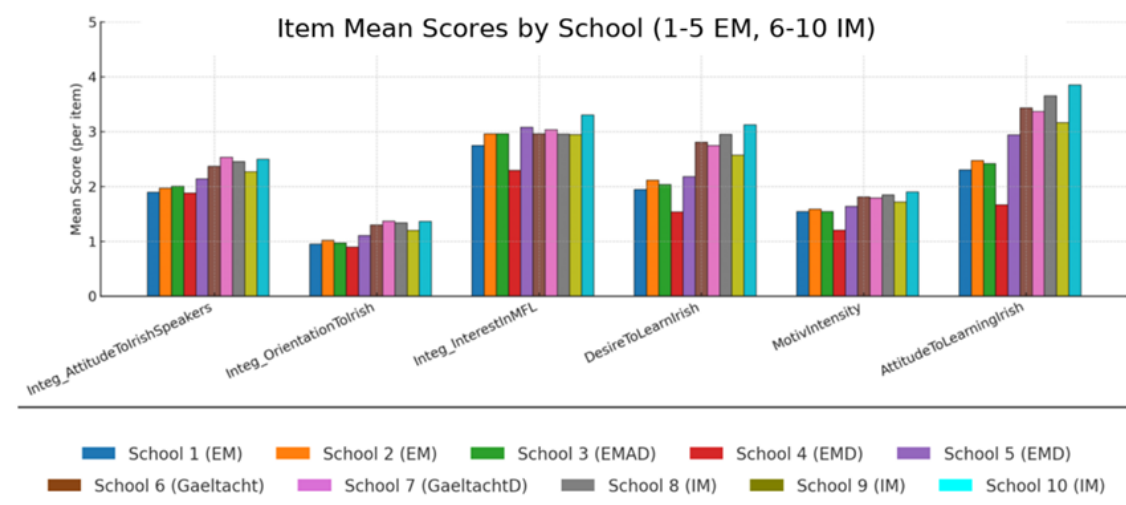


**Figure 2 Item Mean scores by school for key integrative and motivational scales (1–5 EM, 6–10 IM)**

Figure 2 presents the item mean scores for each of the questionnaire scales, broken down by school, with overall mean scores reported in the final column. Since pupils responded on a five-point scale, mean item scores can be interpreted as indicative of a generally negative orientation (scores closer to 1–2), a neutral stance (score around 3), or a positive orientation (scores above 3, and particularly closer to 4–5).

Across the study as a whole, the majority of item mean scores fall above the neutral point, with many clustering in the moderately positive range. For instance, Attitude to Irish Speakers, Interest in Second/Foreign Languages, and Parental Encouragement typically show mean scores well above 3.5, indicating strong endorsement of these constructs among pupils. In contrast, scales such as Motivational Intensity to Learn Irish and Instrumental Orientation to Irish yield more modest means, sometimes falling closer to neutrality, especially in the L2-medium schools.

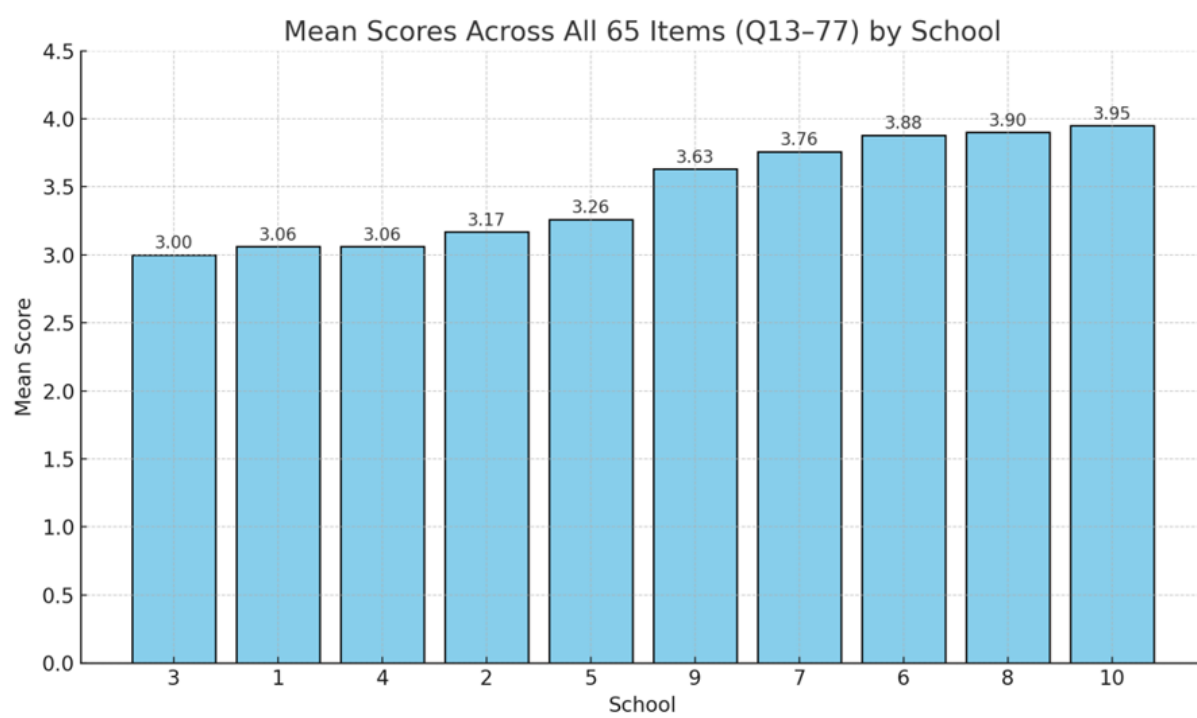


**Figure 3 School-level mean item scores for key AMTB constructs**

### Item Mean Score by School for AMTB Scales

\* Schools are pseudonymised. 1–5 = L1 (Gaeltacht/Irish-medium) and 6–10 = L2 (English-medium).

| School                                | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    | 8    | 9    | 10   | Total |
|---------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| <b>Integrativeness Scales</b>         |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |       |
| Attitude To Irish Speakers            | 4.28 | 4.34 | 3.91 | 4.25 | 4.05 | 3.31 | 3.37 | 3.44 | 3.67 | 3.27 | 3.79  |
| Orientation To Irish                  | 4.09 | 4.11 | 3.62 | 4.05 | 3.89 | 2.76 | 3.06 | 2.91 | 3.31 | 2.86 | 3.47  |
| Interest In MFL                       | 4.24 | 3.9  | 3.8  | 3.84 | 3.8  | 3.03 | 3.8  | 3.8  | 3.96 | 3.54 | 3.77  |
| <b>Motivation Scales</b>              |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |       |
| Desire To Learn Irish                 | 4.02 | 3.53 | 3.32 | 3.84 | 3.61 | 2.03 | 2.71 | 2.62 | 2.8  | 2.51 | 3.1   |
| Motivational Intensity to Learn Irish | 3.42 | 3.22 | 3.1  | 3.36 | 3.25 | 2.23 | 2.85 | 2.78 | 2.94 | 2.78 | 2.99  |
| Attitude To Learning Irish            | 4.33 | 3.79 | 3.58 | 4.15 | 3.86 | 1.92 | 2.78 | 2.72 | 3.31 | 2.6  | 3.3   |

**Table 18 Item mean scores by school for key AMTB attitudinal and motivational scales**

Pupils in the L1-medium schools consistently report higher mean scores across almost all scales. For example, the mean item score for Attitude to Learning Irish is 3.94 among L1 pupils compared to 2.81 among L2 pupils. Similarly, Desire to Learn Irish scores are higher

in L1 contexts ( $M = 3.63$ ) than in L2 contexts ( $M = 2.68$ ). This suggests a sharper differentiation in motivation and affective orientation between the two school types at post-primary level than has sometimes been reported at primary level. Figures 5 and 6 present the results separately for English-medium and Irish-medium schools.

### School Medium Classification

| School Number | Key to Medium Codes                          |
|---------------|----------------------------------------------|
| 1             | EM (English-medium)                          |
| 2             | EM (English-medium)                          |
| 3             | EMAD (English-medium with Aonad, DEIS)       |
| 4             | EMD (English-medium DEIS)                    |
| 5             | EMD (English-medium DEIS)                    |
| 6             | Gaeltacht (Irish-medium in Gaeltacht area)   |
| 7             | GaeltachtD (Irish-medium in Gaeltacht, DEIS) |
| 8             | IM (Irish-medium - outside Gaeltacht)        |
| 9             | IM (Irish-medium - outside Gaeltacht)        |
| 10            | IM (Irish-medium - outside Gaeltacht)        |

**Table 19 School medium classification and contextual codes**

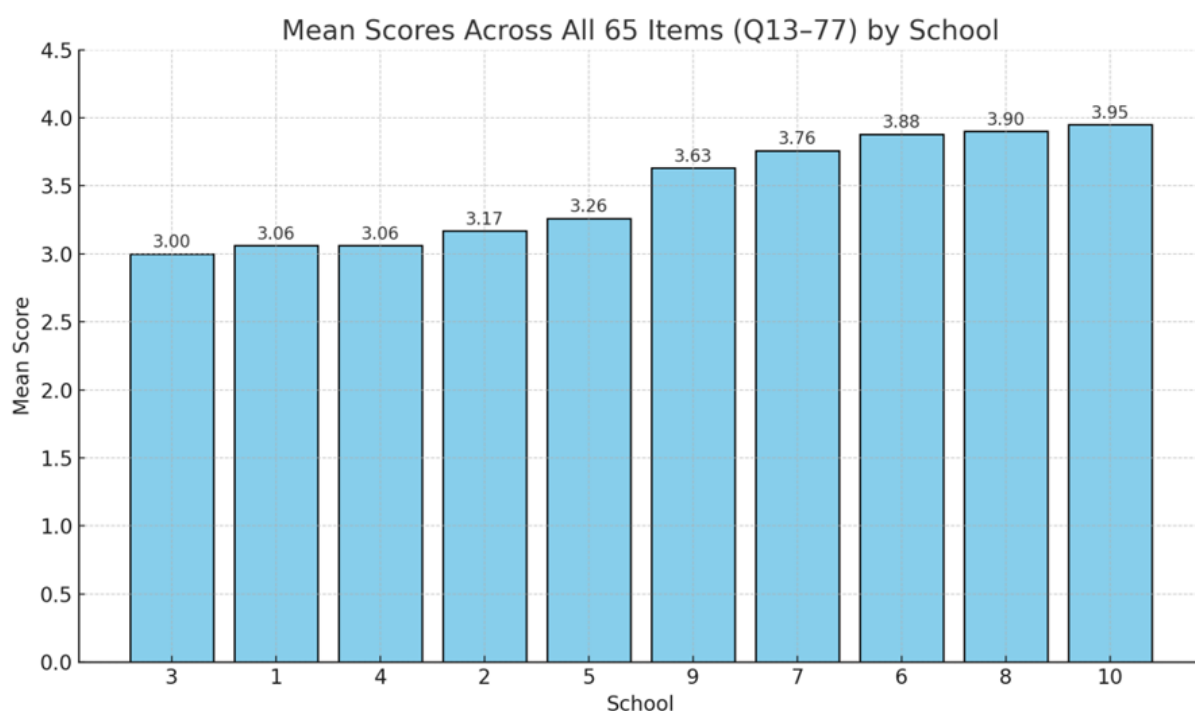


**Figure 4 Comparative mean scores across all 65 AMTB items by school**

Within the English-medium schools, mean scores range from 3.00 to 3.26, representing the lowest values across the full sample. School 3 (EMAD, 3.00) sits at the very bottom of the distribution, suggesting weaker motivational orientations relative to all peers. Schools 1 (EM) and 4 (EMD) both record almost identical mean scores (3.06), placing them just above School 3 but still low in the overall hierarchy. School 2 (EM) performs slightly better (3.17), while School 5 (EMD) emerges as the strongest English-medium school (3.26).

These results highlight several noteworthy points. First, the highest-performing English-medium school is a DEIS school (School 5), challenging assumptions that socioeconomically disadvantaged schools necessarily record the weakest outcomes. Second, the Aonad DEIS context (School 3) produces the very lowest mean score, suggesting that the presence of a small Irish-medium stream within a wider English-medium DEIS context may not automatically enhance motivation towards Irish.

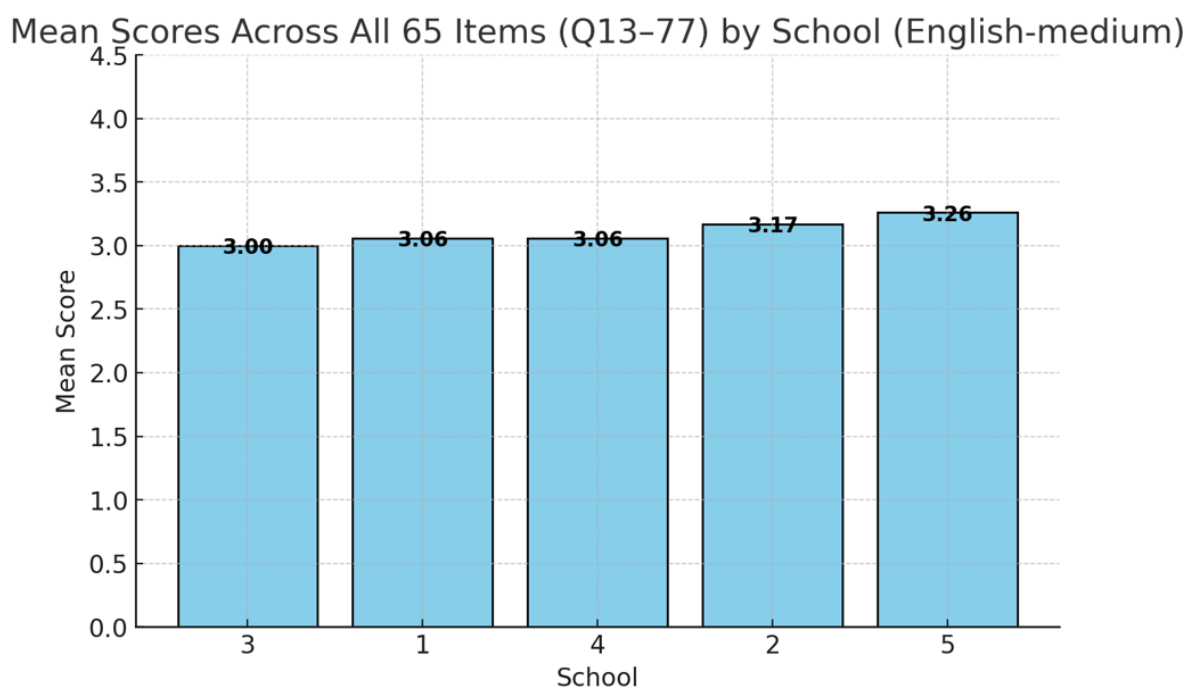


**Figure 5 Mean scores across all items by school - English-medium cohort**

The Irish-medium schools present a markedly stronger profile, with mean scores spanning 3.63 to 3.95. School 9 (IM, 3.63) is the lowest within this group, though it still exceeds the highest-performing English-medium school. School 7 (GaeltachtD) follows at 3.76, suggesting that a Gaeltacht setting with DEIS status does not necessarily guarantee the strongest outcomes. Schools 6 (Gaeltacht) and 8 (IM) cluster in the upper range (3.88 and 3.90), while School 10 (IM) stands out at the very top of the distribution (3.95), recording the highest mean score of the entire sample.

This ordering challenges the widespread assumption that Gaeltacht schools automatically foster stronger motivation and more positive attitudes to Irish than Irish-medium schools outside the Gaeltacht. In this dataset, the three Irish-medium schools located outside Gaeltacht areas (Schools 8, 9, and 10) collectively perform as well as, or better than, their Gaeltacht counterparts, with one of them (School 10) outperforming every other school.

Although the Gaeltacht schools serve overwhelmingly Irish-born populations, the proportion of pupils coming from Irish-speaking homes is very low. This pattern contrasts with the stronger motivational outcomes observed in the non-Gaeltacht Irish-medium schools (8–10), where higher overall positivity towards Irish was recorded despite pupils being more likely to come from English-only homes. In other words, the relative

underperformance of Gaeltacht schools in this dataset cannot be attributed to migration or birthplace differences, but rather reflects the reality that even in Gaeltacht settings, home language use is largely English-dominant.

Mean Scores Across All 65 Items (Q13-77) by School (Irish-medium)

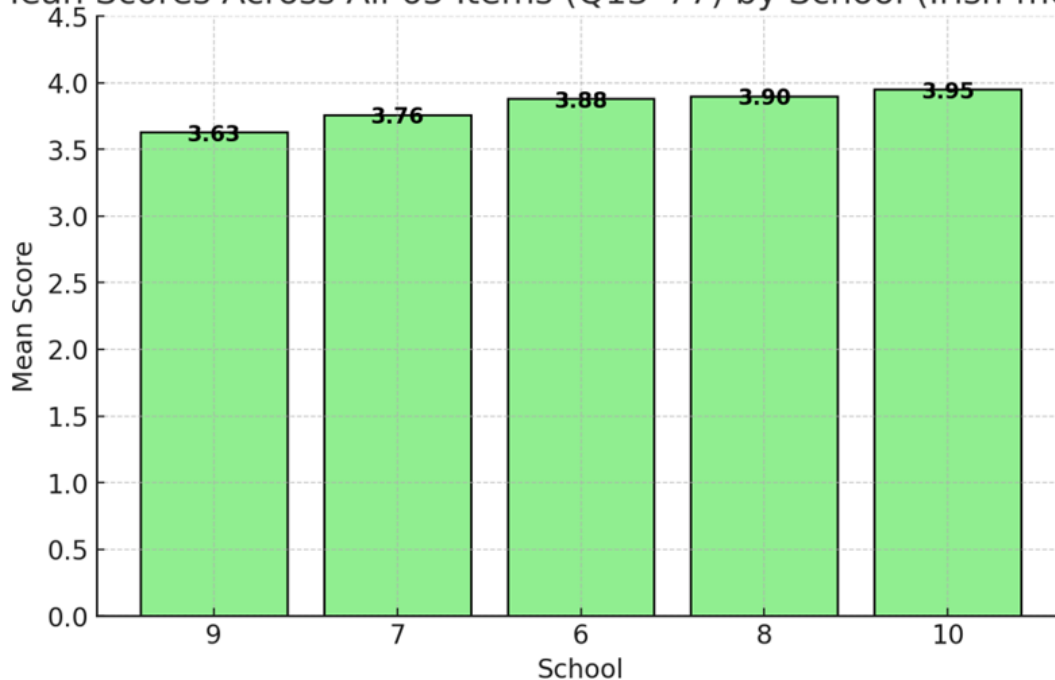


**Figure 6 Mean scores across all items by school - Irish-medium cohort**

Two clear findings emerge. First, all Irish-medium schools outperform all English-medium schools, underlining the strong association between immersion contexts and pupils' motivational orientations towards Irish. Second, variation is evident within both contexts. Among English-medium schools, a DEIS school (School 5) outperforms its non-DEIS peers, while among Irish-medium schools, an IM school outside the Gaeltacht (School 10) achieves the highest overall score.

These patterns demonstrate that while medium of instruction (Irish-medium vs. English-medium) is a powerful predictor of pupil attitudes, school-level factors and local contexts also exert considerable influence. The results caution against assuming uniform outcomes based on Gaeltacht location or DEIS designation alone.

#### 5.2.4 Statistical patterns underlying school differences

To examine whether observed differences were statistically significant, a Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA was conducted across all schools on the six core scales, with a Bonferroni-adjusted alpha of  $p < .0083$  (Field, 2000) to reduce Type I error risk.

The results indicate that significance between-school differences was evident on several scales. Among the L1-medium schools, statistically significant variation was found for Attitude to Irish Speakers, Orientation to Irish, Desire to Learn Irish, and Attitude to Learning Irish. Among the L2-medium schools, the scales Interest in MFL, Desire to Learn Irish, and Attitude to Learning Irish showed significant variation. In contrast, differences on scales such as Motivational Intensity and, within the L1 group, Interest in MFL, were not statistically significant.

Kruskal-Wallis Test Results for L1 and L2 Schools

| Scale                   | Chi-Square | Asymptotic Significance (p) | Statistically Significant |
|-------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| AttitudeToIrishSpeakers | 11.08      | 0.0039                      | Yes                       |
| OrientationToIrish      | 17.56      | 0.0002                      | Yes                       |
| InterestInMFL           | 8.64       | 0.0133                      | No                        |
| DesireToLearnIrish      | 37.75      | 0.0000                      | Yes                       |
| Motivational Intensity  | 7.93       | 0.0190                      | No                        |
| AttitudeToLearningIrish | 34.21      | 0.0000                      | Yes                       |

**Table 20** Kruskal-Wallis tests of differences in mean scores across L1 schools

| Scale                   | Chi-Square | Asymptotic Significance (p) | Statistically Significant |
|-------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| AttitudeToIrishSpeakers | 6.46       | 0.0912                      | No                        |
| OrientationToIrish      | 10.63      | 0.0139                      | No                        |
| InterestInMFL           | 17.66      | 0.0005                      | Yes                       |
| DesireToLearnIrish      | 16.20      | 0.0010                      | Yes                       |
| Motivational Intensity  | 7.79       | 0.0505                      | No                        |
| AttitudeToLearningIrish | 25.95      | 0.0000                      | Yes                       |

**Table 21** Kruskal-Wallis tests of differences in mean scores across L2 schools

Where significant results emerged, post-hoc analysis (Dunn's test with Bonferroni adjustment) revealed that many of the between-school contrasts were small when schools were grouped homogeneously. However, the gap between the highest-ranked and lowest-ranked schools within each group often represented a medium-to-large effect. For instance, Attitude to Learning Irish showed a substantial divergence between the strongest-performing L1-medium school and the weakest within that group, and an even greater gap was evident across the L2-medium schools. These findings underline the importance of local school context in shaping pupils' motivational orientations.

Post-hoc Contrasts: Highest vs Lowest Scoring Schools (with Effect Sizes)

| Scale                                | Lowest School (Mean) | Highest School (Mean) | Significant (K-W) | Effect Size (r <sub>rb</sub> ) |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Integ_AttitudeToIrishSpeakers</b> | (27.23)              | (29.97)               | Yes               | 0.226                          |
| <b>Integ_OrientationToIrish</b>      | (14.41)              | (16.34)               | Yes               | 0.273                          |
| <b>Integ_InterestInMFL</b>           | (26.49)              | (29.71)               | No                | 0.263                          |
| <b>DesireToLearnIrish</b>            | (23.14)              | (28.11)               | Yes               | 0.487                          |
| <b>MotivIntensity</b>                | (15.42)              | (17.11)               | No                | 0.201                          |
| <b>AttitudeToLearningIrish</b>       | (28.48)              | (34.66)               | Yes               | 0.454                          |

**Table 22 Post-hoc contrasts between highest and lowest scoring L1 schools on attitudinal and motivational scales**

| Scale                                | Lowest School (Mean) | Highest School (Mean) | Significant (K-W) | Effect Size (r <sub>rb</sub> ) |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Integ_AttitudeToIrishSpeakers</b> | (22.57)              | (25.67)               | No                | 0.199                          |
| <b>Integ_OrientationToIrish</b>      | (10.76)              | (13.22)               | No                | 0.277                          |
| <b>Integ_InterestInMFL</b>           | (20.65)              | (27.71)               | No                | 0.354                          |
| <b>DesireToLearnIrish</b>            | (13.84)              | (19.61)               | Yes               | 0.362                          |
| <b>MotivIntensity</b>                | (10.84)              | (14.71)               | No                | 0.315                          |
| <b>AttitudeToLearningIrish</b>       | (14.97)              | (26.45)               | Yes               | 0.530                          |

**Table 23 Post-hoc contrasts between highest and lowest scoring L2 schools on attitudinal and motivational scales**



The post-hoc contrasts presented in Tables X and Y show that, where statistically significant differences were found, the contrasts between the highest- and lowest-scoring schools were also meaningful in effect size terms. Among the L1-medium schools, effect sizes ( $r_{rb}$ ) range from small (.20) to medium–large (.45–.49), with the strongest contrasts emerging for Desire to Learn Irish and Attitude to Learning Irish. This suggests that while L1 schools generally perform positively, some institutions foster notably higher levels of motivational intensity and positive affect than others.

For the L2-medium schools, the picture is more varied. Here, effect sizes range from small (.20) to large (.53), with the most substantial gap again appearing for Attitude to Learning Irish. This indicates that within the L2 group, some schools are considerably more successful than others at fostering positive orientations towards Irish. These findings reinforce the point that although the L1/L2 divide is a major driver of differences, within-group variation also matters, and the gap between the best- and worst-performing schools is often of medium to large practical significance.

### 5.3 Results of individual items and scales

In addition to the Kruskal-Wallis and post-hoc analyses conducted at the school level, a series of independent samples T-Tests were employed to compare mean scores across broader educational contexts. These contrasts provide a complementary perspective, highlighting systematic differences between groups of schools and pupil backgrounds rather than individual institutions. Specifically, tests were carried out to compare pupils in English-medium versus Irish-medium secondary schools, those from English-only homes attending Irish-medium versus English-medium secondary schools, and pupils from multilingual homes across the two secondary contexts. Further contrasts considered the role of primary school experience, comparing pupils from English- versus Irish-medium primary schools, as well as transition pathways (e.g., from Irish-medium primary to English-medium secondary, or from English-medium primary into Irish-medium secondary).

These analyses enable a deeper exploration of the contextual and linguistic factors shaping attitudes and motivation, providing a bridge between the school-level variation described above and the more fine-grained discussion of individual scales that follows.

### 5.3.1 Multilingual households and attitudes to Irish

A striking finding emerged when comparing pupils from English-only homes with those from multilingual households (Figure 7). While multilingual pupils expressed significantly higher interest in foreign languages ( $t(266) = -3.27$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $d = -0.29$ , 95% CI  $[-0.46, -0.12]$ ), their scores on Irish-related scales were consistently lower than those of their English-only peers.

Pupils from English-only homes reported significantly more positive attitudes to Irish speakers ( $t(245) = 2.53$ ,  $p = .012$ ,  $d = 0.24$ , 95% CI  $[0.05, 0.42]$ ), stronger orientation to Irish ( $t(261) = 2.23$ ,  $p = .027$ ,  $d = 0.20$ , 95% CI  $[0.03, 0.42]$ ), and greater desire to learn Irish ( $t(259) = 2.81$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $d = 0.25$ , 95% CI  $[0.08, 0.43]$ ). In contrast, differences in instrumental orientation to Irish were negligible and non-significant ( $t(268) = -0.02$ ,  $p = .987$ ,  $d \approx 0.00$ ).

These results suggest that the key factor is not where pupils were born, but whether they grow up in a multilingual environment. Rather than transferring their positive orientations towards language learning to Irish, multilingual pupils appear to differentiate Irish from other world languages. This finding challenges the assumption that multilingualism necessarily aligns with greater openness to Irish, highlighting instead a more complex relationship: multilingual pupils are “language-positive” but not automatically “Irish-positive.”

This nuance has important implications for policy and pedagogy. To engage multilingual learners, Irish may need to be positioned more clearly as part of a broader multilingual repertoire, emphasising its relevance as a living language in multilingual Ireland, rather than solely as a marker of cultural identity or heritage.

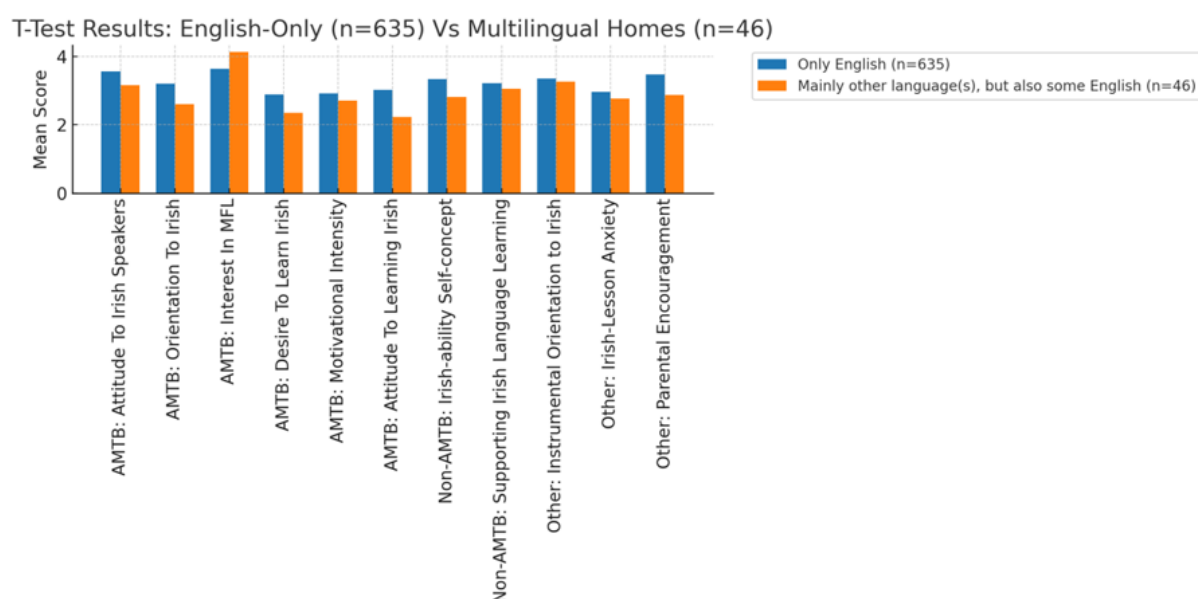


**Figure 7 Comparison of mean scores by home language background (English-only vs multilingual homes, n = 46)**

This pattern was not limited to a small subsample. When expanded to include 175 multilingual pupils, the same result held: multilingual pupils were significantly more interested in learning foreign languages ( $t(266) = -3.27, p = .001, d = -0.29, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.46, -0.12]$ ), but less positive towards Irish across multiple attitudinal scales. Compared with their English-only peers, multilingual pupils reported weaker attitudes to Irish speakers ( $t(245) = 2.53, p = .012, d = 0.24, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.05, 0.42]$ ), weaker orientation to Irish identity and culture ( $t(261) = 2.23, p = .027, d = 0.20, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.03, 0.42]$ ), and lower desire to learn Irish ( $t(259) = 2.81, p = .005, d = 0.25, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.08, 0.43]$ ).

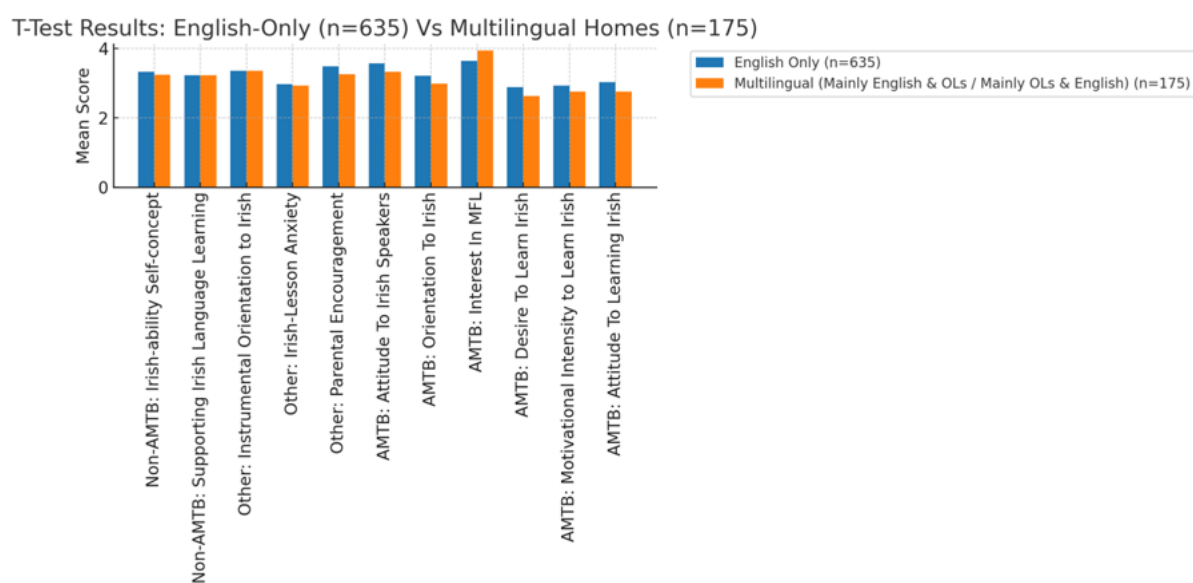


**Figure 8 Comparison of mean scores by home language background (English-only vs multilingual homes, n = 175)**

### 5.3.2 Student attitudes to Irish in a multilingual classroom

Independent Samples T-Test Results

| Scale                  | T     | Df  | P     | Cohen's d | 95% CI for d (Lower-Upper) |
|------------------------|-------|-----|-------|-----------|----------------------------|
| Self-concept           | -2.73 | 298 | < .01 | -0.42     | -0.70 - -0.14              |
| Desire to learn Irish  | -2.11 | 298 | < .05 | -0.38     | -0.66 - -0.10              |
| Attitudes to learning  | -2.02 | 298 | < .05 | -0.36     | -0.64 - -0.08              |
| Lesson anxiety         | 2.01  | 298 | < .05 | +0.33     | +0.05 - +0.61              |
| Parental encouragement | -1.98 | 298 | < .05 | -0.31     | -0.59 - -0.03              |

**Table 24 T-Test results for 1st vs 2nd year pupils on attitudinal and motivational scales**

A striking developmental pattern emerged when comparing the responses of 1st and 2nd Year pupils. Across several key scales, 1st Year pupils reported more positive orientations towards Irish, while 2nd Year pupils consistently displayed lower self-concept, weaker motivation, and heightened anxiety.

Specifically, 1st Years rated themselves significantly higher in Irish-ability self-concept ( $t(298) = -2.73, p < .01, d = -0.42$ ), expressed greater desire to learn Irish ( $t(298) = -2.11, p < .05, d = -0.38$ ), and reported more positive attitudes to learning Irish ( $t(298) = -2.02, p < .05, d = -0.36$ ). In contrast, 2nd Years indicated greater levels of Irish-lesson anxiety ( $t(298) = 2.01, p < .05, d = +0.33$ ), alongside slightly weaker perceptions of parental encouragement ( $t(298) = -1.98, p < .05, d = -0.31$ ).

This pattern suggests that the transition from 1st to 2nd Year marks a critical turning point in attitudes towards Irish. Rather than consolidating early confidence, pupils' self-belief and motivation appear to dip after their first year in post-primary education, accompanied by a rise in anxiety. Such a finding highlights the fragility of language attitudes at a key stage of adolescence, when academic demands and peer dynamics begin to intensify.

Importantly, this trend was not confined to a small subgroup but was evident across the full cohort tested. With over 300 pupils included in this comparison, the results are both statistically reliable and practically meaningful. The medium-sized effect sizes observed ( $|d| \approx 0.3\text{--}0.4$ ) indicate that the differences are not trivial but represent substantive shifts in how Irish is experienced in the classroom between 1st and 2nd Year.

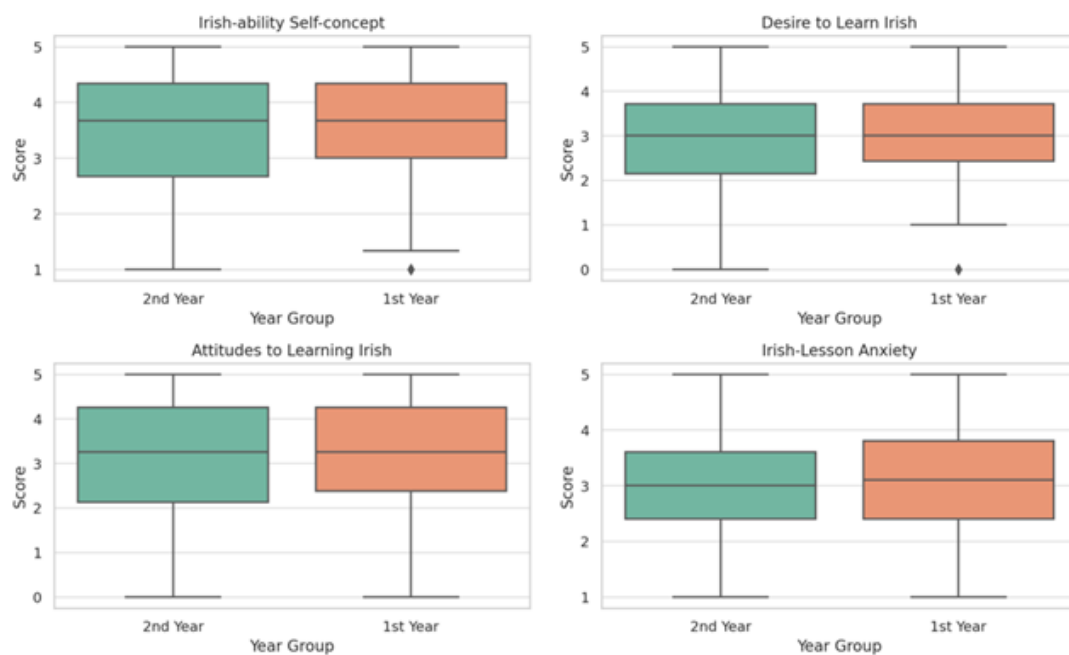


**Figure 9 Comparative boxplots of 1st and 2nd year pupils' attitudes, motivation, and anxiety towards Irish**

This nuance has clear implications for pedagogy. If attitudes and confidence begin to erode within the first two years of post-primary schooling, interventions to sustain motivation and reduce anxiety are essential. Curricular adjustments, greater scaffolding of success in Irish, and strategies to build resilience at the transition stage could play a key role in preventing the early decline of positive orientations.

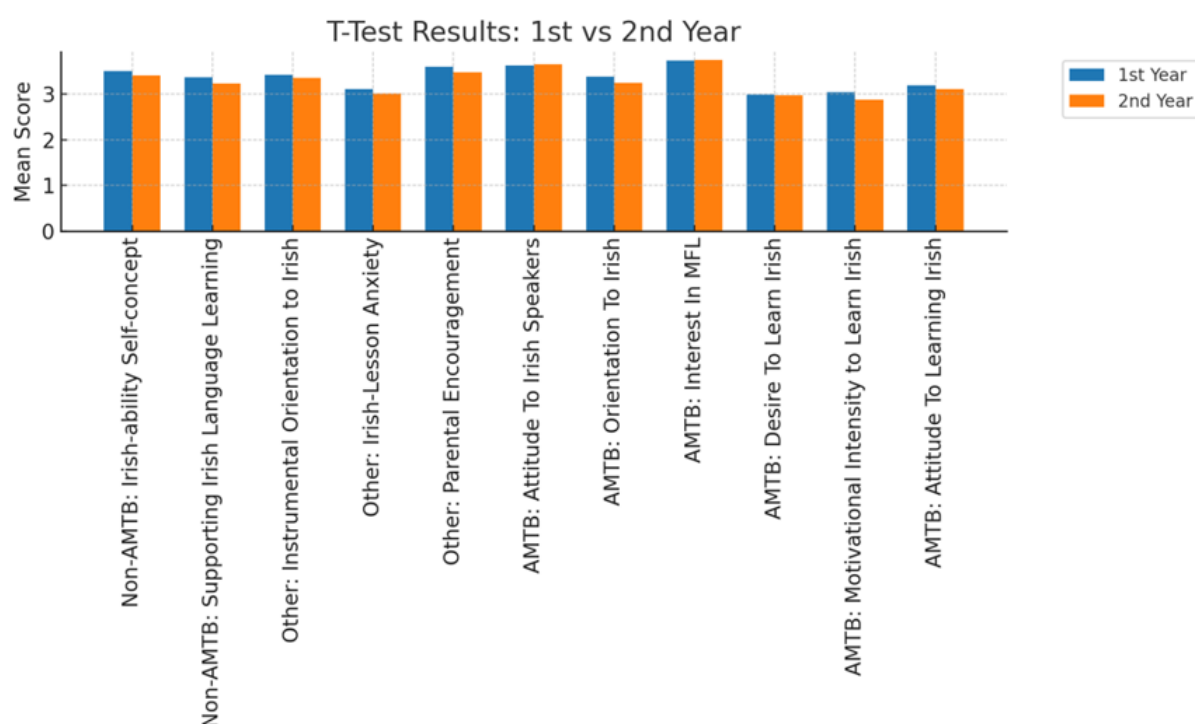


**Figure 10 1st vs 2nd year pupils: mean scores across AMTB and non-AMTB scales**

### 5.3.3 Student motivations for learning Irish

#### Independent Samples T-Test Results

| Comparison                      | Scale                      | T     | Df  | P      | Cohen's d (95% CI)    |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|-------|-----|--------|-----------------------|
| <b>Secondary: Eng vs IrM</b>    | Desire to learn Irish      | -6.82 | 298 | < .001 | -0.98 (-1.25 – -0.71) |
| <b>Secondary: Eng vs IrM</b>    | Positive attitudes         | -5.61 | 298 | < .001 | -0.74 (-1.01 – -0.47) |
| <b>Secondary: Eng vs IrM</b>    | Irish-lesson anxiety       | -5.89 | 298 | < .001 | -0.82 (-1.09 – -0.55) |
| <b>Home: EnH-IrS vs EnH-EnS</b> | Desire to learn Irish      | -5.72 | 298 | < .001 | -0.82 (-1.09 – -0.55) |
| <b>Home: EnH-IrS vs EnH-EnS</b> | Irish-ability self-concept | -6.64 | 298 | < .001 | -0.95 (-1.22 – -0.68) |
| <b>Home: EnH-IrS vs EnH-EnS</b> | Parental encouragement     | -4.04 | 298 | < .001 | -0.58 (-0.85 – -0.31) |

|                                       |                       |       |     |        |                       |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------|-----|--------|-----------------------|
| <b>Primary: IrP vs EnP</b>            | Desire to learn Irish | -5.58 | 298 | < .001 | -0.80 (-1.07 – -0.53) |
| <b>Primary: IrP vs EnP</b>            | Positive attitudes    | -5.02 | 298 | < .001 | -0.72 (-0.99 – -0.45) |
| <b>Primary: IrP vs EnP</b>            | Lesson anxiety        | 3.21  | 298 | < .01  | +0.65 (+0.38 – +0.92) |
| <b>Transition: IrP–EnS vs EnP–EnS</b> | Motivation (overall)  | 5.77  | 298 | < .001 | +0.81 (+0.54 – +1.08) |
| <b>Transition: IrP–EnS vs EnP–EnS</b> | Positive orientations | 5.28  | 298 | < .001 | +0.74 (+0.47 – +1.01) |

**Table 25 Independent samples T-Test results comparing student motivations for learning Irish across school, home, and transition contexts**

The most motivational differences in the dataset emerged between pupils in English-medium and Irish-medium secondary schools (Table 21). On every motivation-related scale, Irish-medium pupils displayed dramatically stronger orientations towards learning Irish. Their desire to learn Irish was almost a full scale-point higher ( $t(298) = -6.82$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.98$ ), accompanied by more positive attitudes ( $t(298) = -5.61$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.74$ ) and reduced anxiety in Irish lessons ( $t(298) = -5.89$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.82$ ). This represents the single strongest contrast in the study, with very large effect sizes ( $|d| > 0.8$ ) consistently favouring Irish-medium pupils.

Importantly, these motivational benefits extended even to pupils from English-only homes when educated in Irish-medium contexts. Pupils from English-only homes in Irish-medium schools reported much stronger desire to learn Irish ( $t(298) = -5.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.82$ ), higher self-belief in their Irish ability ( $t(298) = -6.64$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.95$ ), and greater perceived parental encouragement ( $t(298) = -4.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.58$ ) compared to their peers in English-medium schools. This demonstrates that immersion schooling can provide a motivational uplift, regardless of home language background.

The role of primary school background was also significant. Pupils who attended Irish-medium primaries retained their motivational advantage into secondary education. Compared with peers from English-medium primaries, they reported higher desire to learn



Irish ( $t(298) = -5.58, p < .001, d = -0.80$ ), more positive attitudes ( $t(298) = -5.02, p < .001, d = -0.72$ ), and less lesson-related anxiety ( $t(298) = 3.21, p < .01, d = +0.65$ ). Notably, this effect persisted even when pupils transitioned into English-medium secondaries: those from Irish-medium primaries (IrP–EnS) maintained higher motivation overall ( $t(298) = 5.77, p < .001, d = +0.81$ ) and more positive orientations ( $t(298) = 5.28, p < .001, d = +0.74$ ) than their peers with English-medium primaries (EnP–EnS).

These findings highlight that schooling context exerts a stronger influence on motivation than either gender or birthplace. While pupils' identities and backgrounds shape their orientations to Irish, it is the language of schooling and continuity of immersion that consistently generate the most powerful motivational outcomes. As shown in Figure 2, the bars representing Irish-medium pathways are consistently taller across every motivational measure; desire, attitudes, self-belief, and parental encouragement, while English-medium pupils show comparatively weaker orientations. Even when pupils transition into English-medium secondaries, those with Irish-medium primary backgrounds retain a visible motivational advantage.



**Figure 11 Motivational differences between English-medium and Irish-medium pupils**

#### 5.3.4 Student experiences of learning Irish

##### Independent Samples T-Test Results: Experiences of Learning Irish

| Comparison / Context                   | Scale                | T      | Df  | P      | Cohen's d (95% CI)    |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------|--------|-----|--------|-----------------------|
| <b>Gender (F vs M)</b>                 | Lesson anxiety       | -2.75  | 945 | < .01  | -0.18 (-0.27 – -0.05) |
| <b>School type (Eng vs IrM)</b>        | Lesson anxiety       | -12.94 | 919 | < .001 | -0.82 (-0.77 – -0.57) |
| <b>Primary (Eng vs Gaelscoil)</b>      | Lesson anxiety       | -6.73  | 927 | < .001 | -0.44 (-0.48 – -0.27) |
| <b>Home (Eng-only vs Multilingual)</b> | Lesson anxiety       | 0.53   | 266 | .59    | +0.05 (-0.11 – +0.18) |
| <b>School type (Eng vs IrM)</b>        | Perceived difficulty | -21.76 | 971 | < .001 | -1.28 (-1.24 – -1.03) |

**Table 26 Independent samples T-Test results comparing students' experiences of learning Irish across gender, school type, and linguistic background**

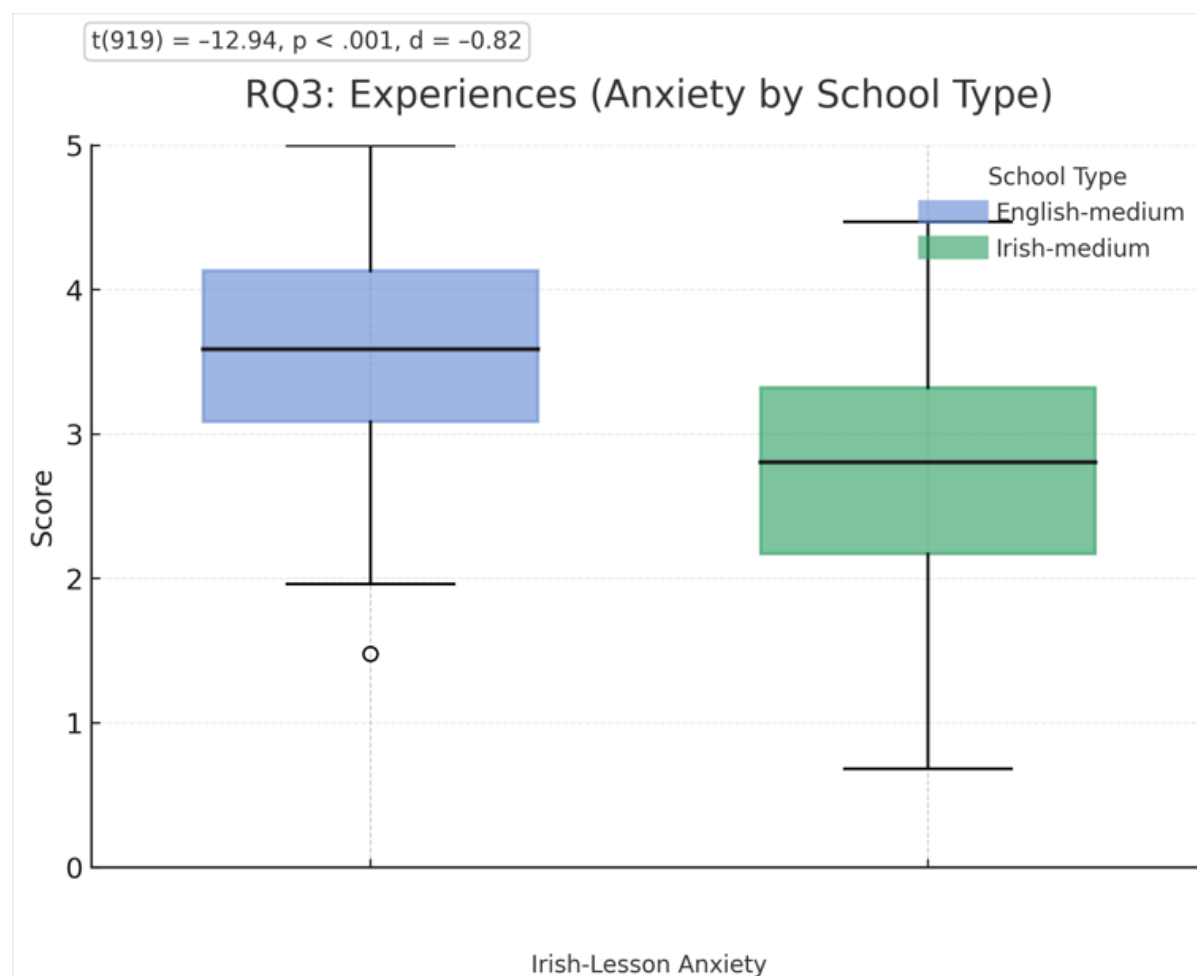


**Figure 12 Comparative boxplot of Irish-lesson anxiety by school type (English-medium vs Irish-medium)**

Pupils' reported experiences of learning Irish revealed clear differences across gender, school type, and educational background, particularly in relation to lesson anxiety and perceptions of difficulty.

Irish-lesson anxiety was found to be significantly higher among males compared to females ( $t(945) = -2.75, p < .01, d = -0.18$ ). The largest contrast, however, was observed between pupils in English-medium and Irish-medium secondary schools: English-medium pupils reported much greater levels of anxiety ( $t(919) = -12.94, p < .001, d = -0.82$ ). A similar trend was evident when comparing pupils by primary school background, with those who had attended English-medium primaries reporting more anxiety than their Gaelscoil counterparts ( $t(927) = -6.73, p < .001, d = -0.44$ ). In contrast, comparisons by home

language background revealed no significant differences in anxiety between English-only and multilingual pupils ( $t(266) = 0.53$ ,  $p = .59$ ,  $d = +0.05$ ).

Perceptions of difficulty and accuracy also diverged strongly by school type. Pupils in English-medium secondary schools rated Irish as much more difficult and reported substantially lower self-concept and accuracy than their Irish-medium peers, with very large effect sizes ( $t(971) = -21.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -1.28$ ).

These results indicate that negative affective experiences cluster most strongly in English-medium contexts, where anxiety is elevated and Irish is perceived as more difficult. By contrast, immersion settings consistently reduce anxiety and bolster pupils' confidence in their Irish ability.

### 5.3.5 Role of identity

Independent Samples T-Test Results: Role of Identity

| Comparison / Context                | Scale / Orientation               | T    | Df  | P      | Cohen's d | 95% CI (Lower–Upper) | CI |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------|-----|--------|-----------|----------------------|----|
| Country of birth: Ireland vs Abroad | Attitude To Irish Speakers        | 2.55 | 105 | 0.012  | 0.281     | 0.064 – 0.513        | –  |
| Country of birth: Ireland vs Abroad | Attitude To Learning Irish        | 3.54 | 104 | < .001 | 0.393     | 0.225 – 0.799        | –  |
| Country of birth: Ireland vs Abroad | Desire To Learn Irish             | 4.21 | 107 | < .001 | 0.440     | 0.248 – 0.690        | –  |
| Country of birth: Ireland vs Abroad | Instrumental Orientation to Irish | 1.08 | 101 | 0.283  | 0.130     | -0.078 – 0.265       | –  |

|                                            |                                   |       |     |        |        |                 |     |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------|-----|--------|--------|-----------------|-----|
| <b>Country of birth: Ireland vs Abroad</b> | Orientation To Irish              | 2.70  | 103 | 0.008  | 0.307  | 0.096<br>0.628  | –   |
| <b>English-only vs Multilingual homes</b>  | Attitude To Irish Speakers        | 2.53  | 245 | 0.012  | 0.238  | 0.052<br>0.419  | –   |
| <b>English-only vs Multilingual homes</b>  | Desire To Learn Irish             | 2.81  | 259 | 0.005  | 0.253  | 0.076<br>0.433  | –   |
| <b>English-only vs Multilingual homes</b>  | Instrumental Orientation to Irish | -0.02 | 268 | 0.987  | -0.001 | -0.124<br>0.122 | –   |
| <b>English-only vs Multilingual homes</b>  | Interest In MFL                   | -3.27 | 266 | 0.001  | -0.288 | -0.461<br>0.115 | – – |
| <b>English-only vs Multilingual homes</b>  | Orientation To Irish              | 2.23  | 261 | 0.027  | 0.199  | 0.026<br>0.423  | –   |
| <b>Gender (F vs M)</b>                     | Attitude To Irish Speakers        | 4.31  | 935 | < .001 | 0.277  | 0.152<br>0.406  | –   |
| <b>Gender (F vs M)</b>                     | Instrumental Orientation to Irish | -1.26 | 946 | 0.209  | -0.081 | -0.148<br>0.032 | –   |
| <b>Gender (F vs M)</b>                     | Orientation To Irish              | 5.40  | 927 | < .001 | 0.347  | 0.255<br>0.547  | –   |
| <b>Primary Eng vs Irish</b>                | Attitude To Irish Speakers        | -7.24 | 921 | < .001 | -0.467 | -0.596<br>0.342 | – – |
| <b>Primary Eng vs Irish</b>                | Instrumental Orientation to Irish | -3.99 | 912 | < .001 | -0.259 | -0.273<br>0.094 | – – |
| <b>Primary Eng vs Irish</b>                | Orientation To Irish              | -7.08 | 927 | < .001 | -0.455 | -0.669<br>0.379 | – – |

|                                                |                                            |        |     |        |        |                     |   |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------|-----|--------|--------|---------------------|---|
| <b>Secondary<br/>Eng<br/>Irish-<br/>medium</b> | Attitude To<br>vs Irish<br>Speakers        | -11.87 | 969 | < .001 | -0.739 | -0.808 – -<br>0.579 | - |
| <b>Secondary<br/>Eng<br/>Irish-<br/>medium</b> | Instrumental<br>vs Orientation<br>to Irish | -7.73  | 913 | < .001 | -0.492 | -0.428 – -<br>0.255 | - |
| <b>Secondary<br/>Eng<br/>Irish-<br/>medium</b> | Orientation<br>vs To Irish                 | -12.33 | 961 | < .001 | -0.770 | -0.970 – -<br>0.704 | - |

**Table 27 Independent samples T-Test results comparing the role of identity across birthplace, home language, gender, and schooling context**

Identity-related orientations towards Irish showed clear, context-dependent patterns. Pupils from multilingual homes demonstrated a stronger interest in other languages (MFL) than those from English-only homes ( $t(266) = -3.27$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $d = -0.29$ ), but English-only home pupils were more aligned with Irish identity itself. They reported more positive attitudes to Irish speakers ( $t(245) = 2.53$ ,  $p = .012$ ,  $d = 0.24$ ), stronger orientation to Irish ( $t(261) = 2.23$ ,  $p = .027$ ,  $d = 0.20$ ), and greater desire to learn Irish ( $t(259) = 2.81$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $d = 0.25$ ). (Differences in instrumental orientation were negligible:  $t(268) = -0.02$ ,  $p = .987$ ,  $d \approx 0.00$ .)

Schooling context strongly predicted integrative outcomes. Pupils in Irish-medium secondary schools scored substantially higher than those in English-medium schools on orientation to Irish ( $t(961) = -12.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.77$ ) and attitudes to Irish speakers ( $t(969) = -11.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.74$ ). Relatedly, instrumental orientation also favored Irish-medium pupils ( $t(913) = -7.73$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.49$ ). Similar patterns appeared by primary school background: pupils from Irish-medium primaries scored higher on orientation to Irish ( $t(927) = -7.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.46$ ) and attitudes to Irish speakers ( $t(921) = -7.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.47$ ), with a smaller advantage on instrumental orientation ( $t(912) = -3.99$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.26$ ).

Gender differences were also evident. Females reported stronger orientation to Irish than males ( $t(927) = 5.40, p < .001, d = 0.35$ ) and more positive attitudes to Irish speakers ( $t(935) = 4.31, p < .001, d = 0.28$ ). (Gender differences in instrumental orientation were non-significant,  $t(946) = -1.26, p = .209, d = -0.08$ ).

Finally, the Time in Ireland / Country of Birth dimension suggested a residence-related gradient. Pupils born in Ireland scored higher than those born abroad on attitudes to Irish speakers ( $t(105) = 2.55, p = .012, d = 0.28$ ), orientation to Irish ( $t(103) = 2.70, p = .008, d = 0.31$ ), desire to learn Irish ( $t(107) = 4.21, p < .001, d = 0.44$ ), and attitudes to learning Irish ( $t(104) = 3.54, p < .001, d = 0.39$ ). Differences in instrumental orientation were not significant ( $t(101) = 1.08, p = .283, d = 0.13$ ).

Identity alignment with Irish is context-dependent: multilingual pupils are enthusiastic about languages generally but less aligned with Irish identity; immersion pathways (at primary and secondary) consistently strengthen integrative orientations; females show a modest advantage in pro-Irish identity attitudes; and longer residence (proxied by being born in Ireland) is associated with stronger integrative alignment. These patterns support the view that identity outcomes reflect the interplay of home language, schooling medium, gender, and time in Ireland. If desired, this section can be extended with a focused analysis of residence duration (e.g., <5 years vs 10+ years) as a dedicated future study.

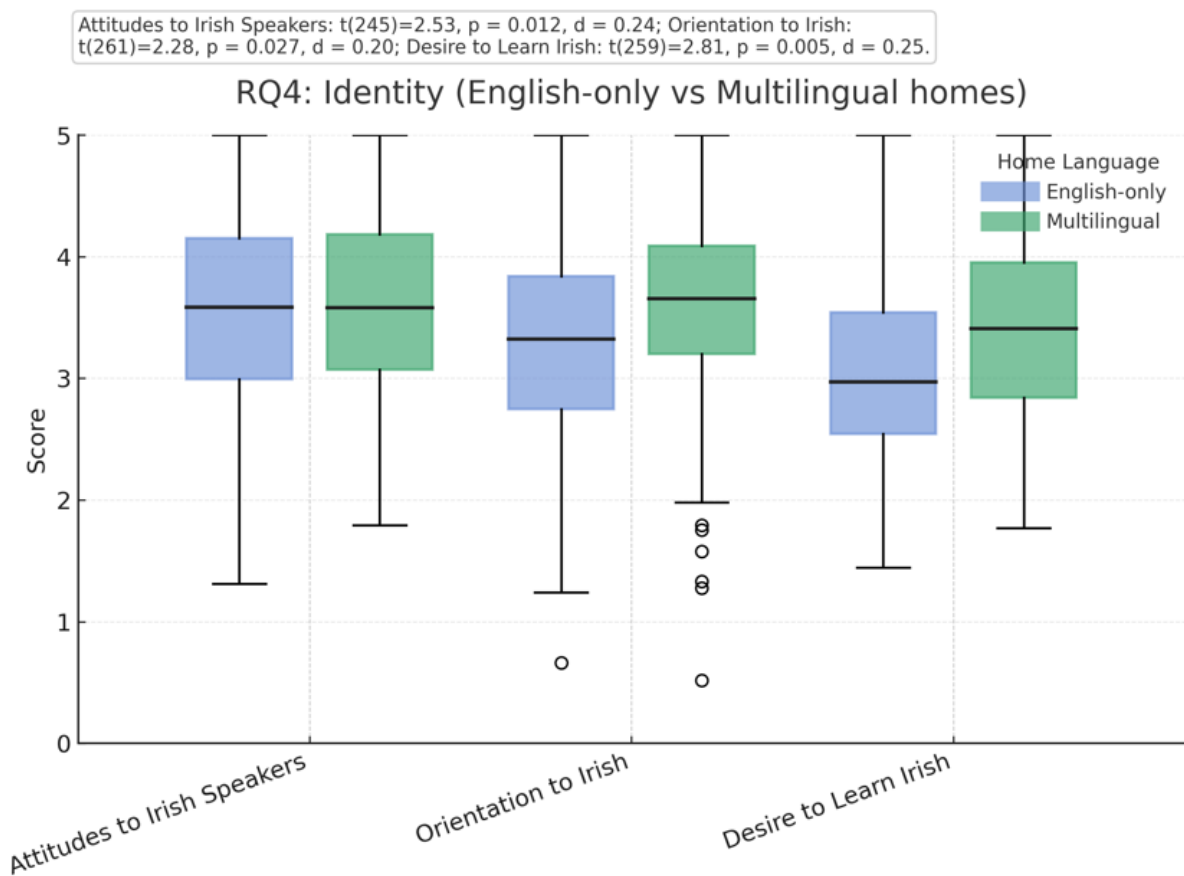


**Figure 13 Comparative boxplots of attitudes and orientations towards Irish by home language background**

### 5.3.6 Factors impacting student engagement and success

#### Independent Samples T-Test Results: Factors Impacting Engagement and Success

| Comparison / Context                 | Scale                  | T      | Df  | P      | Cohen's d | 95% CI (Lower–Upper) |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|--------|-----|--------|-----------|----------------------|
| <b>English-only vs Multilingual</b>  | Parental Encouragement | 3.28   | 242 | 0.001  | 0.31      | 0.09 – 0.37          |
| <b>Secondary Eng vs Irish-medium</b> | Parental Encouragement | -10.44 | 964 | < .001 | -0.65     | -0.58 – -0.40        |
| <b>Primary Eng vs</b>                | Parental Encouragement | -3.68  | 920 | < .001 | -0.24     | -0.28 – -0.09        |



| Irish-medium                         |                        |      |     |        |      |              |  |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|------|-----|--------|------|--------------|--|
| Gender (F vs M)                      | Parental Encouragement | 0.44 | 951 | 0.663  | 0.03 | -0.08 – 0.12 |  |
| Country of Birth (Ireland vs Abroad) | Parental Encouragement | 3.94 | 97  | < .001 | 0.53 | 0.20 – 0.62  |  |

**Table 28 Comparative T-Test results examining the impact of home language, school type, gender, and birthplace on parental encouragement and student engagement**

Parental encouragement was consistently associated with stronger engagement and success in learning Irish. Across pathways and backgrounds, pupils in Irish-medium contexts reported significantly higher levels of parental support. In secondary schools, Irish-medium pupils perceived far greater encouragement than English-medium peers ( $t(964) = -10.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.65$ ). At primary level, the effect was smaller but still significant ( $t(920) = -3.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.24$ ).

Pupils born in Ireland also reported stronger parental encouragement compared with those born abroad ( $t(97) = 3.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.53$ ). A smaller but significant effect emerged by home language background, with English-only pupils reporting more encouragement than multilingual peers ( $t(242) = 3.28$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $d = 0.31$ ). By contrast, gender differences were negligible, with no significant variation in parental support ( $t(951) = 0.44$ ,  $p = .663$ ,  $d = 0.03$ ).

These results confirm that parental encouragement is a key driver of engagement with Irish, particularly in immersion pathways and among Irish-born pupils.

$t(964) = -10.44, p < .001, d = -0.65$

## RQ5: Engagement & Success (Parental Encouragement by School Type)

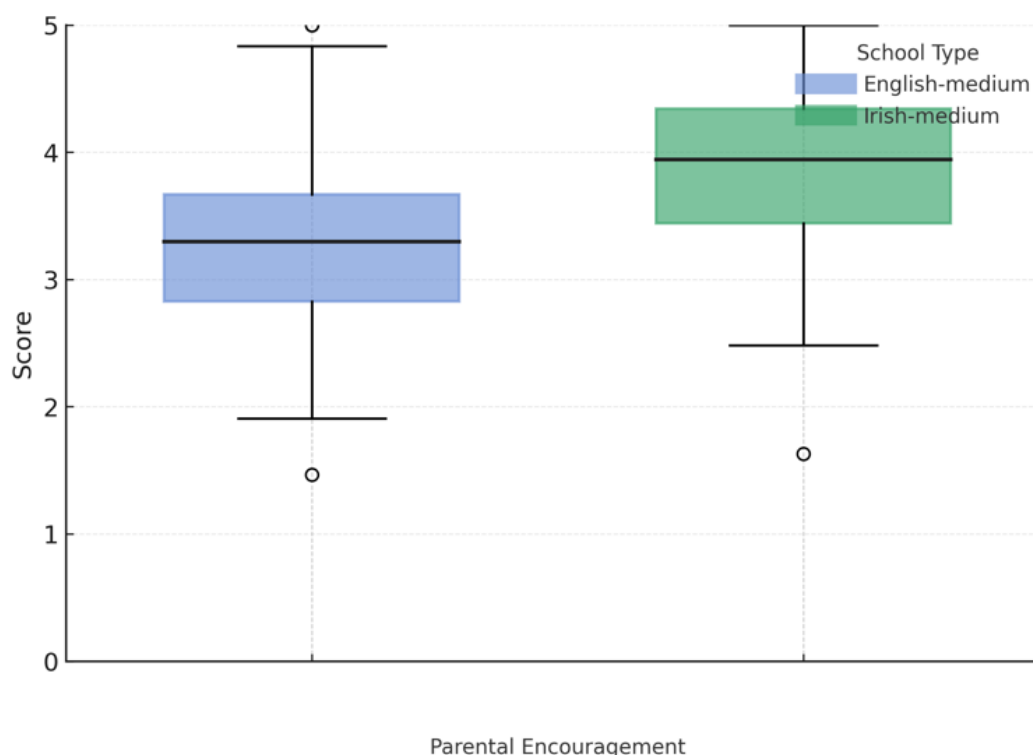


**Figure 14 Comparative boxplot of parental encouragement by school type (English-medium vs Irish-medium)**

## 5.4 Section 2: Quantitative analysis: Open-ended student responses (n = 912)

### 5.4.1 Introduction

This section presents a thematic analysis of students' open-ended responses regarding what would make their experiences of learning Irish better at post-primary level. These responses are included in Appendix 19: Open-ended responses from student survey. The data was gathered from students in Gaeltacht, Irish-medium, and English-medium schools, and firstly colour coded Gaeltacht schools in green, Irish-medium schools in yellow and English-medium schools in white and further coded throughout this chapter to identify ten key threads that capture recurring challenges and strengths, also prevalent in the quantitative data. While previous chapters have outlined the quantitative results, this chapter provides the interpretive and affective context behind those numbers, exploring how students experience Irish learning.

| <b>Key Threads from Open-Ended Responses</b>  | <b>Survey Anchor</b>                   |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 1. Lack of Fun and Interactive Methods        | Attitudes and Motivation               |
| 2. Minimal Real-Life Use of Irish             | Cultural Orientation to the Language   |
| 3. Insufficient Foundational Support          | Self-Concept and Engagement            |
| 4. Limited Speaking Opportunities in Class    | Self-Concept and Desire to Learn Irish |
| 5. Repetitive and Outdated Curriculum         | Attitudes and Desire to Learn          |
| 6. Technology and Media Integration           | Engagement                             |
| 7. Low Confidence and Fear of Mistakes        | Anxiety and Lower Self-Belief          |
| 8. Overemphasis on Grammar and Writing        | Motivation and Enjoyment               |
| 9. Exam Pressure and High-Stakes Assessment   | Anxiety and Motivation                 |
| 10. Positive Learning Experiences – Strengths | Anxiety and Lower Self-Belief          |

**Table 29 Themes emerging from open-ended student responses with link to survey items**

The ten themes reveal a complex interplay of cognitive, affective, and contextual factors shaping students’ relationships with the language. They highlight barriers such as low confidence, lack of foundational support and exam pressure as well as enablers such as supportive teachers, interactive activities, and opportunities to use Irish in real contexts. Understanding these experiences is critical, as they shape students’ motivation, self-concept, and long-term willingness to learn and use Irish. The themes also illustrate how language learning is deeply embedded in broader cultural and policy contexts, and how mismatches between curriculum expectations and lived experience can undermine engagement.

| <b>Thread</b>                                 | <b>Respondents</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Lack of Fun and Interactive Methods        | 184                |
| 2. Minimal Real-Life Use of Irish             | 143                |
| 3. Insufficient Foundational Support          | 137                |
| 4. Limited Speaking Opportunities in Class    | 92                 |
| 5. Repetitive and Outdated Curriculum         | 66                 |
| 6. Technology and Media Integration           | 62                 |
| 7. Low Confidence and Fear of Mistakes        | 37                 |
| 8. Overemphasis on Grammar and Writing        | 32                 |
| 9. Exam Pressure and High-Stakes Assessment   | 24                 |
| 10. Positive Learning Experiences – Strengths | 20                 |
| <b>Total</b>                                  | <b>797</b>         |
| <b>Other</b>                                  | <b>115</b>         |

**Table 30 Frequency of thematic threads identified in students’ open-ended responses on learning Irish**

In the sections that follow, each theme is presented as a narrative synthesis of student feedback, supported by quotations connected to relevant theories of language acquisition and motivation. This section concludes by drawing together the implications of these themes for curriculum design, and classroom practice, offering recommendations to foster a more positive, sustainable, and culturally meaningful experience of learning Irish.

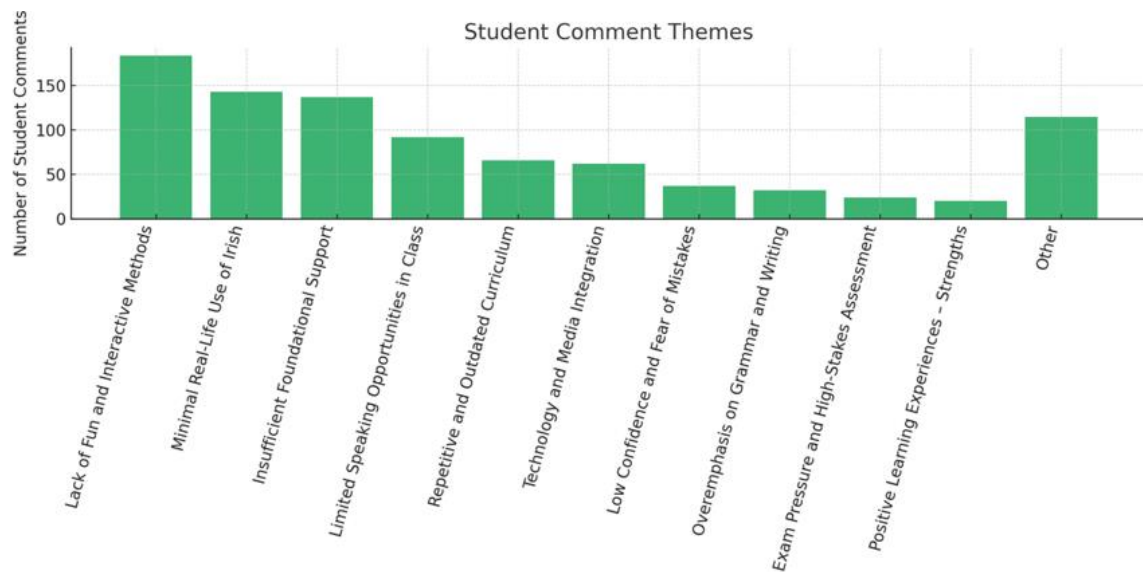


**Figure 15 Distribution of student-identified themes highlighting key challenges and strengths in learning Irish**

#### 5.4.2 Thread 1: Lack of fun and interactive methods

This is the most salient theme emerging from the student responses with a strong perception that Irish lessons are not sufficiently fun, enjoyable, or interactive. Across all school contexts, Gaeltacht, Irish-medium, and English-medium schools, students repeatedly expressed that the way Irish is taught is overly static, teacher-led, and reliant on rote learning. The lack of engaging pedagogical methods appears to be a key factor shaping students' attitudes and motivation toward the subject.

Thread 1: Student Responses by Context - N = 184

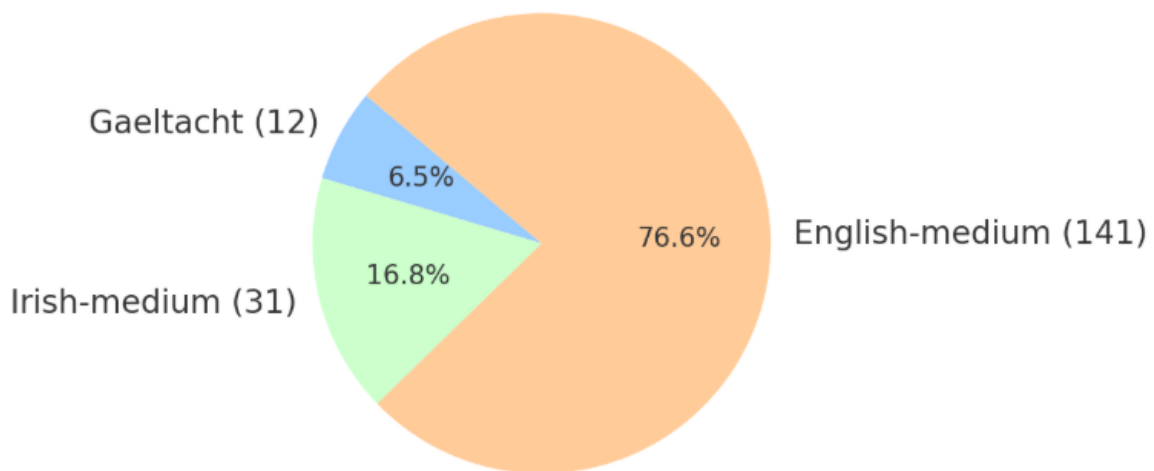


**Figure 16 Proportion of student comments on the lack of fun and interactive methods across English-medium, Irish-medium, and Gaeltacht schools**

#### Perceptions of Irish as Boring and Repetitive

A substantial proportion of respondents explicitly described Irish lessons as “*boring*” or needs to be “*more interesting*,” with many linking this to the absence of active, participatory approaches. Numerous students stated that they would be more motivated if teachers incorporated games, quizzes, competitions, or project-based learning. For example, student comments included: “*Make it more fun to learn Irish*”, “*More fun activities*”, and “*Doing fun things in class often to make us look forward to Irish class and want to go more*”.

Similarly, students from Irish-medium schools called for “*more fun and interactive methods*” and lamented that “*doing novels and poems removes all the little enjoyment that can be retrieved. Focus more on useful conversation tools that we may actually use and stop making us feel like we are worse than those who grew up speaking Irish. Also, be stricter on people trying to use Irish to exclude kids from different countries that have recently moved*”.

This sentiment was particularly strong among students in English-medium schools, who frequently contrasted Irish classes with the more interactive and communicative teaching of other modern languages. As one student noted, *“The way it’s taught... it’s very much like the English curriculum”*. These comparisons suggest that current pedagogical methods for Irish are perceived as outdated and misaligned with contemporary language learning practices, which increasingly emphasise engagement, creativity, and learner agency.

#### Impact on Motivation and Willingness to Participate

The perceived lack of fun has profound implications for student motivation. Many students expressed that they struggle to feel invested or excited about Irish, with some describing the subject as a *“chore.”* This demotivation can manifest as disengagement, low effort, or even resistance to participating in class. One respondent wrote: *“Play fun games, not do boring stuff”*, while another noted: *“If it was more fun and more games-oriented and more free of speech... I just am not too fond of Irish either”*.

Deci and Ryan’s Self-Determination Theory (1985) offers a useful lens here: when students experience low levels of intrinsic motivation, often because the learning environment does not meet their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, they are less likely to engage meaningfully with learning tasks (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The monotony reported in these responses undermines intrinsic motivation, making students more reliant on extrinsic drivers such as exams and grades, which many also described as stressful or counterproductive. This dynamic creates a cycle where low enjoyment fuels low motivation, which in turn deepens disengagement.

#### Desired Interactive and Creative Approaches

Students provided numerous concrete suggestions for making Irish classes more engaging. These included the use of games (e.g., Kahoot, Blooket, Quizlet), collaborative group work, conversational tasks, drama or roleplay, and creative projects. Representative comments included: *“Learn Irish through drama or acting,”* *“Add humour to lessons,”* and *“Let us choose topics to write or speak about”*. Students also advocated for integrating hobbies, sports, music, and other personal interests into Irish learning, thereby making content more meaningful and relevant to their lives.

These recommendations align closely with constructivist and sociocultural theories of learning, which stress that language acquisition is most effective when learners are actively engaged in meaningful, socially situated tasks. By embedding Irish in enjoyable, collaborative activities, teachers could foster a more positive classroom climate and create authentic opportunities for language use, thus addressing both motivational and linguistic needs.

### Linking Enjoyment to Confidence and Attitudes

The qualitative responses also suggest that fun and interaction are not only motivational but also contribute to building students' confidence. Many students reported feeling judged or anxious about speaking Irish, which made them reluctant to participate, *"Let us talk without being corrected every second"*. Creating a playful, low-stakes classroom atmosphere could help reduce this anxiety and normalise making mistakes as part of learning. This aligns with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that learners' emotional states can facilitate or hinder language acquisition. Interactive methods, by making learning less intimidating, can lower the affective filter and promote risk-taking in using the target language.

Furthermore, positive emotional experiences in class may reshape students' broader attitudes toward Irish. Attitude theory (Gardner, 1985) highlights how affective responses influence long-term motivation to learn a language. If students associate Irish with enjoyment and social connection rather than boredom or stress, they are more likely to sustain their engagement beyond compulsory schooling, *"I think if the awkwardness and stigma around speaking Irish outside of the classroom at school wasn't as strong, it would be a lot easier"*.

The evidence strongly indicates that the lack of fun and interactive methods is a major barrier to students' motivation and positive attitudes toward Irish. Across all school contexts, students are calling for a shift away from static, grammar-heavy teaching toward more dynamic, collaborative, and enjoyable approaches. Incorporating interactive activities, learner choice, and creative projects could transform students' experiences of Irish from a tedious obligation into a socially meaningful and intrinsically rewarding pursuit. Addressing this theme is therefore not only a matter of improving engagement but



also crucial to supporting students' emotional connection to the language and their long-term willingness to use it.

#### 5.4.3 Thread 2: Minimal real-life use of Irish

A second major theme to emerge from the open-ended student responses was the perception that Irish has minimal real-life use or relevance beyond the classroom. This perceived disconnection from daily life strongly shapes students' cultural orientation toward the language and has significant implications for their motivation and engagement. Across Gaeltacht, Irish-medium, and English-medium contexts, students consistently questioned the purpose of learning Irish when they rarely encounter or use it outside school.

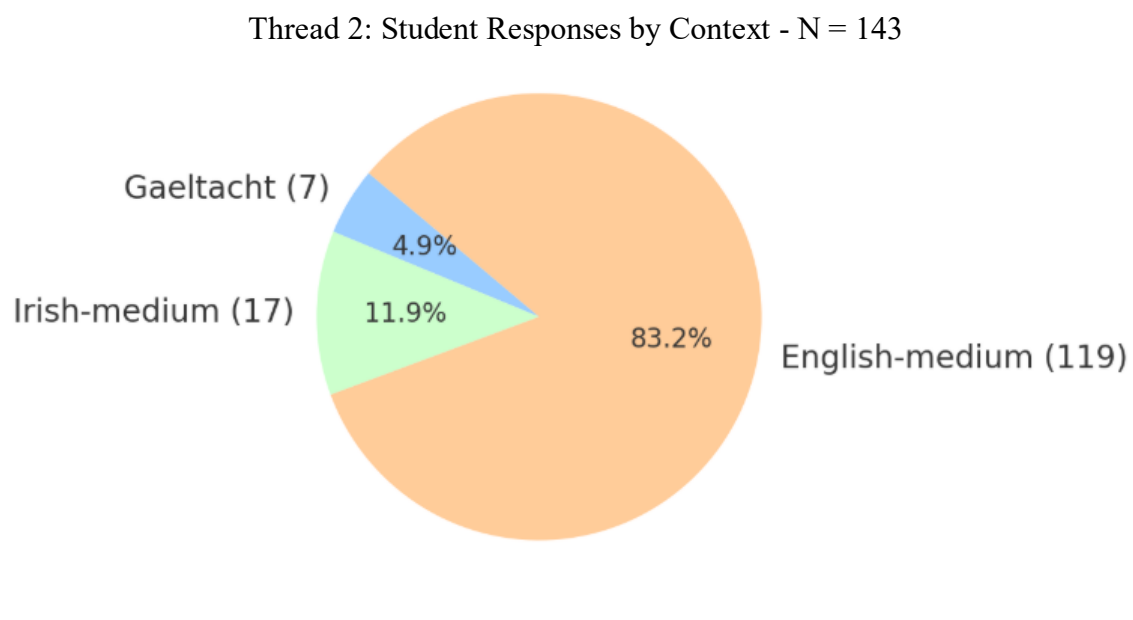


**Figure 17 Proportion of student comments on the limited real-life use of Irish across English-medium, Irish-medium, and Gaeltacht schools**

#### Perceptions of Irish as Irrelevant to Daily Life

Students frequently described Irish as a school-only subject that bears little relevance to their personal, social, or future professional lives. Comments such as *“Make the subject feel more useful in real life”*, *“Irish should be more present in daily life”*, and *“I won’t use Irish for anything”* were common across the dataset. Some students framed this as a practical concern, noting that Irish does not appear to offer tangible benefits for employment or further education, except as a compulsory requirement. Others expressed a

more emotional disconnection, describing Irish as “*a dead language*” or stating that they do not know anyone who speaks it.

This disconnect was also echoed in the Gaeltacht responses, which might be expected to demonstrate stronger community engagement with Irish. Even in these contexts, students noted that “*everyone in Conamara speaks English fluently*” and that “*Irish at school feels disconnected from [our] lives*”. This suggests that geographic proximity to Irish-speaking regions alone is insufficient to foster meaningful cultural orientation if the language is not embedded in students’ authentic social spheres.

#### Limited Opportunities for Authentic Use

Many students highlighted the scarcity of opportunities to use Irish informally in their communities, with friends, or at home. Repeated suggestions included “*more people around me who speak Irish so I can have conversations and improve,*” “*to speak it more at home,*” and “*meeting up with other Irish schools more often to talk Irish*”. This lack of everyday exposure limits students’ ability to see Irish as a living language and reinforces the perception that it exists only within the artificial confines of the classroom.

Krashen’s (1982) Input Hypothesis and sociocultural theories of language learning stress the importance of meaningful interaction and real-world input for language acquisition. The absence of such opportunities for Irish learners likely contributes to the persistent difficulties students report with fluency and confidence. Without authentic contexts for practice, Irish remains an abstract academic exercise rather than a practical communicative tool.

#### Desire for Cultural and Contextual Learning

Linked to this perceived irrelevance is a call for stronger integration of cultural content and context in Irish lessons. Students argued that learning about Irish culture, traditions, history, music, and contemporary life could make the language feel more meaningful. Representative responses included: “*Learning more about the culture,*” “*Learn Irish through music,*” and “*If we went to places where a lot of Irish history happened, I think it would help us enjoy the language more*”.

This aligns with Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model of second language acquisition, which emphasises that positive attitudes and cultural identification are critical to motivation. When students perceive Irish as culturally disconnected from their identities, they struggle to develop the integrative motivation that supports long-term language learning. Conversely, connecting Irish to tangible cultural practices could foster greater emotional investment and pride in the language.

#### Calls for Immersive and Community-Based Opportunities

Students also suggested expanding opportunities for immersive, community-based engagement with Irish beyond the classroom. Common proposals included going to the Gaeltacht, organising Irish-speaking clubs or extracurricular activities, and increasing public visibility of Irish. For instance: *"School trips to Irish places," "More Irish-speaking groups/clubs outside of school,"* and *"Show us Irish being used in the real world"*.

These proposals point to an implicit recognition that language learning is socially situated and that authentic use fosters deeper learning. Vygotskian sociocultural theory and Wenger's (1998) concept of 'communities of practice' suggest that learners acquire language most effectively when they are part of meaningful social groups that use it purposefully. Creating authentic spaces where Irish is used as a normal means of communication could therefore be transformative for students' cultural orientation and motivation.

#### Tension Between Policy Expectations and Lived Experience

The comments also reveal a tension between the compulsory status of Irish and students' lived experience of its absence from daily life. Some expressed resentment that their educational and professional futures hinge on a language they rarely encounter outside school: *"I feel that learning and speaking Irish is not worth it... I don't think I should be learning it"*. Others from Gaeltacht areas resented the assumption that they should take higher-level Irish simply because of where they live. These views suggest that policy-driven expectations are experienced as disconnected from the sociolinguistic realities students inhabit, which undermines their motivation and sense of fairness, *"I live in the Gaeltacht and it's very unfair that we have to do a higher-level test because we live here. I am doing Higher Level Irish and in my school they encourage us to speak Irish, and we are only allowed to."*

The perceived minimal real-life use of Irish is a critical barrier to students' cultural orientation toward the language. Students across all school types expressed difficulty seeing Irish as relevant, useful, or connected to their identities. This perception is reinforced by the scarcity of authentic opportunities to use Irish in their communities and by the curriculum's limited integration of cultural context. Students themselves consistently advocate for more immersive, culturally grounded, and socially meaningful experiences of Irish, such as community events, cultural activities, and Gaeltacht visits. Addressing this disconnect between classroom Irish and lived reality is vital: without a sense that Irish is part of their world, students struggle to invest emotionally or see value in sustaining it.

#### 5.4.4 Thread 3: Insufficient foundational support

Another prominent theme arising from the student responses was a perceived lack of foundational support in learning Irish. Across Gaeltacht, Irish-medium, and English-medium post-primary schools, students repeatedly described feeling underprepared, confused, or left behind in Irish lessons. This perceived gap in early and ongoing support has a profound impact on their self-concept as language learners, shaping both their confidence and their willingness to engage.

### Thread 3: Student Responses by Context - N = 137

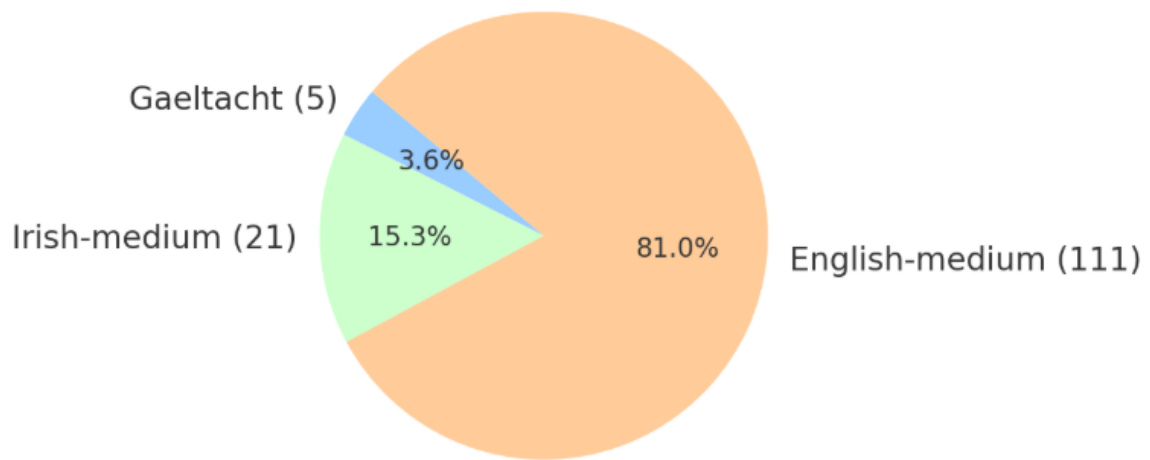


**Figure 18 Proportion of student comments on insufficient foundational support across English-medium, Irish-medium, and Gaeltacht schools**

#### Early Gaps and a Fragile Foundation

Many students attributed their current struggles with Irish to a weak foundation developed during primary school. They reported arriving into post-primary education without sufficient basic vocabulary, grammar knowledge, or oral competence, and found that teachers often assumed prior knowledge they did not have. Representative comments included: *“Start from the basics again”*, and *“It assumes you already know a lot of Irish when you go into secondary school, whereas I knew very little Irish in 1st year”*.

This early discontinuity echoes what the open-ended analysis from English-medium schools described as the misalignment with how other modern languages are introduced. While subjects like French or Spanish are typically taught from absolute beginner level, post-primary Irish instruction often presumes continuity from primary schooling, leaving students with gaps feeling overwhelmed and demotivated.

This aligns with research on language learning trajectories, which emphasises the cumulative nature of language acquisition (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Without strong

early foundations, later learning becomes more cognitively demanding, and students may experience repeated failure that damages their academic self-concept.

### Confusion and Lack of Clarity in Instruction

Compounding these foundational gaps, students often described teaching approaches as unclear, fast-paced, or overly reliant on target-language-only instruction without adequate scaffolding. Many explicitly called for clearer explanations, use of English for translation, and slower pacing. For example, comments included: *“If the teachers spoke more English and explained things more clearly”*, *“If teachers taught Irish through English instead of Irish through Irish”*, and *“Maybe if the teachers say something in Irish and if I or others don't understand, they could translate it”*.

Similarly, students from Gaeltacht and Irish-medium contexts emphasised how unclear explanations hindered their learning: *“I think that if I were told the word in English, it would help me understand the word in Irish more”*. This suggests that the immersion approach commonly used in Irish classes is often applied without sufficient scaffolding to support comprehension. This issue can be understood through Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Effective instruction requires teachers to pitch content within learners’ ZPD and provide scaffolds to bridge gaps. When instruction outpaces students’ comprehension, it places material beyond their ZPD, resulting in confusion, frustration, and disengagement.

### Lack of Individualised Support

Another recurring issue was the absence of personalised or differentiated support for students who struggle. Numerous comments called for one-on-one help, more revision and reinforcement, and extra assistance for weaker learners. Students noted: *“If we got more help for the people who find the subject harder”*, *“It would make my experience of learning Irish better if I got to have one-on-one learning with my teacher”*, and *“Getting more help, explained in English to help me understand it more”*.

This lack of tailored support appears to leave struggling students feeling excluded and demoralised. In the Irish-medium analysis, some students felt *“left behind without one-on-one support from teachers”* and asked for *“more help if I didn’t understand some pieces”*.

This is consistent with the concept of academic self-concept (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985): when students repeatedly experience failure without support, they internalise the belief that they are “*bad at Irish*,” which erodes their motivation and willingness to engage. Several students explicitly voiced this self-perception: “*If I was better at it because I was bad at it in primary school too. I want to learn more, but I don’t like Irish*”.

### The Emotional Consequences of Insufficient Support

The lack of foundational support is not merely a cognitive barrier but also an affective one. Students described feelings of frustration, stress, and resignation stemming from their struggles. Some expressed that they had “*no clue what the teacher is saying*” or that lessons are loaded “*Often, too much grammar is thrown at you at once, and it is hard to make sense of it all.*”. Such experiences undermine students’ sense of competence, which Deci and Ryan (1985) identify as a core psychological need underpinning intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

When students do not feel competent, they are less likely to take risks, speak in class, or persist with challenging tasks. Over time, this can produce a downward motivational spiral in which low perceived competence reduces effort, leading to further difficulties. This dynamic helps explain why some students disengage entirely or express a desire to drop Irish, as seen in comments like “*I don’t want to do Irish at all... I’m not good at Irish*”.

### Students’ Suggested Supports

Students provided several practical suggestions to address these issues. These included starting from basics again, slowing down the pace of lessons, integrating English explanations, providing revision after each chapter, and using bilingual dictionaries or vocabulary lists in textbooks. Comments included: “*More revision after each chapter to make sure everyone understands*”, “*If the books had dictionaries of all complicated Irish words at the back*”, and “*Going over base-level topics more*”.

These suggestions reflect a clear desire for structured scaffolding and accessible entry points into the language. Implementing such supports could not only improve comprehension but also rebuild students’ sense of competence and agency in learning Irish.

Students' responses reveal that insufficient foundational support is a major barrier to both their engagement and their self-concept as Irish learners. Many begin post-primary school with weak Irish skills and find themselves quickly overwhelmed by instruction that assumes prior knowledge, moves too quickly, and offers little personalised help. This fosters confusion, low self-belief, and disengagement, perpetuating a cycle of underachievement. Providing stronger foundational support, through clear explanations, scaffolding, differentiated instruction, and ongoing revision, could empower students to experience success, strengthening their confidence and motivation to persist with Irish. Addressing this theme is therefore essential for fostering both cognitive progress and positive learner identities.

#### 5.4.5 Thread 4: Limited speaking opportunities in class

A persistent and powerful theme across the student responses was the perceived lack of opportunities to speak Irish in class. Students from all school contexts, Gaeltacht, Irish-medium, and English-medium, consistently emphasised that lessons focus heavily on reading, writing, grammar, and exam preparation, with minimal attention to oral communication or spontaneous interaction. This scarcity of speaking opportunities appears to directly affect their self-concept as language learners and undermines their desire to engage with Irish.



#### Thread 4: Student Responses by Context - N = 92

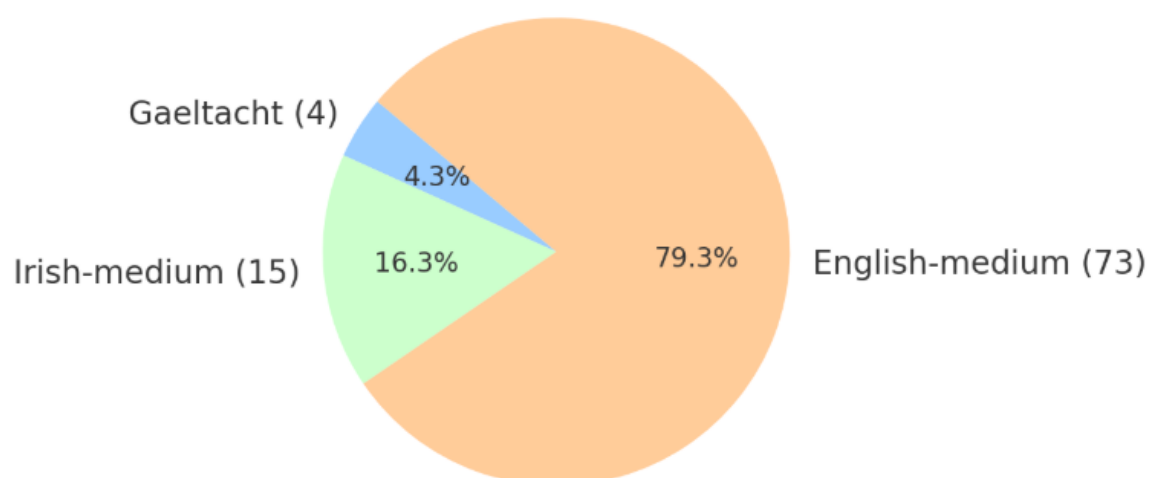


**Figure 19 Proportion of student comments on limited speaking opportunities across English-medium, Irish-medium, and Gaeltacht schools**

#### Overemphasis on Passive Skills Over Active Use

Numerous students explicitly stated that they rarely get to speak Irish during class time, and that this has impeded their fluency and confidence. Comments included: *“More speaking in Irish,” “More time to practice speaking,” “Speaking it more in class and outside of class,”* and *“Let us have conversations in Irish class”*. Others contrasted the teaching of Irish unfavourably with other modern languages, where speaking practice is a central component: *“If we were taught to speak Irish rather than read and write it”*.

This reflects a wider issue identified in the thematic analysis from both Irish-medium and English-medium schools, which reported a lack of speaking practice and conversational use and noted that too much focus on reading and writing diminishes engagement. The predominance of passive skills may inadvertently signal to students that oral fluency is not important, reducing their motivation to use the language actively.

#### Impact on Self-Concept and Confidence

The lack of speaking opportunities has significant consequences for students’ self-concept as Irish speakers. Without regular practice, students struggle to develop automaticity and confidence in producing the language. This creates a vicious cycle: low competence leads

to low confidence, which in turn leads to reluctance to speak, perpetuating further skill gaps. Many students described feeling anxious or self-conscious about speaking Irish because they are not given enough safe practice. For example: *“I think learning how to have a proper conversation in Irish could make learning more enjoyable”*, *“Encourage us to speak, not just write”*, and *“Give us confidence to speak”*.

This pattern aligns with Bandura’s (1997) theory of self-efficacy, which emphasises that successful experiences are crucial to building confidence. When students rarely experience success in speaking, they are less likely to see themselves as capable Irish speakers and more likely to avoid oral tasks. This diminished self-concept was especially evident in comments from students who said they felt they could speak other languages (such as French or Spanish) more fluently despite having studied Irish for longer, highlighting the impact of limited speaking practice on their perceived competence.

#### Desire for Conversational and Collaborative Learning

Students expressed a strong preference for more communicative and collaborative activities to practice speaking. Suggestions included pair work, group conversations, roleplays, and informal chat time. Representative comments included: *“More pair work,” “More conversation-based learning,” “More chances to talk in groups,”* and *“Let us speak more, even if we make mistakes”*. They also requested that teachers use more Irish themselves during class to model authentic language use: *“Teachers should speak more Irish too”*. These comments suggest that students want to move away from teacher-led instruction toward more interactional, learner-centred methods.

This aligns with communicative language teaching (CLT) principles, which emphasise meaningful interaction as the foundation of language acquisition (Littlewood, 2004). Research consistently shows that oral proficiency develops through frequent, authentic use of the target language in supportive environments. By contrast, reliance on mechanical grammar drills and written tasks does little to build communicative competence or spontaneous fluency.

#### Limited Spillover Into Real-World Use

The lack of speaking practice in class also reduces the likelihood that students will use Irish beyond school. Several noted that they have few peers or family members with whom to

speak Irish, and that without regular practice in school, they do not feel capable of initiating conversations. Comments included: *“More people around me who speak Irish so I can have conversations and improve”* and *“Meeting up with other Irish schools more often to talk Irish”*.

This reflects a sociocultural view of language learning (Vygotsky, 1978), which holds that social interaction is essential to language development. If Irish is not positioned as a living, spoken language in the classroom, students struggle to imagine it as a tool for real-world communication, which further undermines their desire to learn it.

### Students’ Proposed Solutions

Students offered numerous practical suggestions to increase speaking opportunities. These included dedicating more class time to oral activities, holding informal conversation sessions, arranging inter-school Irish-speaking meetups, and using techniques like drama or roleplay. Comments included: *“Learn Irish through drama or acting,” “Use roleplay to practice,”* and *“Speaking and after-school activities”*. They also suggested reducing the focus on writing to make space for oral work: *“More talking, less writing”* and *“More oral tasks instead of writing most of the time”*.

Such suggestions indicate that students are aware of the pedagogical gap and are actively seeking more authentic communicative experiences. Implementing these approaches could allow students to develop fluency, experience success, and build the confidence needed to view themselves as legitimate Irish speakers.

Students overwhelmingly feel that limited speaking opportunities are a major barrier to their development, confidence, and desire to learn Irish. The current emphasis on reading and writing has left many without the oral competence needed to feel successful or motivated. This, in turn, weakens their self-concept as Irish speakers and discourages them from using the language outside school. Increasing speaking opportunities through collaborative, interactive, and communicative methods would not only build fluency but also help students develop positive identities as Irish speakers, an essential step toward sustaining their long-term engagement with the language.

#### 5.4.6 Thread 5: Repetitive and outdated curriculum

Another major theme emerging from the student responses was widespread dissatisfaction with the Irish curriculum, which many described as repetitive, outdated, and misaligned with modern language learning practices. Students across Gaeltacht, Irish-medium, and English-medium schools consistently expressed frustration at encountering the same content year after year, a heavy emphasis on literary texts, and a lack of variety or innovation. This monotony appears to significantly undermine their attitudes toward Irish and their desire to engage with it.

Thread 5: Student Responses by Context - N = 66

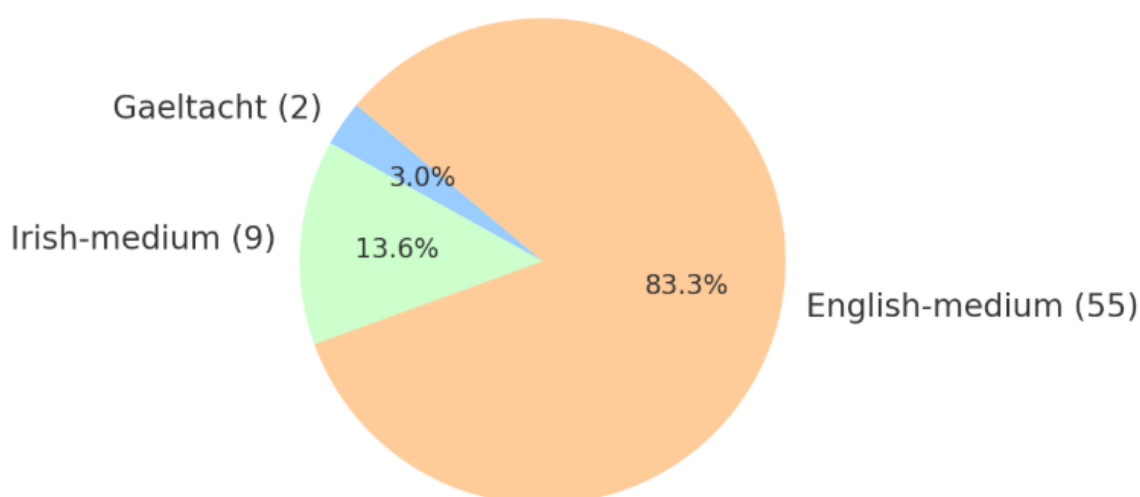


**Figure 20 Proportion of student comments on repetitive and outdated curriculum across English-medium, Irish-medium, and Gaeltacht schools**

#### Perceptions of Repetition and Stagnation

A striking number of students described the Irish curriculum as excessively repetitive, with content being recycled across year groups rather than building progressively. Representative comments included: *“Every year I went to school, the same stuff was taught again and again”*, *“The way it’s taught... it’s very much like the English curriculum”*, and *“The Irish course is very repetitive, and the way it is taught is hard to understand”*. This perception was especially common among students who noted that they had studied Irish for many years yet felt they had made little progress, while peers learning other languages such as French or Spanish advanced much more quickly. As one student put it: *“I can speak*

*and write French much better, and I've only been learning it a year and a half*". This sense of stagnation contributes to negative attitudes by fostering boredom, frustration, and the belief that studying Irish yields little tangible improvement.

#### Overemphasis on Literature and Grammar-Based Content

Students also criticised the content of the curriculum as overly focused on literary texts, grammar rules, and rote learning, at the expense of practical, contemporary language use. Comments included: *"Don't just show us a few words and expect us to make sentences," "Stop making us memorise essays,"* and *"Don't just teach us poems and stories"*.

The open-ended responses from English-medium schools echoed this, noting that Irish is often taught *"like the English curriculum"* and that focusing on conversational Irish rather than literature would make it far easier to learn. Students often contrasted this with how other modern languages are taught, starting from basics, using conversation and real-life contexts, stating: *"Teach it in the way they teach foreign languages such as Spanish, French, or German"*.

This content focus seems to perpetuate a perception of Irish as an academic exercise rather than a living language, which can erode students' intrinsic motivation and make the subject feel irrelevant to their lives.

#### Negative Impact on Attitudes and Motivation

The repetitiveness and outdated content appear to have a demotivating effect on students, contributing to boredom, disengagement, and negative attitudes toward Irish. Many described the curriculum as *"boring," "tedious,"* or needs to be *"more interesting,"* and linked this to a lack of desire to participate. For example: *"More interesting teaching, it's currently boring and makes the language boring"*.

This aligns with expectancy-value theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), which holds that students are motivated when they see value in a task and expect they can succeed at it. When the curriculum feels repetitive and irrelevant, students perceive low value and become less willing to invest effort. This also echoes Gardner's (1985) work on attitudes in second language learning, which identifies interest and perceived cultural relevance as

key drivers of motivation, both of which appear lacking in students' accounts of the Irish curriculum.

#### Disconnect from Contemporary Youth Culture

Students also noted that the content of Irish lessons often feels outdated and disconnected from their contemporary interests and identities. Comments included: *"More modern Irish," "Include music and pop culture,"* and *"Use stories and media we relate to"*. The absence of contemporary cultural materials can make the subject feel old-fashioned and irrelevant, further reducing motivation.

This disconnect undermines what Ushioda (2011) calls the 'person-in-context' view of motivation, which emphasises the need for language learning to be personally meaningful. Without links to their lives and interests, students are unlikely to see Irish as part of their identity or future, weakening their desire to persist with it.

#### Students' Proposed Reforms

Many students offered practical suggestions for modernising the curriculum and breaking the cycle of repetition. These included introducing new, varied content each year, using contemporary media and technology, integrating real-life conversation practice, and treating Irish more like other modern languages. Representative proposals included: *"Teach Irish like Duolingo does," "Teach Irish like we're learning to actually use it,"* and *"Don't just follow the book"*.

Students also called for a greater focus on useful, everyday language rather than obscure vocabulary or outdated literary texts: *"Focus on what's practical"* and *"Teach us useful phrases for real life"*. These suggestions indicate that students are not opposed to learning Irish itself but want a curriculum that feels purposeful, progressive, and aligned with their lived realities.

Students perceive the Irish curriculum as overly repetitive, heavily literature-focused, and disconnected from their lives. This has a negative effect on their attitudes and significantly diminishes their desire to learn Irish. They want more variety, contemporary content, and practical language use, similar to how other modern languages are taught. Modernising the curriculum to reduce repetition, incorporate authentic and culturally relevant materials, and

prioritise communication could transform students' experiences, making Irish feel like a living, evolving language rather than a static academic requirement. Addressing this theme is therefore crucial to fostering sustained motivation and positive attitudes toward Irish.

#### 5.4.7 Thread 6: Technology and media integration

A significant theme across the student responses was the call for greater integration of technology and digital media into Irish language learning. Students frequently reported that current lessons rely too heavily on traditional textbooks, note-taking, and paper-based tasks, which they perceive as outdated and disengaging. They strongly advocated for the use of contemporary digital tools, multimedia content, and interactive platforms to make Irish learning more engaging and aligned with how they learn in other subjects and in their daily lives. This theme highlights the central role of technological relevance in fostering student engagement with Irish.

Thread 6: Student Responses by Context - N = 62

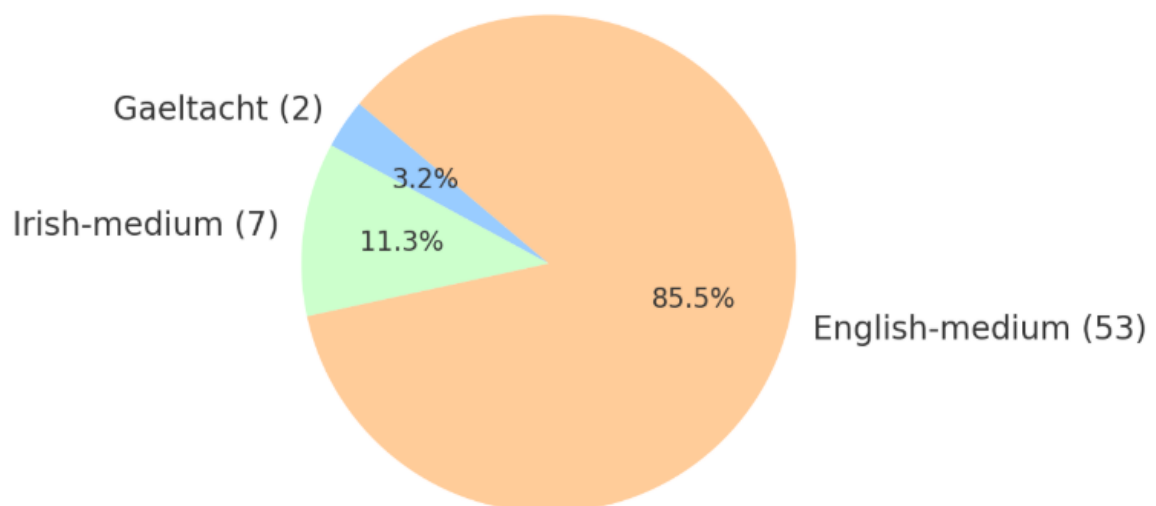


**Figure 21 Proportion of student comments on technology and media integration across English-medium, Irish-medium, and Gaeltacht schools**

### Dissatisfaction with Traditional, Textbook-Based Methods

Students repeatedly described Irish classes as overly reliant on copying from the board, completing written exercises, and using physical textbooks, with little integration of digital tools. Typical comments included: *“More work on Chromebooks and not just using our copies and books all the time”*, *“Less copying from the board”*, and *“Use more online resources”*.

Such remarks suggest that many students experience Irish lessons as out of step with the wider digital learning environments they are accustomed to in other subjects and extracurricular contexts. In an era where digital media is deeply embedded in young people’s lives, the absence of technology in Irish learning contributes to perceptions of the subject as outdated and irrelevant.

This concern was also highlighted in the open-ended responses from English-medium schools, where students suggested that greater supports are needed... *‘for more modern ways of learning’* and that Irish needs to be more aligned with how other modern languages are introduced, *“I believe that if less time was spent on Irish, especially on more prominent and useful modern languages, it would benefit students all around Ireland greatly. In my personal opinion, I believe that Irish is useless in our modern society”*.

Modern language education research supports this view: integrating technology has been shown to enhance motivation, provide authentic input, and enable more student-centred, interactive learning (Chapelle, 2009).

### Student Interest in Digital and Multimedia Tools

In contrast to the perceived staleness of traditional methods, students expressed strong enthusiasm for using digital tools and multimedia resources. Popular suggestions included apps, games, videos, podcasts, and social media. For example, comments included: *“More videos and listening activities”*, *“Use apps like Quizlet or Kahoot”*, *“Play Irish language podcasts in class”*, and *“Gael Linn on social media”*.

They also suggested using music, pop culture, and sports content to make lessons more relatable: *“Include music and pop culture”*, *“Commentary on sport in Irish”*, and *“Use stories and media we relate to”*. These responses reveal that students are eager to engage



with Irish through the same digital channels they use for entertainment and communication, suggesting that integrating such content could significantly boost engagement.

This aligns with the concept of “digital native” learners (Prensky, 2001), who are accustomed to multimodal, interactive environments. Incorporating multimedia can also provide rich comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982), which is essential for developing language skills in meaningful contexts.

#### Making Irish Feel Contemporary and Relevant

Students’ calls for technology are not just about novelty, they also reflect a deeper desire for Irish to feel current and connected to modern life. Several comments highlighted that they rarely see Irish used in contemporary media, which contributes to perceptions of the language as old-fashioned. Suggestions such as “*Audiobooks and putting your phone in Irish*”, “*Irish films and games*”, and “*More modern Irish*” indicate a wish for Irish to be visible in the digital spaces they already inhabit.

This connects directly to their engagement and motivation. According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), students are more likely to engage when learning activities feel relevant to their personal identities and interests. Integrating Irish into digital media platforms could help reposition the language as something alive and socially meaningful, rather than confined to textbooks and exams.

#### Opportunities for Active, Creative Learning

Many students also saw technology as a way to make learning more active, participatory, and creative, rather than passive and teacher-led. Comments included: “*Let us make videos in Irish*”, “*Do more online games like Bloocket and Kahoot*”, and “*Let us watch Irish TV or listen to Irish music*”.

Such activities would allow students to become producers, not just consumers, of Irish-language content, giving them a sense of ownership over their learning. This aligns with constructivist theories of language acquisition, which emphasise active meaning-making through authentic tasks (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). By shifting students from rote exercises to creative digital production, teachers could foster deeper engagement and more positive emotional connections to Irish.

### Bridging the Gap Between Classroom and Real Life

Students also implied that technology could help bridge the gap between classroom Irish and real-world use by increasing their exposure to authentic spoken language. For example, comments like *“Let us listen to how people really speak Irish”* and *“Watch Irish shows and discuss them”* suggest a desire for authentic listening input that models natural language. Providing this exposure through multimedia resources could help students see Irish as a living language used by real people in real contexts, which may enhance their willingness to use it themselves.

Students view the lack of technology and media integration as a key reason why Irish lessons feel outdated and disengaging. They want digital tools, multimedia content, and contemporary cultural materials to make learning Irish feel current, interactive, and relevant to their lives. Integrating technology could transform passive learning into active, creative participation, while also exposing students to authentic Irish use beyond the classroom. Addressing this theme is therefore essential to enhancing engagement, modernising the learning experience, and positioning Irish as a living language for the digital age.

#### 5.4.8 Thread 7: Low confidence and fear of mistakes

A major barrier to students’ engagement with Irish, evident across all school contexts, is low confidence and a pervasive fear of making mistakes. Many students reported anxiety about speaking in class or participating in oral activities, describing feelings of embarrassment, self-consciousness, or fear of being judged. This theme reflects how affective factors, especially self-belief and anxiety, powerfully shape students’ willingness to use Irish and their long-term motivation to learn it.

#### Thread 7: Student Responses by Context - N = 37

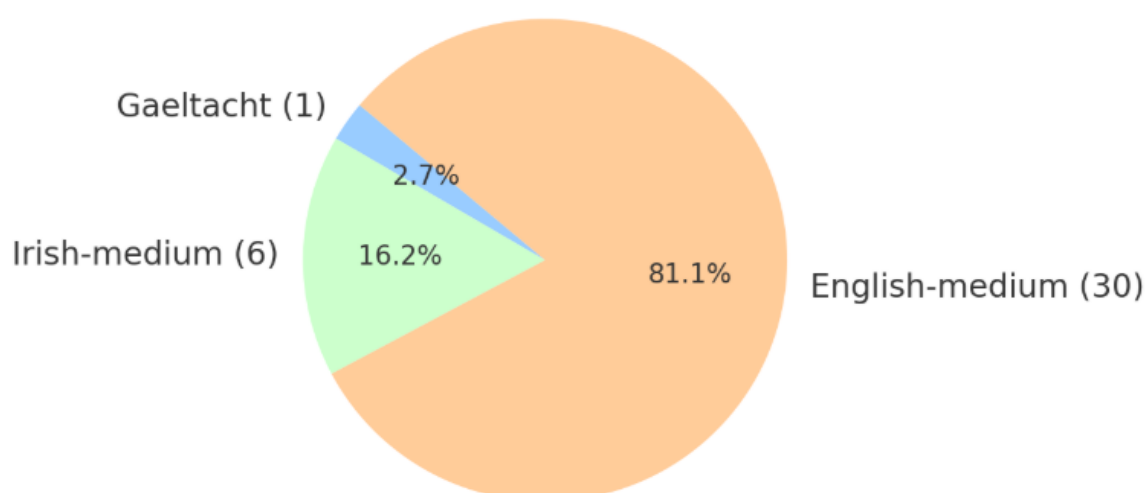


**Figure 22 Proportion of student comments on low confidence and fear of mistakes across English-medium, Irish-medium, and Gaeltacht schools**

#### Fear of Speaking and Performance Anxiety

Students consistently described being reluctant to speak Irish aloud in class because they feared making errors or being corrected in front of their peers. Comments included: *“If I didn’t feel judged every time I raise my hand in class”*, *“Not being nervous about learning it and being wrong when answering questions and speaking”*, and *“I find it hard to answer questions in Irish”*.

This fear of public mistakes appears to inhibit risk-taking, a critical behaviour for language development. Research on foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986) supports this: anxiety can interfere with working memory, reduce willingness to speak, and lower overall performance. In this way, students’ fear of mistakes becomes self-reinforcing, preventing the practice they need to improve, which in turn perpetuates their lack of confidence.

#### Judgement and Negative Feedback

Several students linked their anxiety to perceived negative reactions from teachers or peers when they made errors. Comments included: *“If we didn’t get in trouble for not speaking Irish,”* *“Teachers make us feel worse if we make mistakes,”* and *“If the teachers were to*

*actually help us learn instead of putting us down and saying we don't listen if we get a question they find to be simple wrong, and acting as if we should know everything they want us to know, despite us not necessarily having learned it prior to being in their class."* Students from Irish-medium schools similarly noted that *"teachers are a bit harsh"* and that they dislike *"how teachers give the students bad notes"*. Such responses suggest that some classroom environments may inadvertently heighten students' fear of mistakes through punitive or overly corrective approaches, rather than fostering supportive error-tolerant spaces.

This is significant from an affective perspective. Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis posits that anxiety raises the "affective filter," which blocks language input from being fully processed. Negative emotional climates, where students anticipate criticism, can therefore impede language acquisition, even if instructional quality is high.

#### Impact on Self-Concept and Belief in Ability

Fear of mistakes appears to deeply shape students' self-concept as Irish learners. Many described believing they are *"bad at Irish,"* often because they compare themselves unfavourably to peers or to perceived native speakers. Comments included: *"I'm just not good at Irish"*, *"I was bad at it in primary school too,"* and *"I will never be good at it"*.

Such beliefs reflect what Bandura (1997) describes as low self-efficacy: students who doubt their ability to succeed are less likely to attempt challenging tasks, persist when struggling, or attribute success to their own efforts. Instead, they often attribute failure to internal, stable causes *"I'm just not good at Irish"*, which reinforces learned helplessness and disengagement (Weiner, 1985).

This low self-concept can be especially damaging for language learning, where risk-taking and active participation are essential. Without the confidence to speak, students receive little feedback or communicative experience, which further slows their progress and erodes their sense of competence.

### Emotional and Motivational Consequences

Students' comments also show the emotional toll of low confidence and fear of mistakes. Many described feeling stressed, frustrated, or even hopeless about Irish. Statements like *"It's too stressful trying to learn it for exams"*, *"I don't want to do Irish at all"*, and *"I just hate Irish"* reflect how anxiety and repeated negative experiences can produce strong emotional aversion to the subject.

This aligns with Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory, which identifies competence as a core psychological need. When students do not feel competent, their intrinsic motivation collapses and they often disengage to protect their self-worth. Thus, low confidence is not just a by-product of poor performance but an active cause of ongoing underachievement and disaffection.

### Students' Suggestions for Building Confidence

Students themselves proposed several strategies for reducing anxiety and building confidence. These included creating a more relaxed and supportive classroom atmosphere, encouraging effort rather than perfection, and normalising mistakes. Comments included: *"Make us more confident to speak Irish"* and *"To make it less of a punishment and encourage people to try their best"*.

They also advocated for smaller class groups, more pair or group work, and more opportunities to practise speaking informally without fear of judgement. As one student put it: *"More conversation in groups"*. These approaches could help reduce the social pressure of performing in front of the whole class and provide more low-stakes practice to build fluency.

Research supports these strategies: creating safe speaking spaces, using collaborative tasks, and emphasising communicative success over accuracy have been shown to reduce anxiety and build confidence (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Over time, such environments can help students develop more positive self-beliefs and greater willingness to take risks.

Low confidence and fear of mistakes are major emotional barriers preventing students from participating fully in Irish. Anxiety about being judged or corrected leads many to avoid speaking altogether, which impedes their language development and entrenches their low

self-belief. This fear is often reinforced by negative feedback and a lack of supportive, error-tolerant classroom climates. Addressing this theme requires explicitly fostering confidence-building environments where mistakes are framed as a normal and valuable part of learning. By reducing anxiety and promoting risk-taking, teachers can help students rebuild their self-belief, increase their willingness to speak, and develop a more positive and resilient relationship with Irish.

#### 5.4.9 Thread 8. Overemphasis on grammar and writing

A dominant theme throughout the student responses was the perception that Irish lessons are overly focused on grammar and writing, to the detriment of speaking, listening, and enjoyment. This overemphasis emerged consistently across Gaeltacht, Irish-medium, and English-medium schools, and students frequently described it as monotonous, frustrating, and demotivating. Their feedback suggests that the current balance of instructional content may be undermining both their motivation to learn Irish and their overall enjoyment of the subject.

Thread 8: Student Responses by Context - N = 32

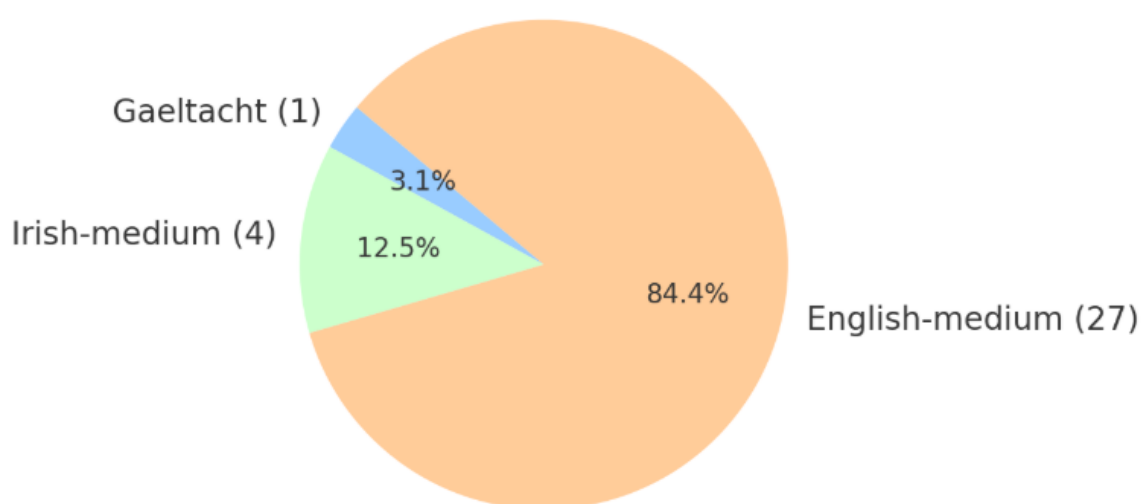


**Figure 23 Proportion of student comments on overemphasis on grammar and writing across English-medium, Irish-medium, and Gaeltacht schools**

### Students' Perceptions of Grammar-Heavy Lessons

Many students explicitly criticised the disproportionate amount of class time devoted to grammar drills, written exercises, and note-taking. Typical comments included: *"We do a lot of grammar"*, *"Instead of only learning some grammar all the time, maybe it would be more helpful to educate us on where specific words come from in the Irish language. Anything to make it more enjoyable, really."*, and *"More activities and not so much writing."*

Students from Irish-medium schools in particular noted that too much time is spent on grammar and written exercises, with one saying: *"Don't just spend the full class learning grammar. Maybe learn grammar by reading a book, watching a show, or writing a story instead of just taking notes the whole class"*. Similarly, students from Gaeltacht schools noted that grammar difficulties were a key source of frustration: *"The grammar needs to be changed because I think that is why people are not so keen on the subject"*.

This perception that grammar dominates instruction reflects a structural feature of the current Irish curriculum, which heavily emphasises grammatical accuracy and written assessment. However, from the students' perspective, this focus appears to overshadow opportunities for communicative use and creative expression, making Irish feel like an abstract academic exercise rather than a living language.

### Negative Impact on Motivation

This grammar-centric approach appears to have a demotivating effect on students. Many associated grammar-heavy lessons with boredom, stress, and a lack of progress. Representative comments included: *"Too much writing, it gets boring"*, *"It's just all essays and grammar,"* and *"Irish is too focused on grammar, make it more fun"*.

These responses align with expectancy-value theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), which suggests that students are motivated when they see value in a task and feel likely to succeed at it. When grammar is presented as endless rules to memorise rather than as a tool for communication, students may struggle to perceive its relevance or experience success, reducing their motivation to engage.

Several students also contrasted Irish with other modern languages they found more enjoyable and easier to learn: *"I know Spanish better than Irish. I have been doing Spanish*

*for 1 and a bit years, and I have been learning Irish for 8”*. This suggests that the perceived lack of communicative and enjoyable content in Irish lessons negatively shapes students’ comparative attitudes and desire to continue studying the language.

### Frustration and Anxiety Around Grammar

Students frequently described grammar as confusing, overly difficult, and a source of stress. Comments included: *“Irish grammar is too hard”*, *“Make grammar easier”*, and *“I get confused by all the rules”*. Students from Gaeltacht schools also emphasised that grammar difficulties discouraged them from speaking Irish: *“If my Irish was better, it could make things easier... I find it very hard to answer questions in Irish”*.

This highlights a paradox: while the curriculum prioritises grammar accuracy, excessive focus on grammar appears to be undermining students’ willingness to use the language at all. According to Krashen’s (1982) Monitor Hypothesis, overemphasis on conscious grammar rules can actually inhibit spontaneous speech by increasing self-monitoring and anxiety. The student data strongly suggests that this is occurring in Irish classrooms.

### Lack of Variety and Enjoyment

Students often linked the emphasis on grammar and writing to a lack of variety and enjoyment in Irish lessons. Many reported that the routine of written exercises and grammar drills makes lessons monotonous: *“It’s just writing every class”*, *“It’s all copying from the board”*, and *“I think that the Irish course is very repetitive”*.

This aligns with research on intrinsic motivation, which shows that novelty, play, and meaningful interaction are crucial for engagement (Deci & Ryan, 1985). By contrast, repetitive grammar tasks offer little novelty or relevance, making it harder for students to connect emotionally with the subject.

### Students’ Suggested Alternatives

Importantly, students did not reject learning grammar altogether but called for it to be taught in more engaging and integrated ways. They suggested learning grammar indirectly through activities such as storytelling, games, reading, or conversation practice, rather than through isolated drills. Comments included: *“Maybe learn grammar by reading a book, watching a show, or writing a story instead of just taking notes the whole class,”* and *“If*



*we did grammar and after learning it, we would do something different in groups and then grammar and so on.”*

They also recommended balancing grammar and writing with more oral and interactive work, such as group discussions, drama, and creative projects. These suggestions align closely with communicative language teaching (CLT), which emphasises meaning-focused interaction as the foundation of language learning (Littlewood, 2004). Research shows that grammar can be more effectively acquired when embedded in meaningful communication rather than taught as abstract rules (Ellis, 2006).

Students perceive the overemphasis on grammar and writing as a major barrier to their motivation and enjoyment of Irish. While grammar knowledge is important, its current dominance appears to be crowding out opportunities for communicative, creative, and engaging learning experiences. This focus leaves many students bored, anxious, and disheartened, reducing their desire to use or continue learning Irish. Rebalancing the curriculum to integrate grammar within meaningful, enjoyable activities, and giving greater weight to oral and interactive tasks, could make Irish learning more motivating, enjoyable, and effective. Addressing this theme is essential to revitalising students’ enthusiasm for the language.

#### 5.4.10 Thread 9: Exam pressure and high-stakes assessment

A central theme emerging from the student responses was the negative impact of exam pressure and high-stakes assessment on their experience of learning Irish. Many students described how the intense focus on tests, grades, and memorisation creates anxiety, diminishes enjoyment, and undermines their intrinsic motivation to learn the language. This concern was widespread across Gaeltacht, Irish-medium, and English-medium schools, indicating that the assessment-driven nature of Irish education is a systemic issue affecting students’ emotional and motivational engagement.

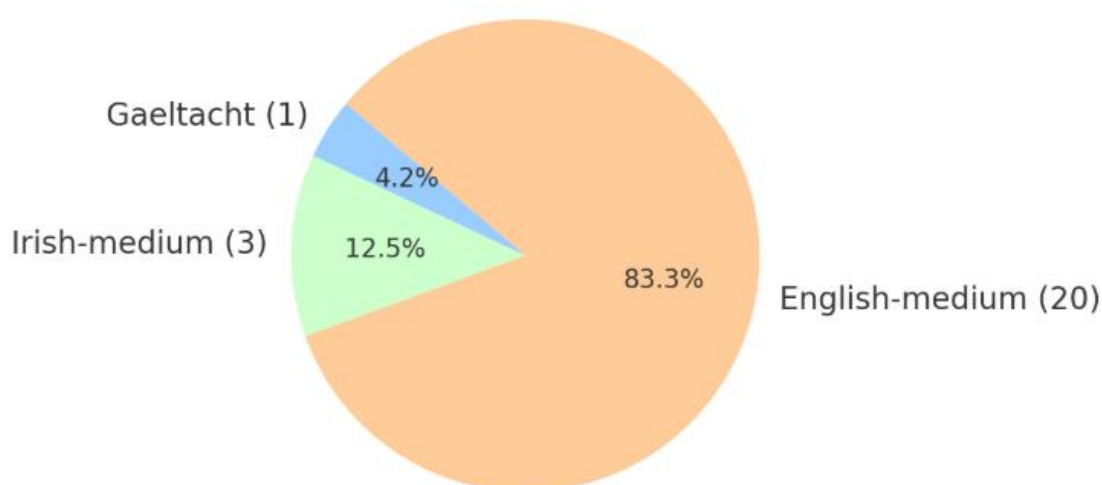


**Figure 24 Proportion of student comments on exam pressure and high-stakes assessment across English-medium, Irish-medium, and Gaeltacht schools**

#### Stress and Anxiety Related to Exams

Students frequently reported feeling stressed, anxious, and overwhelmed by the demands of Irish assessments, particularly at Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate level. Representative comments included: *“It’s too stressful trying to learn it for exams”*, *“Less pressure on getting everything perfect”*, and *“Stop focusing so much on marks”*.

Many expressed that this stress negatively affects their mental well-being and makes them dread Irish lessons. As one student explained: *“If it wasn’t so stressful... and in class it was a bit more fun rather than all note-taking”*. Such remarks align with research showing that high-stakes testing environments can induce debilitating anxiety, which impairs cognitive performance and reduces motivation (Putwain & Daly, 2014).

The emotional toll of this exam pressure contributes to what Krashen (1982) called a raised ‘affective filter’ where stress blocks language input from being fully processed, hindering acquisition. Thus, even capable students may underperform if anxiety prevents them from fully engaging in learning activities.

#### Focus on Memorisation Over Understanding

A related issue repeatedly highlighted by students was the perception that preparing for exams prioritises memorisation of essays, poems, and set texts over genuine language

understanding or communication. Comments included: *“Stop making us memorise essays”*, *“No Irish exams: Irish lessons should be enjoyable and about culture, history, and speech rather than grammar and textbook questions”*, and *“If it was more focused on learning the language than memorising poems, stories, and plays”*.

Students often described this rote learning as frustrating and meaningless, which diminished their motivation: *“I hate Irish... you just have to learn stuff off”*. This reflects a conflict between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985): while students may study for exams out of obligation or fear of failure (controlled motivation), they are unlikely to develop genuine interest or long-term commitment to Irish without meaningful engagement (autonomous motivation).

#### Perceived Unfairness and High Stakes

Some students also perceived the high-stakes nature of Irish exams as unfair, especially when failure could affect access to university or employment. One noted: *“I don’t like how you could be barred from good colleges because you can’t speak Irish”*. Others expressed frustration that their future opportunities seemed to depend on their Irish results, even if they struggled with the language or had limited real-life use for it.

This was especially pronounced among students in Gaeltacht areas, who reported being pressured to take Higher Level Irish solely because of where they live: *“I live in the Gaeltacht and it’s very unfair that we have to do a higher-level test because we live here”*. Such comments suggest that the stakes attached to Irish exams are perceived as disproportionately high, fuelling stress and resentment rather than motivation.

This aligns with research on high-stakes assessment (Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2003), which shows that when students see tests as controlling or punitive, they often disengage to protect their self-worth. Rather than motivating effort, excessive stakes can undermine students’ emotional connection to the subject and create surface learning strategies aimed solely at passing exams.

#### Negative Impact on Enjoyment and Engagement

The dominance of exam preparation appears to crowd out more enjoyable, interactive, and creative approaches to learning Irish, further reducing students’ engagement. Several noted

that Irish lessons focus almost entirely on exam content, leaving no space for fun or real-life language use: *“All we do is learn for exams,” “It’s all about the Leaving Cert,”* and *“We never get to do anything fun in Irish”*.

As a result, students often perceive Irish not as a living language but as a school subject whose sole purpose is assessment. This undermines the intrinsic value they place on Irish and contributes to negative attitudes: *“Make it less about tests and more about actually speaking it”, “Stop teaching it like a dead language”,* and *“Make learning Irish feel less like a chore”*.

### Students’ Suggested Assessment Reforms

Students proposed several changes to reduce exam-related stress and make assessment more meaningful. These included shorter and more frequent low-stakes tests, more emphasis on oral assessment, and greater weight on continuous coursework. Representative comments included: *“Shorter tests and not having to memorise long paragraphs”, “More marks for speaking,”* and *“Make it more like other languages where you get marked on speaking every week”*.

They also suggested incorporating creative projects, cultural activities, and real-life communication tasks into assessment, which could make evaluation more authentic and reduce anxiety. These proposals align with assessment for learning (AfL) principles, which emphasise formative, low-stakes assessment to support learning and motivation (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Students’ responses reveal that the current high-stakes assessment system in Irish education creates significant anxiety, fosters rote learning over meaningful engagement, and undermines motivation. The pressure to perform well in exams, especially when linked to future opportunities, leaves many students stressed, disengaged, and resentful. Rebalancing assessment to place less emphasis on memorisation and high-stakes exams, and more on ongoing oral, interactive, and creative tasks, could reduce anxiety and restore students’ enjoyment and motivation to learn Irish. Addressing this theme is therefore crucial to transforming Irish from a stressful obligation into a meaningful and rewarding subject.

#### 5.4.11 Thread 10: Positive learning experiences: Strengths

While much of the student feedback highlighted challenges and barriers in learning Irish, an important and encouraging theme to emerge was that many students do have positive learning experiences. These experiences, though less frequently discussed than difficulties, offer valuable insights into what fosters motivation, enjoyment, and positive attitudes toward Irish. Students who reported liking Irish often pointed to enthusiastic teachers, interactive lessons, supportive classroom environments, and opportunities to use Irish meaningfully. Understanding these strengths is critical, as they can inform best practice and help guide the development of more engaging, motivating approaches to Irish language education.

Thread 10: Student Responses by Context - N = 20

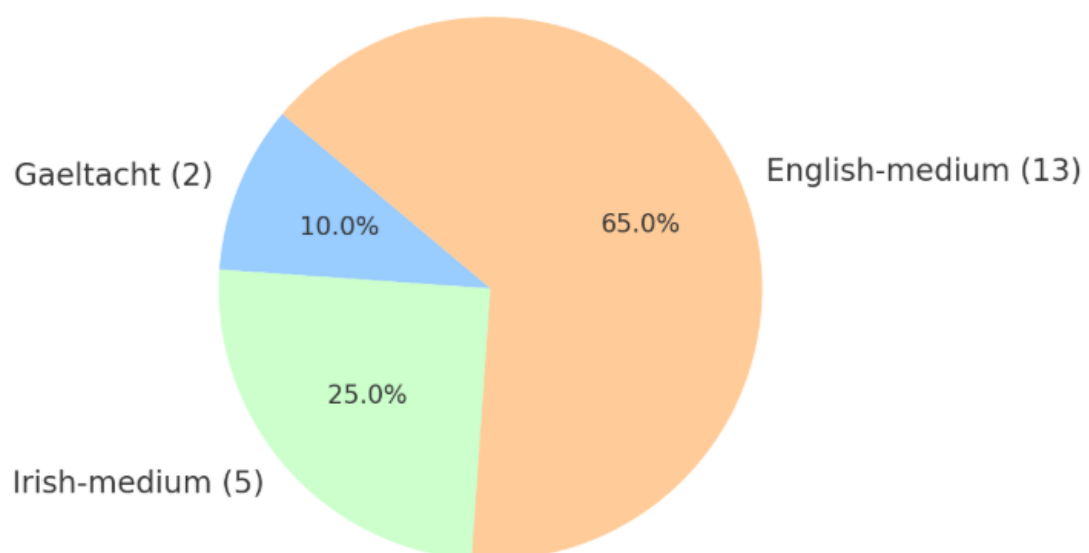


**Figure 25 Proportion of student comments on positive learning experiences across English-medium, Irish-medium, and Gaeltacht schools**

#### Enjoyable and Interactive Lessons

Students who described Irish positively frequently mentioned that their classes were fun, creative, or interactive. Typical comments included: *“I like my experience of learning Irish. My teacher is very nice and makes it very enjoyable.”*

In several cases, students explicitly linked enjoyment to their motivation: *“I like my Irish class”* and *“be around it and people who speak it as much as possible. I find it’s a great way to pick up the language. Something like going to the Gaeltacht is a great way to learn”*. This reinforces the central role of positive affect in language learning motivation. According to Gardner’s (1985) socio-educational model, positive attitudes and enjoyment are strongly associated with increased effort and achievement in language learning. These students’ comments exemplify how incorporating interactive, playful methods can make Irish feel rewarding and intrinsically motivating.

#### Enthusiastic and Supportive Teachers

Teacher enthusiasm and supportive relationships were among the most consistently cited factors in positive experiences. Some students described their Irish teachers as *“very nice,”* or *“brilliant.”* Comments included: *“Nothing, because my Irish teacher is brilliant,”* and *“My teacher is very nice and makes it very enjoyable”*

Students often contrasted these teachers with previous experiences they found discouraging, suggesting that teacher attitude and approach can make a decisive difference. This aligns with extensive research showing that teacher enthusiasm and supportiveness are key predictors of student motivation and engagement (Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007). A positive teacher-student relationship can create a classroom climate where students feel safe to take risks, ask questions, and make mistakes, crucial conditions for language learning.

#### A Sense of Progress and Achievement

Some students noted that they enjoyed Irish because they felt they were making progress and could see themselves improving. Representative comments included: *“I can speak more Irish now,”* and *“immersing in the language. Meet others that have similar levels of Irish and learn with them. Try your best to watch TV as Gaeilge and understand”*.

Experiencing success appears to bolster their confidence and willingness to persist, which aligns with Bandura’s (1997) concept of self-efficacy: when students believe they can succeed, they are more likely to invest effort and enjoy the process. These comments highlight the importance of providing appropriately challenging tasks and celebrating small achievements to sustain motivation.

### Opportunities for Speaking and Real-Life Use

Positive experiences were also linked to opportunities to use Irish in authentic, communicative ways. Students enjoyed conversational activities, Irish-language clubs, and cultural events. Comments included: *“I liked going to the Gaeltacht,” “I also think doing activities outside of school in Irish will really help me improve,”* and *“Letting us talk to each other instead of writing.”*

These opportunities seem to help students view Irish as a living language rather than just a school subject. This aligns with sociocultural theories of language learning (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasise that meaningful social interaction fosters deeper learning and motivation. When students see Irish functioning as a real communicative tool, they are more likely to value it and want to use it.

### Personal Interest and Cultural Connection

A smaller but important group of students described feeling personally or culturally connected to Irish, which enhanced their motivation. Some said they valued Irish as part of their heritage or identity, while others enjoyed learning about Irish culture and history. Comments included: *“The Irish culture is fascinating, and I can't wait to learn more about it”* and *“I would like to learn (through Irish) more about our culture, e.g., Irish music, because that would be a lot of fun to me, and I think it's a good way to learn”*.

These attitudes reflect what Gardner (1985) calls integrative motivation, learning a language out of interest in its cultural community. Fostering this sense of cultural pride could be an important protective factor against disengagement, especially for students who struggle with the language but still value its broader significance.

### Lessons Learned from Positive Experiences

These positive experiences show what works: engaging, interactive lessons; supportive, enthusiastic teachers; opportunities for authentic communication; visible progress; and cultural connection. These factors appear to reinforce each other, creating a virtuous cycle where enjoyment builds motivation, motivation drives effort, and effort produces further enjoyment and success.

They also highlight the role of classroom climate and teacher approach as key levers for change. Even students who previously disliked Irish often reported becoming more engaged when their teacher made lessons fun or built their confidence. This suggests that while structural reforms are important, substantial gains could be made through relatively small shifts in classroom practice, particularly toward more student-centred, confidence-building, and culturally relevant teaching.

While much of the feedback revealed challenges, the positive student experiences offer powerful insights into what fosters motivation and positive attitudes toward Irish. Enjoyable, interactive lessons; supportive teachers; opportunities for communication and cultural engagement; and a sense of progress all appear to nurture students' willingness to learn Irish. These strengths demonstrate that engagement and motivation are possible within the current system when the right conditions are created. Scaling up these positive practices could play a vital role in revitalising students' relationship with Irish and ensuring its long-term sustainability as a living language.

#### 5.4.12 Conclusion

This thematic analysis highlights the complexity of students' experiences with learning Irish, revealing a deeply ambivalent relationship shaped by both systemic barriers and localised strengths. Across all school contexts, students voiced frustration with outdated, repetitive curricula, a lack of interactive pedagogy, excessive focus on grammar and exams, and minimal real-life use of Irish. These challenges often erode students' confidence, enjoyment, and motivation and contribute to a perception of Irish as a compulsory but irrelevant subject.

Yet the data also point to clear pathways forward. When students encounter supportive teachers, interactive lessons, opportunities to speak Irish, and links to their cultural and personal identities, their motivation and attitudes improve markedly. These positive experiences demonstrate that students can and do enjoy learning Irish when the right conditions are present. The findings suggest that reform efforts should focus on making Irish learning more engaging, relevant, and confidence-building by modernising curricula, integrating technology, reducing exam pressure, and expanding real-world opportunities to use Irish.



Ultimately, sustaining Irish as a living language requires more than classroom reform, it requires reshaping how young people experience Irish as part of their everyday lives and identities. This chapter has shown that students are not inherently resistant to Irish, but are often disheartened by the way it is taught. By listening to their voices and addressing the barriers they describe, policymakers and educators can build a more positive and empowering experience of Irish that nurtures not just linguistic skills, but pride, belonging, and cultural continuity.

### 5.5 Comparative summary for phase 2

This phase fused the two strands of the quantitative data, the national AMTB survey ( $n = 1,020$ ) and the open-ended student responses ( $n = 912$ ), to construct a coherent thematic frame to guide the forthcoming qualitative narrative findings. The AMTB survey revealed marked contrasts between students attending Irish-medium (L1) and English-medium (L2) schools. L1 students consistently reported stronger positive orientations, including notably higher scores on Attitude to Learning Irish ( $M = 31.5$  vs  $22.5$ ), Irish-ability self-concept ( $M = 18.9$  vs  $14.7$ ), Desire to Learn Irish ( $M = 25.4$  vs  $18.7$ ) and Attitude to Irish Speakers ( $M = 32.7$  vs  $26.9$ ). They also showed lower Irish-lesson anxiety ( $M = 18.1$  vs  $15.2$ ) and higher perceived parental encouragement ( $M = 26.9$  vs  $23.3$ ). In contrast, L2 students presented a much flatter profile, with weaker attitudes and self-beliefs and heightened anxiety, yet they expressed comparable levels of interest in other foreign languages ( $M = 26.3$  vs  $27.6$ ), suggesting their challenges are not rooted in language learning in general but are specific to Irish. Very low reported home use of Irish across both groups (overall  $M = 3.62$ ) contrasted with broadly positive attitudes to Irish speakers (combined  $M = 29.3$ ) and moderate integrative orientation (combined  $M = 13.6$ ), indicating that while students are generally open to Irish and its speakers, only L1 contexts currently provide the continuity and exposure needed to sustain positive attitudes and motivation.

Patterns also differed by school language context. Students from Irish-medium (L1) settings tended to record higher mean scores for self-concept and attitudes to learning Irish, whereas students from English-medium (L2) schools reported lower motivational intensity, lower self-concept, and higher Irish-lesson anxiety. These patterns are best understood as reflecting differences in exposure and continuity rather than differences in underlying

ability or potential. L1 students typically experience more hours of instruction through Irish, greater opportunities for authentic use, and a stronger sense of cultural belonging, which likely bolster their confidence and motivation. By contrast, L2 students often encounter Irish for fewer hours each week and with limited reinforcement beyond the classroom, conditions that can constrain confidence and motivation despite evident willingness and interest.

The open-ended student responses were thematically analysed and organised into ten recurring threads which captured the main challenges and supports shaping their experiences. These were: (1) lack of fun and interactive methods; (2) minimal real-life use of Irish; (3) insufficient foundational support; (4) limited speaking opportunities in class; (5) repetitive and outdated curriculum content; (6) technology and media integration; (7) low confidence and fear of mistakes; (8) overemphasis on grammar and writing; (9) exam pressure and high-stakes assessment; and (10) positive learning experiences. Each of these threads could be mapped to specific quantitative patterns. For example, the threads on low confidence and fear of mistakes align with the moderate self-concept ( $M = 16.4$ ) and high anxiety ( $M = 16.4$ ) scores, while calls for more speaking opportunities and interactive methods reflect the moderate motivational intensity ( $M = 15.3$ ) and middling attitudes to learning Irish ( $M = 26.2$ ). Similarly, students' concerns about minimal real-life use of Irish are consistent with the low reported home use ( $M = 3.62$ ) alongside relatively positive attitudes to Irish speakers ( $M = 29.3$ ) and moderate integrative orientation ( $M = 13.6$ ).

L1 and L2 students often expressed these issues from different vantage points. L1 students frequently framed their confidence in terms of early immersion and ongoing exposure through Gaelscoil and Gaeltacht experiences, whereas L2 students more often described gaps in foundational knowledge, a lack of confidence, and the pressure of grammar and exam pressured learning. This mirrors their quantitative profiles but should not be read as evidence of differing ability; rather, it underscores how variations in opportunity, exposure and learning conditions shape students' attitudes and self-beliefs.

Considerable thematic overlap existed between the ten original threads. Several addressed interconnected issues, for example, limited speaking opportunities, low confidence, and fear of mistakes often co-occurred, while repetitive curriculum, overemphasis on grammar and writing, and exam pressure clustered around the assessment-driven nature of Irish

learning. Similarly, lack of fun and interactive methods frequently overlapped with technology and media integration, and positive learning experiences were usually described in terms of collaborative or culturally authentic activities. Synthesising these relationships allowed the ten original threads to be meaningfully consolidated into five broader cross-cutting thematic areas: Communicative Confidence and Classroom Interaction; Identity, Culture and Real-World Irish; Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment Alignment; Foundations, Transitions and Differentiation; and Engagement, Media and Modern Input. These five meta-threads now provide the analytic structure for the qualitative phase, enabling a more focused exploration of the mechanisms driving the patterns identified in the survey data.

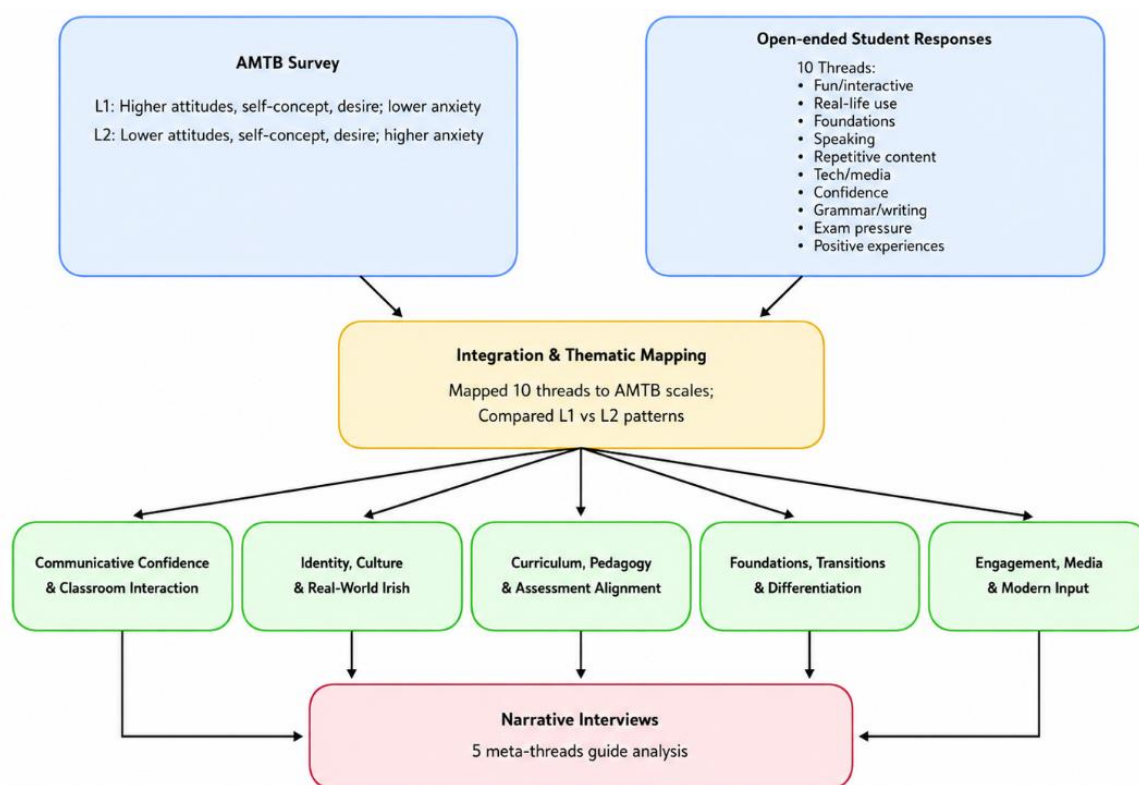


**Figure 26 Integration and thematic mapping framework for phase 2**

## 5.6 Exploratory Sequential Design: Implications for QUAL

The exploratory sequential mixed-methods design of this study required that the quantitative phase directly inform the structure and content of the qualitative phase. While the survey identified what the broad patterns were, the narrative phase was designed to

explore why these patterns emerged and how students experience them within their learning contexts.

The quantitative findings shaped the qualitative design in several ways. The combination of low motivational intensity ( $M = 15.3$ ), high Irish-lesson anxiety ( $M = 16.4$ ) and moderate attitudes and self-concept ( $M = 26.2$ ;  $M = 16.4$ ) highlighted the need to probe students' confidence in speaking Irish both inside and outside the classroom. This informed questions about classroom speaking opportunities, emotional climate, and support from teachers and peers. The contrast between very low home use of Irish ( $M = 3.62$ ) and relatively positive attitudes to Irish speakers ( $M = 29.3$ ) and moderate integrative orientation ( $M = 13.6$ ) also indicated a disconnection between students' willingness to embrace Irish and their lack of authentic opportunities to do so, which led to questions about identity, belonging, and real-world Irish use.

The finding that students showed strong interest in learning other languages ( $M = 26.8$ ) but weaker motivation and enjoyment in Irish specifically suggested that curriculum and pedagogy may be constraining motivation. Accordingly, the narrative interviews explored students' language backgrounds, their views of curriculum content, teaching methods, assessment practices, and their impact on engagement. Because the quantitative data showed clear contextual differences between L1 and L2 students, particularly in their levels of self-concept, attitudes, motivation and anxiety, separate narrative interviews were conducted with L1 ( $n = 5$ ) and L2 ( $n = 5$ ) students to examine how these different starting points shape their experiences. These differences are interpreted here as reflecting variation in exposure and continuity rather than ability.

The ten thematic threads from the open-ended survey were organised into the five cross-cutting meta-threads identified in Section 6.5, and these structured the questioning sequence in the narrative interviews. Questions examined students' language backgrounds and identities, their classroom experiences and supports, and their engagement with Irish beyond the classroom. This design ensured that the qualitative data would provide explanatory depth, illuminating the mechanisms and lived experiences underlying the patterns observed in the quantitative data. The following section 6.7 presents the findings from these narrative interviews, structured around the five meta-threads.

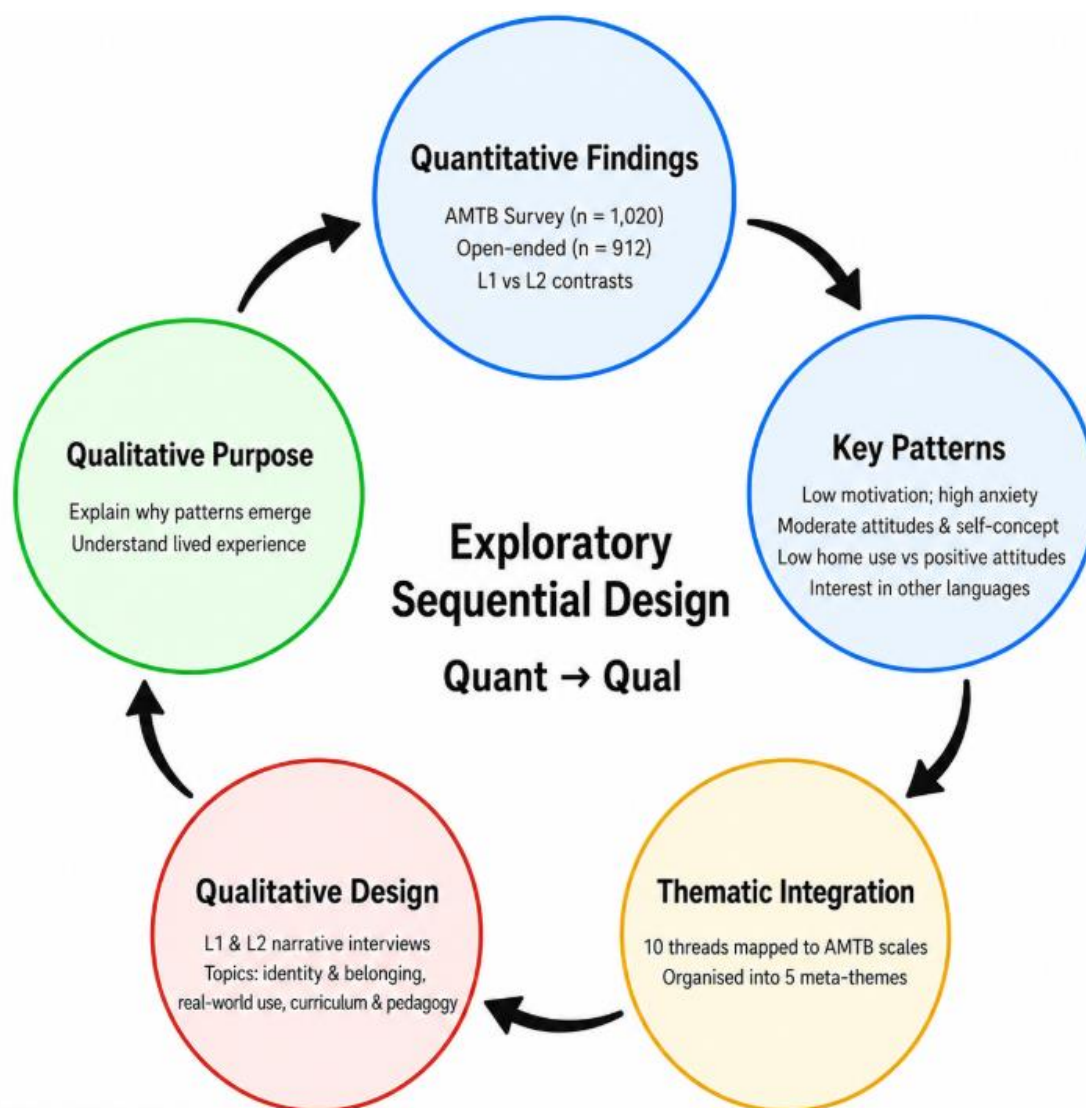


**Figure 27 Exploratory sequential design linking quantitative and qualitative phases**

## 5.7 Section 3: Qualitative findings: L1 & L2 student narrative interviews (n = 10)

### 5.7.1 Introduction

This section reports on the qualitative findings from ten in-depth student narrative interviews, comprising five participants attending an Irish-medium (L1) post-primary school and five attending an English-medium (L2) post-primary school. Their linguistic repertoires and educational backgrounds are outlined in the following table, illustrating the diversity of pathways through which they engaged with Irish language learning. Some participants reported sustained contact with Irish through home use, Gaelscoil attendance, or immersion education, while others described more limited engagement with the

language outside the classroom, often identifying English or additional world languages as dominant within their linguistic repertoires.

The participants volunteered to take part following an invitation distributed through the participating schools and were not intended to be statistically representative of the wider post-primary student population. Rather, the interviews were designed to provide rich, contextualised insight into students' experiences of learning Irish across contrasting educational settings. Participants reflected a range of linguistic backgrounds and language-learning experiences; however, only two had attended English-medium primary schools prior to post-primary education. Consequently, comparisons relating to educational pathways should be interpreted cautiously and viewed as exploratory rather than generalisable. This background information provides the foundation for interpreting the narrative findings, ensuring that students' perspectives are understood within the linguistic, educational, and social contexts in which they were situated.

| Student | Home Languages                                    | Primary School Attended | Other Languages Studied at Post-Primary (MFL) |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| L1-S1   | English; Spanish; Italian (no Irish used at home) | English-medium          | German                                        |
| L1-S2   | English; Russian; some Irish with father          | Gaelscoil               | German                                        |
| L1-S3   | Mostly English; some Irish                        | Gaelscoil               | German                                        |
| L1-S4   | Spanish; English                                  | Gaelscoil               | Spanish                                       |
| L1-S5   | English (little/no Irish at home)                 | Gaelscoil               | Spanish                                       |
| L2-S1   | English (occasional Irish words)                  | Gaelscoil               | French                                        |
| L2-S2   | English; a little Irish from mother               | Gaelscoil               | French                                        |
| L2-S3   | English (~90%); some Irish when younger           | Gaelscoil               | German                                        |
| L2-S4   | English                                           | Gaelscoil               | German                                        |
| L2-S5   | English; Italian; some French                     | English-medium          | French                                        |

**Table 31 Participant profiles for narrative interviews - language backgrounds and schooling**

The analytic frame used here did not emerge in isolation. It was first informed by the large-scale administration of the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) survey (n=1,020 students), complemented by qualitative insights from open-ended written responses (n=912). Analysis of these wider datasets highlighted recurring clusters of issues that shaped how students reported learning Irish. These clusters were synthesised into five

cross-cutting meta-threads: communicative confidence and classroom interaction; identity, culture and real-world Irish; curriculum, pedagogy and assessment alignment; foundations, transitions and differentiation; and engagement, media and modern input. Each of these threads therefore rests on broad quantitative and qualitative evidence, before being explored more deeply through narrative accounts.

The present section develops these five meta-threads within the interviews by focusing closely on how students themselves articulate their experiences. Narratives allow the patterns observed in survey responses to be traced in detail, showing how they play out in individual learning lives. For example, while survey data revealed widespread concern about limited opportunities for speaking, interview extracts bring this finding to life through students' descriptions of lesson routines, peer exchanges, and authentic encounters beyond the classroom. In this way, the narratives do not simply repeat what was identified in the larger dataset but rather extend and contextualise it, highlighting the lived realities behind the statistical patterns.

Each sub-section that follows begins with a thematic synthesis of student perspectives linked to one of the five meta-threads. Verbatim quotations, presented with participant codes, illustrate how learners express their motivations, frustrations, and supports in their own words. This structure ensures that the themes emerging from large-scale data are developed narratively and situated within the distinctive voices of both L1 and L2 students. In doing so, Section 3 provides a textured account of the challenges and opportunities facing young learners of Irish, and establishes a platform for the comparative analysis and implications that follow.

### Sample Interview Questions

| Theme                                         | Sample Questions                                                                                                                           | Link to Quantitative Data                              |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Language background & multilingual households | What is your first/mother tongue? What other languages are spoken at home? How has knowing other languages influenced your Irish learning? | 5.3.1 Multilingual households; 5.3.2 Attitudes         |
| Student attitudes & motivations               | What motivated you to learn Irish? Has that motivation changed? Do you feel                                                                | 5.3.3 Motivations; 5.4.2 Real-life use; 5.4.5 Identity |

|                                                     |                                                                                                                       |                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                     | proud/confident when speaking Irish?                                                                                  |                                                                       |
| <b>Classroom experiences &amp; learning methods</b> | How often do you speak Irish in class? Is it enough? What methods help you most (e.g. grammar, pair work, role play)? | 5.3.4 Experiences; 5.4.1 Lack of fun methods; 5.4.4 Limited speaking  |
| <b>Curriculum &amp; assessment alignment</b>        | Does classwork/exams help you use Irish in real life? What changes would you make to the curriculum?                  | 5.4.5 Outdated curriculum; 5.4.8 Grammar/writing; 5.4.9 Exam pressure |
| <b>Identity, culture &amp; community</b>            | Has Irish made you feel more connected to culture/community? Who do you speak Irish with most?                        | 5.3.5 Identity; 5.4.2 Minimal real-life use                           |
| <b>Foundations &amp; transitions</b>                | How did you experience moving from primary to post-primary Irish? What supports/differentiation would help?           | 5.4.3 Insufficient support; 5.3.6 Factors impacting engagement        |
| <b>Media, technology &amp; input</b>                | Do you use Irish via TG4, social media, apps? Would you like more media/tech in class?                                | 5.4.6 Technology/media integration; 5.3.6 Engagement                  |
| <b>Challenges &amp; supports</b>                    | What has been hardest in learning Irish? What supports (teachers, parents, peers) helped most?                        | 5.4.7 Low confidence; 5.3.6 Engagement factors                        |
| <b>Future aspirations</b>                           | Do you see yourself using Irish in career, community, or family life? How important is Irish to your identity?        | 5.3.3 Motivation; 5.3.5 Identity                                      |

**Table 32 Interview question framework - quantitative to qualitative alignment**

### 5.7.2 Meta-Thread 1: Communicative confidence & classroom interaction

This section reports what students said about communicative confidence and interactional opportunities in Irish across classroom and out-of-school settings. Ten student accounts are included: five L1 learners (L1-S1–S5) and five L2 learners (L2-S1–S5). Extracts are integrated to evidence each finding. Where students refer to time allocations, routines, or activity types, these are presented verbatim.

L1 students describe authentic-use settings as places where Irish is the default medium and hesitation drops. L1-S1 notes, *“When I went to the Gaeltacht, everyone was speaking in Irish,”* presenting the context as ordinary and speech-led rather than exceptional; the



reported effect is readiness to speak in real time alongside highly proficient speakers (L1-S1).

Accounts emphasise frequent, everyday classroom interaction. L1-S2 reports, “*We speak Irish all the time in my Irish class and Irish in every single class except English,*” directly linking frequency to progress (L1-S2). Students foreground peer-to-peer and teacher-student exchanges rather than solitary work, characterising talk as a regular classroom event rather than an occasional task (L1-S2).

Beyond single lessons, students locate Irish across the school day and relationships. L1-S3 says, “*I speak Irish all day with friends and teachers*” (L1-S3). In these accounts, use is not confined to Irish class; it extends to corridors, informal interactions, and other lessons, and is described as typical rather than aspirational (L1-S3).

Alongside frequent use, learners identify a specific classroom request: more teacher-led oral questioning and spoken vocabulary work. L1-S4 comments, “*Teacher should use more questions ... speak the vocabulary more instead of writing it down,*” contrasting preferred spoken routines with experiences they describe as grammar-heavy (L1-S4). The request targets teacher moves (questioning, prompted talk) rather than a general call for “*more speaking.*”

Students also report that casual exchanges outside school create additional speaking episodes that carry into everyday practice. L1-S5 notes, “*Outside school ... you hear someone talk in Irish and you can just have a conversation ... feels nice*” (L1-S5). These moments are presented as straightforward, positive interactions that help sustain day-to-day speaking.

L1 accounts depict a high-density interactional ecology, routine talk in class, spillover use across the school day, and occasional out-of-school exchanges that keep speaking active, alongside a clear request for more teacher-led questioning and spoken vocabulary work (L1-S1–S5). L2 learners, by contrast, characterise ordinary lessons as offering very little opportunity to speak with peers. L2-S1 explains, “*Really, we don’t speak Irish in the class ... we just do grammar and sample answers ... we don’t have a conversation with each*

*other in Irish*” (L2-S1). Speech events are described as incidental or peripheral rather than timetabled, making it difficult to build conversational confidence.

Students add that writing-led routines often overshadow speaking, with talk occurring mainly during whole-class answer checks. L2-S2 notes, *“When we’re calling out answers, that’s probably the most we speak ... we’re just writing most of the time ... I probably wouldn’t be able to have a conversation in Irish, but I’d be able to talk about a poem”* (L2-S2). Speaking is thus framed as a by-product (answer-calling) rather than a planned interpersonal exchange.

When asked what would help, learners describe a predictable, short, timetabled conversation phase at the start of lessons, supported by prompt word lists so that all pairs speak before moving on. L2-S3 states, *“I’d like 10 minutes at the start of class, just speaking in Irish ... maybe if you’re given a list of words and just try to speak about the words”* (L2-S3).

Time estimates underscore how limited speaking currently feels. L2-S4 reports, *“Probably less than a minute per class ... asking to go to the toilet ... it’s mainly writing ... there should definitely be more speaking and also more listening exercises”* (L2-S4). The comment distinguishes procedural talk from learning-oriented speaking and pairs the request for more talk with listening that feeds pair work.

Learners also state that conversation-based practice is more helpful for building oral ability than comprehension-style activity. L2-S5 summarises, *“It’s all really comprehensions ... it’s much harder to pick up Irish if you’re doing comprehensions rather than actually speaking it”* (L2-S5). In these accounts, conversation is the activity they want more of, and it is presented as the condition under which everyday speaking can develop. L2 accounts describe limited in-class speaking, with talk often confined to brief, whole-class turns; students propose a scheduled conversation phase with lexical prompts and request listening that leads into pair talk. Reported time figures such as *“less than a minute per class”* highlight the gap between current routines and the sustained conversational opportunities learners seek (L2-S1–S5).

Meta-thread 1:

Communicative Confidence & Classroom Interaction Table (L1 & L2 Students)

| Student | Theme                                                                                    | Implication for practice                                                                               | Student Comment                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| L1 - S1 | Authentic contexts (Gaeltacht) normalise Irish and lift confidence.                      | Create regular authentic-use experiences (Gaeltacht/club links).                                       | “When I went to the Gaeltacht, everyone was speaking in Irish.” / “Happy to speak ... with people who speak Irish really well and in the Gaeltacht.”                                                             |
| L1 - S2 | Routine classroom talk-time with peers/teacher is a key driver of progress.              | Embed structured conversational openers and sustained pair work across lessons.                        | “We speak Irish all the time in my Irish class and Irish in every single class except English.”                                                                                                                  |
| L1 - S3 | Whole-school Irish use (peers + teachers) builds automaticity and confidence.            | Guarantee frequent interaction across classes; keep peer support visible.                              | “I speak Irish all day with friends and teachers.”                                                                                                                                                               |
| L1 - S4 | Students want more teacher-led questioning and talk; current routines are grammar-heavy. | Rebalance lessons toward spoken interaction with targeted prompts and checks for understanding.        | “Teacher should use more questions ... speak the vocabulary more instead of writing it down.”                                                                                                                    |
| L1 - S5 | Real-world encounters in Irish feel rewarding and motivate further use.                  | Create opportunities for authentic conversations with community partners and events.                   | “Outside school ... you hear someone talk in Irish and you can just have a conversation ... feels nice.”                                                                                                         |
| L2 - S1 | Classroom talk-time is minimal; wants routine conversation to build confidence.          | Embed a daily 10-minute conversational opener; move beyond grammar/sample answers.                     | “Really, we don’t speak Irish in the class... we just do grammar and sample answers... we don't have a conversation with each other in Irish.”                                                                   |
| L2 - S2 | Writing dominates; everyday conversational Irish is lacking.                             | Rebalance toward everyday talk; use speaking tasks tied to daily life (consider proficiency grouping). | “When we're calling out answers, that's probably the most we speak... we're just writing most of the time... I probably wouldn't be able to have a conversation in Irish, but I'd be able to talk about a poem.” |

|         |                                                                                       |                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| L2 - S3 | Wants a planned conversation slot with vocabulary scaffolds.                          | Guarantee structured talk-time (e.g., 10-minute opener) with prompt word lists to support mixed proficiency. | “I’d like 10 minutes at the start of class, just speaking in Irish... Maybe if you’re given a list of words and just try to speak about the words.”                        |
| L2 - S4 | Speaking time is <1 minute; needs more speaking and listening for fluency.            | Introduce everyday check-ins and regular listening that feed pair talk.                                      | “Probably less than a minute per class...asking to go to the toilet... it’s mainly writing... there should definitely be more speaking and also more listening exercises.” |
| L2 - S5 | Comprehension-heavy instruction limits speaking; prefers conversation-based learning. | Replace some comprehension work with conversational practice on everyday functions.                          | “It’s all really comprehensions... it’s much harder to pick up Irish if you’re doing comprehensions rather than actually speaking it.”                                     |

**Table 33 Meta-Thread 1: Communicative confidence and classroom Interaction - student insights**

### 5.7.3 Meta-Thread 2: Identity, culture & real-world Irish

This section reports what students said about identity, culture, and real-world uses of Irish across in-school and out-of-school settings. Ten student accounts are included: five L1 learners (L1-S1–S5) and five L2 learners (L2-S1–S5). Extracts are integrated to evidence each finding. Where students refer to settings, relationships, or activity types, these are presented verbatim.

L1 students describe Gaeltacht immersion as a context where Irish is the unmarked, everyday medium and where belonging is felt through ordinary participation. L1-S1 notes, “*When I went to the Gaeltacht, everyone was speaking in Irish ... it made me feel more connected because everyone speaks it*” (L1-S1). The emphasis is on normality (“*everyone was speaking*”) and on the personal effect of that normality, feeling “*more connected.*”

Students also situate Irish inside family life and GAA/club culture, presenting these as anchors that extend use beyond school hours and across generations. L1-S2 reports, “*I speak Irish with my Dad ... I’m in an GAA Irish club, na Gael Óga and we speak Irish*

*when we play our matches*” (L1-S2). Here, intergenerational talk and organised sport appear together, with Irish described as routine in both.

L1 learners point to public-facing club outputs as visible signals that Irish is the expected language of representation. L1-S3 remarks, *“Our club posts stuff about the club and it’s all through Irish ... videos about the club would be through Irish”* (L1-S3). The choice of Irish is presented as consistent rather than occasional, with audiences beyond school assumed.

Spontaneous public encounters are narrated as recognition moments that cue immediate use of Irish and affirm membership. L1-S4 recalls, *“There was a man ... speaking Irish to me. So I was like, he’s speaking Irish, so I’ll speak back to him”* (L1-S4). The sequence; hearing, replying, is framed as self-evident and positive.

L1 students characterise casual real-world chats as intrinsically rewarding and self-reinforcing. L1-S5 says, *“Outside school ... you hear someone talk in Irish and you can just have a conversation with them ... it feels nice”* (L1-S5). The phrasing *“just have a conversation”* underscores ease rather than preparation. L1 accounts link Irish to belonging and visibility through Gaeltacht immersion, family and GAA/club life, and public representation; brief public exchanges are easy to enter and positively received, reinforcing everyday willingness to use Irish (L1-S1–S5).

L2 students reported experiences of pride, civic usefulness, and public readiness. L2 learners connect national pride to public use, naming ordinary service settings where they envisage speaking. L2-S1 states, *“I’m proud to speak Irish because I’m from Ireland ... I could have a conversation with someone, like in a shop or a public setting”* (L2-S1). Pride is placed first, followed by concrete sites (shops/public), positioning Irish as a marker that can be brought into everyday interactions.

Students also frame Irish as uniquely tied to Ireland and useful in civic moments. L2-S2 explains, *“Not a lot of people speak it ... only people in Ireland do ... if you meet people from another country who can’t read the signs ... you can help them”* (L2-S2). Identity (*“only people in Ireland”*) is paired with a practical scenario (signage/directions), presenting Irish as a resource for assisting others locally.

Learners express a desire to use every day Irish in public spaces, naming specific roles and places for short exchanges. L2-S3 comments, *“Even speaking it in public ... talking to a cashier ... speaking in Irish with someone”* (L2-S3). The examples foreground brief, functional talk as an accessible entry point to public use.

Some L2 students highlight recognition abroad, where Irish functions as a cue of shared origin. L2-S4 notes, *“If you’re abroad and you hear someone speaking Irish ... you speak it back, so you both know you’re from the same place”* (L2-S4). The rapid sequence; hearing, replying, mutual knowing, attaches belonging to a brief exchange outside Ireland.

L2 learners describe local audibility as a belonging cue that increases readiness to initiate talk. L2-S5 states, *“Be nice to hear it around ... that would give me more motivation to speak as well”* (L2-S5). Ambient exposure is presented as a driver of willingness, independent of formal practice. L2 accounts connect Irish to pride and civic usefulness, identify everyday public settings (e.g., shops/cashiers) as preferred sites for speaking, describe recognition through Irish when abroad, and present hearing Irish locally as a prompt to initiate conversation (L2-S1–S5).

#### Meta-Thread 2:

Identity, Culture & Real-World Irish: Evidence Table (L1 & L2 Students)

| Student | Theme                                                                 | Implication for practice                                                                    | Student Comment                                                                                                               |
|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| L1 - S1 | Gaeltacht immersion links Irish to belonging and identity.            | Build Irish-only immersion/community days and sustained Gaeltacht links.                    | “When I went to the Gaeltacht, everyone was speaking in Irish ... it made me feel more connected because everyone speaks it.” |
| L1 - S2 | Family & GAA club, anchor identity and extend real-world Irish.       | Leverage family partnerships and GAA/club partnerships to normalise Irish beyond school.    | “I speak Irish with my Dad ... I’m in an GAA Irish club, na Gael Óga and we speak Irish when we play our matches.”            |
| L1 - S3 | Irish-medium clubs & social media normalise public Irish.             | Partner with youth clubs; set class→club media tasks (short posts/clips in Irish).          | “Our club posts stuff about the club and it’s all through Irish ... videos about the club would be through Irish.”            |
| L1 - S4 | Spontaneous public encounters trigger pride and community membership. | Design public-facing tasks (market/shop conversations) and replicate these norms in school. | “There was a man ... speaking Irish to me. So I was like, he’s speaking Irish, so I’ll speak back to him.”                    |

|         |                                                                        |                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| L1 - S5 | Casual real-world chats feel rewarding and motivate continued use.     | Create supported community conversation opportunities.                                            | “Outside school ... you hear someone talk in Irish and you can just have a conversation with them ... it feels nice.”                                    |
| L2 - S1 | Pride in public use; Irish as the country’s language.                  | Stage ‘shop/public’ role-plays that lead to real local encounters.                                | “I’m proud to speak Irish because I’m from Ireland ... I could have a conversation with someone, like in a shop or a public setting.”                    |
| L2 - S2 | Identity as uniquely Irish; ability to ‘help’ in real-world moments.   | Highlight civic uses (signage, directions) and micro-service projects through Irish.              | “Not a lot of people speak it ... only people in Ireland do ... if you meet people from another country who can’t read the signs ... you can help them.” |
| L2 - S3 | Desire to use everyday Irish in public spaces (e.g., cashier).         | Broker partnerships with local businesses for Irish-first interactions.                           | “Even speaking it in public ... talking to a cashier ... speaking in Irish with someone.”                                                                |
| L2 - S4 | Migration connection: Irish creates recognition when abroad.           | Make ‘Irish abroad’ scenarios/projects (travel cards, greetings, way-finding) part of assessment. | “If you’re abroad and you hear someone speaking Irish ... you speak it back, so you both know you’re from the same place.”                               |
| L2 - S5 | Community soundscape matters; hearing Irish locally boosts motivation. | Support community ‘Irish hours’/listening posts; amplify local Irish audio/media.                 | “Be nice to hear it around ... that would give me more motivation to speak as well.”                                                                     |

**Table 34 Meta-Thread 2: Identity, culture and real-world Irish - student perspectives**

#### 5.7.4 Meta-Thread 3: Curriculum, pedagogy & assessment alignment

This section reports what students said about curriculum structures, everyday pedagogy, and assessment as they relate to developing Irish. Ten student accounts are included: five L1 learners (L1-S1–S5) and five L2 learners (L2-S1–S5). Extracts are integrated to evidence each finding. Where students refer to activity types or assessment emphases, these are presented verbatim.

L1 students portray lessons where speaking serves as the main route to show understanding, with writing positioned as a brief record. L1-S1 summarises this ordering: *“Definitely speaking in an Irish community, like speaking a lot, and probably a bit of writing”* (L1-S1). In these accounts, oral production is the default mode for participating in the lesson and for demonstrating what is known.

Learners describe questioning and discussion as the everyday mechanisms that keep oral work central. L1-S2 links teacher interaction and peer talk, *“asking a teacher questions... and speaking with my friends in Irish”*, and connects these to learning *“to... talk properly in Irish”* (L1-S2). Students characterise this questioning-plus-peer pattern as ordinary lesson flow rather than a special activity.

Students also point to how materials and teacher support organise what counts as curriculum-in-use. L1-S3 remarks, *“Just the books and all the teachers giving you support, like with learning”* (L1-S3). The comment is descriptive, books and teacher help are the visible touchpoints that frame day-to-day work.

A repeated request concerns how vocabulary is handled in class: students want teacher moves that keep target items spoken. L1-S4 states, *“the teacher should use more like questions so we get to speak the vocabulary more instead of writing it down on a page”* (L1-S4). The emphasis is on shifting vocabulary from recording to live use during questioning.

L1 students highlight simple, reliable formats that trigger peer talk on demand. L1-S5 notes, *“If you do like questions or something, we... speak in Irish and just like ask each other stuff”* (L1-S5). These brief prompts are presented as routine, producing frequent, low-stakes evidence of oral ability. L1 accounts depict oral-first classroom alignment: teacher questioning and peer discussion are the everyday conduits for demonstrating understanding, with writing used after speaking; materials and teacher support shape the visible curriculum, and students ask that vocabulary be spoken in questioning rather than only written (L1-S1–S5).

L2 learners describe a task mix dominated by written, assessment-type products, with limited space for sustained peer talk. L2-S1 states, *“We just... do grammar and sample answers and stuff”* (L2-S1). Speaking is not cited as a core product in this account, aligning lessons with model answers and written responses. Where speaking occurs, students say it is often confined to whole-class answer-calling. L2-S2 explains, *“when we’re calling out answers, that’s probably the most that we speak... we’re just writing most of the time”* (L2-S2). The contrast positions oral turns as brief interludes within a largely writing-led routine.



A further strand centres on form-focused explanations. L2-S3 reports initial difficulty with grammar until *“it was explained a different way... then it was pretty simple”* (L2-S3). The account emphasises clarity of explanation; immediate communicative use is not referenced here, indicating that explanation and interaction can sit apart in current practice.

Students also note that oral/aural modes are sparse in general. L2-S4 comments, *“we wouldn’t really be speaking or doing listening exercises often in Irish class”* (L2-S4). Speaking and listening are grouped together as under-represented in the routine mode balance.

L2 learners connect the predominance of comprehension tasks with difficulty building everyday speech. L2-S5 states, *“it’s so much harder to pick up Irish if you’re doing comprehensions rather than actually speaking it... the kind of things you’d use every day”* (L2-S5). In these accounts, students implicitly differentiate between what gets produced and collected (written comprehensions, model answers) and what they feel would evidence oral development (sustained, everyday talk). L2 accounts portray written products (comprehensions, model answers, grammar writing) as central, with speaking mostly limited to brief answer-calling; learners highlight explanation without immediate interaction, infrequent listening, and report that the current task mix does not capture everyday speech they wish to develop (L2-S1–S5).

Meta-Thread 3: Curriculum, Pedagogy & Assessment Alignment Table (L1 & L2 Students)

| Student | Theme                                                        | Implication for practice                                                      | Student Comment                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| L1 - S1 | Desire for pedagogies that prioritise speaking over writing. | Guarantee talk-time; assess speaking frequently with low-stakes checks.       | “Definitely speaking in an Irish community, like speaking a lot, and probably a bit of writing.”                                                                                         |
| L1 - S2 | Students request more questioning/discussion pedagogy.       | Embed daily questioning cycles and structured pair/group talk.                | “I think asking a teacher questions if I’m not sure of the words or meanings, and speaking with my friends in Irish, which helps me also learn more and to like talk properly in Irish.” |
| L1 - S3 | Curriculum/pedagogy alignment issues noted.                  | Align curriculum, teaching moves, and assessment with communicative outcomes. | “Just the books and all the teachers giving you support, like with learning.”                                                                                                            |

|         |                                                                   |                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| L1 - S4 | Students request more questioning/discussion pedagogy.            | Embed daily questioning cycles and structured pair/group talk.                      | “Yeah, I feel like the teacher should use more like questions so we get to speak the vocabulary more instead of writing it down on a page.”                                                                       |
| L1 - S5 | Desire for pedagogies that prioritise speaking over writing.      | Guarantee talk-time; assess speaking frequently with low-stakes checks.             | “If you do like questions or something, we like speak in Irish and just like ask each other stuff.”                                                                                                               |
| L2 - S1 | Assessment tasks dominate (comprehension/sample answers/writing). | Rebalance towards oral/interactive tasks; align assessment with communicative aims. | “We just like do grammar and sample answers and stuff.”                                                                                                                                                           |
| L2 - S2 | Desire for pedagogies that prioritise speaking over writing.      | Guarantee talk-time; assess speaking frequently with low-stakes checks.             | “Well, like when we're calling out answers, that's probably the most that we speak in our classes because we're just like writing most of the time.”                                                              |
| L - S3  | Grammar-heavy focus may limit communicative practice.             | Pair grammar work with immediate communicative use (listen-then-use, info-gap).     | “I think like I just kind of struggle with the grammar a little bit, but then it was explained a different way and then it was pretty simple, you know.”                                                          |
| L2 - S4 | Desire for pedagogies that prioritise speaking over writing.      | Guarantee talk-time; assess speaking frequently with low-stakes checks.             | “Like, we wouldn't really be speaking or doing listening exercises often in Irish class.”                                                                                                                         |
| L2 - S5 | Assessment tasks dominate (comprehension/sample answers/writing). | Rebalance towards oral/interactive tasks; align assessment with communicative aims. | “I just think it's so much harder to pick up Irish if you're doing comprehensions rather than actually speaking it and talking about like the kind of things you'd use every day, rather than stories and stuff.” |

**Table 35 Meta-Thread 3: Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment alignment - student perspectives**

#### 5.7.5 Meta-Thread 4: Foundations, transitions & differentiation

This section reports what students said about entry foundations and differentiation for Irish across in-school and out-of-school contexts. Ten student accounts are included: five L1 learners (L1-S1–S5) and five L2 learners (L2-S1–S5). Extracts are integrated to evidence each finding. Where students refer to time, settings, or supports, these are presented verbatim.

L1 learners who began Irish later (from English-medium primary) describe thin early exposure and a need to build a baseline quickly. L1-S1 explains, *“I went to an English primary school ... only half an hour or maybe only an hour per week,”* adding, *“I took a private tutoring class and I have a feeling it helped a lot”* (L1-S1). Limited weekly contact is foregrounded, with targeted tutoring named as a practical bridge to cover core ground.

A second thread concerns confidence as part of the foundation: some students say early nerves masked what they could already do until routines were established. L1-S2 recalls, *“I was more nervous ... I thought that I didn’t do well in my exams, but that was all just my nerves and I was OK at the end”* (L1-S2). In these accounts, reassurance and low-stakes checks are treated as enabling conditions for underlying competence to show.

Students highlight a home–school partnership that co-scaffolds basics and grammar so practice can happen beyond class. L1-S3 reports, *“Our parents were encouraged to pick up Irish so that they could help us at home ... we got a lot of support from school,”* and, *“My mom ... got like posters and stuff to help me”* (L1-S3). Concrete tools, posters, parental involvement, quick teacher help, are cited as visible resources that underpin core knowledge at home.

Learners describe skill-split profiles that call for differentiation: stronger speaking/vocabulary/pronunciation alongside weaker spelling; they also prefer classroom moves that keep talk active. L1-S4 says, *“I’m better at speaking ... I have a bit worse spelling ... but I have more of a vocabulary and better pronunciation,”* adding, *“Teacher should use more questions ... instead of writing it down”* (L1-S4). Oral strengths and orthographic challenges are distinguished, with questioning named as a day-to-day way to keep vocabulary in spoken use.

Where home Irish exposure is low, learners keep momentum with bite-size inputs and immediate teacher help. L1-S5 notes, *“Asking the teacher for help ... is a support,”* and, *“If there was something like Irish on the TV ... we’d sit and watch it for a few minutes ... that kind of helps”* (L1-S5). The pattern is opportunistic: short media moments plus quick clarifications to sustain foundations between lessons. L1 accounts foreground baseline building for late starters, confidence-enabling routines, home–school co-scaffolds (parental

help, posters, teacher access), and skill-split differentiation (oral strengths vs. spelling), with bite-size exposure used to maintain progress where home Irish is limited (L1-S1–S5).

L2 students reported experiences of foundational access and differentiation. L2 learners say that the current lesson mix centres on grammar/sample answers/comprehension, leaving limited access to oral foundations (routine pair talk, formulaic exchanges, listening that feeds speech). L2-S1 states, *“Really, we don’t speak Irish in the class ... we just do grammar and sample answers ... we don’t have a conversation with each other in Irish”* (L2-S1). Peer conversation is described as largely absent from ordinary lessons.

Students propose learner-driven differentiation to match input and tasks to proficiency so that foundations can be built at an appropriate pace. L2-S2 suggests, *“If they standardised it ... everyone of the same level was put into the same class, so then everyone’s learning together”* (L2-S2). The emphasis is on fit, keeping challenge consistent within groups rather than spreading very different needs across the same activity.

Learners also describe explanatory clarity as foundational, with bilingual explanations unlocking tricky grammar, alongside a request for a short, structured speaking slot to consolidate. L2-S3 reports, *“It was explained a different way in primary and it was pretty simple ... now it’s mostly English to explain,”* and adds, *“... at the start of class speaking in Irish would be good ... given a list of words”* (L2-S3). Understanding form and getting guaranteed time-on-task for speech are presented as complementary foundations.

Some accounts point to profile-aware differentiation within the same class: higher oral vocabulary/pronunciation but weaker spelling, especially among students with prior Irish-medium exposure. L2-S4 says, *“I’m better with vocabulary and better pronunciation ... a bit worse at spelling”* (L2-S4). The profile implies parallel supports, extension in oral work to maintain fluency, plus targeted spelling practice.

L2 students without home/community Irish describe foundation gaps that persist without reinforcement. L2-S5 explains, *“Nobody speaks Irish at home ... Neither of my parents learned it ... I don’t really hear it at all”* (L2-S5). Ambient absence is presented as a background condition that reduces incidental uptake; school is framed as the primary site of exposure. L2 accounts emphasise limited oral foundations within current task mixes,

propose proficiency-matched grouping, value bilingual explanation plus a brief structured speaking phase to consolidate, note mixed profiles (oral strengths vs. spelling), and describe foundation gaps where home/community Irish is not audible (L2-S1–S5).

Meta-Thread 4:

Foundations, Transitions & Differentiation Table (L1 & L2 Students)

| Student | Theme                                                                                                                        | Implication for practice                                                                                                                                | Student Comment                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| L1 - S1 | Late-start Irish (English-medium primary) → needs a ‘bridge’ of support                                                      | Design a 4–6 week bridge unit at entry, signpost optional tutoring for catch-up.                                                                        | “I went to an English primary school ... only half an hour or maybe only an hour per week.” / “I took a private tutoring class and I have a feeling it helped a lot.”                        |
| L1 - S2 | Transition shock (nerves) masks underlying ability during move to secondary.                                                 | Build a transition onboarding: early low-stakes speaking checks, explicit reassurance about assessment, and weekly teacher check-ins to defuse anxiety. | “I was more nervous going into secondary ... I thought that I didn’t do well in my exams, but that was all just my nerves and I was OK at the end.”                                          |
| L1 - S3 | Home-school partnership as foundation: parents and school co-scaffold basics and grammar.                                    | Issue home starter packs (posters/parent guides), plus short teacher one-to-ones to convert knowledge to use.                                           | “Our parents were encouraged to pick up Irish so that they could help us at home ... we got a lot of support from school.” / “My mom ... got like posters and stuff to help me.”             |
| L1 - S4 | Skill-split differentiation: strong pronunciation/vocab from Gaelscoil; weaker spelling; grammar-heavy routines reduce talk. | Run a spelling/orthography clinic for Gaelscoil graduates while increasing teacher questioning to push oral practice.                                   | “I’m better at speaking ... I have a bit worse spelling ... but I have more of a vocabulary and better pronunciation.” / “Teacher should use more questions ... instead of writing it down.” |
| L1 - S5 | Low home Irish exposure: relies on quick teacher help and bite-size input to keep momentum.                                  | Provide tasks with app/dictionary ‘look-up’ routines.                                                                                                   | “Asking the teacher for help ... is a support.” / “If there was something like Irish on the TV ... we’d sit and watch it for a few minutes ... that kind of helps.”                          |
| L2 - S1 | Assessment-heavy routines (grammar/sample answers) squeeze out                                                               | Audit task mix; embed a daily 10-minute conversation slot tied to unit vocabulary.                                                                      | “Really, we don’t speak Irish in the class ... we just do grammar and sample answers ... we don’t have                                                                                       |

|         |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|         | conversation during the secondary transition.                                                         |                                                                                                                           | a conversation with each other in Irish.”                                                                                                                                                                          |
| L2 - S2 | Learner-proposed differentiation: proficiency-based grouping to match instruction to level.           | Adopt flexible level bands and tiered tasks; rotate roles (coach/reporter) to balance access.                             | “If they standardised it ... everyone of the same level was put into the same class, so then everyone’s learning together.”                                                                                        |
| L2 - S3 | Transition pedagogy: bilingual explanation of tricky grammar unlocks understanding.                   | Use bilingual explainers at the start of cycles, then taper to Irish-only; provide prompt word-lists for structured talk. | “It was explained a different way in primary and it was pretty simple ... now it’s mostly English to explain.” / “Like 10 minutes at the start of class speaking in Irish would be good... given a list of words.” |
| L2 - S4 | Profile-aware differentiation: higher oral vocabulary/pronunciation; weaker spelling after Gaelscoil. | Offer spelling remedial tasks alongside extended oral tasks to sustain fluency gains.                                     | “I’m better with vocabulary and better pronunciation than other students in my class ... a bit worse at spelling.”                                                                                                 |
| L2 - S5 | Non-Irish home languages create foundation gaps at entry without community reinforcement.             | Run baseline diagnostics and pair with a peer buddy; send home ‘starter Irish’ packs for families.                        | “Nobody speaks Irish at home ... Neither of my parents learned it ... I don’t really hear it at all.”                                                                                                              |

**Table 36 Meta-Thread 4: Foundations, transitions and differentiation - student perspectives**

#### 5.7.6 Meta-Thread 5: Engagement, media & modern input

This section reports what students said about media and modern input for Irish across home and community contexts. Ten student accounts are included: five L1 learners (L1-S1–S5) and five L2 learners (L2-S1–S5). Extracts are integrated to evidence each finding. Where students refer to platforms, programmes, or devices, these are presented verbatim.

L1 students reported experiences of media contact and carry-over into use. L1 learners describe children’s TV as familiar, short-form input that keeps attention and exposes them to dialectal variety. L1-S1 reports, “*I would watch Cúla4 sometimes on my TV. The actors... have different dialects*” (L1-S1). In these accounts, brief episodes are routine and the presence of multiple dialects is treated as expected rather than confusing, with variety encountered as part of normal viewing.

L1 students also point to video and radio as sources that stock vocabulary they later draw on in speech. L1-S4 says, *“More videos... they use loads of grammar and vocabulary... we’ll understand it more,”* adding, *“My dad put on the Irish TG4 shows...”* and *“Sometimes in the car... Irish would come on and we would just listen to that”* (L1-S4). The emphasis is on repeated exposure in everyday settings (home TV, car radio) and on the feeling that vocabulary availability increases with listening.

L1 learners mention club-linked social media as both motivating and domain-specific. L1-S3 notes, *“My club posts stuff... it’s all through Irish... videos... on our Instagram... It helps me... different phrases for sport”* (L1-S3). Here, outward-facing clips that students already follow are described as supplying ready-made expressions tied to contexts they care about (sport).

L1 students also report switching sports/TV to Irish, citing GAA coverage as comprehensible and engaging. L1-S2 explains, *“I might put the TV on in Irish... my brother would watch GAA in Irish... I would understand what’s going on”* (L1-S2). Topic familiarity is presented as a support for understanding, with Irish-language commentary compatible with keeping up with the match.

Where family use is low, L1 learners describe light-touch viewing with on-device look-ups to maintain engagement. L1-S5 says, *“If there was something like Irish on the TV, we’d sit and watch it for a few minutes... that kind of helps,”* and mentions *“...searching up on your iPad or something”* (L1-S5). The pattern is brief exposure plus quick searches to stabilise understanding outside class.

L1 accounts situate Irish within short, routine media moments, Cúla4, TG4, radio, club Instagram/videos, and sports coverage, and report that these inputs sustain interest, increase accessible vocabulary, and provide domain-linked phrases, with device look-ups used to support comprehension (L1-S1–S5).

L2 students reported experiences of accessible input, pronunciation noticing, and incremental uptake. L2 learners characterise home media (TG4/radio) as accessible input that transfers to speech, especially for pronunciation and everyday words. L2-S1 reports, *“My sister watches TG4 at home... like the radio...”* and adds, *“It helps you like how to*

*pronounce words... and use those words... in an everyday conversation*” (L2-S1). The link described is from passive listening to later small-scale reuse in talk.

L2 students also cite sports commentary in Irish as a site for incidental vocabulary pickup. L2-S2 explains, *“Sometimes when you’re watching a match on TV, they have the commentators speaking in Irish... you pick up a few words”* (L2-S2). The reported gains are modest (*“a few words”*) but recurring across repeated viewing.

Some L2 learners indicate they already watch Irish-language sports, naming camogie on TG4. In a short exchange, L2-S3 is asked, *“Do you watch TG4 and the camogie matches through Irish?”* and answers, *“Yeah, yeah”* (L2-S3). This positions Irish-language sports as current habit rather than a future change.

Students highlight media-driven pronunciation gains that support everyday conversation. L2-S4 echoes the progression from listening to use: *“...it helps you like how to pronounce words and how to use those words... in an everyday conversation”* (L2-S4). The sequence is described as noticing sounds first, then carrying items into short exchanges.

L2 learners mention radio as a complementary background source, again stressing incremental word pickup. L2-S5 states, *“We’d be listening... picking up a few words... like the radio”* (L2-S5). Radio is framed as ambient input that nonetheless adds small units of vocabulary over time. L2 accounts present TG4, radio, and Irish-language sports commentary as approachable inputs that foster pronunciation noticing and small, reusable lexical gains, with existing viewing habits (e.g., camogie on TG4) providing topic-relevant material for later everyday talk (L2-S1–S5).

Meta-Thread 5:

Engagement, Media & Modern Input Table (L1 & L2 Students)

| Student | Theme                                                      | Implication for practice                                                | Student Comment                                                                                                                   |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| L1 - S1 | Children’s TV & dialect exposure sustain engagement.       | Curate short TV clips aligned to topics; follow with speak-first tasks. | “I would watch Cúla4 sometimes on my TV. The actors... have different dialects.”                                                  |
| L1 - S4 | Video input (TG4) and radio build vocab that feeds output. | Use listen-then-use cycles                                              | “More videos... they use loads of grammar and vocabulary... we’ll understand it more.” / “My dad put on the Irish TG4 shows...” / |



|         |                                                                                                |                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|         |                                                                                                |                                                                                          | “Sometimes in the car... Irish would come on and we would just listen to that.”                                                                              |
| L1 - S3 | Social media through Irish (club Instagram/videos) motivates and adds domain phrases.          | Seed tasks from student-facing Instagram/club posts; phrases for immediate dialogic use. | “My club posts stuff... it’s all through Irish... videos... on our Instagram... It helps me... different phrases for sport.”                                 |
| L1 - S2 | Switching sports/TV to Irish (e.g., GAA coverage) supports comprehension and motivation.       | Encourage ‘sport-in-Irish’ at home; provide quick glossaries for match commentary.       | “I might put the TV on in Irish... my brother would watch GAA in Irish... I would understand what’s going on.”                                               |
| L1 - S5 | Light-touch home viewing plus on-device look-ups maintains engagement, when family use is low. | Provide tasks with approved dictionary/app links on school iPad/home devices.            | “If there was something like Irish on the TV, we’d sit and watch it for a few minutes... that kind of helps.” / “...searching up on your iPad or something.” |
| L2 - S1 | Home media (TG4/radio) offers accessible input that transfers to speech.                       | Share curated TG4/radio playlists; model ‘notice-and-imitate’ pronunciation routines.    | “My sister watches TG4 at home... like the radio...” / “It helps you like how to pronounce words... and use those words... in an everyday conversation.”     |
| L2 - S2 | Sports commentary in Irish (TV) helps pick up vocabulary incidentally.                         | Set ‘watch-a-clip’ homework: extract 5 new words from commentary and reuse in class.     | “Sometimes when you’re watching a match on TV, they have the commentators speaking in Irish... you pick up a few words.”                                     |
| L2 - S3 | Students already connect with TG4 sports coverage.                                             | Link classroom speaking tasks to TG4 camogie segments students already watch.            | “Do you watch TG4 and the camogie matches through Irish?” - “Yeah, yeah.”                                                                                    |
| L2 - S4 | Media-driven pronunciation gains support everyday talk.                                        | Turn short media lines into quick role-plays to recycle rhythmic pattern and lexis.      | “...it helps you like how to pronounce words and how to use those words... in an everyday conversation.”                                                     |
| L2 - S5 | Real-world broadcast input complements classroom learning.                                     | Blend live/radio snippets with in-class ‘shadowing’ to build fluency.                    | “We’d be listening... picking up a few words... like the radio.”                                                                                             |

**Table 37 Meta-Thread 5: Engagement, media and modern input - student perspectives**

### 5.7.7 Comparison of L1 and L2 student narratives

The comparative findings highlight stark contrasts between L1 and L2 students across five thematic areas, while also revealing some shared needs and overlapping experiences.

Communicative confidence and classroom interaction emerge as a defining divergence. L1 students describe a high-density interactional ecology, where Irish is used routinely across lessons, corridors, and informal peer exchanges. As L1-S3 put it, *“I speak Irish all day with friends and teachers.”* For these learners, immersion contexts such as the Gaeltacht normalise use: L1-S1 reflected, *“When I went to the Gaeltacht, everyone was speaking in Irish ... happy to speak ... with people who speak Irish really well.”* In contrast, L2 learners report minimal speaking time, often less than one minute per class, with Irish lessons dominated by grammar and comprehension. L2-S1 noted, *“Really, we don’t speak Irish in the class ... we just do grammar and sample answers.”* Requests for structured conversation slots with scaffolds (e.g., *“10 minutes at the start of class ... given a list of words,”* L2-S3) highlight a strong appetite for interaction.

In terms of identity, culture, and real-world Irish, L1 students ground their sense of belonging in community networks. L1-S2 captured this integration: *“I speak Irish with my Dad ... I’m in an GAA Irish club, na Gael Óga and we speak Irish when we play our matches.”* Similarly, everyday encounters reinforce identity, as L1-S4 recalled, *“There was a man ... speaking Irish to me. So I was like, he’s speaking Irish, so I’ll speak back to him.”* By contrast, L2 students frame Irish in terms of civic pride and usefulness. L2-S1 stated, *“I’m proud to speak Irish because I’m from Ireland ... I could have a conversation with someone, like in a shop or a public setting.”* For L2 learners, public audibility and recognition, even abroad, matter: L2-S4 noted, *“If you’re abroad and you hear someone speaking Irish ... you speak it back, so you both know you’re from the same place.”*

Curriculum and pedagogy reinforce this divide. L1 accounts place speaking at the centre of learning and assessment, with writing secondary. L1-S4 asked that teachers *“use more questions ... speak the vocabulary more instead of writing it down.”* Conversely, L2 accounts emphasise comprehension and grammar tasks, with speaking confined to answer-calling. As L2-S5 reflected, *“It’s so much harder to pick up Irish if you’re doing comprehensions rather than actually speaking it.”*

Foundations and transitions also diverge. L1 late starters report gaps but describe targeted scaffolds such as tutoring and home-school support: L1-S1 explained, *“I went to an English primary school ... only half an hour ... I took a private tutoring class and I have a feeling it helped a lot.”* Others highlight parental involvement: L1-S3 noted, *“Our parents*

were encouraged to pick up Irish ... my mom ... got like posters and stuff to help me.” L2 learners, in contrast, emphasise lack of home reinforcement: L2-S5 admitted, “*Nobody speaks Irish at home ... I don’t really hear it at all.*” They propose system-level differentiation, for example, “*If they standardised it ... everyone of the same level was put into the same class*” (L2-S2).

Engagement with media provides a shared bridge. Both groups report benefiting from TG4, sports commentary, and radio, though with slightly different emphases. L1 students link media to motivation and domain-specific phrases, “*My club posts stuff ... it’s all through Irish ... It helps me ... different phrases for sport*” (L1-S3), while L2 students highlight pronunciation and incremental vocabulary gains, as L2-S1 observed: “*It helps you like how to pronounce words ... and use those words ... in an everyday conversation.*”

L1 students’ narratives portray Irish as a living, everyday medium embedded in school, family, and community life, whereas L2 students describe restricted classroom opportunities, low exposure outside school, and a desire for structured, supported speaking. Both groups, however, value authentic use, accessible media, and oral interaction, suggesting clear points of convergence for pedagogical practice.

Thematic Comparison Matrix for L1 & L2 Student Narratives

| Aspect                                                         | L1 School Findings                                                                                                       | L2 School Findings                                                                                                                    | Rationale                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Communicative Confidence &amp; Classroom Interaction</b> | Frequent routine talk across class & school day; immersion normalises speaking; desire for more teacher-led questioning. | Limited talk-time (<1 min); writing/comprehension dominates; request structured 10-min conversation slots + listening.                | L1 students immersed in high-density oral ecology; L2 students experience restricted oral practice and call for scaffolds. |
| <b>2. Identity, Culture &amp; Real-World Irish</b>             | Irish tied to belonging (Gaeltacht, family, GAA/club); public use feels normal; spontaneous chats affirm membership.     | Irish tied to pride, civic usefulness, and recognition (shops, cashiers, signs, abroad); motivation boosted by hearing Irish locally. | L1 identity rooted in lived community & public presence; L2 identity aspirational and linked to civic/national pride.      |
| <b>3. Curriculum, Pedagogy &amp;</b>                           | Oral-first: speaking before writing; questioning/discussion                                                              | Written tasks dominate (grammar,                                                                                                      | L1 lessons aligned to communicative outcomes; L2 lessons aligned to                                                        |

|                                                          |                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Assessment Alignment</b>                              | are routine; vocabulary should be spoken not just written.                                                                                                    | comprehensions, sample answers); oral turns brief (answer-calling); listening rarely included.                                                                               | written/assessment products.                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>4. Foundations, Transitions &amp; Differentiation</b> | Late starters need bridge units; nerves at transition; home-school scaffolding (parents, posters, quick teacher help); oral strengths vs spelling weaknesses. | Limited oral foundations in secondary; call for proficiency grouping; bilingual explanations; structured speaking slots; oral vs spelling split; home exposure often absent. | Both highlight need for tailored supports; L1 benefits from home/community scaffolds; L2 struggles with lack of exposure and seeks structured differentiation. |
| <b>5. Engagement, Media &amp; Modern Input</b>           | Cúla4, TG4, radio, club Instagram, GAA coverage in Irish; media builds vocab, domain-specific phrases, and motivation; device look-ups support comprehension. | TG4, radio, sports commentary (camogie, matches); accessible input builds pronunciation and small lexical gains; students already connect with TG4 sports.                   | Both groups value media input; L1 highlights social media and club outputs; L2 highlights pronunciation gains and incremental vocabulary.                      |

**Table 38 Thematic comparison matrix for L1 + L2 student narratives: communicative, identity, pedagogical, and engagement dimensions**

### 5.7.8 Conclusion

The narratives in this section trace how ten students, five L1 and five L2, encounter Irish across school, home, and community, with the opening background table clarifying the linguistic ecologies that shape each account. Students who arrived from English-medium primary or homes with little Irish describe thinner foundations and fewer incidental opportunities; those with Gaelscoil histories or family use narrate denser exposure and more routine talk. This variation in starting points is visible in what students count as “normal” language activity: for some, Irish is the unmarked medium of everyday school life; for others, it is largely a subject of study with limited space for spontaneous use.

Across Meta-thread 1: Communicative Confidence & Classroom Interaction, L1 students consistently describe a high-frequency speaking environment that spans the class period

and spills over into corridors, clubs, and casual encounters. Statements such as *“We speak Irish all the time in my Irish class and Irish in every single class except English”* (L1-S2) and *“I speak Irish all day with friends and teachers”* (L1-S3) present oral interaction as ordinary. L2 students, by contrast, characterise talk as incidental, often confined to answer-calling or procedural phrases, while written tasks dominate. As one learner noted, *“Really, we don’t speak Irish in the class ... we just do grammar and sample answers ... we don’t have a conversation with each other in Irish”* (L2-S1). Their remedy is specific and practical: a short, timetabled conversation phase, ideally scaffolded with prompt word lists.

Meta-thread 2: Identity, Culture & Real-World Irish, shows belonging taking different routes. For L1 students, identity is anchored in lived communities, family talk, club life, the Gaeltacht, and affirmed through everyday recognition moments: *“There was a man ... speaking Irish to me ... I’ll speak back to him”* (L1-S4). L2 students emphasise civic pride and the wish to use Irish in public micro-encounters (shops, cashiers) and to recognise or be recognised through Irish abroad, e.g., *“you speak it back, so you both know you’re from the same place”* (L2-S4). Both sets of accounts link audibility, hearing Irish around them, to willingness to initiate talk.

In Meta-thread 3: Curriculum, Pedagogy & Assessment Alignment, students describe how day-to-day task mixes steer what “counts” as learning. L1 accounts depict lessons where questioning and discussion are the main conduits for demonstrating understanding, with writing a brief record: *“Definitely speaking ... and probably a bit of writing”* (L1-S1). L2 accounts foreground written products (comprehensions, model answers) and form-focused explanation with sparse speaking and listening, leading to a recurrent claim that comprehension-heavy routines do not grow everyday speech: *“It’s so much harder to pick up Irish if you’re doing comprehensions rather than actually speaking it”* (L2-S5).

Meta-thread 4: Foundations, Transitions & Differentiation, highlights how learners build or rebuild a baseline. L1 late starters describe targeted supports (e.g., tutoring, parental resources) that accelerate catch-up, *“I took a private tutoring class ... it helped a lot”* (L1-S1), and several point to nerves at transition that eased with routine and reassurance (L1-S2). L2 students call for proficiency-matched teaching and short, structured talk time to consolidate form with use, *“10 minutes at the start of class ... given a list of words”* (L2-S3). Across groups, many report a split profile, stronger oral vocabulary/pronunciation

versus weaker spelling, suggesting parallel supports for orthography alongside sustained speaking.

Meta-thread 5: Engagement, Media & Modern Input, shows media functioning as an accessible bridge from input to output. L1 students cite Cúla4/TG4, radio, and club social media as steady sources of vocabulary and domain phrases (e.g., sport) that later surface in conversation (L1-S3, L1-S4). L2 students point to TG4, radio, and sports commentary as routes to pronunciation noticing and incremental lexical gains that transfer into short exchanges: *“It helps you ... how to pronounce words ... and use those words ... in an everyday conversation”* (L2-S1). In both groups, familiar topics (e.g., GAA) scaffold comprehension and encourage re-use.

The five meta-threads, originally derived from the AMTB survey (n = 1,020) and the open-ended responses (n = 912), are visible in lived form across these narratives. The student voices confirm broad patterns from the quantitative phase (e.g., limited speaking opportunities, grammar/writing emphasis, the motivational role of authentic use) while adding texture about where, when, and with whom Irish is actually spoken. The descriptive picture that emerges is not simply L1 versus L2; it is a map of opportunity structures: density of everyday talk, audibility in community spaces, alignment of classroom tasks with communicative aims, and the availability of bridges (media, scaffolds, targeted supports) that move learners from knowledge about Irish to using Irish.

Building directly on the five student meta-threads, the teacher narratives are organised as Meta-threads 6–10, mirroring the same conceptual domains but shifting the lens from learner experience to mechanisms of enactment in classrooms and schools. Specifically: (6) Communicative confidence & classroom interaction: time-on-task, talk routines, and how conversational slots are timetabled and scaffolded; (7) Identity, culture & real-world Irish: how teachers cultivate public-facing uses, local partnerships, and belonging cues; (8) Curriculum, pedagogy & assessment alignment: how task mixes, assessment artefacts, and explanations are designed to elicit use rather than only knowledge; (9) Foundations, transitions & differentiation: entry diagnostics, grouping, bilingual supports, and parallel tracks for spelling/orthography vs oral fluency; (10) Engagement, media & modern input: what media are curated, how input is recycled into output, and how community/sports links are leveraged. Numbering the teacher themes as 6–10 (rather than re-starting at 1) preserves continuity with the student analysis, makes cross-references unambiguous (e.g., “see Meta-

threads 1 vs 6”), and positions Section 4 as the practice-side response to the opportunity structures surfaced in Section 3.

## 5.8 Section 4: Teacher narratives on student attitudes and motivation (n = 9)

### 5.8.1 Introduction

The teacher narratives presented in this section offer a vital counterpoint to the student voices explored earlier. Whereas Section 3 highlighted how students interpret their own experiences of learning Irish, Section 4 shifts the lens to those who structure, facilitate, and often mediate these experiences on a daily basis. Drawing on nine narrative teacher interviews (T1–T9), across both Irish-medium and English-medium schools, this section examines the ways in which teachers perceive student motivation, identity, and engagement. Their accounts reveal the systemic, pedagogical, and cultural dynamics that shape how Irish is taught and learned, providing important insight into the broader ecology within which students’ attitudes are formed.

The five teacher meta-threads (6–10) reflect recurrent patterns across contexts, while also allowing space for divergence between Irish-medium and English-medium perspectives. Specifically, the teacher meta-threads adopt the following numeric pattern: (6) Communicative Confidence & Classroom Interaction; (7) Identity, Culture & Real-World Irish; (8) Curriculum, Pedagogy & Assessment Alignment; (9) Foundations, Transitions & Differentiation; and (10) Engagement, Media & Modern Input. These threads parallel, but do not duplicate, the five student-based meta-threads presented previously. Instead, they extend and complicate the earlier findings by showing how teacher practices and perceptions help explain the mechanisms underlying student reports.

The narratives presented here are not isolated anecdotes but reflections structured by the same survey-based findings that framed the student narratives. The AMTB survey (n = 1,020) and open-ended responses (n = 912) had already highlighted concerns with communicative practice, cultural identity, curriculum design, foundational gaps, and the role of modern media in shaping attitudes to Irish. These themes provided a narrative scaffold for the teacher interviews, ensuring that the resulting qualitative material spoke

directly to the broader patterns observed in the quantitative phase. In this way, the teacher narratives not only triangulate but also enrich the earlier findings, offering grounded perspectives on why students might have reported the attitudes and motivations they did.

The diversity of teacher contexts adds an important dimension to this section. Teachers from Irish-medium schools described environments where Irish functions as a naturalised communicative code, permeating lessons, corridors, and extracurricular life. By contrast, their English-medium counterparts often described classrooms dominated by written tasks, exam-driven pedagogy, and limited oral interaction. Yet across both contexts, common challenges emerged: sustaining student confidence, ensuring equitable supports for diverse learners, and integrating Irish into the modern, digital life worlds of young people. These nine voices illustrate how the ecology of Irish teaching is at once varied and interdependent, with local practices reflecting, reinforcing, or resisting national curricular and assessment structures.

This section positions teacher perspectives as both explanatory and generative. They explain why students perceive Irish learning as they do, whether as immersive and identity-affirming, or as marginal and exam-bound. They also generate new possibilities, pointing to practices, resources, and systemic changes that could bridge the gap between aspiration and reality. As such, the teacher narratives serve as a crucial middle ground between student experience and policy frameworks, preparing the ground for the comparative synthesis and wider discussion that follow.

### 5.8.2 Meta-Thread 6: Communicative confidence & classroom interaction

Teacher accounts of communicative confidence and classroom interaction (Meta-thread 6) reveal the structural and pedagogical forces that underpin the differences reported by students in Meta-thread 1. Across the nine narratives, oral ability is described as both a product of opportunity structures and a function of teacher-led routines.

In Irish-medium schools (T1–T5), oral interaction is portrayed as embedded and habitual. Teachers describe a learning ecology where Irish is the normal medium not only of lessons but also of peer exchanges and informal school life. T1 noted: *“Right now we’re reading a*



*novel... but discussions are always in Irish. We put a lot of emphasis on that.*” For T4, peer interaction itself guarantees density of use: *“About 40% of students use Irish as their primary language with friends.”* Still, even in these settings, vigilance is needed. T3 cautioned: *“They’ll slip into English at the first opportunity... you have to bring them back with direct questions.”* Teachers therefore see communicative confidence as something cultivated through constant reinforcement and immersion, echoing L1 students’ descriptions of ‘speaking all day’ across contexts.

In English-medium schools (T6–T9), oral opportunities are far scarcer, aligning with L2 students’ frustration at speaking *‘less than a minute per class.’* Teachers acknowledge that grammar, writing, and comprehension dominate, leaving speaking marginal. T7 observed: *“The most they speak is when calling out answers... it’s mainly writing.”* Similarly, T9 linked exam preparation to reduced oral readiness: *“It’s all essays and comprehensions... they’re not ready to have an actual conversation in Irish.”* To counterbalance, some teachers deliberately introduce short conversational slots; as T6 explained: *“I try to give them a few minutes at the start just to speak... it helps them feel less nervous.”* These strategies directly echo L2 students’ own proposals for structured conversation phases at the start of class.

Teachers also pointed to structural constraints that affect communicative ecologies. T8 highlighted the impact of recent EAL and refugee intake: *“EAL students get extra support, but struggling Irish speakers don’t... so students who used to speak Irish now speak English instead.”* This concern positions oral confidence not only as a matter of individual pedagogy but also of system-level resourcing and equitable scaffolding.

The teacher narratives strengthen the student findings by clarifying the mechanisms behind them. Where students reported immersion versus scarcity, teachers describe how immersion is deliberately sustained through repetition, questioning, and whole-school norms, and how scarcity is produced by task selection, exam pressures, and lack of supports. Communicative confidence, in this view, is less an innate trait than a fragile outcome of routine, context, and structural provision, aligning tightly with the patterns identified in student Meta-thread 1.

| Teacher             | Theme                                                                                                 | Implication for Practice                                                       | Teacher Comment                                                                                                   |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| T1 (Irish-medium)   | Oral practice embedded across strands; speaking remains the default medium.                           | Maintain all-Irish discussion even in reading/writing tasks to normalise talk. | “Right now we’re reading a novel... but discussions are always in Irish. We put a lot of emphasis on that.”       |
| T2 (Irish-medium)   | Repetition of set questions builds confidence, especially for weaker learners.                        | Begin year with oral routines, recycle questions, scaffold gradual confidence. | “We start the year with key questions... repetition, repetition, repetition, especially with the weaker classes.” |
| T3 (Irish-medium)   | Peer Irish use strong, but risk of slippage to English without monitoring.                            | Increase spontaneous conversational checks; reinforce peer accountability.     | “They’ll slip into English at the first opportunity... you have to bring them back with direct questions.”        |
| T4 (Irish-medium)   | Oral confidence linked to immersion at school level (corridors, breaks, co-curricular).               | Extend Irish into informal spaces; create more whole-school Irish-use norms.   | “About 40% of students use Irish as their primary language with friends.”                                         |
| T5 (Irish-medium)   | Oral ability shaped by identity and expectation; students sustain Irish in peer groups.               | Leverage peer-to-peer Irish as an anchor; pair with structured questioning.    | “In this school, they’d always speak in Irish with each other outside of class.”                                  |
| T6 (English-medium) | Students hesitant to speak; teacher scaffolds with short conversation slots.                          | Build predictable oral routines (e.g., 10-minute opener); model risk-taking.   | “I try to give them a few minutes at the start just to speak... it helps them feel less nervous.”                 |
| T7 (English-medium) | Writing/comprehension overshadow speaking; talk confined to answer-calling.                           | Rebalance lessons toward everyday speaking; tie oral tasks to daily life.      | “The most they speak is when calling out answers... it’s mainly writing.”                                         |
| T8 (English-medium) | External pressures (EAL/refugee intake) reduce peer Irish use; weak supports for struggling speakers. | Provide scaffolds equivalent to EAL support for weaker Irish speakers.         | “EAL students get extra support, but struggling Irish speakers don’t.”                                            |
| T9 (English-medium) | Oral confidence undermined by exam-driven focus on written products.                                  | Reduce exam overemphasis; include low-stakes oral checks regularly.            | “It’s all essays and comprehensions... they’re not ready to have an actual conversation in Irish.”                |

**Table 39 Teacher perspectives on communicative confidence and classroom interaction (Meta-Thread 6)**

### 5.8.3 Meta-Thread 7: Identity, culture & real-world Irish

Teacher perspectives on identity, culture, and real-world Irish (Meta-thread 7) underscore the layered ways in which language is tied to belonging, pride, and visibility. In Irish-medium schools (T1–T5), teachers describe Irish as an everyday cultural code that pervades school life. For some, this immersion generates a seamless link between classroom and community. One teacher reflected that even when working through literature, students “*do it through Irish naturally, because that’s how they think here.*” Another observed that Irish surfaces in corridors, in announcements, and in extracurricular activities, making it less a subject and more a living norm. These accounts show that Irish-medium contexts cultivate cultural identity by embedding the language in all spaces where students enact social life. The Gaeltacht remains a cornerstone, described by one teacher as “*a rite of passage that affirms for them: this is our language.*” Teachers framed such immersion as formative, shaping not only linguistic ability but also self-perception as members of an Irish-speaking community.

Yet, even in these settings, teachers noted fragility. One Irish-medium teacher admitted that “*English creeps in quickly if we let it,*” while another explained that maintaining Irish as the peer group ‘we-code’ required constant reinforcement. The danger, they suggested, is not just language shift but identity slippage: moving into English risks undermining students’ sense of themselves as Irish speakers. These accounts highlight identity as contingent, strongly anchored in immersive ecologies but vulnerable if those ecologies are diluted. This resonates with L1 students’ narratives of belonging in Gaeltacht and GAA clubs, and their description of everyday exchanges as affirming membership. Teachers add nuance by showing how fragile that identity can be without vigilance and reinforcement.

In English-medium schools (T6–T9), the picture is markedly different. Teachers emphasised that while many students profess pride in Irish, they struggle to integrate it into daily life. One noted that students “*see it as symbolic but not practical,*” while another remarked that cultural markers are taught; songs, poems, even the national anthem, but these remain detached from use. Several teachers expressed frustration that exam pressures crowd out authentic cultural engagement. One said plainly: “*There’s no time to explore Irish as part of who they are when every lesson is built around past papers.*” This aligns

with L2 students' reflections that Irish is something to be "*proud of*" but not something they hear or use in ordinary public settings.

A further challenge raised by teachers is inclusivity. Those working in diverse English-medium schools pointed out that newcomer and EAL students often have no accessible route into Irish cultural identity. As one put it, "*We welcome them, but we don't show them how Irish can belong to them too.*" Another commented that "*immigrant students get strong supports in English, but in Irish they're left behind, so they never feel part of that identity.*" These accounts underscore that identity through Irish is not equally available to all students and requires intentional design of inclusive pathways.

These teacher narratives reinforce and extend the student findings in Meta-thread 2. For L1 learners, identity is rooted in daily immersion, supported by community ties, and strengthened by experiences like the Gaeltacht. For L2 learners, identity is aspirational, framed as pride or civic usefulness but undermined by lack of daily contact, exam dominance, and exclusionary structures. Teachers clarify the mechanisms that underpin these differences: immersion and peer networks cultivate cultural belonging, while curriculum constraints and unequal support systems weaken it. In doing so, they highlight that identity is not static but constructed in relation to opportunities, expectations, and the visibility of Irish in everyday life.

| Teacher           | Theme                                                                                                     | Implication for Practice                                                                                | Teacher Comment                                                                              |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| T1 (Irish-medium) | Irish positioned as part of students' everyday identity; co-curricular life sustains cultural connection. | Build curricular to co-curricular links (music, sport, debating) to establish Irish as identity marker. | "They'll use Irish in debating, on stage, at matches... it's more than a subject here."      |
| T2 (Irish-medium) | Strong link between Gaeltacht experience and ownership of identity.                                       | Secure sustained Gaeltacht partnerships to extend immersion identity.                                   | "The Gaeltacht gives them a sense of belonging... they come back different, more confident." |
| T3 (Irish-medium) | Identity weakened when students shift into English; vigilance needed to keep Irish as the 'we-code.'      | Create peer-to-peer accountability for keeping Irish as default.                                        | "Once they move into English, they stop seeing themselves as Irish speakers."                |

|                            |                                                                                                |                                                                                          |                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>T4 (Irish-medium)</b>   | Peer networks central: friends speaking Irish reinforce pride and cultural belonging.          | Facilitate Irish-only friendship spaces, clubs, and events.                              | “They have pride when they speak it with their friends, it marks who they are.”                             |
| <b>T5 (Irish-medium)</b>   | Irish is naturalised as cultural norm in school corridors and activities.                      | Highlight cultural continuity (heritage events, public representation) through Irish.    | “It’s expected here... posters, announcements, everything is through Irish.”                                |
| <b>T6 (English-medium)</b> | Students link Irish to civic/national pride but lack everyday identity ties.                   | Scaffold local identity projects (shop dialogues, signage) to make Irish visibly useful. | “They say they’re proud, but they don’t see where it fits into their daily lives.”                          |
| <b>T7 (English-medium)</b> | Cultural identity through Irish is fragile; exam focus reduces authentic cultural experiences. | Curriculum: ensure tuition of cultural content (songs, drama, local history).            | “It’s mostly about poems and essays... the culture part is missing.”                                        |
| <b>T8 (English-medium)</b> | Newcomer/EAL students can access Irish identity if supported, but often excluded.              | Design inclusive cultural pathways for all, not just heritage learners.                  | “We don’t really give immigrant kids a way into the Irish cultural side... so they don’t see it as theirs.” |
| <b>T9 (English-medium)</b> | Identity cues present but overshadowed by pressure to perform academically.                    | Introduce low-stakes cultural/identity projects to foster belonging beyond exams.        | “They’ll learn about the flag or anthem, but Irish itself is still just exam prep.”                         |

**Table 40 Teacher perspectives on identity, culture, and real-world Irish (Meta-Thread 7)**

#### 5.8.4 Meta-Thread 8: Curriculum, pedagogy & assessment alignment

Teacher perspectives on curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment (Meta-thread 8) highlight tensions between oral communicative goals and the written, exam-focused structures that dominate Irish classrooms. In Irish-medium schools (T1–T5), teachers describe a pedagogy where oral work is integrated and prioritised, even in domains often assumed to be grammar- or comprehension-led. As T1 explained, *“Even grammar is explained in Irish, they get used to hearing it that way.”* Teachers frame oral questioning not as an add-on but as the main method of formative assessment. One noted, *“I know what they know by how they answer me in Irish, not by what they write.”* This echoes L1 students’ accounts of preferring teacher-led questioning and interactive tasks to grammar drills.

However, Irish-medium teachers also recognise contradictions. The official curriculum may endorse communicative learning, but high-stakes exams reassert control. T2 observed that “*Junior Cycle is supposed to be broader, but the Leaving still pulls everything back to essays.*” Others pointed out that the dominant textbooks remain comprehension-heavy. T4 remarked, “*The textbook doesn’t help them speak, it’s mostly comprehension passages.*” The result is a push-pull effect: teachers value oral-first pedagogy, but systemic structures still channel effort toward written outcomes. This helps explain why L1 students described classrooms as oral-rich but still called for more varied and spoken vocabulary use, their teachers, too, are working against the gravitational pull of written assessment.

In English-medium schools (T6–T9), this gravitational pull is even stronger. Teachers repeatedly described grammar, comprehension, and sample-answer drills as the dominant task mix. T6 summarised, “*They want the model answers, that’s what gets marks.*” The problem is not only student demand but also exam incentives: students know that essays and literary analysis will be rewarded. One teacher (T7) lamented, “*We’re on poems for weeks, and they don’t say a word in Irish during it.*” Here, pedagogy and curriculum alignment issues converge: while oral exams carry significant weight in official assessment, daily classroom practice marginalises oral interaction.

A further strand concerns differentiation. Teachers in English-medium contexts highlighted the absence of curricular pathways for weaker or less confident Irish speakers. T8 explained, “*There isn’t a lower-level pathway for Irish, they all get the same material.*” Unlike EAL provision, which scaffolds access to English, Irish classrooms often present a one-size-fits-all curriculum. This not only limits struggling learners but also reinforces the dominance of written modes, which feel more controllable than oral production.

Teacher accounts mirror and expand the student findings in Meta-thread 3. L1 learners experienced oral-first pedagogy and asked for even more spoken vocabulary integration; L2 learners described writing-heavy classrooms and a lack of communicative practice. Teachers confirm that these differences are real, rooted in school type, but also reveal how structural forces; textbooks, exams, absence of differentiated tracks, constrain pedagogy. In both contexts, assessment design emerges as a key driver: where exams reward writing, writing dominates; where teachers are empowered to value speech, oral interaction

flourishes. This underscores the central challenge of curriculum alignment, ensuring that pedagogical practice reflects communicative goals, not just exam scripts.

| Teacher             | Theme                                                                            | Implication for Practice                                                 | Teacher Comment                                                                                  |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| T1 (Irish-medium)   | Curriculum delivered through Irish integrates speaking, reading, and writing.    | Maintain integrated oral-first pedagogy, using writing as follow-up.     | "Even grammar is explained in Irish, they get used to hearing it that way."                      |
| T2 (Irish-medium)   | Assessment practices still too exam-heavy, risk narrowing pedagogy.              | Balance state exam requirements with communicative tasks.                | "Junior Cycle is supposed to be broader, but the Leaving still pulls everything back to essays." |
| T3 (Irish-medium)   | Peer collaboration is central, but slips into English undermine curricular aims. | Structure peer tasks with accountability to ensure Irish remains medium. | "Group work is fine, but if you don't monitor, they'll finish it in English."                    |
| T4 (Irish-medium)   | Oral fluency prioritised, but textbooks lean toward comprehension and grammar.   | Supplement set texts with authentic oral/aural resources.                | "The textbook doesn't help them speak, it's mostly comprehension passages."                      |
| T5 (Irish-medium)   | Teachers push questioning as main mode of formative assessment.                  | Retain oral questioning as low-stakes, daily evaluation.                 | "I know what they know by how they answer me in Irish, not by what they write."                  |
| T6 (English-medium) | Curriculum dominated by grammar and sample answers, reducing oral time.          | Rebalance toward interactive tasks linked to exam themes.                | "They want the model answers, that's what gets marks."                                           |
| T7 (English-medium) | Writing tasks and poetry analysis take precedence, marginalising spoken Irish.   | Build in oral preparation before literary/essay tasks.                   | "We're on poems for weeks, and they don't say a word in Irish during it."                        |
| T8 (English-medium) | Lack of differentiated resources hinders weaker speakers' curricular access.     | Provide tiered tasks and scaffolds, similar to EAL.                      | "There isn't a lower-level pathway for Irish, they all get the same material."                   |
| T9 (English-medium) | Assessment practices overly focused on written output.                           | Include structured oral assessments, not just written essays.            | "The Leaving Cert. oral exam is 40%, but daily class is 90% writing."                            |

**Table 41 Teacher perspectives on curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment alignment (Meta-Thread 8)**

### 5.8.5 Meta-Thread 9: Foundations, transitions & differentiation

Teacher perspectives on foundations, transitions, and differentiation (Meta-thread 9) reveal clear contrasts between Irish-medium and English-medium contexts, while also surfacing common challenges around confidence, home reinforcement, and uneven learner profiles. Teachers in Irish-medium schools (T1–T5) described students who entered secondary with strong oral abilities but uneven literacy foundations. As one noted, confident speakers sometimes struggled with spelling or grammar accuracy, reflecting a gap between fluent communication and formal correctness. This mirrors L1 student reflections in Meta-thread 4, where they reported stronger oral than written skills and asked for more questioning to keep vocabulary active.

A recurring issue is the emotional dimension of transition. Teachers observed that even students arriving from Gaelscoileanna can lose confidence at secondary level, perceiving themselves as weaker than they are. T2 highlighted that nerves, rather than competence, often explain initial dips in performance. Similarly, T5 emphasised the stabilising effect of peer mentoring, suggesting that structured buddy systems could prevent confidence loss. These accounts echo L1-S2's narrative of feeling nervous during the transition despite underlying ability.

Differentiation emerged as a shared concern across both school types. In Irish-medium contexts, mixed profiles, some with fluent oral ability but weak spelling, others with balanced skills, make single-track teaching difficult. T3 stressed the need for parallel tasks tailored to oral versus literacy strengths. In English-medium schools (T6–T9), the absence of formal differentiated pathways was more stark. T8 noted that weaker learners were given the same curriculum materials as fluent peers, creating frustration and inequity. This directly aligns with L2 student suggestions for proficiency-based grouping, which they felt would allow all learners to progress at an appropriate pace.

Foundational exposure in primary school was also raised. Teachers in English-medium schools described students arriving with as little as 30 minutes per week of Irish, placing them at an immediate disadvantage. T6 explained that these learners start secondary already behind, requiring structured catch-up support. T9 added that, for many, school is the only place they hear Irish, with no home or community reinforcement. This absence mirrors L2-



S5's admission that *"nobody speaks Irish at home"* and points to the importance of extending exposure through media and community partnerships.

Teacher accounts reinforce the patterns evident in student narratives. L1 learners experience nerves and uneven literacy foundations but benefit from parental and peer support, while L2 learners struggle with minimal exposure, lack of home reinforcement, and absence of differentiated provision. Teachers make clear that transition points are critical moments for sustaining motivation and confidence, and that without tailored supports, students risk disengagement. Meta-thread 9 therefore underlines the importance of systematic differentiation, home–school partnerships, and targeted scaffolds during the early stages of post-primary.

| Teacher             | Theme                                                                                   | Implication for Practice                                                                 | Teacher Comment                                                                                     |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| T1 (Irish-medium)   | Early immersion builds strong foundations but masks later spelling/grammar gaps.        | Pair immersion fluency with explicit form-focused tasks to sustain balanced development. | "They speak confidently, but when it comes to writing, small gaps show up from early years."        |
| T2 (Irish-medium)   | Transition from primary to post-primary creates confidence dips despite prior exposure. | Provide reassurance and diagnostic assessments at entry to secondary.                    | "They arrive from Gaelscoileanna fluent, but nervous, they think they're weaker than they are."     |
| T3 (Irish-medium)   | Mixed profiles in the same class (strong oral vs weak spelling) demand differentiation. | Adopt flexible grouping and parallel tasks for oral and literacy skills.                 | "Some can chat away easily, but their spelling is shaky compared to others."                        |
| T4 (Irish-medium)   | Support at home is uneven; parental Irish helps sustain foundations.                    | Offer home resource packs for parents with limited Irish.                                | "The ones with Irish-speaking parents keep it going at home, others lose it without reinforcement." |
| T5 (Irish-medium)   | Transitions are smoother where scaffolding and peer mentoring exist.                    | Formalise peer buddy systems for first-year students.                                    | "If older students take them under their wing, the younger ones settle faster."                     |
| T6 (English-medium) | Late starters struggle with foundations due to minimal early exposure.                  | Introduce a structured 'catch-up' programme in first year.                               | "Some only had 30 minutes a week in primary, they arrive already behind."                           |
| T7 (English-medium) | Students often overestimate gaps; nerves and exam                                       | Embed low-stakes oral checks and                                                         | "They panic about not knowing enough,                                                               |

|                            |                                                                        |                                                               |                                                                            |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                            | pressure undermine progress.                                           | wellbeing supports during transition.                         | but often it's just nerves, not ability."                                  |
| <b>T8 (English-medium)</b> | No differentiated pathway for weaker students limits progress.         | Develop tiered levels or scaffolded curriculum strands.       | "Weaker learners get the same material as fluent speakers, it's not fair." |
| <b>T9 (English-medium)</b> | Home reinforcement is minimal, leaving school as sole source of Irish. | Create community/media links to extend exposure beyond class. | "For many, this is the only place they'll ever hear Irish spoken."         |

**Table 42 Teacher perspectives on foundations, transitions, and differentiation (Meta-Thread 9)**

#### 5.8.6 Meta-Thread 10: Engagement, media & modern input

Teacher perspectives on engagement, media, and modern input (Meta-thread 10) reveal how technology and contemporary platforms are increasingly central to sustaining motivation and participation in Irish. Teachers consistently emphasised that traditional resources, particularly comprehension-heavy textbooks, cannot compete with the dynamism of digital tools. As one Irish-medium teacher explained, students become disengaged when materials are limited to book-based tasks, whereas short videos, podcasts, or online clips bring Irish to life in ways that feel authentic and immediate.

Teachers also highlighted the value of connecting Irish to the media platforms students already use. One English-medium teacher observed that learners are highly active on social media and that projects using TikTok or Instagram in Irish tapped into this existing digital fluency. Another noted that recorded tasks, such as voice notes or short videos, reduce the anxiety many students feel when speaking in front of the class. These observations align directly with L2 student requests for structured conversation phases supported by prompts: teachers are finding that digital rehearsal offers a bridge to more confident live use.

In both Irish- and English-medium contexts, teachers reported that community-linked media and sport amplify motivation. Several teachers pointed to the role of Irish-language GAA club social media, which students already follow, as a natural extension of learning. These examples echo L1 students' accounts of seeing their clubs post exclusively in Irish and feeling motivated to use phrases in sport. Teachers argued that embedding such

domain-specific media into class tasks not only validates students' identities but also extends language learning beyond the school gates.

Access, however, remains uneven. Teachers in English-medium schools particularly noted digital divides, with some students lacking devices or reliable internet at home. This creates inequities in exposure to Irish through modern input. While some learners can explore TG4, Spotify, or YouTube freely, others rely entirely on school-based provision. One teacher reflected that media-rich tasks are “*not equal for all*,” highlighting the need for in-school access and resource provision to ensure equitable engagement opportunities.

Teacher narratives in Meta-thread 10 confirm and extend student perspectives from Meta-thread 5. Both groups highlight the motivational role of media, the importance of hearing Irish in everyday digital and social contexts, and the potential of modern input to normalise use. Where students asked for more exposure through apps, social media, and sports coverage, teachers described concrete practices for integrating these into lessons. Yet they also cautioned that without systemic support, equitable access, curated content banks, and clear curricular links to media, risks becoming an add-on rather than a transformative driver of engagement. Meta-thread 10 thus underscores that modern input is not optional but essential for embedding Irish into the lived digital landscapes of young people.

| Teacher           | Theme                                                             | Implication for Practice                                                          | Teacher Comment                                                                 |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| T1 (Irish-medium) | Media and tech enrich Irish when integrated into authentic tasks. | Embed TG4, podcasts, and digital platforms into everyday lessons.                 | “When they see clips from TG4 or podcasts, it’s more alive for them.”           |
| T2 (Irish-medium) | Students engage more with digital projects than textbooks.        | Prioritise multimodal assignments (videos, blogs, podcasts) to enhance relevance. | “They’d rather record themselves than write another essay.”                     |
| T3 (Irish-medium) | Club/social media contexts extend classroom Irish.                | Link schoolwork with local Irish-medium clubs’ digital presence.                  | “Our students love seeing their GAA clubs post in Irish, it motivates them.”    |
| T4 (Irish-medium) | Traditional resources fail to compete with modern input.          | Replace comprehension-heavy tasks with media-based listening and speaking.        | “The book just isn’t enough, they switch off unless there’s something digital.” |
| T5 (Irish-medium) | Irish needs to be audible in everyday student lives.              | Encourage Irish radio/music playlists as routine listening.                       | “When they hear it on the bus or at home, it starts to feel normal.”            |

|                            |                                                                        |                                                                       |                                                                            |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>T6 (English-medium)</b> | Students connect better when Irish is tied to apps/social media.       | Integrate TikTok/Instagram tasks into curriculum-linked projects.     | “They’re on TikTok anyway, why not get them to make Irish clips?”          |
| <b>T7 (English-medium)</b> | Limited availability of engaging modern content in Irish is a barrier. | Curate and distribute accessible content banks for teachers/students. | “It’s not that they won’t use Irish media, it’s that they can’t find it.”  |
| <b>T8 (English-medium)</b> | Digital divides affect engagement; some students lack access at home.  | Provide in-school access to devices/media for equity.                 | “Some don’t have Wi-Fi or laptops, digital Irish isn’t equal for all.”     |
| <b>T9 (English-medium)</b> | Media can reduce anxiety, offering safe practice spaces.               | Use apps and recordings to allow rehearsal before live speaking.      | “They’re more confident recording a voice note than speaking up in class.” |

**Table 43 Teacher perspectives on engagement, media, and modern input (Meta-Thread 10)**

### 5.8.7 Conclusion

The teacher narratives presented in Section 4 have illuminated the pedagogical and structural forces that underpin student attitudes and motivation toward Irish. Teacher narratives mirror the broad concerns raised by students, while adding depth and explanation to the patterns observed in Section 3.

Teachers confirmed many of the contrasts already apparent in student accounts. In Irish-medium schools, communicative confidence and cultural identity are nurtured through immersion, peer networks, and everyday visibility, though teachers cautioned that vigilance is required to sustain Irish as a living code. In English-medium schools, by contrast, teachers described classrooms dominated by written tasks and exam pressures, with oral practice and cultural engagement relegated to the margins. These professional perspectives help explain why L1 students reported stronger confidence and identity connections, while L2 students emphasised limited opportunities, anxiety, and disconnection from Irish in daily life.

At the same time, teacher narratives extended student findings by pointing to systemic constraints that shape classroom ecologies. Curriculum design, textbook reliance, high-stakes assessment, and lack of differentiated pathways were repeatedly cited as forces that limit pedagogy and disadvantage weaker learners. Teachers also underscored the

importance of transitions, noting how early exposure, parental reinforcement, and peer mentoring can either sustain or erode confidence. In terms of engagement, they described the transformative potential of modern media and digital platforms, while also cautioning that unequal access risks creating new divides. These insights underline that motivation and identity are not simply student dispositions but outcomes produced by broader structures and supports.

Section 4, demonstrates that teachers play a pivotal role in mediating the gap between policy aspirations, curricular structures, and student experience. Their accounts reveal both the resilience of Irish as a language of identity in certain contexts and the fragility of its presence in others. They show how student motivation is co-constructed by ecological conditions, from classroom routines to digital life worlds. As such, the teacher narratives corroborate the student perspectives from Section 3, allowing for a comparative synthesis, where both sets of voices are brought into dialogue. This synthesis will clarify how the dynamics of Irish learning are collectively understood across learners and educators, offering critical insights for the discussion and policy-focused chapters that follow.

## 5.9 Weaving the Threads

This section draws together the findings presented across this chapter, integrating the quantitative survey data with the qualitative accounts provided by students. The aim is to highlight key patterns, areas of convergence, and points of contrast that collectively deepen our understanding of how young people experience and engage with Irish at post-primary level. The purpose here is not to provide a full theoretical interpretation, which follows in the subsequent discussion chapter, but to synthesise the evidence into a coherent narrative that bridges quantitative trends and qualitative voices (Gardner, 1985).

Quantitative results from the adapted Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) indicate that pupils' orientations to Irish are shaped by school type, linguistic background, gender, and perceived parental encouragement. Scale reliabilities were generally strong for attitudes to Irish speakers and to learning Irish, and for parental encouragement, consistent with earlier Irish research using AMTB-derived measures (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). By contrast, motivational intensity and a newly developed measure of support for Irish

language learning showed weaker internal consistency, suggesting a need to refine items to reflect diverse contemporary contexts in which Irish is learned (Ó Duibhir, 2018).

Across scales, a consistent pattern was the stronger positivity among pupils in Irish-medium schools when compared with peers in English-medium schools. Whether in relation to attitudes to Irish speakers, desire to learn Irish, or self-concept as Irish learners, immersion settings tended to be associated with more favourable orientations (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, & Ní Thuairisg, 2019). These trends were evident both at school and individual levels in the present dataset.

At the same time, notable variation was evident within sectors. For example, some English-medium DEIS schools recorded comparatively higher mean scores than non-DEIS peers, while within Irish-medium provision, non-Gaeltacht schools at times matched or exceeded the scores of Gaeltacht schools. These findings suggest that educational context alone does not determine students' attitudes or motivation towards Irish. While previous research has often associated socio-economic disadvantage with lower levels of engagement in language learning and has highlighted the potential benefits of immersion and community language exposure (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, 2009), the present findings indicate that substantial variation exists both within and across school sectors. Similarly, recent sociolinguistic research has highlighted considerable differences in Irish language vitality across Gaeltacht regions, suggesting that geographical location alone does not necessarily provide an advantage in students' orientations towards Irish (Ó Giollagáin et al., 2015).

The demographic profile of the cohort further illuminates these dynamics. While most participants were Irish-born and used English at home, a substantial minority reported multilingual backgrounds. In the present study, multilingual pupils expressed strong interest in other languages yet often reported weaker attitudes to Irish. This pattern is consistent with work that emphasises how multilingual repertoires and identities are distributed across language ecologies, enthusiasm for global languages does not automatically translate into stronger alignment with a minority language (Baker, 2011; García & Wei, 2014).

Year-group differences also emerged. First-year pupils tended to report higher self-belief and more positive orientations than second-year pupils, who indicated greater anxiety and

lower confidence. This aligns with wider evidence that early post-primary transition can be a vulnerable period for motivation and engagement (Dörnyei, 2005; Growing Up in Ireland, 2017).

The qualitative analysis enriches these patterns by foregrounding students' classroom and community experiences. Ten recurrent themes were identified, the most prominent being the perceived lack of fun and interactive pedagogy. Students frequently characterised lessons as static or overly reliant on rote learning; many called for games, group work, conversational tasks, and opportunities to link Irish to their interests. Such preferences accord with motivational theory that highlights the roles of autonomy, competence and relatedness in sustaining intrinsic engagement (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and with second-language perspectives that stress the importance of lowering affective barriers to participation (Krashen, 1982).

A second prominent theme concerned the limited perceived use of Irish beyond school. Students frequently characterised Irish as a “*school-only*” language and highlighted the dominance of English in their homes, communities, and media environments. This perception aligns with evidence of uneven community language vitality, even within Gaeltacht areas (Ó Giollagáin, 2015), and longstanding concerns that school-based learning does not reliably transfer into real-world Irish-language use (Harris & Conway, 2002; Ó Duibhir, 2018).

A third theme focused on foundational support. Many students felt underprepared entering post-primary Irish compared with how other modern languages are introduced from beginner level. Expectations of prior competence were experienced as discouraging and contributed to lower self-concept in some groups, concerns that align with earlier evaluations of Irish teaching and learning at primary level (Harris & Murtagh, 1999).

Additional themes included perceptions of a repetitive curriculum, an over-emphasis on grammar and writing, and the pressures associated with high-stakes assessment. These experiences are consistent with the quantitative pattern in which English-medium students, in particular, reported higher lesson anxiety and greater perceived difficulty, underscoring the interplay between pedagogy, assessment, and motivation.

These threads suggest several overarching conclusions. First, medium of instruction remains a powerful predictor of motivational orientation, with immersion schooling generally associated with more positive dispositions (Ó Duibhir, 2018). Second, the early post-primary transition appears fragile for motivation and self-belief (Dörnyei, 2005; *Growing Up in Ireland*, 2017). Third, multilingual students' strong language interest does not necessarily extend to Irish without targeted, context-sensitive support (Baker, 2011; García & Wei, 2014). Finally, students' own accounts consistently point to pedagogy, interactive methods, authentic opportunities for use, and supportive classroom climates, as central levers for sustaining engagement (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Krashen, 1982).



## **6 Chapter 6: Discussion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the findings of the study in light of the wider literature on language motivation, bilingualism, and Irish language education. It has two interconnected purposes. First, it interprets the empirical evidence presented in previous chapters in relation to established theoretical frameworks and international debates. Second, and most importantly, it introduces the CAIRDE Framework for Engagement, the central outcome and original contribution of this thesis.

The CAIRDE framework synthesises the study's quantitative and qualitative findings into a student-centred model that captures the multidimensional conditions shaping learners' relationships with Irish. It is not an adaptation of an existing framework but a new conceptual contribution, developed inductively from the data and informed by the critical, motivational, and sociocultural perspectives outlined in Chapter 2. By offering this framework, the thesis moves beyond description of challenges and enablers to present a holistic model for reimagining engagement with Irish at post-primary level.

The chapter is organised thematically in order to show how the empirical findings build cumulatively towards the CAIRDE framework. Section 6.2 examines attitudes, motivation, and learner self-concept, highlighting how orientations, affective factors, and identity positionings shape student engagement. Section 6.3 considers the influence of school contexts and medium of instruction, interrogating the immersion advantage and the variation within and across school types. Section 6.4 focuses on pedagogy, curriculum, and student experience, emphasising pupils' perspectives on classroom practices and assessment pressures. Section 6.5 broadens the scope to multilingualism and language ecologies, situating Irish within students' wider repertoires and community contexts. Section 6.6 examines policy-practice tensions, juxtaposing curriculum reforms and strategic ambitions with classroom realities.

These thematic sections provide the foundation for Section 6.7, which presents the CAIRDE framework in detail. Each dimension of CAIRDE: Confidence, Access, Identity, Relevance, Diversity, and Environment, emerges directly from the findings while also dialoguing with the wider literature. The framework therefore represents the synthesis of

the thesis as a whole: an empirically grounded, theoretically informed, and practically relevant contribution to the field of language education in Ireland and internationally.

## 6.2 Attitudes, motivation and learner self-concept

### 6.2.1 Integrative and instrumental orientations

The distinction between integrative and instrumental orientations has been a cornerstone of motivational research since Gardner and Lambert's (1972) early Canadian studies, later consolidated in Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model. Integrative orientation refers to learners' desire to connect with a target language community, while instrumental orientation reflects pragmatic goals such as employment or academic achievement.

Findings from this study confirm the relevance of this dichotomy for Irish but also highlight its limits in a minority-language context. Pupils in Irish-medium schools consistently displayed stronger integrative orientations, expressing not only positive attitudes towards Irish speakers but also a sense of cultural affinity with the language. For example, several students described Irish as "*part of who we are*" or "*a link to our history*," echoing earlier Irish research showing that immersion environments sustain cultural connection and long-term positive orientations (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Murtagh, 2007).

Instrumental orientations, by contrast, were weaker and more fragmented. Survey reliability analyses showed low internal consistency for instrumental items, and qualitative testimony frequently positioned Irish as "*just for school*" or "*only for exams*." This suggests that students did not perceive clear long-term benefits beyond compulsory education. The finding aligns with Harris and Conway's (2002) conclusion that Irish has limited perceived utility in comparison with global languages, and with Flynn's (2014) observation that it is often valued symbolically rather than functionally.

Internationally, such patterns are not unusual in minority-language contexts. Cummins (2000) and Baker (2011) have noted that heritage and minority languages often carry strong symbolic and identity-based value but weak instrumental status. García and Wei (2014) further argue that when languages are positioned primarily in cultural rather than pragmatic terms, learner investment can become fragile, especially among multilingual youth who

perceive greater economic and social capital in global languages such as English, French, or Spanish.

For multilingual pupils in this study, this differentiation was stark. Many expressed enthusiasm for foreign language learning yet positioned Irish as marginal to their imagined futures. Norton's (1995, 2013) concept of investment provides a useful interpretive lens: while students may recognise Irish as a cultural marker, they are less likely to invest effort when the language does not align with their imagined communities or future selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

#### 6.2.2 Confidence, anxiety, and the 1st - 2nd Year dip

One of the most striking patterns in the data was the motivational and affective 'dip' between first and second year. First-year pupils generally reported strong self-concepts regarding their Irish ability, high willingness to engage, and relatively low levels of anxiety. By second year, however, scores for confidence and motivation declined significantly, while reported anxiety rose sharply. Statistical analysis confirmed that these differences were of medium effect size, suggesting meaningful developmental shifts rather than marginal variation.

This pattern resonates with both national and international research. Murtagh (2007) documented similar declines among post-primary students in subject-only Irish programmes, where exposure is limited to classroom instruction. Deckner (2019) found a comparable 'Year 7 dip' among UK learners of foreign languages, attributing the decline to increased curricular demands, changing peer dynamics, and reduced novelty. The present findings suggest that Irish learners experience similar dynamics, intensified by the compulsory nature of the subject.

Qualitative data underscored the psychological dimension of this dip. Students described embarrassment about speaking, reluctance to participate, and fear of making mistakes; behaviours directly linked to Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, which posits that anxiety raises a barrier to input and reduces acquisition. Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy also helps explain the pattern: students who lose belief in their ability to succeed

are less willing to attempt challenging tasks, creating a cycle of avoidance and reduced progress.

Importantly, this dip was most pronounced among pupils in English-medium schools. Students in immersion contexts reported more frequent opportunities for low-stakes oral use, which appeared to buffer against anxiety. This aligns with Ó Duibhir's (2018) finding that immersion fosters communicative confidence, while English-medium contexts often limit Irish to formal, high-stakes instruction. Dörnyei (2005) notes that early adolescence is a fragile stage for sustaining motivation; in the case of Irish, the combination of exam pressure, limited opportunities for authentic communication, and the compulsory status of the subject appears to exacerbate vulnerability.

### 6.2.3 Gender, identity, and learner variation

The dataset also revealed notable, if nuanced, variation across gender, identity, and school contexts. Female students reported marginally stronger attitudes and lower anxiety than their male peers, consistent with international findings that girls tend to show higher motivational quality and more sustained engagement in language learning (Henry, 2009; Oga-Baldwin et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2002). While gender differences were not dramatic, they nonetheless highlight the influence of peer norms and participation patterns in shaping students' experiences of Irish.

Identity emerged as a more decisive factor. Many students valued Irish symbolically as part of national heritage, but relatively few integrated it into their personal sense of self. Multilingual pupils in particular described Irish as secondary to global languages they associated with mobility, travel, or employment. One student's comment, *"I speak Polish at home and want to learn Spanish for travel; Irish is just for school"*, captures this differentiation. These perspectives confirm Norton's (2013) argument that learners invest in languages that align with their imagined identities and possible futures. Block (2007) similarly frames identity as an umbrella term capturing social, cultural, and historical positioning; for many multilingual students, Irish did not occupy a central position in these trajectories.

Variation was also evident across school types. Pupils in Irish-medium schools reported stronger motivation, lower anxiety, and higher confidence than their English-medium peers, reflecting the immersion advantage identified in previous Irish language education research (Murtagh, 2007; Barnes et al., 2024). However, this pattern was not uniform across all schools. Some DEIS schools reported comparatively high levels of motivation, while certain Gaeltacht schools displayed weaker orientations towards Irish than might be expected. These findings suggest that students' attitudes and motivation are shaped not only by structural characteristics such as school type or geographical location, but also by local factors including school culture, pedagogical practices, opportunities for language use, and peer networks (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007). Wenger's (1998) communities of practice framework is particularly useful in interpreting these findings, as it highlights how learners' identities and participation are negotiated through everyday social interactions rather than being determined solely by institutional or geographical contexts.

### 6.3 School contexts and medium of instruction

#### 6.3.1 Immersion advantage and its limits

The most consistent finding in this study was the motivational uplift associated with Irish-medium education. Pupils in immersion settings reported higher self-concepts, stronger desire to learn Irish, and significantly lower levels of anxiety compared to peers in English-medium schools. These results confirm the well-documented "immersion advantage" (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, 2018) and align with international evidence that immersion fosters stronger affective engagement and higher levels of competence in minority languages (Baker, 2011; Cenoz & Gorter, 2017).

From a theoretical perspective, Cummins' (1979, 2000) Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) hypothesis provides a useful lens. It suggests that literacy and cognitive skills acquired in one language can transfer to another, meaning that pupils in immersion contexts can leverage their English literacy to support Irish. This transfer appears to underlie the confidence and reduced anxiety observed among immersion students in this study. Similarly, Hornberger's (2003) Continua of Biliteracy highlight how immersion environments extend opportunities for oral, written, receptive, and productive use, reinforcing both competence and identity.

Yet the immersion advantage has clear limits. As several students in Irish-medium schools observed, Irish was rarely used outside the classroom. This reflects broader sociolinguistic concerns about the declining vitality of Irish, even in traditionally Irish-speaking areas (Ó Giollagáin & Charlton, 2015). Internationally, similar limits are evident in Canadian French immersion, where high levels of classroom competence do not always translate into sustained community use (Cummins, 2000). In this study, the “school-only” character of Irish remained a barrier: while immersion bolstered competence and motivation, students still struggled to locate authentic communicative opportunities beyond formal schooling.

### 6.3.2 Variation across and within contexts (Gaeltacht, DEIS, urban IM)

The study also revealed notable variation both across and within school contexts. While pupils attending Irish-medium schools generally reported more positive attitudes, stronger motivation, higher self-concept, and lower levels of anxiety than their English-medium peers, important differences were evident between schools within the same sector. For example, some Irish-medium schools outside the Gaeltacht recorded stronger outcomes than Gaeltacht schools across a number of measures. These findings challenge assumptions that geographical location alone translates into stronger engagement with Irish. Rather, they support recent sociolinguistic research highlighting considerable variation in language vitality across Gaeltacht communities and the increasingly complex relationship between place, language use, and linguistic identity (Ó Giollagáin et al., 2015).

Variation was also evident within English-medium provision. Some DEIS schools reported comparatively positive attitudes and motivational orientations towards Irish, demonstrating that socio-economic context alone does not determine learner engagement. Such findings suggest that local factors, including school culture, leadership, pedagogical approaches, opportunities for language use, and teacher-student relationships, may play a significant role in shaping learners’ experiences of Irish. This interpretation is consistent with Hornberger and Johnson’s (2007) argument that language learning outcomes emerge through interactions between broader structural conditions and local educational practices.

These findings further reinforce the view that categories such as “Gaeltacht”, “DEIS”, and “Irish-medium” should not be treated as homogeneous. Hornberger’s (2003) ecological framework provides a useful lens through which to understand this variability, emphasising

that language learning is shaped by multiple interacting influences operating at both macro and micro levels. While educational structures and language policies create opportunities for engagement, the ways in which these opportunities are enacted within individual schools, classrooms, and peer networks appear equally important. The findings therefore suggest that students' attitudes and motivation towards Irish are influenced not solely by institutional or geographical context, but by the dynamic interaction of social, cultural, and educational factors within each school community.

### 6.3.3 Transition and continuity across school stages

A further pattern concerned the importance of educational continuity. Pupils who attended Irish-medium primary schools retained a motivational advantage into post-primary education, even when transitioning to English-medium settings. Their higher self-concepts, reduced anxiety, and stronger desire to learn Irish suggest durable benefits from early immersion, echoing findings from Harris and Murtagh (1999) and Little et al. (2013).

Continuity across stages appeared most influential. Students who remained in Irish-medium pathways from primary through post-primary reported the strongest motivation and confidence, supported by parental encouragement and sustained exposure. This aligns with longitudinal findings from the Growing Up in Ireland study (2017), which found that immersion continuity predicts sustained positive orientations to Irish (Barnes et al., 2024). Conversely, pupils who transitioned from immersion primary to English-medium secondary schools often experienced a motivational decline, suggesting that discontinuity undermines learners' investment.

This transition effect reflects broader international trends. Cenoz and Gorter (2017) argue that seamless pathways are critical in minority-language education: when exposure is interrupted, competence and motivation often decline rapidly. May (2012) likewise highlights the risks of discontinuity in heritage language maintenance, where learners disengage once the language becomes confined to narrow curricular domains. For Irish, the implication is clear: continuity of immersion is vital for sustaining engagement, and policy provision must consider not only access to immersion at a single stage but also pathways across the full educational trajectory.

## 6.4 Pedagogy, curriculum, and student experience

### 6.4.1 Lack of fun and interactive methods

A consistent theme in students' accounts was the limited use of interactive and engaging pedagogies in Irish lessons. Many described learning experiences dominated by grammar exercises, rote memorisation, and translation tasks, which they perceived as monotonous and disconnected from authentic language use. These observations echo earlier evaluations that highlighted the lack of communicative approaches and creative language engagement in Irish classrooms (Harris & Conway, 2002; Ó Duibhir, 2018).

From a theoretical standpoint, such approaches reflect a transmission model of language teaching rather than a sociocultural model of learning. Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development underscores the importance of scaffolded, interactive learning experiences, while Dörnyei's (2001) motivational strategies emphasise the value of tasks that reduce anxiety and build learner engagement. Students' requests for "games," "speaking practice," and "more fun activities" resonate with research showing that learner-centred, task-based approaches foster both motivation and oral competence (Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Ellis, 2006).

Internationally, minority-language classrooms that overemphasise grammar at the expense of communication have similarly been criticised for undermining motivation (Lasagabaster, 2011; May, 2012). In the present study, pupils made clear that the perceived lack of enjoyment limited their willingness to engage. This finding demonstrates how pedagogy directly shapes learner affect and illustrates the need for approaches that position Irish as a living, enjoyable language rather than an academic burden.

### 6.4.2 Irish as a "school-only" language

Students across both English-medium and immersion contexts often described Irish as a "school-only" language. This perception reflected the limited visibility and use of Irish beyond classroom walls, reinforcing the sense that it has little role in contemporary youth culture. One pupil remarked: *"We never hear it anywhere else, only in Irish class."*

This perception is not new. Harris and Murtagh (1999) documented the weak transfer of Irish from school to out-of-school domains, while Ó Giollagáin and Charlton (2015) noted



the declining vitality of Irish even in Gaeltacht communities. Similar patterns are seen in Canadian French immersion, where graduates often achieve high academic proficiency but rarely use the language socially (Cummins, 2000).

Theoretically, Hornberger's (2003) Continuum of Biliteracy and García and Wei's (2014) work on translanguaging suggest that the problem lies in artificial separations between school and community use. By failing to connect Irish to students' broader repertoires, pedagogical practices reinforce the perception that it is an academic subject rather than a communicative resource. This highlights the importance of authenticity in language learning: learners must encounter the target language in spaces they value; peer interaction, digital media, extracurricular activities, for it to feel relevant and meaningful.

#### 6.4.3 Curriculum, assessment, and anxiety

Assessment emerged as a powerful driver of anxiety in this study, particularly among students in English-medium schools. Pupils repeatedly described Irish as "*stressful*" or "*too focused on exams*," with many associating negative emotions with written grammar tests. These findings echo the proposition that high-stakes assessment encourages form-focused instruction and marginalises oral communicative competence, with research showing that students preparing for the Leaving Certificate frequently rely on rote learning and memory recall (McGrath, 2021; Ó Laoire, 2012).

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has sought to shift the focus through the revised Junior Cycle Irish L1 and L2 specifications (NCCA, 2017; revised 2023), which emphasise oral proficiency, creativity, and authentic communication. Yet, student perspectives in this study indicate that such reforms have had limited impact at classroom level; written tasks and exam-oriented practices continue to dominate, while oracy remains comparatively underdeveloped. Persistent gaps between policy ambitions and classroom practices in Irish-medium education illustrate how curriculum reform frequently fails to shift long-established instructional cultures (Ó Duibhir, 2018).

Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis provides an interpretive framework: the high-stakes nature of assessment raises learners' anxiety, which in turn reduces their willingness to speak and lowers acquisition. Research on foreign language anxiety demonstrates that

exam-driven contexts can intensify fear of making errors and inhibit oral participation (Horwitz et al., 1986). In this study, such dynamics were particularly evident in English-medium schools, where students had fewer opportunities for informal spoken interaction to offset the pressures of assessment.

#### 6.4.4 Pedagogical innovations and student recommendations

Despite their frustrations, students also offered concrete suggestions for improving Irish language learning. They called for greater opportunities for oral communication, increased use of digital media, more creative and interactive learning activities, and authentic opportunities to use Irish beyond the textbook. These preferences align with international research on effective minority-language pedagogy, which highlights the value of learner-centred approaches that promote meaningful, real-world communication and active language use (Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Ellis, 2006).

The findings also resonate with a number of contemporary pedagogical approaches discussed in Chapter 2. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emphasises the use of meaningful communicative tasks that require learners to use language for authentic purposes rather than simply practise linguistic forms (Ellis, 2003, 2009). Similarly, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) promotes language development through engagement with meaningful subject content, creating opportunities for learners to use language in purposeful and contextually rich ways (Coyle et al., 2010). Both approaches reflect students' calls for greater relevance, interaction, and opportunities to use Irish as a communicative resource rather than solely as an academic subject.

Examples from other contexts further demonstrate the potential of such innovations. In the Basque Country, translanguaging pedagogies have been shown to increase both competence and motivation by creating meaningful connections between minority and majority languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). Research has also highlighted the importance of incidental and informal language use beyond formal classroom instruction, including peer interaction, extracurricular activities, digital media, youth culture, and everyday communicative encounters (O'Rourke, 2011). Students in this study echoed these insights, asking for Irish to be used through *“music, apps, and social media”* and for teachers to *“let us speak more, not just write.”*

These recommendations suggest that learners are not resistant to Irish itself but rather become disengaged when pedagogical practices fail to align with their identities, interests, and communicative needs. By foregrounding student voice, this study highlights how students themselves articulate pathways towards more meaningful, enjoyable, and authentic engagement with Irish.

Their recommendations point towards the value of pedagogies that prioritise communication, contextualised language use, creativity, and participation. These findings suggest considerable potential for continued innovation within Irish language education and reinforce the importance of creating opportunities for learners to use Irish as a living language within meaningful social and educational contexts.

## 6.5 Multilingualism, inclusion, and language ecologies

### 6.5.1 Multilingual learners: language-positive but not Irish-positive

One of the more nuanced findings of this study was the pattern among multilingual pupils who, while enthusiastic about learning global languages, consistently expressed weaker orientations toward Irish. Many self-identified as “*language lovers*,” showing strong motivation for Spanish, French, or Polish, but described Irish as “*just for school*” or “*less useful*.” This reflects an important distinction: being language-positive does not automatically translate into being Irish-positive.

This dynamic has been recognised internationally. Baker (2011) argues that multilingualism does not inherently strengthen minority language vitality; rather, attitudes are shaped by the perceived utility, identity, and status of the language. García and Wei (2014) highlight that when minority languages are framed outside of students’ lived repertoires, they risk being positioned as less relevant. In the Irish context, O’Rourke (2011) similarly found that new speakers often positioned Irish as marginal relative to English and global languages.

From a raciolinguistic perspective, Flores and Rosa (2015) caution that ideologies of language value are bound up with social hierarchies and notions of legitimacy. In multilingual Ireland, pupils often perceive global languages as offering symbolic and

material capital, while Irish remains tethered to compulsory schooling and symbolic heritage. The present findings extend this argument by showing that multilingual pupils differentiate between languages in their repertoires based on imagined futures, aligning with Norton's (2013) concept of investment: Irish is less frequently imagined as a resource for mobility or opportunity, and thus attracts less learner investment.

#### 6.5.2 Home and community use of Irish

Consistent with national trends, most pupils reported little or no use of Irish at home, even in Gaeltacht schools. Many noted that their families and peers defaulted to English, while Irish was reserved for school-based interactions. Students often remarked that they “*never speak Irish at home*,” confirming Harris and Murtagh's (1999) observation that school learning does not readily transfer into domestic or social domains.

This limited home and community use reflects broader demographic and sociolinguistic shifts. Ó Giollagáin and Charlton (2015) have documented the weakening of intergenerational transmission in Gaeltacht regions, while Walsh (2022) notes that despite extensive policy supports, English continues to dominate many domains of everyday communication in contemporary Ireland. From an international perspective, Fishman's (1991) model of Reversing Language Shift underscores the importance of family and community networks in sustaining minority languages. Without such transmission, the burden of maintenance falls disproportionately on schools, as seen in Welsh, Basque, and Canadian French contexts (May, 2012; Cenoz & Gorter, 2017).

The protective effect of home use was visible in this study. Students from Irish-speaking households, though a small minority, displayed notably higher confidence, lower anxiety, and stronger sense of ownership of Irish. This aligns with Edwards' (2010) claim that minority-language identity and competence are most robust when embedded in everyday life, and with May's (2012) conclusion that school-based provision alone cannot guarantee vitality without complementary home and community use.

#### 6.5.3 Identity, belonging, and plurilingual realities

Identity negotiations around Irish were complex and fluid. Many students valued Irish symbolically as part of national heritage but did not integrate it into their personal identities.

For multilingual pupils, Irish was often perceived as secondary to languages associated with mobility, heritage, or global communication. This echoes Ó Ríagáin's (2007) view that Irish often functions as a collective symbol of national belonging rather than as a lived communicative resource.

Theoretically, Norton's (1995, 2013) concept of investment explains these findings: learners invest in languages that align with their imagined identities and communities of the future. In this study, Irish was not frequently linked to such futures, particularly among pupils who saw themselves as global citizens. Cummins (2000) argues that language learning must connect to learners' identities and hybrid realities; when this link is weak, motivation declines.

García and Wei's (2014) concept of translinguaging and Cenoz and Gorter's (2017) work on plurilingual ecologies suggest that framing Irish as part of students' broader repertoires, rather than as separate or oppositional to other languages, may foster stronger belonging. Furthermore, O'Rourke and Walsh (2015) highlight how new speakers construct hybrid identities that challenge native-speaker ideologies, positioning minority languages as resources in plurilingual identities.

From a raciolinguistic perspective, Flores and Rosa (2015) remind us that ideologies of legitimacy shape who is seen as a "real" speaker. Some students in this study internalised the belief that only Gaeltacht natives were "authentic," which limited their sense of belonging. Such perceptions reinforce exclusionary dynamics that can discourage learners from investing in Irish.

## 6.6 Policy-practice tensions

### 6.6.1 Curriculum reform vs classroom realities

Over the past decade, Irish education policy has introduced successive reforms aimed at rebalancing the teaching of Irish. The Junior Cycle specifications (NCCA, 2017; revised 2023), the Primary Language Curriculum (DES, 2019), and ongoing Leaving Certificate reviews emphasise communicative competence, creativity, and learner-centred approaches. These reforms align with international trends in minority-language education, where

communicative and plurilingual approaches are promoted as means of enhancing engagement (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; García & Wei, 2014).

Despite policy commitments to fostering more communicative and engaging learning experiences, findings from this study reveal a persistent gap between ambition and practice. Pupils frequently described lessons centred on memorisation, translation, and preparation for written examinations, with comparatively few opportunities to use Irish orally or creatively. These findings reflect wider critiques that the exam-oriented culture in Irish education inhibits communicative pedagogies and limits opportunities for authentic language use (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011; NCCA, 2017). Comparable challenges are evident in other minority-language education systems, such as Basque, Welsh, and Canadian French, where curriculum reforms have struggled to displace entrenched assessment-orientated approaches (May, 2012; Lewis, 2008).

The disjuncture observed here highlights the importance of what Hornberger and Johnson (2007) term “implementational spaces”: spaces where teachers and learners reinterpret policy. When high-stakes examinations dominate, these spaces are constrained, and official reform risks remaining aspirational. For Irish, the implication is that systemic reform requires not only curricular change but also structural shifts in assessment and accountability to enable teachers to enact communicative, learner-centred pedagogy.

#### 6.6.2 Positioning Irish in a multilingual Ireland

Another tension lies in how Irish is positioned within Ireland’s increasingly multilingual education system. National strategies such as *Languages Connect* (DES, 2017) promote foreign language learning but often treat Irish as separate from broader plurilingual agendas. Findings from this study revealed that many multilingual pupils embraced global languages such as Spanish or French but perceived Irish as marginal or irrelevant to their imagined futures.

This reflects concerns raised by Walsh (2022) that Irish-language policy has often developed separately from broader language and multilingualism policy frameworks. International scholarship suggests alternatives: Cenoz and Gorter (2017) argue for ecological models where minority, majority, and global languages are interlinked; García

and Wei (2014) emphasise translinguaging as a pedagogy that validates learners' full repertoires. In the Irish context, O'Rourke and Walsh (2015) highlight the potential of reimagining Irish as part of hybrid, plurilingual identities rather than as a binary between "native speakers" and others.

The present findings extend these arguments by demonstrating how pupils themselves articulate the disconnection: many expressed enthusiasm for "*useful*" global languages while dismissing Irish as "*just for exams.*" While recent policy developments increasingly position Irish within a broader plurilingual vision of language learning, including *Languages Connect* (DES, 2017), the Primary Language Curriculum (DES, 2019), the Primary Language Specifications (NCCA, 2025), and Ireland's *Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024–2033*, the findings of this study suggest that many students do not yet experience Irish as part of their wider linguistic repertoires. The challenge therefore may not lie in policy intent alone, but in ensuring that plurilingual aspirations are consistently translated into classroom practice and learner experience.

### 6.6.3 Teacher support, training, and resources

Teacher support emerged as another critical policy-practice tension. Students frequently noted variability in classroom experiences, with some teachers fostering confidence and enjoyment while others relied heavily on rote learning and grammar. This variability confirms that teacher agency and pedagogical choices play a decisive role in shaping learner motivation (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007).

Teachers themselves face significant systemic constraints that shape what is possible in the classroom. Research highlights ongoing challenges in Irish-medium teacher education, including limited opportunities for continuing professional development and specialist support relating to immersion education, inclusive practice, and Irish-medium pedagogies (Ó Ceallaigh, Ní Mhurchú, & Ní Chróinín, 2017; Nic Aindriú, Ó Duibhir, Connaughton-Crean, & Travers, 2022), inadequate resource provision (Department of Education and Science, Inspectorate, 2007), and the difficulty of sustaining language learning in communities where students have little exposure to Irish outside school (Ó Duibhir, 2018). These pressures were reflected indirectly in pupils' accounts in this study: when teachers

integrated games, collaborative tasks, or digital tools, engagement noticeably increased; when lessons reverted to exam-driven routines, disengagement deepened.

International comparisons highlight similar pressures. May (2012) observes that minority-language teachers often carry disproportionate responsibility for language revitalisation, without sufficient systemic support. In Welsh-medium and Basque schools, reforms have been undermined when teacher education and resources did not match curricular ambitions (Lewis, 2008; Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). For Irish, policy must therefore go beyond rhetorical commitments to communicative competence and invest in sustained professional learning, resourcing, and support for teachers who mediate policy on the ground.

## 6.7 The CAIRDE Framework for Engagement

### 6.7.1 Introduction

This section presents the CAIRDE Framework for Engagement, which represents the key original contribution of this thesis. Developed inductively from the findings of this study, the CAIRDE framework offers a holistic, student-centred model that conceptualises the multiple conditions shaping young people's engagement with Irish at post-primary level. Unlike existing models of language motivation or bilingual education, CAIRDE is not an adaptation of prior frameworks but a new synthesis, grounded in the voices of learners and interpreted through the theoretical lenses outlined in Chapter 2.

The preceding sections of this chapter (6.2-6.6) highlighted the complex interplay of motivational, contextual, pedagogical, multilingual, and policy-related factors influencing learners' orientations to Irish. Each of these strands pointed to specific enablers and constraints: the fragility of confidence during adolescence, the decisive role of school contexts, the impact of pedagogical practices and assessment, the negotiation of identity within plurilingual repertoires, and the tension between policy rhetoric and classroom realities. These themes underscored the need for a framework that integrates these dimensions into a coherent model for understanding engagement.

The CAIRDE framework responds to this need by identifying six interrelated conditions: Confidence, Access, Identity, Relevance, Diversity, and Environment. Each dimension reflects a distinct but overlapping sphere of influence, capturing both individual and



systemic factors. Together, they provide a comprehensive model for reimagining how Irish can be positioned in schools, policy, and communities.

A visual representation of the framework is provided in Figure 28, summarising its six dimensions and their interconnections. The following subsections (6.7.2-6.7.7) discuss each dimension in turn, illustrating how it emerges from the findings and how it contributes to a holistic understanding of engagement with Irish. In doing so, this section synthesises the empirical and theoretical contributions of the study, establishing CAIRDE as a practical and conceptual tool for advancing both research and practice in Irish language education.

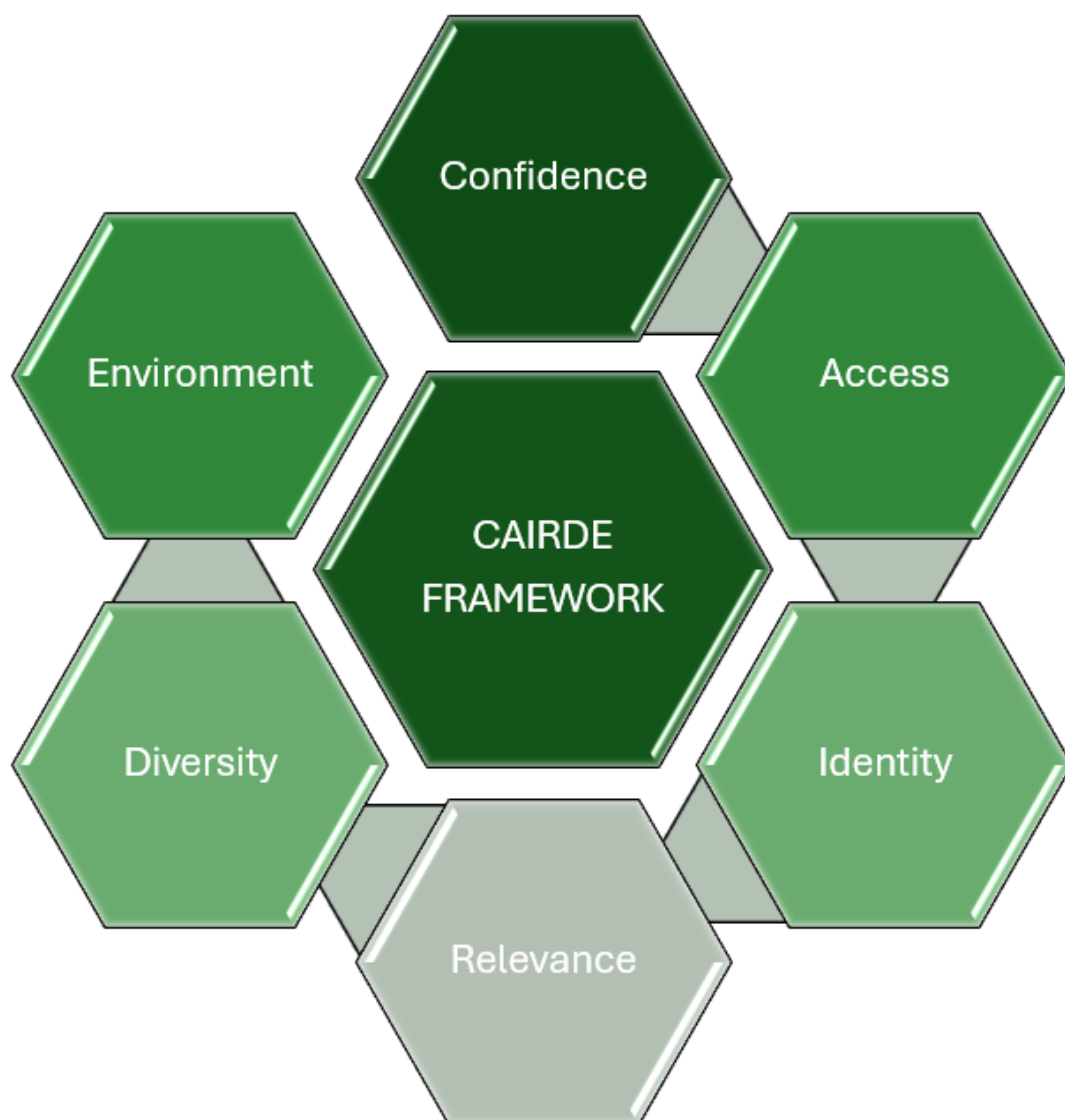


**Figure 28 Visual representation of the CAIRDE framework for engagement with Irish**

### 6.7.2 Confidence

Confidence emerged as one of the most critical yet fragile dimensions of engagement. Quantitative survey data indicated that students in English-medium schools scored significantly lower on measures of self-concept in Irish than their immersion peers, echoing earlier findings by Harris and Murtagh (1999). More strikingly, the data revealed a marked dip between first and second year, suggesting that the early transition into post-primary school is a vulnerable moment for motivation and self-belief. Qualitative responses underscored this pattern, with students frequently referring to embarrassment, reluctance to speak, and fear of being judged. As one student explained, *“If I didn’t feel judged every time I raise my hand in class”*, while another commented, *“Not being nervous about learning it and being wrong when answering questions and speaking.”* Others were more direct: *“I find it hard to answer questions in Irish.”* These comments illustrate how linguistic insecurity, rather than lack of knowledge, can translate into disengagement from oral participation.

These findings resonate with classic theories of language affect. Krashen’s (1982) affective filter hypothesis posits that anxiety and low self-confidence can block language acquisition, while Bandura’s (1997) concept of self-efficacy highlights the role of belief in one’s capacity to perform a task. Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory further emphasises competence as a key driver of intrinsic motivation. More recent perspectives, however, conceptualise confidence within broader dynamic and socially situated models. For example, Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self System frames learners’ visions of themselves as competent speakers as central to sustained engagement (Dörnyei, 2009), while Norton’s (2013) theory of investment underscores that willingness to participate is linked to whether speaking Irish affords students valued social or symbolic capital.

The international literature also highlights how confidence is shaped by classroom ecologies. Ó Duibhir (2018) observed that learners in immersion settings benefit from confidence-building through frequent, low-stakes oral practice, whereas English-medium classrooms often provide fewer authentic speaking opportunities. Translanguaging research reinforces this point, showing that when students can flexibly draw on their full repertoires, they are more likely to take risks and build confidence in minority languages

(García & Wei, 2014; Ó Duibhir, 2018). Conversely, separationist ideologies and high-stakes assessments may intensify anxiety by positioning mistakes as failures rather than as part of the learning process (Shohamy, 2011).

Addressing confidence therefore requires systemic responses at both classroom and policy levels. Pedagogically, classrooms must normalise oral error as a natural part of learning, integrate pair and group tasks that reduce the spotlight on individual performance, and create informal speaking spaces beyond assessment contexts (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). From a policy perspective, curricula should embed confidence-building as an explicit outcome alongside accuracy and fluency, while teacher education programmes must equip practitioners with strategies to nurture students' oral self-belief (Barnes et al., 2024). Without confidence, even the most positive attitudes to Irish are unlikely to translate into meaningful engagement.

### 6.7.3 Access

Access to Irish, both within and beyond the classroom, strongly shaped student orientations. The clearest contrast in this study was between immersion and English-medium provision, with immersion pupils consistently reporting higher levels of motivation and more positive attitudes. This confirms the immersion advantage documented in earlier research (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, 2018). However, the findings also revealed important variation within sectors. Some Irish-medium schools outside the Gaeltacht matched or outperformed Gaeltacht schools on a number of measures, while certain DEIS schools reported relatively strong attitudes and motivation towards Irish. These variations suggest that access is not determined solely by geography or socioeconomic status but by the quality of provision and opportunities to use Irish meaningfully (Barnes et al., 2024).

Qualitative data highlighted students' frustration at the lack of authentic exposure, particularly in English-medium contexts. Comments such as "Irish is only in the classroom, nowhere else" were common. This echoes Ó Duibhir and Ní Thuairisg's (2019) study, which found that even immersion learners struggled to locate contexts for out-of-school use, underlining the importance of broader language environments. Ó Giollagáin (2015) similarly documented uneven vitality within the Gaeltacht, noting that the presence of Irish-medium schooling does not guarantee sustained intergenerational transmission. These

findings resonate with Cummins' (2000) ecological perspective, which emphasises that minority-language learning requires supportive contexts across multiple domains, not only schools.

Hornberger's (2003) Continua of Biliteracy provide further insight: opportunities for oral and written engagement are shaped by the interaction of home, school, and community practices. Where Irish is restricted to formal, classroom-based domains, students' repertoires remain underdeveloped, reinforcing perceptions of Irish as "just for school." García and Wei's (2014) translanguaging perspective highlights the need for learning environments that enable students to mobilise Irish alongside their other linguistic resources in authentic, creative ways.

The implications are significant. Expanding access requires multifaceted strategies: integrating Irish into extracurricular activities, increasing the availability of youth media in Irish, and strengthening links between schools and Gaeltacht summer courses (Walsh, 2022). Equity demands that resource-rich environments are made available to students regardless of school type or location. Without such measures, disparities in access risk reinforcing unequal patterns of engagement across student populations and undermining the broader goals of language policy.

#### 6.7.4 Identity

Identity was another prominent dimension in this study. While many students valued Irish symbolically as part of national heritage, relatively few described it as central to their personal sense of self. For multilingual pupils, Irish was often positioned as one language among many, typically secondary to global languages such as Spanish or French. One student captured this sentiment succinctly: *"I speak Polish at home and want to learn Spanish for travel; Irish is just for school."* Such perspectives highlight the challenges of situating Irish within hybrid, globalised identities.

These findings resonate with Cummins' (2000) discussion of identity negotiation in bilingual education, which emphasises that learners' sense of self is shaped by the relative status, power, and value accorded to different languages. In multilingual contexts, students often orient their identities toward languages associated with mobility, capital, or wider

communication. García and Wei's (2014) theory of translinguaging extends this perspective by conceptualising students as active agents who draw flexibly on their full repertoires to construct hybrid, fluid identities. For the students in this study, Irish did not consistently feature as part of these repertoires of belonging, reflecting its weaker symbolic and material value relative to English or global languages.

From a motivational perspective, Norton's (1995, 2013) concept of investment is particularly relevant. Students are more likely to invest effort in a language when it aligns with their imagined communities and future selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In this study, learners' orientations suggested that Irish was often disconnected from their imagined trajectories, resulting in low investment despite generally positive attitudes at a symbolic level. This echoes international research showing that minority languages frequently function as markers of collective identity without becoming integrated into learners' personal sense of self (Block, 2007; May, 2012).

The Irish case also illustrates the tensions of authenticity and legitimacy. Some students expressed the view that only Gaeltacht natives were "real" speakers, reflecting what O'Rourke and Walsh (2015) call the "*native speaker fallacy*" in minority-language communities. From a raciolinguistic perspective, Flores and Rosa (2015) argue that such ideologies of legitimacy reproduce exclusionary dynamics, whereby learners who do not fit traditional speaker categories see themselves as outsiders. This finding suggests that Irish education must actively challenge binary conceptions of authenticity by framing Irish as a language that all learners can legitimately own and use.

The challenge, then, is to reposition Irish as a valued component of plurilingual identity rather than as a marginalised or imposed subject. Policy frameworks such as *Languages Connect* (DES, 2017) acknowledge the importance of inclusive plurilingual approaches, yet the relationship between Irish-language policy and broader multilingual education policy remains complex (Walsh, 2022). Embedding Irish into broader narratives of hybrid and globalised identities, through youth culture, digital media, and translinguaging pedagogies, may help students perceive it not as an obligation but as a resource that enriches their linguistic and cultural repertoires.

### 6.7.5 Relevance

Students consistently questioned the relevance of Irish to their daily lives, frequently describing it as a “*school-only*” subject with little presence in contemporary youth culture. Survey data reflected low levels of instrumental motivation, with relatively few learners viewing Irish as useful for future employment, further study, or participation in a globalised world. Qualitative comments reinforced this view, noting the dominance of English in public life and the perceived wider utility of international languages such as Spanish or French. These perceptions mirror earlier evaluations that found limited transfer of school-based Irish to authentic, real-life communication (Harris & Conway, 2002).

Theoretically, relevance relates closely to Gardner’s (1985) notion of integrative motivation, which depends on learners identifying with a target language community, and to Markus and Nurius’ (1986) “possible selves” framework, which emphasises how future-oriented self-concepts shape persistence. When students fail to envision Irish as part of their possible selves, disengagement follows. Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self System extends this argument, positioning the “ideal L2 self” as central to sustained motivation. In this study, few learners articulated an ideal self-involving Irish, in contrast to more common aspirations involving global languages.

Policy reforms such as the Junior Cycle Irish L1 & L2 specifications (NCCA, 2017; revised 2023) and the broader *Languages Connect* strategy (DES, 2017) have sought to reframe Irish as a communicative, creative, and culturally rich resource. Yet student testimony here suggests that these intentions are unevenly realised in practice. Classrooms remained dominated by grammar, exams, and formal writing tasks, leaving limited space for students to experience Irish as relevant to their interests or social worlds.

Enhancing relevance therefore requires both curricular and extracurricular innovation. Curricula must embed opportunities for authentic communication and cultural exploration, while extracurricular interventions should connect Irish to domains young people value: music, social media, gaming, film, and intercultural exchange (O’Rourke, 2011). As Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory highlights, when learners perceive activities as personally meaningful, intrinsic motivation flourishes. Without such enhanced relevance, Irish risks being experienced as an academic hurdle rather than a living language with personal, social, and cultural significance.

#### 6.7.6 Diversity

The linguistic diversity of today's classrooms presents both challenges and opportunities for Irish. Multilingual students in this study often expressed enthusiasm for language learning in general but weaker orientations to Irish specifically. This finding confirms earlier conclusions that multilingualism in itself does not guarantee the vitality of minority languages (Baker, 2011; May, 2012). In fact, the relative positioning of languages within social hierarchies often determines which are valued, invested in, or marginalised. For many pupils, global languages such as Spanish or French were perceived as more relevant to their futures than Irish.

Theoretically, inclusive pedagogies position linguistic diversity as a resource rather than a barrier. García and Wei's (2014) work on translanguaging demonstrates how students' full linguistic repertoires can be mobilised to affirm identity and strengthen competence across languages, including those with minority status. Similarly, Cenoz and Gorter (2017) advocate for "focus on multilingualism" approaches that foster meaningful connections between minority, majority, and foreign languages instead of treating them as separate systems. In the Irish context, studies indicate that multilingual learners are often open to engaging with Irish but become disengaged when it is presented as compulsory, abstract, or disconnected from their everyday linguistic realities (Smyth & Darmody, 2016).

Students' testimonies reflected these tensions. Some migrant-background students described feeling excluded from Irish because they lacked prior exposure or found themselves positioned as "outsiders." Others expressed that Irish felt irrelevant to their cultural identity, reinforcing Flores and Rosa's (2015) raciolinguistic argument that ideologies of legitimacy can exclude those who do not fit traditional speaker norms. Yet, at the same time, several multilingual students articulated interest in learning Irish as a way of integrating into Irish society or connecting with peers. This duality underscores the potential of pedagogical approaches that frame Irish not as an obligation but as an opportunity.

Cummins (2000) stresses that affirming students' identities requires building on their existing repertoires and recognising them as legitimate participants in the classroom. Policy

frameworks such as the *Intercultural Education Strategy* (Department of Education and Skills & Office of the Minister for Integration, 2010) and *Languages Connect* (DES, 2017) highlight the need to value linguistic diversity as a resource for all learners. Yet the implementation of these policies in practice has been uneven (Walsh, 2022), and the students in this study frequently reported experiences of exclusion or irrelevance rather than inclusion.

Within the CAIRDE framework, Diversity is therefore not viewed as a barrier but as a resource. By positioning Irish as part of a shared multilingual repertoire, educators can create spaces where all students, regardless of background, see themselves as legitimate participants in the language community. This requires pedagogies that validate multilingual identities, disrupt exclusionary ideologies of authenticity, and present Irish as a language that enriches, rather than competes with, students' broader linguistic repertoires.

#### 6.7.7 Environment

The broader learning environment was repeatedly identified by students as crucial to their relationship with Irish. School culture, peer norms, and teacher modelling emerged as particularly influential. In contexts where teachers regularly used Irish for informal communication and where peers accepted it as normal, students reported higher levels of confidence and engagement. Conversely, in schools where English dominated, Irish was confined to the classroom and associated only with formal instruction, limiting students' sense of the language as a living resource.

These findings are consistent with Ó Giollagáin and Charlton's (2015) analysis of Gaeltacht vitality, which demonstrates that community use cannot be assumed even in traditionally Irish-speaking areas. They also resonate with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which conceptualises learning as shaped by interactions across multiple environmental layers, from the immediate microsystem of classrooms to the wider macrosystem of societal ideologies and policies. Within Irish education, Hornberger's (2003) Continua of Biliteracy provide a complementary framework, illustrating how environments that support use across home, school, and community domains foster stronger outcomes than those where opportunities are fragmented.



The OECD (2019) highlights school climate as a determinant of student well-being and engagement, an observation reinforced by this study: learners described thriving in environments where Irish was visible, normalised, and supported across disciplines and extracurricular spaces (OECD, 2019). International minority-language research similarly underscores that when the environment validates and encourages use, learners are more likely to invest in the language (Baker, 2011; Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; May, 2012). Conversely, where Irish is compartmentalised as an academic subject, the absence of supportive ecology undermines both confidence and motivation.

Strengthening the environment requires systemic, whole-school approaches. Within schools, visible signage, announcements, and the use of Irish by staff beyond language teachers can normalise the language as part of everyday institutional life (Moriarty, 2014; Ó Giollagáin & Charlton, 2015). Extracurricular clubs, sports, and student leadership structures offer further opportunities for authentic participation. Beyond school, partnerships with Gaeltacht communities, youth organisations, and digital media platforms can extend Irish into valued domains of peer interaction and youth culture (O'Rourke, 2011). Such measures align with Cummins' (2000) emphasis on empowering environments that connect classroom learning to meaningful communicative practices.

Within the CAIRDE framework, Environment is therefore understood not as a passive backdrop but as an active determinant of engagement. By shaping what is possible, valued, and legitimised, the environment can either constrain or catalyse meaningful relationships with Irish.

#### 6.7.8 Implications for policy and practice

The six dimensions of the CAIRDE framework highlight the need for a multidimensional and systemic response to the challenges of Irish language engagement. Confidence requires explicit curricular recognition and sustained teacher professional development that foregrounds oral self-belief and strategies for reducing anxiety (Bandura, 1997; Krashen, 1982). Access demands equitable resource allocation, pathways of continuity between primary and post-primary immersion, and authentic opportunities for use across all school types (Ó Duibhir & Ní Thuairisg, 2019). Identity calls for inclusive, plurilingual framings that acknowledge students' hybrid and globalised selves, challenging narrow ideologies of

authenticity (Norton, 2013; O'Rourke & Walsh, 2015). Relevance must be pursued through curricular innovation that embeds Irish in meaningful communication, as well as extracurricular integration with domains young people value, including digital media and youth culture (NCCA, 2023; O'Rourke, 2011). Diversity requires pedagogies that harness multilingual repertoires as assets rather than barriers (Cummins, 2000; García & Wei, 2014), while Environment highlights the importance of whole-school cultures, peer norms, and community-level support in normalising Irish use (Ó Giollagáin & Charlton, 2015; Walsh, 2022).

Policy frameworks already articulate elements of this agenda. The *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* (Government of Ireland, 2010) sets out a system-wide commitment to revitalisation; *Languages Connect* (Department of Education and Skills, 2017) promotes multilingualism and explicitly recognises the role of Irish within this landscape; and the Junior Cycle Irish specifications (NCCA, 2017; revised 2023) place greater emphasis on communicative competence and creativity. However, the findings of this study indicate that significant implementation challenges persist, particularly in translating policy aspirations into shifts in day-to-day pedagogical practice, an issue also identified in evaluations of Irish-language teaching, where assessment-driven approaches have been shown to constrain authentic communicative use (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011; Mac Gearailt & Ó Duibhir, 2022).

The CAIRDE framework offers a bridge between high-level policy aspirations and lived learner experiences by providing a student-centred, ecologically grounded model for action. Its interdependent dimensions emphasise that interventions must be systemic: confidence depends on supportive environments; relevance is shaped by opportunities for access; identity is mediated by recognition of diversity. By aligning with international research on bilingual education (Hornberger, 2003; Cenoz & Gorter, 2017) and responding to the specific challenges of Irish, CAIRDE provides a roadmap for policymakers, educators, and communities seeking to sustain and revitalise student engagement.

#### 6.7.9 Conclusion

The CAIRDE framework encapsulates the central contribution of this study: a student-centred model of Irish language engagement grounded in confidence, access, identity,

relevance, diversity, and environment. By integrating quantitative findings, qualitative narratives, and contemporary educational and policy contexts, CAIRDE reconceptualises language revitalisation not simply as preservation, but as participation, inclusion, belonging, and meaningful language use.

The framework directly addresses the research questions that guided the study. It identifies the conditions that most powerfully shape students' engagement with Irish, explains how these conditions interact across individual, classroom, school, and systemic levels, and offers a synthesising model capable of informing both policy and practice. In doing so, it responds to the gaps identified in Chapter 2, where research on Irish language education was shown to be dispersed across motivational, sociolinguistic, pedagogical, and multilingual domains without an integrative, student-centred framework. CAIRDE addresses this gap by bringing together affective, contextual, and ecological dimensions of engagement within a single explanatory model.

The findings both support and extend previous research on the teaching and learning of Irish. The framework integrates insights from earlier work relating to motivation (Murtagh, 2007; Flynn, 2014), immersion education (Ó Duibhir, 2018), learner identity and multilingualism (O'Rourke, 2011; Ní Dhiorbháin, 2021), and communicative language learning, while extending this body of research through the integration of quantitative, qualitative, and narrative data across multiple educational contexts within contemporary multilingual Ireland. By foregrounding student voice and examining Irish language learning across differing educational settings, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how motivation, identity, confidence, participation, and educational context interact to shape engagement with Irish at post-primary level.

The contribution of the thesis is therefore threefold. Empirically, it provides robust mixed-methods evidence of the patterns, challenges, and opportunities associated with learning Irish at post-primary level. Theoretically, it extends existing work on motivation, identity, multilingualism, and minority-language education by articulating a framework that is both grounded in learners' lived experiences and informed by contemporary scholarship on bilingual, multilingual, and plurilingual education. Practically, it offers a model that can inform policy development, curriculum reform, teacher education, and classroom practice

in ways that are both evidence-based and responsive to the realities of contemporary Irish classrooms.

Ultimately, CAIRDE represents not only a conceptual framework but also a roadmap for reimagining how Irish can be taught, learned, and experienced in multilingual Ireland. It positions language revitalisation as a process of enabling participation, fostering belonging, and creating meaningful opportunities for engagement. In doing so, it seeks to ensure that Irish is not only sustained as an important cultural and linguistic resource, but experienced by learners as a relevant, empowering, and valued part of their educational journeys.

## 7 Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

### 7.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter brings together the aims, findings, and implications of the research. The study addressed enduring challenges in post-primary Irish language education, where motivation, attitudes, and engagement remain fragile and uneven (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Duibhir, 2018). It explored how students' affective experiences, classroom environments, and wider sociolinguistic conditions shape their orientations toward Irish during the critical transition into junior cycle. Central to this inquiry was the question of how educational structures and social contexts influence whether Irish is experienced as meaningful, inclusive, and sustainable in students' lives.

Chapter 2 established that research on Irish language education, while extensive, remains fragmented across motivational, pedagogical, and sociolinguistic domains. International models of language motivation (Dörnyei, 2009; Norton, 2013), plurilingualism (García & Wei, 2014), and minority-language ecologies (Hornberger, 2003; May, 2012) provide valuable theoretical perspectives but have seldom been integrated within the Irish context. This gap underscored the need for a comprehensive, student-centred framework capable of connecting psychological, contextual, and policy dimensions of engagement, a challenge addressed through the mixed-methods design described in Chapter 3.

The discussion culminates in the CAIRDE Framework for Engagement: Confidence, Access, Identity, Relevance, Diversity, and Environment, which unites the study's theoretical and empirical strands. CAIRDE reconceptualises revitalisation as inclusion, participation, and meaningful use, providing a practical tool for aligning classroom practice with policy aspirations. The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows: Section 7.2 reviews the study's design and trajectory; Section 7.3 revisits key findings in relation to the research questions; Section 7.4 outlines the study's theoretical, empirical, and practical contributions; Section 7.5 considers limitations; Section 7.6 discusses implications for policy and practice; Section 7.7 proposes directions for future research; and Section 7.8 offers closing reflections.

### 7.2 Overview of the study

This study was motivated by continuing concerns about the status of Irish within post-primary education. Despite sustained policy investment, including the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* (Government of Ireland, 2010), research consistently reports difficulties in maintaining motivation and confidence among learners. Early studies highlighted declining enthusiasm and limited communicative confidence after primary

school (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Harris & Conway, 2002), while more recent research shows that many students perceive Irish as difficult and disconnected from their everyday lives, particularly when opportunities for meaningful use are limited (Smyth & Darmody, 2016). As outlined in Chapter 1, addressing this emerging “engagement gap” provides the core rationale for the present study.

Chapter 2 reviewed the theoretical foundations for addressing this question. Classical models of motivation (Gardner, 1985) and later developments such as Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self System illuminated the psychological dimensions of engagement, while sociocultural perspectives, Norton’s (2013) theory of investment and Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice, foregrounded identity and belonging. Research on bilingual and minority-language education (Cummins, 2000; Hornberger, 2003; May, 2012; García & Wei, 2014) further emphasised ecological and ideological influences on learning. However, Irish-language research had rarely integrated these strands, pointing to the need for a holistic framework connecting affective, contextual, and ecological dimensions of engagement.

To meet this need, the study employed a mixed-methods design (Chapter 3), combining a large-scale student questionnaire with qualitative narrative interviews. The quantitative strand offered breadth, mapping patterns of attitude, motivation, and self-concept across diverse school types, while the qualitative strand provided depth through students’ and teachers’ narratives. Guided by a pragmatic paradigm, data were analysed using complementary quantitative and qualitative approaches (Chapter 4): descriptive and inferential statistics identified cross-school patterns, while thematic analysis interpreted participant experiences. Integration of both strands enabled comparison of convergence and divergence, offering a comprehensive view of learner engagement.

Findings (Chapter 5) clustered around five interrelated domains; attitudes and motivation; school context and medium of instruction; pedagogy and curriculum experience; multilingualism and inclusion; and policy-practice mediation, showing that engagement is shaped by the interaction of psychological, pedagogical, and sociocultural factors rather than by any single determinant.

These strands culminate in the CAIRDE Framework for Engagement developed in Chapter 6 which synthesises the study’s empirical and theoretical insights and provides a foundation for the final discussion of contributions, limitations, and implications that follow.

### 7.3 Key findings in relation to research questions

This section revisits the six research questions outlined in Chapter 1 and synthesises how the findings addressed each of them. Together, the findings reveal that students' engagement with Irish is complex, relational, and deeply shaped by context. The quantitative and qualitative analyses converge to show that while attitudes and motivations toward Irish remain broadly positive in principle, they are fragile in practice, influenced by confidence, classroom experience, identity, and sociolinguistic environment. These interconnections underpin the development of the CAIRDE Framework for Engagement, which conceptualises how students form and sustain meaningful relationships with Irish through six interdependent dimensions: Confidence, Access, Identity, Relevance, Diversity, and Environment.

RQ1. What are the attitudes of 1st and 2nd Year post-primary pupils towards learning the Irish language in a multilingual Irish classroom?

Across the dataset, students expressed positive symbolic attitudes towards Irish but lower levels of practical engagement. While most students recognised Irish as part of national culture and identity, fewer associated it with personal or instrumental value. This distinction between cultural respect and active enthusiasm mirrors earlier findings (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Devitt et al., 2016), but the present study reveals sharper variation across school types and linguistic backgrounds. Students in Irish-medium (T1/L1) contexts, including Gaeltacht and Gaelcholáistí, consistently demonstrated stronger motivation and higher self-concept scores than those in English-medium (T2/L2) schools. However, even within Gaeltacht schools, a notable proportion of students reported speaking English at home, reflecting the complexity of language maintenance in bilingual communities.

The survey further indicated a decline in positive attitudes and confidence between first and second year, particularly in English-medium settings. Open-ended responses revealed frustration with rote learning and assessment-focused teaching, with several students describing Irish in so many words as “harder than it needs to be.” These findings highlight the early post-primary years as a critical point for sustaining motivation and identity connection. Within the CAIRDE Framework, these results align most closely with Confidence and Relevance, underscoring that positive attitudes alone are insufficient without opportunities for meaningful and affirming use.

RQ2. What are the motivations of these pupils for learning the Irish language?

Motivational patterns varied widely but revealed a consistent hierarchy between integrative and instrumental goals. Students were more motivated by cultural and relational factors,

wanting to keep Irish “*alive*” or “*because it’s part of who we are*”, than by pragmatic reasons such as employment or global mobility. Instrumental motivation remained low across all school types, though some Gaeltacht students linked Irish to pride in place or local identity.

Among multilingual students, enthusiasm for learning languages in general was high, but Irish was not always included in that enthusiasm. For many, Irish was perceived as less globally useful than languages like Spanish or French. Despite this, a subset of multilingual learners described learning Irish as an act of belonging or inclusion, particularly those who viewed participation in Irish as a way to connect with Irish peers and culture.

Motivation, therefore, was dynamic and context-dependent, shaped by students’ confidence, their classroom experiences, and their perceived opportunities for success. Within CAIRDE, these findings correspond to Confidence, Access, and Relevance, demonstrating that motivation flourishes where learning feels achievable, supported, and connected to students’ lived realities.

RQ3. What are the experiences of these pupils in learning the Irish language?

Students’ experiences of learning Irish were diverse but consistently shaped by pedagogical approach, school ethos, and classroom culture. Many described enjoyment when learning was interactive, creative, or connected to real-life communication. However, such opportunities were unevenly distributed. English-medium students frequently described Irish as a “*school-only*” subject, heavily grammar-focused and assessed through written exams, which limited authentic oral practice.

Teachers corroborated these accounts, acknowledging the difficulty of maintaining communicative aims within an exam-oriented system. While many teachers valued creativity and oral engagement, they also cited time pressures, resource limitations, and assessment demands as barriers. Some expressed frustration that policy reforms, particularly the Junior Cycle Irish specifications (NCCA, 2017; revised 2023) which promoted communicative and creative goals, yet the time and capacity available for professional learning often constrained their realisation in practice.

Despite these challenges, positive relational environments stood out as transformative. Students in classrooms where teachers fostered encouragement, humour, and mutual respect described higher confidence and enjoyment. These findings correspond to Environment and Confidence within CAIRDE, affirming that pedagogical climate and relational trust are central to sustaining motivation.



RQ4. How does student identity influence their attitudes, motivations, and experiences in learning the Irish language?

Identity was found to operate both as a resource and as a constraint. For many students, Irish represented symbolic identity, something to be respected and protected, but not necessarily a living part of their daily selves. This pattern was especially evident in English-medium contexts, where students rarely saw Irish as part of their personal or imagined futures. In contrast, students in immersion and Gaeltacht schools often expressed stronger emotional connection, though some described tension between Irish as a school language and English as the social language of home and peers.

For some students from multilingual backgrounds, Irish could function as both an inclusionary and exclusionary force. While some viewed learning Irish as a pathway to belonging and participation within Irish society, others experienced it as peripheral to their linguistic identities and everyday language practices. This reflected wider societal ideologies of authenticity and ownership, where the “real Irish speaker” was still often associated with native-speaker status or traditional Gaeltacht communities.

These findings align with Norton’s (2013) theory of investment and with raciolinguistic perspectives (Flores & Rosa, 2015) that highlight how power and legitimacy shape learner identity. Within CAIRDE, the dimensions of Identity and Diversity capture this dynamic, reframing Irish as a shared cultural and communicative resource for all learners, regardless of background.

RQ5. What factors impact students’ engagement and success in learning the Irish language?

Engagement was found to be influenced by a constellation of interrelated factors rather than any single determinant. Confidence emerged as the most consistent predictor of motivation and success across all school types. School ethos, teacher relationships, peer culture, and access to authentic communication opportunities all exerted strong effects. Immersion contexts generally supported more positive engagement, though variation was evident within and across schools. For example, one DEIS Gaelcholáiste performed among the most positively motivated schools, while another DEIS English-medium school reported some of the lowest confidence levels, indicating that context interacts with pedagogy and leadership rather than determining outcomes on its own.

Students also identified curriculum overload, exam stress, and limited real-world connection as barriers. Teachers echoed these concerns, emphasising that systemic

pressures often undercut communicative and affective aims. Within CAIRDE, this question draws together Confidence, Access, and Environment, reinforcing that engagement thrives where learners feel supported, capable, and connected to purpose.

RQ6. What strategies can improve students' attitudes, motivations, and experiences in learning the Irish language?

Teachers and students alike highlighted the value of communicative, creative, and relational pedagogies that make Irish feel relevant, achievable, and alive. Students called for more speaking opportunities, contemporary cultural content, and inclusive classroom practices that reflect Ireland's multilingual realities. Teachers emphasised the need for ongoing professional learning, resource-sharing, and collaborative communities of practice to sustain these approaches.

At system level, policy needs to bridge the gap between aspiration and enactment. While *Languages Connect* (DES, 2017) and the Junior Cycle Irish specifications (NCCA, 2017; revised 2023) promote inclusion and revitalisation, the implementation of such aims remains constrained by time, resources, and the weight of assessment tradition. Strengthening teacher agency and reflective practice, alongside sustained curricular support, are key strategies for realising reform in practice.

Within CAIRDE, these insights connect most closely to Relevance, Diversity, and Environment, but also to the holistic interplay of all six dimensions. The framework thus provides a practical and conceptual roadmap for fostering engagement through confidence-building, inclusive pedagogy, and meaningful use.

## 7.4 Contributions of the study

This section outlines the study's contributions at three levels: theoretical, empirical, and practical/policy. These contributions establish the originality and significance of the research and situate it within both Irish and international scholarship. The study contributes new conceptual, methodological, and applied understandings of engagement with Irish in the multilingual contexts of contemporary Ireland.

### 7.4.1 Theoretical contributions

The study makes three principal theoretical contributions.

First, it develops the CAIRDE Framework for Engagement as an original, student-centred model that integrates psychological, sociocultural, and ecological perspectives. While international research has produced influential frameworks for language motivation

(Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2009), identity (Norton, 2013), and language ecologies (Hornberger, 2003; García & Wei, 2014), these literatures have often evolved in parallel rather than in dialogue. By weaving them together and grounding them in the Irish context, CAIRDE advances a holistic conceptualisation of engagement as an interdependent system encompassing confidence, access, identity, relevance, diversity, and environment. This integration moves beyond single-variable models to a relational understanding of how affective, contextual, and ecological dimensions co-construct learner engagement.

Second, the framework extends theoretical debates in minority-language education by reframing revitalisation. Much discourse around Irish has emphasised preservation and transmission (Ó Giollagáin & Charlton, 2015; Government of Ireland, 2010). CAIRDE shifts this focus from preservation to participation and inclusion, foregrounding learners' lived experiences and positioning them as legitimate members of the language community. This reconceptualisation aligns with plurilingual and raciolinguistic perspectives (May, 2012; Flores & Rosa, 2015), offering a more dynamic, socially situated understanding of what it means to engage with a minority language in a multilingual society.

Third, the study refines motivational theory by highlighting confidence as a fragile yet decisive factor in sustaining engagement. While constructs such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and the “ideal L2 self” (Dörnyei, 2009) have long been recognised, the Irish data illustrate how confidence interacts with ecology and identity in ways not fully captured by existing models. CAIRDE therefore contributes a more nuanced lens for understanding motivation in minority-language contexts, linking affective stability to sociocultural belonging and communicative opportunity.

#### 7.4.2 Empirical contributions

Empirically, the study provides one of the most comprehensive datasets on junior cycle students' engagement with Irish to date. The large-scale survey adapted from the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (Gardner, 1985) generated robust quantitative evidence across diverse school types, revealing clear patterns of variation by medium of instruction, year group, and linguistic background. These data update and extend earlier surveys conducted in the 1990s and 2000s (e.g., Harris & Conway, 2002), providing a contemporary picture of attitudes and motivation in a rapidly changing sociolinguistic landscape.

The qualitative narrative interviews add further depth, offering rich narrative accounts of students' lived experiences and giving voice to perspectives often absent from large-scale evaluations. Importantly, the inclusion of students from multilingual backgrounds provides

new insights into how Irish is positioned within complex repertoires of languages, aspirations, and identities.

The study also incorporated teacher perspectives and policy analysis, enabling triangulation across data sources. By analysing points of convergence, divergence, and elaboration, the study contributes a nuanced empirical account that demonstrates how individual experiences are embedded within broader pedagogical and policy contexts.

#### 7.4.3 Practical and policy contributions

Finally, the study offers significant contributions for practice and policy. The CAIRDE framework provides a roadmap for educators, school leaders, and policymakers, translating research insights into actionable conditions for engagement. Each dimension points to specific areas for intervention:

- Confidence: Normalising error, embedding oral self-belief, and prioritising affective outcomes in curricula and teacher education.
- Access: Expanding opportunities for authentic Irish use across school types, extracurricular domains, and digital media.
- Identity: Promoting inclusive framings of Irish that challenge narrow authenticity ideologies and recognise hybrid identities.
- Relevance: Embedding connections to youth culture, creativity, and future-oriented selves in both curricula and extracurricular programmes.
- Diversity: Harnessing multilingual repertoires as assets through translanguaging and intercultural pedagogies.
- Environment: Fostering whole-school language climates and partnerships with community organisations.

Beyond informing individual classroom practice, the CAIRDE Framework has potential applications across multiple levels of the education system. At classroom level, it can support teachers in designing learning environments that prioritise confidence, communication, inclusion, and meaningful language use. At whole-school level, it offers a framework for developing positive language climates and strengthening connections between curricular and extracurricular Irish language experiences. At sectoral and institutional levels, CAIRDE may inform teacher education, professional learning, curriculum development, school self-evaluation, and policy implementation. The framework therefore provides a shared language through which students, teachers, school leaders, policymakers, and support agencies can collaboratively promote engagement with Irish across diverse educational contexts. In this respect, CAIRDE represents not simply a

descriptive framework arising from the findings, but a practical and transferable model capable of informing decision-making, evaluation, and improvement across multiple levels of the Irish education system.

### 7.5 Limitations of the study

Like all research, this study was shaped by methodological, practical, and interpretive boundaries that frame its claims and contributions. Rather than undermining its significance, these limitations underscore the complexity of investigating language engagement in a context as fluid, multilingual, and policy-rich as Irish education. They also highlight how methodological choices, each made deliberately and transparently, both enable and constrain what can be known.

#### 7.5.1 Methodological scope

The study employed a mixed-methods design integrating survey and narrative interviews. This design provided both breadth and depth, but it also entailed necessary trade-offs. The survey component was cross-sectional, capturing attitudes and motivation at a single point in time. While this offered a valuable snapshot across a large and diverse cohort, it limited the capacity to trace how confidence and motivation evolve, particularly across the first-to-second-year transition identified as a critical juncture. A longitudinal design would have permitted a more dynamic account of how engagement trajectories develop and decline over time.

The qualitative component added essential depth and contextualisation. As with all interpretive research, participants' responses were shaped by the social contexts in which they spoke, yet care was taken throughout the research process to create conditions of trust and openness. Narrative interviews were conducted in school settings, using age-appropriate facilitation and bilingual prompts where needed to support clarity and comfort. While social interaction can inevitably influence what is shared in group discussions, the consistency of themes across methods and contexts suggests that participants spoke authentically and with confidence. Triangulation between survey and qualitative data further strengthened interpretive credibility.

At a philosophical level, the pragmatic orientation of the research privileges utility and insight over purity of method. This approach produced a richly textured dataset, yet it also means that the study prioritised understanding what “works” in context rather than producing universally generalisable laws of motivation.

### 7.5.2 Representativeness and generalisability

While substantial and diverse, the sample cannot claim to be fully representative of all post-primary learners of Irish. Certain regions and school types were more accessible than others, and students who were chronically disengaged from school or absent during data collection may be underrepresented. The quantitative sample was intentionally diverse, encompassing Gaeltacht, non-Gaeltacht immersion (T1/L1), DEIS, and English-medium (T2/L2) schools, thereby capturing a broad spectrum of learner experiences. However, the number of participants within certain subgroups, particularly smaller Gaeltacht and DEIS cohorts, limited the scope for detailed statistical comparison between school types. Consequently, the findings are best understood as indicative of broader patterns rather than precise population-level generalisations.

The qualitative interview sample was necessarily small and was intended to provide depth of understanding rather than statistical representativeness. Although participants reflected a range of linguistic and educational backgrounds, the majority had attended Irish-medium primary schools prior to entering post-primary education, with only two participants having experienced English-medium primary education. As a result, comparisons between educational pathways and between T1/L1 and T2/L2 learner narratives should be interpreted cautiously. The value of the qualitative strand lies in the richness of the narratives generated and their capacity to illuminate how students experience, interpret, and negotiate Irish language learning across differing educational contexts.

The diversity of contexts represented across both strands of the study strengthens its transferability. By incorporating students from Irish-medium, English-medium, DEIS, and Gaeltacht settings, alongside participants from a range of linguistic backgrounds, the study provides valuable insight into how engagement with Irish is shaped across varied educational and sociolinguistic environments.

Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted as transferable rather than universally generalisable. They reveal patterns and mechanisms that illuminate how confidence, access, identity, relevance, diversity, and environment interact to shape engagement with Irish, but they do not claim to capture every possible learner experience or educational context. What is offered is a conceptual and empirical map of engagement, designed to support understanding, reflection, and adaptation across contexts rather than direct replication.

### 7.5.3 Analytical and interpretive boundaries

As in all qualitative inquiry, the analysis reflects the positionality of the researcher. The interpretation was shaped by the dual identity of the author as both a teacher of Irish and a researcher of language education. This insider perspective brought depth of understanding and authenticity to the analysis but also required conscious reflexivity to guard against over-identification or assumption. Reflexive journaling, coding verification, and alignment with established theoretical frameworks (e.g., Norton, 2013; Dörnyei, 2009) were employed to enhance credibility.

The CAIRDE Framework itself, while empirically grounded, represents a conceptual synthesis rather than a literal transcription of data. Like all models, it simplifies complex realities to make them analytically useful. Its six dimensions should therefore be understood as heuristic categories, mutually reinforcing and contextually fluid, rather than rigid typologies.

While the study included teacher and policy perspectives, it intentionally centred student voices. This decision provided depth but also delimited scope: perspectives from parents, community actors, and policymakers were not systematically included. Future research could extend the ecological view by integrating these voices, offering a fuller understanding of how engagement circulates across the wider sociolinguistic landscape.

#### 7.5.4 Policy context

The research was conducted during a particular policy moment, coinciding with the rollout of the Junior Cycle Irish reforms (NCCA, 2017; revised 2023) and ongoing reflection on the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language* (Government of Ireland, 2010). Policy environments are dynamic; since the completion of fieldwork, further developments in curriculum design, digital education, and inclusion policy may have altered the landscape in ways not captured here. These contextual shifts do not diminish the validity of the findings but remind us that engagement with Irish is historically situated, shaped by evolving social, political, and educational discourses.

#### 7.6 Implications for policy and practice

The findings of this study carry important implications for how engagement with Irish is understood, supported, and sustained in post-primary education. At the broadest level, the research reaffirms that language revitalisation and language maintenance are not solely a linguistic or curricular project, but a relational and ecological one. At its core, meaningful engagement with Irish depends on the alignment of confidence, access, identity, relevance, diversity, and environment, the six interwoven strands identified in this study, the six

interdependent conditions articulated in the CAIRDE Framework. Policy and practice must therefore move beyond isolated reforms and address how these dimensions interact across the system.

At the policy and curriculum level, the study suggests that national frameworks such as the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language* (Government of Ireland, 2010), *Languages Connect* (DES, 2017), and the Junior Cycle Irish specifications (NCCA, 2017; revised 2023) could be strengthened through a more integrated focus on affective and ecological factors. Current initiatives articulate strong communicative and inclusive intentions but risk fragmentation when implementation relies solely on curriculum change. Embedding CAIRDE's principles across language policy would help translate these aspirations into everyday practice by ensuring a sustained and revisited coherence between vision, pedagogy, and student experience.

At the school level, the findings highlight the power of context in shaping engagement. Teachers' relational practices, leadership support, and whole-school language climate emerged as decisive influences on students' confidence and motivation. School leaders and policymakers should therefore prioritise teacher professional learning that supports not only linguistic and methodological expertise, but also the socio-emotional and intercultural dimensions of language teaching. Collaborative professional networks, such as communities of practice and cross-sector partnerships, can play a vital role in sustaining these aims.

At the classroom level, the implications point toward a rebalancing of priorities. Communicative competence and assessment literacy remain essential, but equal attention must be given to fostering psychological safety, learner voice, and belonging. Teachers can enact policy through small, relational practices: valuing students' multilingual repertoires, validating partial competence, and making creative connections between Irish and students' lives. Such approaches resonate strongly with the CAIRDE dimensions of Confidence, Relevance, and Diversity, and offer a path toward genuine inclusion and engagement.

These implications underscore the need to view Irish language education not as a static heritage enterprise, but as a living, evolving ecosystem. Policy coherence, teacher agency, and learner-centred practice are mutually reinforcing: each depends on the others to sustain meaningful participation. The CAIRDE framework offers a shared language through which stakeholders: students, teachers, policymakers, and communities, can work together toward a more inclusive and confident future for Irish.



### 7.7 Directions for future research

This study provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding engagement with Irish at junior cycle but also highlights several areas requiring further investigation.

First, longitudinal research is needed to trace students' motivational and identity trajectories beyond the first two years of post-primary education. A follow-up study into senior cycle and early adulthood would clarify how confidence, self-concept, and attitudes evolve over time and how key transitions affect engagement and use.

Second, comparative studies across different language learning contexts, such as other minority or heritage languages in multilingual societies, could test the wider applicability of the CAIRDE Framework and refine its relevance beyond the Irish case.

Third, there is scope for classroom-based intervention studies to explore how CAIRDE-informed pedagogies influence learner outcomes in practice. Action research involving teachers could evaluate how confidence, access, and identity can be fostered through specific instructional strategies and how these interact with curriculum design and assessment reform.

Fourth, future work should consider teacher education and professional learning as sites of engagement. Investigating how teachers develop confidence and intercultural competence in multilingual classrooms could extend CAIRDE to the professional domain and support a more cohesive ecology of language education.

Finally, further curriculum and policy-focused research could examine how system-level initiatives, such as *Languages Connect* and the revised *Junior Cycle Irish* specifications, are translated into classroom realities. Building on existing longitudinal evaluations of Junior Cycle reform, such research could continue to explore how policy intentions are enacted in practice and identify the conditions under which coherence between policy vision, pedagogy, and learner experience is sustained, strengthened, or challenged over time.

Dissemination of the findings will form an important part of the next phase of this research. It is anticipated that outputs from the study will be shared through academic publications, conference presentations, teacher professional learning events, and practitioner-focused dissemination within the Irish language education sector. Particular emphasis will be placed on communicating the CAIRDE Framework to teachers, school leaders, teacher educators, and policymakers in ways that support its practical application, critical reflection, and continued refinement across diverse educational contexts.

These directions point towards a research and practice agenda that deepens theoretical understanding, supports the ongoing development of Irish language education, and strengthens the relationship between Irish, identity, multilingualism, language maintenance, and language revitalisation within contemporary education.

## 7.8 Final reflections

This study set out to explore how young people engage with the Irish language in a rapidly changing, multilingual Ireland. What began as a question about motivation evolved into a broader inquiry into belonging, identity, and connection; what it means to live with and through a minority language in contemporary education. Across classrooms, surveys, and stories, a consistent truth emerged: engagement with Irish is not an individual trait or a static condition, but a living relationship, something that must be nurtured, revisited, and renewed through use, inclusion, and belief.

As a teacher-researcher, this journey revealed that learning and teaching are reciprocal acts of listening. Students' voices: curious, conflicted, and courageous, invited me to see Irish not as a subject to be mastered, but as a shared space of meaning, emotion, and identity. Their reflections reminded me that motivation cannot be mandated; it grows in the spaces where confidence is supported, where language feels relevant, and where learners recognise that Irish belongs to them as much as they belong to it.

The CAIRDE Framework for Engagement emerged as both the outcome and the embodiment of this understanding. It weaves together six threads: Confidence, Access, Identity, Relevance, Diversity, and Environment, into a living framework that connects research to practice and policy to possibility. It reimagines language revitalisation and language maintenance not as preservation of the past, but as participation in the present: a dynamic process of creating the conditions where Irish can be lived, shared, and loved.

Writing this thesis has been an act of weaving - "Fí na teanga" - bringing together data and story, policy and practice, reflection and hope. It does not claim to provide final answers, but to open spaces for dialogue: between teachers and students, between language and identity, between what Irish has been and what it can become. It affirms that the future of Irish in education depends not on obligation but on invitation, on the confidence that can be built, the access that can be widened, and the belonging that can be shared.

In the end, the story of Irish in our schools is a story of people; their courage to speak, to connect, to imagine. If this research contributes even a single thread to that collective

tapestry, strengthening the weave of voices that keep Irish alive in all its diversity, then it has fulfilled its purpose.

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## 9 Appendices

### 9.1 Appendix 1: Paradigmatic orientation & methodological influences

#### Comparative Overview of Paradigmatic and Methodological Influences in Selected Irish Language Education Doctoral Studies

Note. This table was developed by the researcher to identify key methodological, theoretical, and epistemological influences informing the design of the present study.

| Researcher               | Literature Review                                                                                                                                                                                        | Theoretical Framework & Ontology                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Epistemology                                                                                                                                                                                   | Paradigms & Methodology                                                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pádraig Ó Duibhir (2009) | Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Research and pedagogy in immersion education Research on the acquisition of Irish as a second language.                                                                | Sociocultural Theory: the study of how language learning is influenced by social and cultural factors. SLA: examines age, motivation, input, instructional approaches. Corpus Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Psycholinguistics, Interactionist Approaches. | Not explicitly outlined. Mentions differences in subjectivity/objectivity in mixed-methods. Ethnomethodology rooted in social constructionism. Phenomenology focuses on subjective experience. | Mixed Methods Quantitative and qualitative approaches used with differences in balance. Irish Language Questionnaire for Adult Learners, Speaker Evaluation Exercise, Semi-structured Interviews. |
| Colin Flynn (2014)       | Affective Variables in Second Language Learning Motivation and Identity in Second Language Learning Limited exploration of identity negotiation in Irish language learning.                              | Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Sociolinguistics, Corpus Linguistics Focus on cultural, identity, and social context in language use.                                                                                                                    | Not explicitly outlined. Mentions subjectivity/objectivity in quantitative vs. qualitative methods. Reflexivity discussed in terms of bias and social desirability.                            | Mixed Methods Quantitative measures of attitudes/motivation, qualitative interviews. Focus on instrument design and bias mitigation.                                                              |
| Gene Dalton (2016)       | Towards an Ecology of Second Language Acquisition 3D Virtual Environments and language learning Design-Based Research and ecological approach.                                                           | Ecological Framework: interaction between learner and environment. Sociocognitive approach, Pragmatics, Psycholinguistic. Emphasises dynamic systems and social influence on cognition.                                                                    | Combination of Positivism and Constructivism. Pragmatism allows flexibility in epistemological stance. Subjective awareness and reflexivity included.                                          | Mixed Methods Design-Based Research with iterative cycles. Data from focus groups, game interactions, questionnaires, assessments.                                                                |
| Jane O'Toole (2023)      | Sociocultural Theory (SCT) in Language Learning Technology-Mediated Language Learning (TMLL) Tutoring and Parent/Child partnerships Context of Irish as an Additional Language (IAL) in primary schools. | Sociocultural Theory: learning as socially mediated. Constructivist and Interactionist Approaches. Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST).                                                                                                                  | Interpretivism, Critical Inquiry, Feminism. SCT emphasises co-construction of knowledge through interaction. Reflexivity is acknowledged.                                                      | Mixed Methods Participatory Action Research (PAR) Data from questionnaires, advisory groups, field notes, videos.                                                                                 |

### 9.2 Appendix 2: Assent form - Student



#### ASSENT FORM FOR STUDENT

**STUDY:** Irish Language Learning in a Multilingual Irish Society  
**Recruitment Site:** 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Post-Primary Students

There are two sections in this form.  
Section 1 asks you to read and tick each line if you understand it. If you do not understand it, please ask the researcher to explain.  
Section 2 asks for you to tick 'yes' or 'no'.  
 Thank you.  
 The end of this form is for the researcher to complete.

| 1. General Understanding                                                                                                                                              | Tick                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| I have read the Information Leaflet. The information has been fully explained to me. If I do not understand anything, I know I can ask for it to be explained better. |                                                          |
| I understand that I do not have to take part in this survey and/or interview. I understand that not taking part will have no negative impact on me.                   |                                                          |
| I understand that I can ask to stop taking part in the survey and/or interview, at any time without giving a reason.                                                  |                                                          |
| I understand that asking to stop will not affect my education, now or in the future.                                                                                  |                                                          |
| 2. Consent                                                                                                                                                            |                                                          |
| I am happy to take part in this survey and/or interview.                                                                                                              | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am happy for the interview to be recorded, and written into words for use in this research study.                                                                   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |

Participant Name (Block Capitals) \_\_\_\_\_ Participant Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Witness Name (Block Capitals) \_\_\_\_\_ Witness Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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To be completed by the Principal Investigator or nominee.

I, the undersigned, have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a way that they could understand.

I have explained the risks and possible benefits involved. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

I have given a copy of the participant information leaflet and consent form to the participant with contact details of the study team.

Researcher name Karen Uí Chaiside

Title and qualifications You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Karen Uí Chaiside, a practicing post-primary Irish teacher and PhD student of Trinity College Dublin. The purpose of this research is to investigate the attitudes, motivations, and experiences of migrant pupils towards learning Irish language in post-primary schools.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Two copies to be created and retained: 1 for Participant, 1 for PI.

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## 9.3 Appendix 3: Informed consent form - Teacher/School Leader

### INFORMED COSENT FORM – TEACHER / SCHOOL LEADER

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| STUDY: Irish Language Learning in a Multilingual Irish Society                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| Recruitment Site:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| <p>There are <b>two sections</b> in this form.</p> <p><b>Section 1</b> contains statements of understanding and asks you to tick each if you understand. Please ask any questions you may have when reading each of the statements.</p> <p><b>Section 2</b> asks for your informed consent. Please select either 'yes' or 'no' to indicate your choice.</p> <p>Thank you for participating.</p> <p>The end of this form is for the researchers to complete.</p> |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| <b>1. General Understanding</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Tick</b>                                                                                                                                    |     |    |                          |                          |
| I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Leaflet for the above study. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| I understand that taking part in this study is entirely voluntary. I understand that not taking part will have no negative impact on me.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| I understand that I can leave this study at any time without giving a reason. I understand that leaving this study will not affect my education / employment, now or in the future.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| I understand that I will not be paid for taking part in this study or receive any benefits from any products developed as a result of this research study.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| I know how to contact the research team if I need to.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| By ticking each box above and choosing my options below <b>and</b> signing this document I agree to participate in this study as described in the Participant Information Leaflet.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| <b>2. Consent</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| I agree to take part in this research study, having been fully informed of the risks and benefits in the participant information leaflet provided to me.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>No</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table> | Yes | No | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | No                                                                                                                                             |     |    |                          |                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                                       |     |    |                          |                          |
| I agree to the use of information about me (personal data) including (e.g. information from focus group narrative meetings) being used by the research team for this research study as described in the participant information leaflet.                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>No</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table> | Yes | No | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | No                                                                                                                                             |     |    |                          |                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                                       |     |    |                          |                          |

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|                                   |                       |      |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|------|
| Participant Name (Block Capitals) | Participant Signature | Date |
| Witness Name (Block Capitals)     | Witness Signature     | Date |

To be completed by the Principal Investigator or nominee.

I, the undersigned, have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a way that they could understand.

I have explained the risks and possible benefits involved. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

I have given a copy of the participant information leaflet and consent form to the participant with contact details of the study team.

Researcher name: **Karen Ui Chaiside**

Title and qualifications: You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Karen Ui Chaiside, a practicing post-primary Irish teacher and PhD student of Trinity College Dublin. The purpose of this research is to investigate the attitudes, motivations, and experiences of migrant pupils towards learning the Irish language in post-primary schools.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Two copies to be created and retained: 1 for Participant, 1 for PI.

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## 9.4 Appendix 4: Informed consent form - Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN(S)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| STUDY: Irish Language Learning in a Multilingual Irish Society                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| Recruitment Site:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| <p>There are <b>two sections</b> in this form.</p> <p><b>Section 1</b> contains statements of understanding and asks you to tick each if you understand. Please ask any questions you may have when reading each of the statements.</p> <p><b>Section 2</b> asks for your informed consent. Please select either 'yes' or 'no' to indicate your choice.</p> <p>Thank you for participating.</p> <p>The end of this form is for the researchers to complete.</p> |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| <b>1. General Understanding</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Tick</b>                                                                                                                                    |     |    |                          |                          |
| I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Leaflet for the above study. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| I understand that my child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary. I understand that not taking part will have no negative impact on my child.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| I understand that my child can leave this study at any time without giving a reason. I understand that leaving this study will not affect my child's education / employment, now or in the future.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| I understand that my child will not be paid for taking part in this study or receive any benefits from any products developed as a result of this research study.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| I know how to contact the research team if I need to.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| By ticking each box above and choosing my options below <b>and</b> signing this document I agree to my child's participation in this study as described in the Participant Information Leaflet.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| <b>2. Consent</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                |     |    |                          |                          |
| I agree to my child's participation in this research study, having been fully informed of the risks and benefits in the participant information leaflet provided to me.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>No</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table> | Yes | No | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | No                                                                                                                                             |     |    |                          |                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                                       |     |    |                          |                          |
| I agree to the use of information about my child (personal data) including (e.g. information from focus group narrative meetings) being used by the                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>No</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table> | Yes | No | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | No                                                                                                                                             |     |    |                          |                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                                       |     |    |                          |                          |

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|                                                                                            |  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| research team for this research study as described in the participant information leaflet. |  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|

|                                       |                           |      |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|------|
| Parent/Guardian Name (Block Capitals) | Parent/Guardian Signature | Date |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|------|

To be completed by the Principal Investigator or nominee.

I, the undersigned, have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a way that they could understand.

I have explained the risks and possible benefits involved. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

I have given a copy of the participant information leaflet and consent form to the participant with contact details of the study team.

Researcher name: **Karen Ui Chaiside**

Title and qualifications: You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Karen Ui Chaiside, a practicing post-primary Irish teacher and PhD student of Trinity College Dublin. The purpose of this research is to investigate the attitudes, motivations, and experiences of migrant pupils towards learning the Irish language in post-primary schools.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Two copies to be created and retained: 1 for Participant, 1 for PI.

www.tcd.ie/privacy

## 9.5 Appendix 5: Participant information leaflet - Parent(s)/Guardian(s)



### Participant Information Leaflet for Parent/Guardian Study: Irish Language Learning in a Multilingual Irish Society

#### INTRODUCTION

Before deciding to participate, please understand the research purpose and what your involvement entails. Read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if needed. If you have any questions or need more details, ask the researcher to help you make an informed decision.

#### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to explore the attitudes, motivations, and experiences of 1st and 2nd Year post-primary pupils towards learning the Irish language. This research aims to understand how student identity influences their language learning journey and to identify factors impacting their engagement and success. The findings aim to inform and potentially improve educational strategies and language policies.

The study will run for approximately six months, encompassing data collection to conclusion. Information will be gathered through student surveys, student narratives and teacher narratives, including demographic details (age, gender, mother tongue, cultural background), students' attitudes and motivations, and teachers' observations. All personal data will be handled confidentially and used solely for research purposes.

#### MAIN QUESTIONS FOR THE STUDY

1. What are the attitudes of 1st and 2nd Year post-primary pupils towards learning the Irish language in a multilingual Irish society?
2. What are the motivations of these pupils for learning the Irish language?
3. What are the experiences of these pupils in learning the Irish language?
4. How does student identity influence their attitudes, motivations, and experiences in learning the Irish language?
5. What factors impact students' engagement and success in learning the Irish language?
6. What strategies can improve students' attitudes, motivations, and experiences in learning the Irish language?

#### WHY HAS MY CHILD BEEN CHOSEN TO PARTICIPATE?

Your child has been chosen to participate because research aims to understand the attitudes, motivations and experiences of 1st and 2nd Year post-primary students learning the Irish language in **multilingual classrooms**. Your child fits the criteria as a student in this



category. The research aims to involve approximately 1000 Irish language students from diverse demographic backgrounds.

#### DOES MY CHILD HAVE TO TAKE PART?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and your child can withdraw at any time without penalty. If your child chooses to participate, you'll be asked to sign a consent form. Your decision will not affect your child's education or future work practice, and you can ask questions at any stage.

#### WHAT DOES THE STUDY INVOLVE FOR MY CHILD?

**Complete a Questionnaire:** As a student participant, your child will fill out a questionnaire about their attitudes, motivations, and experiences with learning the Irish language.

**Participate in a Narrative Interview:** Your child will be invited to participate in a narrative interview to share their experiences and perspectives on learning Irish. The interview will be approximately 30 minutes long. The interview will be conducted either in person or online using Microsoft Teams. These interviews will be recorded, and the researcher will take notes but no information which could identify your child will be noted.

#### BENEFITS

There are no direct benefits to your child for taking part in an interview. The results of the study aim to inform policy and practice in relation to supporting Irish language education in Ireland.

#### DISADVANTAGES

The researcher can foresee no risks associated with your child's participation in this study beyond those experienced in everyday life.

#### WILL MY CHILD'S DATA REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL?

Yes. All information gathered will be treated with appropriate privacy and confidentiality. All information will be stored securely in compliance with GDPR, with access limited to the researcher and her supervisors, Dr. Ann Devitt and Dr. Noel Ó Murchadha. The anonymised results of the overall study may be used in policy briefs to inform policymakers about the needs and effective practices related to Irish language provision. The anonymised results may also be discussed at conferences and published in academic literature.

#### WHAT DO I DO IF I HAVE ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS?

You can get more information or answers to your questions about the study and participation in this study, from the researcher, Karen Uí Chaiside at [brophyk2@tcd.ie](mailto:brophyk2@tcd.ie).



#### Data Protection Information

|                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Data Controller         | Trinity College Dublin                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Data Protection Officer | Data Protection Officer<br>Secretary's Office<br>Trinity College Dublin<br>Dublin 2<br>Ireland<br>Email: <a href="mailto:dataprotection@tcd.ie">dataprotection@tcd.ie</a><br>Website: <a href="http://www.tcd.ie/privacy">www.tcd.ie/privacy</a> |

#### What is the lawful basis to use my personal data?

The personal data collected in this study will be used solely for this research study aimed at understanding the attitudes, motivations, and experiences of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year post-primary pupils towards learning the Irish language. The lawful basis for processing your personal data is Article 6(1)(e) and Article 9(2)(j) GDPR of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (research in the public interest).

#### What are my rights in relation to your use of my personal data?

You are entitled to request any of the rights below on behalf of your child unless it would make it impossible or very difficult to carry out the research study:

- The right to access to your personal data;
- The right to receive a copy of your personal data;
- The right to ask us to restrict our use of your personal data;
- The right to ask us to correct inaccurate information about you; or
- The right to ask us to delete your personal data.

You are also entitled to object to any further processing of the information we hold about you.



You can exercise these rights or learn more about data protection in relation to this study by contacting the Principle Investigator of the research study at [brophyk2@tcd.ie](mailto:brophyk2@tcd.ie) or the Trinity College Data Protection Officer (contact details above).

Please note that these rights relate to data which could identify you (personal data). If your data has been anonymised, we will not be able to access or delete it as we will have no way of being able to link the data to you.

If you are unhappy with how we have used your personal data, you can raise a concern with the Data Protection Commission via their online form - <https://forms.dataprotection.ie/contact> - or contact the Commission at:

Data Protection Commission  
21 Fitzwilliam Square South  
Dublin 2  
D02 RD28  
Ireland  
<https://www.dataprotection.ie>

## 9.6 Appendix 6: Participant information leaflet - Student

### Participant Information Leaflet for Student Study: Irish Language Learning in a Multilingual Irish Society

#### INTRODUCTION

Before deciding to participate, please understand the research purpose and what your involvement entails. Read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if needed. If you have any questions or need more details, ask the researcher to help you make an informed decision.

#### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to explore the attitudes, motivations, and experiences of 1st and 2nd Year post-primary pupils towards learning the Irish language. This research aims to understand how student identity influences their language learning journey and to identify factors impacting their engagement and success. The findings aim to inform and potentially improve educational strategies and language policies.

The study will run for approximately six months, encompassing data collection to conclusion. Information will be gathered through student surveys, student narratives and teacher narratives, including demographic details (age, gender, mother tongue, cultural background), students' attitudes and motivations, and teachers' observations. All personal data will be handled confidentially and used solely for research purposes.

#### MAIN QUESTIONS FOR THE STUDY

1. What are the attitudes of 1st and 2nd Year post-primary pupils towards learning the Irish language in a multilingual Irish society?
2. What are the motivations of these pupils for learning the Irish language?
3. What are the experiences of these pupils in learning the Irish language?
4. How does student identity influence their attitudes, motivations, and experiences in learning the Irish language?
5. What factors impact students' engagement and success in learning the Irish language?
6. What strategies can improve students' attitudes, motivations, and experiences in learning the Irish language?

#### WHY HAVE I BEEN CHOSEN TO PARTICIPATE?

You have been chosen to participate because research aims to understand the attitudes, motivations and experiences of 1st and 2nd Year post-primary students learning the Irish language in multilingual classrooms. You fit the criteria as a student in this category. The

research aims to involve approximately 1000 Irish language students from diverse demographic backgrounds.

#### DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART?

No. Taking part is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. If you take part, we will ask you to sign a consent form. Your decision will not affect your education and you can ask questions at any stage.

#### WHAT DOES THE STUDY INVOLVE FOR STUDENTS?

**Complete a Questionnaire:** As a student participant, you will fill out a questionnaire about your attitudes, motivations, and experiences with learning the Irish language.

**Participate in a Narrative Interview:** Students will be invited to participate in a narrative interview to share their experiences and perspectives on learning Irish. The interview will be approximately 30 minutes long. The interview will be conducted either in person or online using Microsoft Teams. These interviews will be recorded, and the researcher will take notes but no information which can identify you will be noted.

#### BENEFITS

There are no direct benefits to you. We hope that the results of the study will inform policy and practice to support Irish language education in Ireland.

#### DISADVANTAGES

The researcher does not believe that there are any risks if you take part in this study above those you experience in everyday life.

#### WILL MY DATA REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL?

Yes. The information gathered will be treated with appropriate privacy and confidentiality. No identifiable information about you will be used in the research. All information will be stored securely in compliance with GDPR, with access limited to the researcher and her supervisors, Dr. Ann Devitt and Dr. Noel Ó Murchadha. The anonymised results of the overall study will be used in policy briefs to inform policymakers about the needs and effective practices related to Irish language provision. The anonymised results may also be discussed at conferences and published in academic literature.

#### WHAT DO I DO IF I HAVE ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS?

You can get more information or answers to your questions about the study and your participation in this study, from the researcher, Karen Uí Chaiside at [brophyk2@tcd.ie](mailto:brophyk2@tcd.ie).

#### Data Protection Information

|                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Data Controller         | Trinity College Dublin                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Data Protection Officer | Data Protection Officer<br>Secretary's Office<br>Trinity College Dublin<br>Dublin 2<br>Ireland<br>Email: <a href="mailto:dataprotection@tcd.ie">dataprotection@tcd.ie</a><br>Website: <a href="http://www.tcd.ie/privacy">www.tcd.ie/privacy</a> |

#### What is the lawful basis to use my personal data?

We will only use the information we collect in this study for research aimed at understanding the attitudes, motivations, and experiences of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year post-primary pupils towards learning the Irish language.

#### What are my rights in relation to your use of my personal data?

You or your parent on your behalf can request any of the rights below unless it would make it very difficult to carry out the research study:

- The right to access to your personal data;
- The right to receive a copy of your personal data;
- The right to ask us to restrict our use of your personal data;
- The right to ask us to correct inaccurate information about you; or
- The right to ask us to delete your personal data.

You can also object to any further processing of the information we have collected about you.

You can exercise these rights or learn more about data protection in relation to this study by contacting the Principle Investigator of the research study at [brophyk2@tcd.ie](mailto:brophyk2@tcd.ie) or the Trinity College Data Protection Officer (contact details above).

Please note that these rights relate to data which could identify you (personal data). If your data has been anonymised, we will not be able to access or delete it as we will have no way of being able to link the data to you.

If you are unhappy with how we have used your personal data, you can raise a concern with the Data Protection Commission via their online form - <https://forms.dataprotection.ie/contact> - or contact the Commission at:

Data Protection Commission  
21 Fitzwilliam Square South  
Dublin 2  
D02 RD28  
Ireland  
<https://www.dataprotection.ie>

## 9.7 Appendix 7: Participant information leaflet - Teacher/School Leader



### Participant Information Leaflet for Teacher/School Leader

Study: Irish Language Learning in a Multilingual Irish Society

#### INTRODUCTION

Before deciding to participate, please understand the research purpose and what your involvement entails. Read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if needed. If you have any questions or need more details, ask the researcher to help you make an informed decision.

#### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to explore the attitudes, motivations, and experiences of 1st and 2nd Year post-primary pupils towards learning the Irish language. This research aims to understand how student identity influences their language learning journey and to identify factors impacting their engagement and success. The findings aim to inform and potentially improve educational strategies and language policies.

The study will run for approximately six months, encompassing data collection to conclusion. Information will be gathered through student surveys, student narratives and teacher narratives, including demographic details (age, gender, mother tongue, cultural background), students' attitudes and motivations, and teachers' observations. All personal data will be handled confidentially and used solely for research purposes.

#### MAIN QUESTIONS FOR THE STUDY

1. What are the attitudes of 1st and 2nd Year post-primary pupils towards learning the Irish language in a multilingual Irish classroom?
2. What are the motivations of these pupils for learning the Irish language?
3. What are the experiences of these pupils in learning the Irish language?
4. How does student identity influence their attitudes, motivations, and experiences in learning the Irish language?
5. What factors impact students' engagement and success in learning the Irish language?
6. What strategies can improve students' attitudes, motivations, and experiences in learning the Irish language?

#### WHY HAVE I BEEN CHOSEN TO PARTICIPATE?

You have been chosen to participate because research aims to understand the experiences and observations of 1st and 2nd Year post-primary Irish language teachers in multilingual



classrooms. You fit the criteria as a teacher in this category. The research aims to involve approximately 10 Irish language teachers from diverse demographic backgrounds.

#### DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. If you choose to participate, you'll be asked to sign a consent form. Your decision will not affect your practice, and you can ask questions at any stage.

#### WHAT DOES THE STUDY INVOLVE FOR TEACHERS?

Teachers will be invited to share their experiences and insights through narrative interviews. The topics discussed will include your perspectives on teaching Irish, and how student identity affects language learning. The interview will take about 30-45 minutes and will be conducted either in person or online using Microsoft Teams. The interview will be recorded. The researcher will take notes but no names or personal information will be recorded in the notes.

#### BENEFITS

There are no direct benefits to you for taking part in an interview. The results of the study aim to inform policy and practice in relation to supporting Irish language education in Ireland.

#### DISADVANTAGES

The researcher can foresee no risks associated with your participation in this study beyond those experienced in everyday life.

#### WILL MY DATA REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL?

The personal data collected during this study includes signed consent forms and narrative interviews. The information gathered will be treated with appropriate privacy and confidentiality. No identifiable information about you will be used in the research. All information will be stored securely in compliance with GDPR, with access limited to the researcher and her supervisors, Dr. Ann Devitt and Dr. Noel Ó Murchadha. The anonymised results of the overall study will be used in policy briefs to inform policymakers about the needs and effective practices related to Irish language provision. The anonymised results may also be discussed at conferences and published in academic literature.

#### WHAT DO I DO IF I HAVE ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS?

You can get more information or answers to your questions about the study and your participation in this study, from the researcher, Karen Uí Chaiside at [kbrophy2@tcd.ie](mailto:kbrophy2@tcd.ie).



#### Data Protection Information

|                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Data Controller         | Trinity College Dublin                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Data Protection Officer | Data Protection Officer<br>Secretary's Office<br>Trinity College Dublin<br>Dublin 2<br>Ireland<br>Email: <a href="mailto:dataprotection@tcd.ie">dataprotection@tcd.ie</a><br>Website: <a href="http://www.tcd.ie/privacy">www.tcd.ie/privacy</a> |

#### What is the lawful basis to use my personal data?

The personal data collected in this study will be used solely for research purposes aimed at understanding the attitudes, motivations, and experiences of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year post-primary pupils towards learning the Irish language. The lawful basis for processing your personal data is Article 6(1)(e) of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which allows processing that is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller. If sensitive personal data (such as ethnicity or language proficiency) is collected as part of this study, the legal basis for processing such data is Article 9(2)(j) GDPR, which permits processing for research purposes.

#### What are my rights in relation to your use of my personal data?

You are entitled to request any of the rights below unless it would make it impossible or very difficult to carry out the research study:

- The right to access to your personal data;
- The right to receive a copy of your personal data;
- The right to ask us to restrict our use of your personal data;
- The right to ask us to correct inaccurate information about you; or



- The right to ask us to delete your personal data.

You are entitled to object to any further processing of the information we hold about you (except where it is de-identified).

You can exercise these rights or learn more about data protection in relation to this study by contacting the Principle Investigator of the research study at [kbrophy2@tcd.ie](mailto:kbrophy2@tcd.ie) or the Trinity College Data Protection Officer (contact details above).

Please note that these rights relate to data which could identify you (personal data). If your data has been anonymised, we will not be able to access or delete it as we will have no way of being able to link the data to you.

If you are unhappy with how we have used your personal data, you can raise a concern with the Data Protection Commission via their online form - <https://forms.dataprotection.ie/contact> - or contact the Commission at:

Data Protection Commission  
21 Fitzwilliam Square South  
Dublin 2  
D02 RD28  
Ireland  
<https://www.dataprotection.ie>

## 9.8 Appendix 8: Recruitment information

### Recruitment Information

#### MAIN QUESTIONS FOR THE STUDY

1. What are the attitudes of 1st and 2nd Year post-primary pupils towards learning the Irish language in a multilingual Irish society?
  - How do students generally feel about learning Irish?
  - Are these attitudes predominantly positive, negative, or neutral?
2. What are the motivations of these pupils for learning the Irish language?
  - What drives students to engage with learning Irish?
  - Are their motivations intrinsic (personal interest, cultural connection) or extrinsic (academic requirements, societal pressure)?
3. What are the experiences of these pupils in learning the Irish language?
  - What challenges and successes do students encounter in their language learning journey?
  - How do these experiences vary among students from different backgrounds (exemptions)?
4. How does student identity influence their attitudes, motivations, and experiences in learning the Irish language?
  - In what ways do factors like cultural background, mother tongue, personal interests, and identity shape students' engagement with Irish?
  - Are there specific identity-related factors that have a significant impact on their learning experience?
5. What factors impact students' engagement and success in learning the Irish language?
  - What external and internal factors influence how well students engage with and succeed in learning Irish?
  - How do societal attitudes, family background, and peer influence play a role?
6. What strategies can improve students' attitudes, motivations, and experiences in learning the Irish language?
  - What teaching methods and resources have been effective in fostering positive attitudes and motivation?
  - What additional support could enhance students' engagement and success in learning Irish?

- **Teachers:** Teachers who agree to participate will be asked to sign consent forms and arrange convenient times for their narrative interviews.
- **Students:** Students who return signed consent forms from their parents/guardians will be provided with assent forms to ensure they understand and agree to participate.

#### Data Collection

- **Anonymous Student Questionnaires:** Once consent and assent are obtained, students will complete an anonymous questionnaire during a designated class period. This AMTB based questionnaire has been designed to capture their attitudes, motivations, and experiences with learning Irish. Additionally, it will include questions to capture their identities, such as age, gender, cultural background, mother tongue, and self-identification with Irish culture and language.
- **Student Narrative Interviews:** Scheduled narrative interviews with students will be conducted either in person or via secure online platforms. These interviews will delve deeper into students' personal experiences with learning Irish, their motivations, and the impact of their cultural identities on their language learning journey. The interviews will provide detailed insights into their individual challenges and successes, as well as their perceptions of the support they receive in their learning environment.
- **Teacher Narrative Interviews:** Scheduled narrative interviews with teachers will be conducted either in person or via secure online platforms. Interviews will focus on their observations and experiences related to teaching Irish to 1st and 2nd Year pupils in multilingual classrooms.

#### Ethical Considerations

- **Confidentiality Assurance:** All participants will be assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. No personal identifiers will be used in the reporting of the research.
- **GDPR Compliance:** All data collected will be stored securely in compliance with GDPR regulations, with access limited to the researcher and her supervisors.
- **Right to Withdraw:** Participants will be reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

#### Recruitment Materials: Materials that will be used to recruit participants, including:

- Participant Information Sheet (Attached)
- Informed Consent Form: (Attached)
- Social Media Recruitment Plans: If recruiting via social media, a detailed plan outlining how social media will be used, including sample posts and how you will ensure privacy and confidentiality (See below).
- Recruitment Timeline: An outline of the timeline for recruitment activities (See below).
- Recruitment Email / Letter of invitation to schools (See below).

### RECRUITMENT PLAN

#### Identification of Participants

- **Target Population:** The study will focus on 1st and 2nd Year post-primary pupils and their teachers.
- **Schools Selection:** A diverse range of post-primary schools across different regions will be identified to ensure a representative sample of students from various cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO), there were 96,497 non-Irish national students and pupils aged 5 years and over resident in Ireland in 2016 accounting for 18 per cent of all non-Irish nationals. The administrative counties of Dublin City (91,876 persons), Fingal (46,909) and Cork County (42,002) had the highest numbers of non-Irish nationals in 2016. As a proportion of its resident population, Galway City was the most multi-cultural with 18.6 per cent of its residents recorded as non-Irish.
- **Teacher Identification:** Teachers who instruct Irish language classes for 1st and 2nd Year pupils will be identified within the selected schools.

#### Approaching Participants

- **School Permissions:** Initial contact will be made with school principals to seek permission to conduct the study within their schools. This will include a formal letter or email outlining the study's objectives, methods, and benefits.
- **Teacher Engagement:** Upon receiving school approval, Irish language teachers will be approached via email or in-person meetings. Teachers will be provided with detailed information about the study and asked for their support in facilitating student participation.
- **Parent/Guardian Notification:** Letters and consent forms will be sent to parents or guardians of potential student participants, informing them about the study and seeking their consent for their children's participation.

#### Recruitment Process

- **Informational Sessions:** Brief informational sessions will be conducted in selected schools to explain the study to students and teachers. These sessions will provide an overview of the research, its purpose, and what participation entails.
- **Distribution of Participant Information Leaflets (PILs):** Participant information leaflets and consent forms will be distributed to students and teachers. These documents will include details about the study, participation requirements, and assurances of confidentiality.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Emphasis will be placed on the voluntary nature of participation. Students and teachers will be informed that they can choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

#### Consent Collection:

- Phone calls, texts or in-person recruitment

### RECRUITMENT TIMELINE

#### Week 1-2: Preparation and Initial Outreach

- Develop and finalize recruitment materials (PILs, consent forms, social media posts).
- Obtain necessary approvals from school authorities and ethics committees.
- Contact school gatekeepers and principals for permission

#### Week 3-4: Active Outreach

- Conduct in-person informational sessions at participating schools to explain the study and answer questions as requested.
- Distribute PILs, consent forms, and questionnaires to students and parents.
- Launch social media recruitment campaign on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

#### Week 5: Engagement and Follow-Up

- Actively manage social media recruitment campaign and engage with education-related groups and influencers.
- Send reminder communications to potential participants.
- Conduct follow-up with schools to ensure return of consent forms and completed questionnaires.

#### Week 6: Confirmation and Finalisation

- Collect and review consent forms and completed questionnaires.
- Confirm participant lists and schedule interviews.
- Begin conducting interviews and start initial data collection.

### RECRUITMENT EMAIL/LETTER OF INVITATION TO SCHOOLS

Dear [School Principal Name],

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Karen Uí Chaiside, and I am a PhD student at Trinity College Dublin. I am writing to invite your school to participate in a research study aimed at exploring the attitudes, motivations, and experiences of 1st and 2nd Year post-primary pupils towards learning the Irish language in a transcultural Irish society.

Purpose of the Study



The goal of this research is to gain insight into how student identity influences their language learning journey and to identify factors that may impact their engagement and success. The findings will help inform educational strategies and language policies to better support students in their Irish language learning.

#### Participation Details

We are seeking to involve both students and teachers in this study. Participation will include:

- **Anonymous Student Questionnaire:** Students will complete a questionnaire designed to capture their attitudes, motivations, and experiences with learning Irish. The questionnaire will also include questions about their cultural identities.
- **Student Narrative Interviews:** Selected students will be invited to participate in a narrative interview to discuss their personal experiences and perspectives on learning Irish. These interviews will last approximately 30 minutes and will be conducted either in person or online via Microsoft Teams.
- **Teacher Narrative Interviews:** Teachers who teach 1st and 2nd Year Irish language classes will be invited to interview to share their observations and experiences related to teaching Irish in multilingual classrooms. These interviews will last approximately 30-45 minutes and will be conducted either in person or online via Microsoft Teams.

#### Ethical Considerations

All participation is voluntary, and we ensure strict confidentiality and anonymity for all participants. The study will comply with GDPR regulations, and all data will be securely stored with access limited to the researcher and her supervisors, Dr. Ann Devitt and Dr. Noel Ó Murchadha. Participants have the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences.

#### Benefits of Participation

Your school's participation will contribute to valuable research that aims to improve language education strategies and policies. The insights gained from this study will help in understanding the diverse needs of students and in creating a more supportive learning environment for the Irish language.

#### Next Steps

#### Consent and Assent Collection:

We kindly request your assistance in obtaining parental/guardian consent and student assent from 1st and 2nd Year students. The necessary forms are included with this communication.

#### Return of Forms:

Once the consent and assent forms have been collected, please return them to the researcher at your earliest convenience.

#### Survey Completion:

Upon receipt of the completed forms, the school will be provided with a unique link to facilitate the survey completion process for participating students, or a school visit by the researcher to complete the survey with students.

#### Optional Narrative Interviews for Students and Teachers

I would be grateful if you could share this invitation with your school community. I am available to discuss any questions or concerns you may have and to provide further information about the study.

Thank you for considering this request. Your support and participation would be greatly appreciated.

Is mise le meas,

Karen Uí Chaiside  
Post-primary Irish Teacher at Coláiste Cois Life  
PhD student at Trinity College Dublin  
Contact number: 087-9849703  
Email address: [brophyk2@tcd.ie](mailto:brophyk2@tcd.ie)

## SOCIAL MEDIA RECRUITMENT PLAN

### Social Media Recruitment Plan

#### Overview

To recruit participants for the study on the attitudes, motivations, and experiences of 1st and 2nd Year post-primary pupils towards learning the Irish language, I will utilise various social media platforms. My strategy will include targeted posts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to reach students, parents, and teachers. This plan will ensure privacy and confidentiality for all potential participants.

#### Social Media Platforms and Strategy

##### Facebook

**Target Audience:** Parents, teachers, school communities, and education groups.

**Groups/Pages:** Post-primary school pages, local community groups, and education-focused groups.

**Ads:** I will use Facebook Ads to target specific demographics (e.g., parents of 12-15 year olds, teachers, and education professionals).

#### Instagram

**Target Audience:** Students, parents, and teachers.

**Posts:** Visual posts with engaging graphics and concise information about the study.

**Hashtags:** #IrishLanguageStudy, #EducationResearch, #PostPrimaryEducation, #LanguageLearning

#### Twitter

**Target Audience:** Teachers, parents, education professionals, and academic communities.

**Tweets:** Informative and engaging tweets about the study, with links to more detailed information.

**Retweets:** Engage with education-related accounts to share our posts.

**Hashtags:** #EdChatIE, #IrishEducation, #Research, #LanguageLearning #Gaeilge

#### Sample Posts

##### Facebook Post

📢 Calling all 1st and 2nd Year post-primary students, parents, and teachers! I am conducting a study to explore attitudes, motivations, and experiences with learning the Irish language. Your participation can help shape the future of Irish language education. Interested? Learn more and take part! [Link to study details]

Image: Engaging graphic with study details and a call to action.

Privacy Note: "All responses will be confidential and used solely for research purposes."

##### Instagram Post

📸 I am looking for 1st and 2nd Year students to share their experiences with learning Irish. Your insights are valuable! Don't miss the opportunity to participate in this study. Click the link to learn more. #IrishLanguageStudy #EducationResearch #Gaeilge

##### Twitter Post

🔍 Exciting research opportunity! I am studying the experiences of 1st and 2nd Year students with learning Irish. Teachers, parents, and students, your input can make a difference! Learn more here: [Link to study details] #EdChatIE #IrishEducation #LanguageLearning #Gaeilge  
Image: Relevant graphic with study details.

**Retweet and Engage:** Retweet from educational influencers and organisations to amplify reach.

#### Ensuring Privacy and Confidentiality

**Anonymity:** No personal information will be collected through social media platforms. All links will direct users to a secure survey platform where consent and assent forms will be signed.  
**Secure Links:** I will use encrypted and secure links to direct participants to the study's official information and consent forms.

**Confidential Information:** I will clearly state in all posts that participation is voluntary and confidential, and personal data will be protected according to GDPR guidelines.  
**Moderation:** I will monitor comments and messages to address any privacy concerns immediately and to provide additional information securely.

# 9.9 Appendix 9: REAMS (research ethics application management system) approval letter

## Applicant & Collaborators

### Applicant Details

- Applicant Name : Karen Cassidy
- Is applicant applying as a member of staff or a student? : Student
- School / Department : School of Education - Education
- Role on the Project : Principal Investigator
- Primary Employer (if not TCD) : Department of Education
- Other affiliations ( if applicable) :
- Course ( for student applicant only) : PhD
- Part time / full time : Part-Time
- I have read and understood Trinity policy on Good Research Practice : Yes
- I have read and completed the Integrity module : Yes
- I have read and completed the Data Protection Training module within the last 24 months : Yes

### Trinity Collaborators

| User             | Role                  |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| Noel O Murchadha | Trinity Co supervisor |
| ANN Devitt       | Primary Supervisor    |

### Other Collaborators

No data available in this section.

## Project Details

on language education and migration, offering valuable insights that can inform educational policy and practice. By focusing on the experiences of migrant pupils and educators, the study aims to advocate for more inclusive and equitable language learning environments within post-primary schools.

- Identify all countries where data is collected or processed : IE
- Does the project involve Human participants and /or their data and no biological samples
- Is the project funded : No

### Details on Human Participants and their Data

- Does your research involve Mixed Methods : Yes
- Does the project use data from: Primary sources only
- Will you obtain Consent from participants (or in the case of children or adults at risk of vulnerability from a parent / legal guardian) for their participation and/ or the use of their data? : Yes
- Provide further information :
- Will payment be made to research participants? :No
- Provide further information :
- Is the research Health Research as defined in the Health Research Regulations? : No
- Does the research require a Consent Declaration form as defined by the Health Research Regulations 2018 and amendments 2021? :
- Which of the following best describes the research Secondary Data Source(s)? :
- Could any of the research data directly identify any participant? : Yes
- Could any of the research data indirectly identify any participant? :Yes
- Do you process Personal Data for study administration purposes? e.g. contacting individuals : Yes
- If yes please outline how you will store the information, keep it confidential, and destroy it in line with the data retention policy. : I will adhere to TCD's specific data management policies and seek guidance from your institution's data protection officer or research ethics committee as needed. Storage: Use secure and encrypted storage systems to store personal data, such as password-protected databases or encrypted cloud storage. Limit access to personal data to authorised personnel only and implement access controls to prevent unauthorised access. Ensure that the storage system complies with relevant data protection regulations and TCD policies. Confidentiality: Minimise the amount of personal data collected to only what is necessary for the research purpose. Anonymise personal data whenever possible to reduce the risk of re-identification. Implement confidentiality protocols, including confidentiality agreements and data protection training. Avoid sharing personal data with third parties unless necessary and ensure that appropriate data sharing agreements are in place. Destruction: Regularly review and update data retention policies to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements and TCD guidelines. Establish clear procedures for securely destroying personal data once it is no longer needed for the research purpose or when the retention period expires. Use secure methods of data destruction, such as shredding physical documents or using data wiping software for electronic files. Maintain records of data destruction activities, including the date, method, and justification for the destruction. Adhere to TCD's specific data management policies and seek guidance from your institution's data protection officer or research ethics committee as needed.

### Main Project Details

- Title of research :Irish Language Learning in a Multilingual Irish Society
- Data Collection Start Date : 02/09/2024
- Data Collection End Date : 01/11/2024
- Project End Date : 31/03/2025 12:00:00 AM
- Does the research involve Humans (or their data)
- Does this Animal research involve :
- Is this AREC research a first application or an amendment :
- Is the research WHOLLY (i) an analysis of statutes/legal provisions AND/OR (ii) legal judgments/cases which have been made public by a judicial process? :
- Trinity Researchers will have access ONLY to aggregate data or data that otherwise fall outside of the remit of the GDPR. :
- Could the research have detrimental legal, economic or social consequences for either the participant or their establishments : No
- Intentions of the research: Does the research : None of the above
- State research aim(s) and objective(s), research question or hypothesis : Aim: Investigate pupils' attitudes, motivations, and experiences in learning Irish within post-primary schools. Research Question: What are pupils' attitudes, motivations, and experiences in learning Irish in a transcultural society, and how do these intersect with student identity? Hypothesis: Pupils' attitudes and motivations in learning Irish are influenced by cultural background, language proficiency, and perceived language utility. Student identity significantly shapes these factors, impacting engagement and success. Objectives: Assess pupil attitudes and motivations using the AMTB. Explore the intersection of student identity with attitudes and motivations through narrative inquiry. Gather teacher perspectives on pupil attitudes and motivations. Analyse language policy implications on pupil attitudes, motivations, and identity in Irish language learning.
- Lay Summary: including background/ rationale/ justification, research approach, study design (exclude detail of measurement instruments and intervention and analysis (if applicable) (Word limit: 250 words) : In today's multicultural educational landscape, understanding the experiences of migrant pupils learning the Irish language is crucial. This study aims to explore the attitudes, motivations, and experiences of migrant pupils in post-primary schools towards learning Irish, investigating how these factors intersect with student identity. The rationale lies in the need to provide insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by migrant pupils in language learning contexts, informing more inclusive and effective educational practices. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study adopts a mixed-methods design, combining narrative inquiry with language policy analysis. Narrative inquiry allows for in-depth exploration of individual experiences, while language policy analysis provides a broader contextual understanding of the educational framework. By integrating these approaches, the study seeks to capture the multifaceted nature of language learning experiences among migrant pupils, acknowledging the complex interplay between personal narratives and institutional structures. The research design emphasises a participant-centred approach, prioritising the voices of migrant pupils and educators. Through narrative inquiry, participants are invited to share their stories and perspectives, illuminating the nuances of language learning journeys. Additionally, language policy analysis provides insights into the broader socio-political context shaping language education policies and practices. Overall, this study endeavours to contribute to the growing body of knowledge

- Which of the following best describes the general characteristics of the target population? :Adults currently not at risk of vulnerability, Children (~18 years )
- Do any of the following further describe the characteristics of the target population? :
- Please describe :
- List the inclusion/ exclusion criteria for selection of research participants : Inclusion Criteria: 1. Age: Participants must fall within a specified age range, typically 12-14 years old. 2. Language Proficiency: Participants should have a varying range of proficiency in the language under study. 3. Migrant Status: Both migrant and non-migrant individuals are eligible for participation. 4. School Enrolment: Participants must be enrolled in post-primary schools in either 1st or 2nd Year. 5. Consent: Participants must provide informed consent to take part in the study. 6. Diversity: Participants from diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences are encouraged to participate as well as students who have been awarded an exemption from the Junior Cycle Irish exam. 7. Availability: Participants should be available for data collection sessions at specified times. Exclusion Criteria: 1. Age: Individuals outside the specified age range are excluded from participation. 2. Lack of Consent: Individuals who do not provide informed consent are excluded from participation. 3. Unavailability: Individuals who are unable to participate in data collection sessions at specified times are excluded.

### Research Sources and Sites

No data available in this section.

### Outline of research methods

No data available in this section.

- Does your research use any of the following methods exclusively? : Anonymous Surveys
- Does the research include an intervention? : No
- Please select which of the following best describes the intervention :
- Other :
- Outline the intervention :
- Outline the method of analysis (Word limit :100 words) : The method of analysis will involve both qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore the attitudes, motivations, and experiences of pupils towards learning the Irish language in multicultural classrooms. Qualitative data from narrative inquiries with both students and teachers will be thematically analysed to identify patterns, themes, and insights regarding language learning experiences and student identity. Quantitative data from surveys, such as the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), will be analysed using statistical methods to examine correlations, trends, and differences in language attitudes and motivations among pupils. Integration of qualitative and quantitative findings will provide a comprehensive understanding of the research questions.
- What is the approximate size of the target population? : 1000
- What is the proposed sample size -how many participants are involved in the study? : 1000

- What is the justification for the sample size? : According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) 2016, the counties of Dublin City (91,876 persons), Fingal (46,909) and Cork County (42,002) had the highest numbers of non-Irish nationals. As a proportion of its resident population, Galway City was the most multi-cultural with 18.6 per cent of its residents recorded as non-Irish. Just over 17 per cent of the resident population of Dublin city were non-Irish with Polish, Romanian, UK nationals, Brazilian, Italian, Spanish and French making up more than half of the total 91,876 non-Irish in the city in 2016. One in six of Fingal residents was a non-Irish national with Polish, Romanian, UK and Lithuanian nationals combined accounting for 53.8 per cent of these (CSO, 2016). This study will focus on available participants from post-primary schools in multilingual classrooms. Consultation with education authorities in these counties will provide a more precise estimate of the target population size.

## Risk

### Risk , benefit, harm to researcher

- What setting/s will be used for data collection : Online, Classroom

- Other elaborate :

| Type | Other Type | Impact | Probability | Mitigation |
|------|------------|--------|-------------|------------|
| None |            |        |             |            |

### Risk , benefit, harm to site environment or Society

| Type | Impact | Probability | Mitigation |
|------|--------|-------------|------------|
| None |        |             |            |

### Risk , benefit, harm to participants

- Do you or any of the research team have any dependant relationship to the participants? : No

- Detail the role of the researcher/s, the relationship of the researcher/s to the participants normally, and how you will mitigate against coercion of participants to participate in the research or in influencing their responses :

| Type          | Other Type | Impact | Probability | Mitigation                                                                     |
|---------------|------------|--------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Inconvenience |            | Low    | Low         | The design of the survey has prioritised ease of use and minimal inconvenience |

- Provide Further Information : Signed consent forms will be securely retained by the researcher in accordance with data protection regulations.

- Are you required to have Garda Clearance : Yes

- What is the time interval between giving information and securing Consent : Less Than 7 Days

- Provide Further Information : N/A

- Describe how you will inform participants about the use of their Personal Data : Participants will be informed about the use of their personal data through clear and transparent communication at various stages of the research process. Informed Consent Process: During the consent process, participants will be provided with detailed information about how their personal data will be collected, stored, and used for research purposes. This information will be included in the consent form and explained verbally, ensuring participants understand the implications of providing their data. Information Sheet: Alongside the consent form, participants will receive an information sheet outlining the specific purposes for which their personal data will be used. This sheet will detail how their data will be processed, who will have access to it, and the measures in place to protect their privacy. Data Protection Statement: A data protection statement will be included in all recruitment materials and research documents, outlining the researcher's commitment to protecting participants' privacy and complying with data protection regulations. Privacy Measures: Participants will be assured that their personal data will be treated confidentially and securely. Information will only be accessed by authorised members of the research team and will be stored in password-protected electronic files. Contact Information: Researchers will provide participants with contact information for any questions or concerns about the use of their personal data. This may include email addresses or phone numbers of designated research team members.

- Describe how participants can withdraw their Consent and/or their data : Right to Withdraw Consent: Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw their consent for the use of their personal data at any time. They will also be provided with information on how to exercise this right and the implications of doing so.

## Sampling & Recruitment

### Sampling and Recruitment

- Outline the sampling method : The sampling method for this research study will incorporate both purposive and stratified sampling techniques to ensure the inclusion of both migrant and non-migrant students, as well as teachers, from post-primary schools in the selected multicultural counties of Dublin, Galway, and Cork. Purposive Sampling: Purposive sampling will be used to select post-primary schools located across Ireland. Within each selected school, efforts will be made to recruit both migrant and non-migrant students to ensure diversity and representation across different student demographics. Irish language teachers will also be purposively selected to provide a comprehensive perspective on the experiences of teaching Irish to migrant and non-migrant learners. By purposively selecting Irish language teachers from different schools and backgrounds, this study can gather a range of perspectives and experiences that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the teaching dynamics and language learning environment. Stratified Sampling: Stratified sampling will be employed to ensure proportional representation of different student and teacher demographics within each selected school. Stratification variables may include age, gender, language proficiency, and nationality for students, and teaching experience, and language proficiency for teachers. This approach will help to capture a more nuanced understanding of the attitudes, motivations, and experiences of both migrant and non-migrant students, as well as teachers, towards learning and teaching the Irish language. By combining purposive sampling to select schools and participants based on specific

### Participant Benefits

- Is it foreseeable that participants could potentially reveal information that you have a legal obligation to disclose (e.g. child protection policy, malpractice, etc.) : Yes

- What information may be disclosed, why, and to whom : Examples of information that participants might potentially disclose during this research and that could trigger a legal obligation to disclose could include for example: 1. Professional misconduct: Participants may disclose instances of professional misconduct, such as unethical behaviour in their academic setting, which may need to be reported to relevant regulatory bodies or employers. 2. Discrimination or Harassment: Participants may disclose experiences of discrimination, harassment, or other forms of abuse, which may need to be reported to appropriate authorities or support services.

- Outline any direct benefits to research participants of participation : 1. Enhanced Understanding: Participation in this research will provide participants with an opportunity to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this academic field, which can lead to a deeper understanding of relevant topics and issues. 2. Personal Growth: Engaging in research activities, such as completing surveys and interviews, may promote personal growth and self-reflection. Participants may gain insights into their own attitudes, behaviour, and experiences, leading to increased self-awareness and personal development. 3. Networking Opportunities: Participation in research studies may offer participants networking opportunities with researchers, other participants, or professionals in their field of interest. These connections can be valuable for future collaborations, mentorship, or career advancement. 4. Feeling of Contribution: By participating in this research, individuals may experience a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment from contributing to the generation of new knowledge. This feeling of contribution can enhance participants' sense of purpose and engagement with the research process.

### Conflict of Interest

- Are you aware of any Conflict of Interest from the PI or any collaborator, processor or other person involved in the conduct of the project, that could arise in the course of the project? : No

- Give details of the Conflict of Interest and what mitigation measures are in place :

## Consent

### Consent

- Do your participants require support to give Consent : No

- How will Assent be obtained and by whom : Students: Students who are aged between 12-14 years will be asked to provide their own consent to participate in the study. They will receive the recruitment materials directly through their school communicator application and be asked to sign the assent form if they wish to take part.

- Provide Further Information :

- Do you require Assent or Proxy Consent from participants e.g. because of their vulnerability : Yes

criteria and stratified sampling to ensure diversity within each group, the research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing language learning and teaching experiences among both migrant and non-migrant students and teachers.

- Describe the time commitment of the participant : The time commitment for participants in the research study will vary depending on their role and involvement in the research activities. Students: Participation in AMTB survey: Students will be asked to complete a survey, which could range from 10-15 minutes. Involvement in narrative inquiry: Students who participate in narrative inquiry sessions may need to commit additional time, typically ranging from 30 minutes, for sharing their experiences and reflections. Teachers: Participation in narrative inquiry: Teachers will be asked to share their perspectives on teaching Irish to migrant and non-migrant learners of 1st and 2nd Year post-primary school. The duration of these sessions may vary but typically ranges from 30 - 45 minutes. Involvement in data collection and analysis: Teachers may also be involved in providing feedback on research findings or participating in data analysis sessions, which could require additional time.

- Will the research require/use a gatekeeper : Yes

- Outline the position/role of the gatekeeper within the organisation : School administrators, principals, or relevant educational authorities.

- Detail the role of the gatekeeper in the research : The gatekeeper can grant the researcher permission to conduct the study within their schools and facilitate the recruitment of participants. The gatekeeper can provide valuable assistance in navigating institutional protocols, obtaining necessary permissions, and ensuring compliance with ethical guidelines and data protection regulations. Additionally, gatekeepers can help the researcher establish rapport and trust with potential participants, address any concerns or questions, and facilitate communication throughout the research process. They will play a crucial role in fostering collaboration between myself the researcher and the school community, ultimately contributing to the success and ethical conduct of the research study.

- Is there a dependent relationship between the gatekeeper and the participants : Yes

- Outline how this is going to be managed to mitigate against the dependencies : To mitigate against dependencies and ensure the integrity of the research process, several strategies will be implemented: Diverse Recruitment Channels: diverse recruitment channels beyond the gatekeeper's network can be employed to access potential participants. This may include leveraging Irish language organisations, online platforms, or direct outreach to individuals to broaden the pool of participants and reduce reliance solely on the gatekeeper. Clear Communication with Participants: As a researcher, I will establish direct communication channels with participants to provide them with information about the research study, including its purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits. This will ensure that participants have a comprehensive understanding of the study independent of the gatekeeper's influence. Transparency in Decision-Making: As a researcher, I will maintain transparency in decision-making processes related to participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis. This will include clearly documenting the rationale behind decisions and ensuring that gatekeepers are aware of the ethical principles guiding the research. Independent Consent Procedures: As a researcher, I will implement independent consent procedures to obtain participants' informed consent and assent directly through the school's online communicator application, separate from the gatekeeper's involvement. This will ensure that participants and parents are fully aware of their rights and can freely choose whether to participate in the study without feeling obligated by the gatekeeper's influence. Ongoing Monitoring and Feedback: As a researcher, I will conduct ongoing monitoring of the research process and solicit feedback from participants to identify any concerns or issues related to dependencies on gatekeepers. By implementing these strategies, I the researcher, will mitigate dependencies on gatekeepers and uphold the principles of autonomy, fairness, and integrity in the research process.

- Please give a detailed step by step description of how participants will be recruited and append the recruitment material ( Word limit: 100 words ) : The recruitment process will begin with identifying post-primary schools with diverse student populations. School administrators or principals will be contacted to seek permission for the study, and detailed information about the research will be provided. Upon obtaining permission, recruitment materials, including consent/assent forms and



information sheets, will be distributed to potential participants via the school communicator application, email, or in-person. Participants will be given the opportunity to opt in or opt out of the study, and their participation will be confirmed accordingly.

## Data Protection

### Opening Questions

- Have all Trinity researchers (staff and students ) in this project completed the College Data Protection GDPR training module? \* : Yes

- Are all Trinity Staff and Trinity Students familiar with the Trinity College Personal Data Breach Procedural Guidelines? : Yes

### Data Protection Assessment

- What is Trinity's role in the research? : Controller

- How many participants' Personal Data is being processed in this project? : <100

- List all types of Personal Data (including any special category or sensitive Personal Data) that you will process during the lifecycle of the project? : Basic Identifying Information: • Names • Contact details (e.g., email addresses, phone numbers) • Addresses Demographic Information: • Age • Gender • Nationality • Ethnicity Educational Information: • School attended • Class/grade level • Academic performance or achievement data Special Category or Sensitive Personal Data: • Racial or ethnic origin • Health information (if relevant to the study, such as language-related disabilities) • Religious or philosophical beliefs (if disclosed voluntarily by participants) • Information about migrant status or immigration history

- Does the research involve processing of special category data or data relating to criminal convictions and/or offences (sensitive personal data)? : No

- Is the Personal Data shared outside the research team with any other units within Trinity College? : No

- Name these units :

- Is this data shared with any third party outside of Trinity ? : No

- Provide names of these organisations and detail what Personal Data will be shared with them and why. :

- Describe what IT due diligence you have carried out on these organisations. : N/A

- Provide a general description of the security measures in place to keep Personal Data secure for each system, platform and application you will use for access, storage, and transfer, including but not limited to multi factor authentication, use of passwords, use of VPN, device encryption, vendor ISO certification, anti-virus used, use of secure file transfers such as HEA net, and detail on how data is

backed up etc. : Security measures in place for access, storage, and transfer of project data will include: Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA): Where available, MFA will be enabled for access to all platforms and applications used for data management. This adds an extra layer of security by requiring users to provide multiple forms of verification before accessing sensitive data. Strong Password Policies: All users will be required to adhere to strong password policies, including the use of complex passwords and regular password updates. Passwords will be encrypted and stored securely to prevent unauthorised access. Use of Virtual Private Network (VPN): A VPN will be used when accessing sensitive data remotely or when connecting to external networks. This helps secure data transmission by creating a private encrypted connection over a public network. Device Encryption: All devices used for data management, including laptops, tablets, and smartphones, will have encryption enabled to protect data stored on these devices in case of loss or theft. Anti-Virus Software: All devices used for data management will have up-to-date anti-virus software installed to detect and prevent malware and other security threats. Secure File Transfers: Secure file transfer protocols, such as Secure File Transfer Protocol (SFTP) or HTTPS, will be used for transferring sensitive data over the internet. This ensures data integrity and confidentiality during transit. Data Backup Procedures: Regular data backups will be performed to ensure data resilience and continuity in case of data loss or corruption. Backups will be stored securely, preferably in encrypted format, and tested periodically to verify data integrity.

- Is the data transferred outside of the UK & EEA? If yes, you must contact the Data Protection Office : No

- Detail how long Personal Data will be retained in an identifiable or coded format. : The retention period for personal data in an identifiable or coded format will be determined based on the requirements of the research study and applicable data protection regulations. Here's a general outline of the retention period: Identifiable Personal Data: Personal data that can directly identify an individual (e.g., names, contact details) will be retained only for the duration necessary to fulfil the purposes of the research study. Once the study objectives are met, identifiable personal data will be securely deleted or anonymised. Coded Personal Data: Personal data that is coded, where identifiers are replaced with a unique code, may be retained for a longer period if necessary for data analysis, follow-up studies, or archiving purposes. However, access to the key linking the coded data to identifiable information will be restricted to authorised personnel only. Retention Period: Personal data will be retained for a period of time sufficient to meet the research objectives and any regulatory obligations. Data Retention Policy: A formal data retention policy will be established, outlining the specific retention periods for different types of personal data and the procedures for securely deleting or archiving data at the end of the retention period. This policy will be communicated to all research team members and strictly adhered to throughout the lifecycle of the project. Overall, the retention of personal data will be managed responsibly and in accordance with data protection principles, ensuring that data is retained only for as long as necessary and disposed of securely when no longer required for research purposes.

### Processing Risk

No data available in this section.

### Closing Section

- Include any additional information in respect of the research which may be relevant \* .Measures will be implemented to ensure the well-being of participants throughout their involvement in the study.

Research findings will be disseminated through academic publications, conference presentations, and community engagement activities. Efforts will be made to ensure that findings are accessible to a wide audience, including participants and relevant stakeholders.

9.10 Appendix 10: Integrity training certificate



9.11 Appendix 11: Research integrity training: Course reflection achievement

Course Reflection Achievement



Custom

View Requirements

| Issuer Details    |                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Issuer Name       | Trinity College Dublin                                                                                                                        |
| URL               | <a href="https://tcd.blackboard.com/tcd.blackboard.com">https://tcd.blackboard.com/tcd.blackboard.com</a>                                     |
| Organisation      | The Provost Fellows - Foundation Scholars                                                                                                     |
| Details           |                                                                                                                                               |
| Name              | Course Reflection Achievement                                                                                                                 |
| Description       | Congratulations. You have reflected on each of the five topics in the <i>Research Integrity and Ethics in an Open Scholarship Era</i> Course. |
| Criteria          | <a href="https://tcd.blackboard.com/webapps/achievements/di...">https://tcd.blackboard.com/webapps/achievements/di...</a>                     |
| Recipient Details |                                                                                                                                               |
| Recipient         | BROPHYK2@TCD.IE                                                                                                                               |
| Criteria          | <a href="https://tcd.blackboard.com/webapps/achievements/di...">https://tcd.blackboard.com/webapps/achievements/di...</a>                     |

## 9.12 Appendix12: Alignment of quantitative scales and student threads

This appendix summarises how the ten thematic threads from the open-ended student survey responses were aligned with the quantitative scales from the AMTB survey data to produce the five consolidated cross-cutting threads.

| Original Thread                           | Associated Quantitative Scale(s)                    | Consolidated Cross-Cutting Thread                |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Lack of Fun and Interactive Methods       | Motivational Intensity; Attitudes to Learning Irish | Engagement, Media & Modern Input                 |
| Minimal Real-Life Use of Irish            | Integrative Orientation; Home Use of Irish          | Identity, Culture & Real-World Irish             |
| Insufficient Foundational Support         | Self-Concept; School Type Comparisons               | Foundations, Transitions & Differentiation       |
| Limited Speaking Opportunities in Class   | Anxiety; Self-Concept                               | Communicative Confidence & Classroom Interaction |
| Repetitive and Outdated Curriculum        | Motivational Intensity; Attitudes to Learning Irish | Curriculum, Pedagogy & Assessment Alignment      |
| Technology and Media Integration          | Interest in Languages; Engagement Indicators        | Engagement, Media & Modern Input                 |
| Low Confidence and Fear of Mistakes       | Anxiety; Self-Concept                               | Communicative Confidence & Classroom Interaction |
| Overemphasis on Grammar and Writing       | Motivational Intensity; Attitudes                   | Curriculum, Pedagogy & Assessment Alignment      |
| Exam Pressure and High-Stakes Assessment  | Anxiety; Attitudes                                  | Curriculum, Pedagogy & Assessment Alignment      |
| Positive Learning Experiences (Strengths) | Attitudes; Self-Concept                             | Engagement, Media & Modern Input                 |

### 9.13 Appendix 13: Overview of questionnaire components, scales, and constructs

| Category                 | Instrument                                                  | Purpose                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Background Information   | Demographic Information and Language Use (11 items)         | To capture students' linguistic backgrounds, home language practices, and exposure to Irish and other languages |
| Integrativeness Scales   | Attitude to Irish Speakers (7 items)                        | Attitudes towards Irish speakers and the Irish-speaking community                                               |
|                          | Integrative Orientation to Irish (4 items)                  | Desire to identify with or engage with Irish language and culture                                               |
|                          | Interest in Modern Foreign Languages (7 items)              | Interest in learning additional languages                                                                       |
| Motivation Scales        | Desire to Learn Irish (7 items)                             | Learners' willingness to learn Irish                                                                            |
|                          | Motivational Intensity to Learn Irish (5 items)             | Effort invested in learning Irish                                                                               |
|                          | Attitude to Learning Irish (8 items)                        | Overall attitudes towards learning Irish                                                                        |
| Other Scales             | Instrumental Orientation to Irish (3 items)                 | Perceived practical value of Irish                                                                              |
|                          | Parental Encouragement (7 items)                            | Perceived parental support for learning Irish                                                                   |
|                          | Irish-Lesson Anxiety (5 items)                              | Anxiety experienced during Irish language lessons                                                               |
| Additional Scales        | Irish-Ability Self-Concept (5 items)                        | Learners' perceptions of their ability in Irish                                                                 |
|                          | Supporting Irish Language Learning (7 items)                | Perceived supports for learning Irish                                                                           |
| Open-Ended Response Item | "What would make your experience of learning Irish better?" | To provide space for student voice and individual reflection                                                    |

*Note.* The questionnaire comprised demographic and language-use items, eleven closed-response scales, and one open-ended response item. Eight scales were adapted from Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) as utilised by Harris and Murtagh (1999) and Ó Duibhir (2009). Irish-Lesson Anxiety was adapted from Horwitz et al. (1986), Irish-Ability Self-Concept was adapted from the 20 Classes Study, and Supporting Irish Language Learning was developed for the present study and informed by the Growing Up in Ireland study (Government of Ireland, 2021).

#### 9.14 Appendix 14: Questionnaire administered to students

| Survey Questions                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Assent                                                                                           |
| <b>Non-AMTB(11): Demographic &amp; Language Use</b>                                                 |
| 2. Gender                                                                                           |
| 3. Age                                                                                              |
| 4. School Year                                                                                      |
| 5. Where were you born?                                                                             |
| 6. How long have you lived in Ireland?                                                              |
| 7. What are the main languages used in your home every day?                                         |
| 8. What other languages are used in your home?                                                      |
| 9. No one at home ever speaks Irish                                                                 |
| 10. What type of primary school did you attend?                                                     |
| 11. What type of secondary school do you attend?                                                    |
| 12. In which county in Ireland is your school?                                                      |
| <b>Non-AMTB(5): Irish-ability Self-concept</b>                                                      |
| 13. I am better than most pupils in my class at speaking Irish                                      |
| 14. By the time I finish school, I will be able to speak Irish quite well                           |
| 15. I understand most of what the teacher says in Irish at school                                   |
| 16. I am better than most pupils in my class at Irish writing                                       |
| 17. I am better than most pupils in my class at Irish reading                                       |
| <b>Non-AMTB(7): Supporting Irish Language Learning</b>                                              |
| 18. I find it difficult to learn Irish at school                                                    |
| 19. I have more difficulty learning Irish than some of my peers who have been studying Irish longer |
| 20. Teachers in my school give extra help to students who have difficulty with Irish                |
| 21. Students in my school help other students who have difficulty with Irish                        |
| 22. I have access to curriculum materials and resources that help me learn Irish better             |

23. I feel that Irish language exams are fair for me

24. There are enough opportunities at school to practice Irish outside the classroom (e.g., clubs, events)

**Other Scales(3): Instrumental Orientation to Irish**

25. Learning Irish is important for me only because I'll need it for my job or career when I am older

26. Learning Irish in school is important for me because people will have more respect for me if I speak Irish

27. Learning Irish is important because it will make me a more knowledgeable person

**Other Scales(5): Irish-Lesson Anxiety**

28. It embarrasses me to put up my hand and say something aloud during the Irish lesson

29. I don't feel sure of myself when I am speaking out loud in Irish during the Irish lesson

30. I get nervous and mixed up when I am speaking in my Irish class

31. I always feel that the rest of the pupils in my class are better at speaking Irish than I am

32. I am afraid that the other pupils in the class will laugh at me when I speak Irish

**Other Scales(7): Parental Encouragement**

33. My parents try to help me with my Irish

34. My parents feel that because we live in Ireland, I should learn Irish

35. My parents feel that it is important that I work hard at my Irish until I finish school

36. My parents encourage me to ask my teacher for help if I am having problems with my Irish

37. My parents often tell me how important Irish will be for me when I leave school

38. My parents really encourage me to work hard at my Irish

39. My parents are usually very interested in anything to do with my Irish schoolwork

**Integrativeness Scales(7): Attitudes to Irish Speakers**

40. The more I get to know people who speak Irish, the more I want to learn it

41. The Irish language is an important part of Ireland and the Irish people

|                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 42. If Ireland lost the Irish language and the Irish way of life, it would really be a great loss                                                                     |
| 43. People in our country who only speak English should try harder to learn the Irish language                                                                        |
| 44. People who speak Irish help to make the Irish way of life special and different from other countries                                                              |
| 45. People who speak Irish help to keep alive an old and beautiful part of the Irish way of life                                                                      |
| 46. I would like to know more people who speak Irish                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Integrativeness Scales(4): Integrative Orientation to Irish</b>                                                                                                    |
| 47. Learning Irish is important for me because it will allow me to meet and talk to different kinds of people                                                         |
| 48. It is important for me to learn Irish because it will make it easier for me to take part in Irish heritage and cultural activities like festivals and Irish music |
| 49. Learning Irish is important because it will make me feel more at home with people who speak Irish                                                                 |
| 50. It is important to learn Irish because it will help me to read Irish books and to understand Irish songs, stories and television programmes                       |
| <b>Integrativeness Scales(7): Interest in 2nd/Foreign Languages</b>                                                                                                   |
| 51. Even though countries which speak other languages are not right beside Ireland, it is still important to learn foreign languages                                  |
| 52. I wish I could speak another language, besides English, really well                                                                                               |
| 53. I would like to be able to read in another language, besides English                                                                                              |
| 54. Learning another language, besides English, can be very enjoyable                                                                                                 |
| 55. I would really like to learn a lot of foreign languages                                                                                                           |
| 56. If I went to another country for a while I would try hard to learn the language of that country - even if I could get by using English                            |
| 57. I like meeting and listening to people who speak other languages besides English                                                                                  |
| <b>Motivation Scales(7): Desire to Learn Irish</b>                                                                                                                    |
| 58. If there were Irish-speaking families living near me, I would like to speak Irish to them                                                                         |
| 59. Compared to subjects like Maths and English reading, I don't like Irish very much                                                                                 |

|                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 60. During the Irish lesson, I wish that only Irish was spoken                                      |
| 61. If there was a chance to speak Irish outside school, I would like to try speaking it            |
| 62. I would like to visit the Gaeltacht                                                             |
| 63. I would not like to go to a Summer course in Irish                                              |
| 64. I would like to spend less time learning Irish at school                                        |
| <b>Motivation Scales(5): Motivational Intensity to Learn Irish</b>                                  |
| 65. To be honest, I don't really try very hard to learn Irish at school                             |
| 66. During the Irish lesson I put up my hand to answer very often                                   |
| 67. I often think about what I have learned in my Irish lesson when the day is over                 |
| 68. I don't go to too much trouble with my Irish homework                                           |
| 69. I try to understand Irish programmes on television                                              |
| <b>Motivation Scales(8): Attitude to Learning Irish</b>                                             |
| 70. Learning Irish is a waste of time                                                               |
| 71. When I leave school, I will give up learning Irish completely because I am not interested in it |
| 72. I really enjoy learning Irish                                                                   |
| 73. Irish is an important school subject                                                            |
| 74. I hate Irish                                                                                    |
| 75. The time I spend learning Irish, I would rather spend on other subjects                         |
| 76. I think that learning Irish is boring                                                           |
| 77. I want to learn as much Irish as possible                                                       |
| <b>Personal Response</b>                                                                            |
| 78. What would make your experience of learning Irish better?                                       |



## 9.15 Appendix 15: Instructions for completion of the questionnaire



Trinity College Dublin  
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
The University of Dublin

### Instructions for Completion of the Questionnaire

STUDY: Irish Language Learning in a Multilingual Irish Society

This questionnaire forms part of a doctoral research study being conducted through the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin. The purpose of the study is to explore students' attitudes, motivations, and experiences of learning Irish in post-primary education. Please read the following instructions carefully before beginning the questionnaire.

| Instructions                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Participation in this study is voluntary. Students may choose not to participate and may withdraw at any stage before submitting their responses.                        |
| 2. Students should not write their names on the questionnaire. All responses will be treated confidentially and will be anonymised during analysis.                         |
| 3. Before beginning, students should confirm that parental/guardian consent and student assent have been obtained where required.                                           |
| 4. Students should answer each question honestly and independently. There are no right or wrong answers.                                                                    |
| 5. For Questions 13–77, students should indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement by selecting the response that best reflects their opinion. |
| 6. The questionnaire should be completed individually and without discussion with other students.                                                                           |
| 7. Completion of the questionnaire typically requires approximately 10–15 minutes.                                                                                          |
| 8. Students will have an opportunity at the end of the questionnaire to provide additional comments regarding their experiences of learning Irish.                          |

Thank you for your participation.

[www.tcd.ie/privacy](http://www.tcd.ie/privacy)

## 9.16 Appendix 16: Comparative analysis of AMTB survey in Irish context (1)

Comparative Analysis of Survey Items per Scale

| Scale                                 | Karen Uí Chaiside | 20 Classes Study | Pádraig Ó Duibhir |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Integrativeness Scales Items</b>   |                   |                  |                   |
| Attitude to Irish Speakers            | 7                 | 10               | 7                 |
| Integrative Orientation to Irish      | 4                 | 4                | 4                 |
| Interest in 2nd/Foreign Languages     | 7                 | 10               |                   |
| <b>Motivation Scales Items</b>        |                   |                  |                   |
| Desire to Learn Irish                 | 7                 | 7                | 5                 |
| Motivational Intensity to Learn Irish | 5                 | 5                | 4                 |
| Attitude to Learning Irish            | 8                 | 10               | 8                 |
| <b>Other Scales</b>                   |                   |                  |                   |
| Instrumental Orientation to Irish     | 3                 | 4                | 3                 |
| Irish Lesson Anxiety                  | 5                 | 5                |                   |
| Parental Encouragement                | 7                 | 10               | 7                 |
| Irish-ability Self-concept            | 5                 | 6                |                   |
| Use of Irish at Home                  |                   | 3                |                   |
| Demographic Info & Language Use       | 11                |                  |                   |
| Supporting Irish Language Learning    | 7                 |                  |                   |
| Student Personal Recommendation       | 1                 |                  |                   |

## 9.17 Appendix 17: Comparative analysis of AMTB survey in Irish context (2)

### Scale-by-Scale Comparison of Items Across Studies

#### Integrativeness Scales

##### Scale 1: Attitude to Irish Speakers

| Item Text                                                                                      | Karen Uí Chaiside<br>PhD | 20 Classes Study | Pádraig Ó Duibhir<br>PhD |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| The more I get to know people who speak Irish, the more I want to learn it.                    | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✓ Same wording           |
| The Irish language is an important part of Ireland and the Irish people.                       | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✓ Same wording           |
| Some of the best people in Ireland are Irish speakers.                                         | ✗ Omitted                | ✓ Included       | ✓ Included               |
| If Ireland lost the Irish language and the Irish way of life, it would really be a great loss. | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✓ Same wording           |
| People in our country who only speak English should try harder to learn the Irish language.    | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✓ Same wording           |
| People who speak Irish help to make the Irish way of life special and                          | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✓ Same wording           |

|                                                                                               |                |                |                |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| different from other countries.                                                               |                |                |                |
| People who speak Irish help to keep alive an old and beautiful part of the Irish way of life. | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording |
| I would like to know more people who speak Irish.                                             | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✗ Omitted      |
| Most people who speak Irish are friendly and easy to get along with.                          | ✗ Omitted      | ✓ Included     | ✗ Omitted      |
| People who speak Irish are friendly, nice and interesting.                                    | ✗ Omitted      | ✓ Included     | ✗ Omitted      |

Scale 2: Integrative Orientation to Irish

| Item Text                                                                                                               | Karen Uí Chaiside PhD                             | 20 Classes Study                                           | Pádraig Ó Duibhir PhD                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Learning Irish is important for me because it will allow me to meet and talk to different kinds of people.              | ✓ Same wording                                    | ✓ Same wording                                             | ✓ Same wording                                                  |
| It is important for me to learn Irish because it will make it easier for me to take part in Irish heritage and cultural | ✓ Same wording (mentions festivals & Irish music) | ✓ Same wording (mentions Slógadh, feiseanna & Irish music) | ✗ Modified wording (Coirm, Scór, feiseanna & traditional music) |

|                                                                                                                                              |                |  |                |                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--|----------------|----------------|
| activities like festivals and Irish music.                                                                                                   |                |  |                |                |
| Learning Irish is important because it will make me feel more at home with people who speak Irish.                                           | ✓ Same wording |  | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording |
| It is important to learn Irish because it will help me to read Irish books and to understand Irish songs, stories and television programmes. | ✓ Same wording |  | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording |

Scale 3: Interest in 2<sup>nd</sup>/Foreign Languages

| Item Text                                                                                                                         | Karen Uí Chaiside<br>PhD | 20 Classes Study | Pádraig Ó Duibhir<br>PhD |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| If I were visiting a foreign country I would like to be able to speak the language of that country.                               | ✗ Omitted                | ✓ Included       | ✗ Omitted                |
| Even though countries which speak other languages are not right beside Ireland, it is still important to learn foreign languages. | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✗ Omitted                |

|                                                                                                                                         |                |                |           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|
| I wish I could speak another language, besides English, really well.                                                                    | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✗ Omitted |
| I would like to be able to read books written in another language, besides English.                                                     | ✗ Omitted      | ✓ Included     | ✗ Omitted |
| I often wish I could read newspapers and magazines in another language besides English.                                                 | ✗ Omitted      | ✓ Included     | ✗ Omitted |
| Learning another language, besides English, can be very enjoyable.                                                                      | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✗ Omitted |
| I would really like to learn a lot of foreign languages.                                                                                | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✗ Omitted |
| If I went to another country for a while I would try hard to learn the language of that country – even if I could get by using English. | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✗ Omitted |
| I would like to learn a foreign language in school even if I didn't have to do it.                                                      | ✗ Omitted      | ✓ Included     | ✗ Omitted |
| I like meeting and listening to people                                                                                                  | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✗ Omitted |

|                                            |  |  |  |
|--------------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| who speak other languages besides English. |  |  |  |
|--------------------------------------------|--|--|--|

## Motivation Scales

### Scale 1: Desire to Learn Irish

| Item Text                                                                                  | Karen Uí Chaiside<br>PhD | 20 Classes Study | Pádraig Ó Duibhir<br>PhD                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| If there were Irish-speaking families living near me, I would like to speak Irish to them. | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✓ Same wording                                                   |
| Compared to subjects like Maths and English reading, I don't like Irish very much.         | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✓ Same wording                                                   |
| During the Irish lesson, I wish that only Irish was spoken.                                | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✗ Omitted                                                        |
| If there was a chance to speak Irish outside school, I would like to try speaking it.      | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✓ Same wording                                                   |
| I would like to visit the Gaeltacht.                                                       | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✓ Same wording                                                   |
| I would not like to go to a Summer course in Irish.                                        | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✗ Omitted / altered to "I would like to go to a Summer course in |

|                                                           |                |                |                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------------|
|                                                           |                |                | Irish” (positive form) |
| I would like to spend less time learning Irish at school. | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✗ Omitted              |

#### Scale 2: Motivational Intensity to Learn Irish

| Item Text                                                                        | Karen Uí Chaiside<br>PhD | 20 Classes Study | Pádraig Ó Duibhir<br>PhD                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| To be honest, I don't really try very hard to learn Irish at school.             | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✓ Same wording                                                                               |
| During the Irish lesson I put up my hand to answer very often.                   | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✗ Omitted                                                                                    |
| I often think about what I have learned in my Irish lesson when the day is over. | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✓ Same wording                                                                               |
| I don't go to too much trouble with my Irish homework.                           | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✓ Same wording                                                                               |
| I try to understand Irish programmes on television.                              | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✗ Modified wording: 'I make a special effort to watch programmes in Irish on the television' |

#### Scale 3: Attitude to Learning Irish

| Item Text | Karen Uí Chaiside<br>PhD | 20 Classes Study | Pádraig Ó Duibhir<br>PhD |
|-----------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
|-----------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|



|                                                                                                  |                |                |                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Learning Irish is a waste of time.                                                               | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording                               |
| When I leave school, I will give up learning Irish completely because I am not interested in it. | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording                               |
| I really enjoy learning Irish.                                                                   | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording                               |
| Irish is an important school subject.                                                            | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording                               |
| I hate Irish.                                                                                    | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✗ Different wording: 'I hate learning Irish' |
| The time I spend learning Irish, I would rather spend on other subjects.                         | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording                               |
| I think that learning Irish is boring.                                                           | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording                               |
| I want to learn as much Irish as possible.                                                       | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording                               |
| I love learning Irish.                                                                           | ✗ Omitted      | ✓ Included     | ✗ Omitted                                    |
| Learning Irish is really great.                                                                  | ✗ Omitted      | ✓ Included     | ✗ Omitted                                    |

## Other Scales

### Scale: Instrumental Orientation to Irish

| Item Text                                                                                                   | Karen Uí Chaiside<br>PhD | 20 Classes Study | Pádraig Ó Duibhir<br>PhD |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Learning Irish is important for me only because I'll need it for my job or career when I am older.          | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✓ Same wording           |
| Learning Irish in school is important for me because people will have more respect for me if I speak Irish. | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✗ Omitted                |
| I think it is important for me to learn Irish because it may be useful to me someday in getting a good job. | ✗ Omitted                | ✓ Included       | ✓ Same wording           |
| Learning Irish is important because it will make me a more knowledgeable person.                            | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✓ Same wording           |

### Scale: Irish-Lesson Anxiety

| Item Text                                             | Karen Uí Chaiside<br>PhD | 20 Classes Study | Pádraig Ó Duibhir<br>PhD |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| It embarrasses me to put up my hand and say something | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✗ Omitted                |

|                                                                                               |                |                |           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|
| aloud during the Irish lesson.                                                                |                |                |           |
| I don't feel sure of myself when I am speaking out loud in Irish during the Irish lesson.     | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✗ Omitted |
| I get nervous and mixed up when I am speaking in my Irish class.                              | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✗ Omitted |
| I always feel that the rest of the pupils in my class are better at speaking Irish than I am. | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✗ Omitted |
| I am afraid that the other pupils in the class will laugh at me when I speak Irish.           | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✗ Omitted |

Scale: Parental Encouragement

| Item Text                                                                                | Karen Uí Chaiside<br>PhD | 20 Classes Study | Pádraig Ó Duibhir<br>PhD |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| My parents try to help me with my Irish.                                                 | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✓ Same wording           |
| My parents feel that because we live in Ireland, I should learn Irish.                   | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✓ Same wording           |
| My parents feel that it is important that I work hard at my Irish until I finish school. | ✓ Same wording           | ✓ Same wording   | ✓ Same wording           |

|                                                                                           |                |                |                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| My parents encourage me to ask my teacher for help if I am having problems with my Irish. | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✗ Omitted      |
| My parents often tell me how important Irish will be for me when I leave school.          | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording |
| My parents think I should spend more of my time on my Irish lessons.                      | ✗ Omitted      | ✓ Included     | ✗ Omitted      |
| My parents really encourage me to work hard at my Irish.                                  | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording |
| My parents are usually very interested in anything to do with my Irish schoolwork.        | ✓ Same wording | ✓ Same wording | ✗ Omitted      |
| My parents encourage me to practice my Irish as much as possible.                         | ✗ Omitted      | ✓ Included     | ✓ Same wording |
| My parents feel that I should really try to learn Irish.                                  | ✗ Omitted      | ✓ Included     | ✓ Same wording |

Scale: Irish-ability Self-concept

| Item Text                                                              | Karen Uí Chaiside PhD | 20 Classes Study | Pádraig Ó Duibhir PhD |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| I am better than most pupils in my class at speaking Irish.            | ✓ Same wording        | ✓ Same wording   | ✗ Omitted             |
| By the time I finish school, I will be able to speak Irish quite well. | ✓ Same wording        | ✓ Same wording   | ✗ Omitted             |
| I understand most of what the teacher says in Irish at school.         | ✓ Same wording        | ✓ Same wording   | ✗ Omitted             |
| I am better than most pupils in my class at Irish writing.             | ✓ Same wording        | ✓ Same wording   | ✗ Omitted             |
| I am better than most pupils in my class at Irish reading.             | ✓ Same wording        | ✓ Same wording   | ✗ Omitted             |
| I am better at speaking Irish than I am at doing Maths.                | ✗ Omitted             | ✓ Included       | ✗ Omitted             |

## 9.18 Appendix 18: Rationale for adapting AMTB scales in the present study

This appendix sets out the rationale for adapting items from Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) in designing the pupil questionnaire. While the AMTB has been widely employed in international contexts, adaptations are common in minority language settings and have precedent in prior Irish research. The adaptations in this study were therefore guided by both theoretical and empirical considerations, with the aim of preserving construct validity while ensuring contextual and linguistic relevance.

| 1. Precedent in Irish Educational Research                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Previous studies on Irish language learning have modified AMTB scales to suit different populations. In the 20 Classes Study (Harris & Murtagh, 1999), items were adapted for L2 learners in English-medium primary schools, while Ó Duibhir's (2014) doctoral research altered or omitted items to suit L1 Irish-medium primary pupils. Ó Duibhir explicitly documented differences in item numbers within his Cronbach's Alpha tables, noting, for example, reduced items for Motivational Intensity and the complete omission of Irish Lesson Anxiety. These precedents illustrate that adaptation of AMTB scales is accepted practice when instruments are transferred across linguistic and educational contexts. |
| 2. Contextual Differences in the Target Population                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| The original AMTB was designed in the Canadian context for English-speaking pupils learning French as an L2. Both Harris & Murtagh's and Ó Duibhir's adaptations targeted primary-level pupils, either in L2 English-medium or L1 Irish-medium settings. By contrast, the present study surveyed post-primary 1st and 2nd Year pupils (ages 12–14) across L1, L2, and Gaeltacht schools. Items that were highly relevant in one stream (e.g., exclusively L2 assumptions such as "I would like to speak Irish like a native speaker") risked irrelevance or bias when applied to the other. Adaptation was therefore essential to avoid confusion, disengagement, or construct distortion.                             |
| 3. Ensuring Cross-Context Validity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| A central requirement was to develop a unified instrument that functioned equally well across L1 and L2 contexts. Certain items used in earlier Irish studies contained implicit assumptions about linguistic background or exposure (e.g., "I often speak Irish outside school"), which would not have been meaningful for many L2 learners. Retaining such items could have introduced artificial differences between groups and depressed internal reliability. Instead, items were selected and modified to be equally interpretable across contexts, ensuring validity in comparisons between subgroups.                                                                                                          |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 4. Reliability and Construct Integrity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <p>The decision to adapt scales was also informed by psychometric considerations. As Ó Duibhir's findings show, low Cronbach's Alpha scores (e.g., <math>\alpha = .34</math> for Instrumental Orientation) often resulted from context-specific items. By refining and rebalancing items in this study, scale reliability was strengthened, and construct validity was preserved. Positive and negative formulations were deliberately retained where possible to reduce agreement bias, while avoiding items that risked lack of relevance in one subgroup.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 5. Scholarly Consensus on Instrument Adaptation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p>Educational measurement literature recognises that when instruments are transferred across populations, some degree of adaptation is both necessary and legitimate. Such adaptation is acceptable provided that the underlying theoretical constructs remain intact and that reliability and validity are reassessed in the new context (Hinton, 2004; Cohen, Manion, &amp; Morrison, 2018; DeVellis, 2016). In line with this principle, the present study preserved the AMTB's core constructs; integrativeness, motivation, anxiety, self-concept, and parental encouragement, while modifying item wording or inclusion to ensure their relevance within the sociolinguistic and educational realities of bilingual post-primary pupils. This process balanced continuity with innovation, maintaining conceptual comparability with earlier research while enhancing contextual appropriateness.</p> |

## 9.19 Appendix 19: Open-ended responses from student survey

### ANALYSIS OF STUDENT SURVEY OPEN ENDED QUESTION

Gaeltacht School



Irish-medium School



English-medium School



| SCHOOL       | Q 78 - STUDENT RECOMMENDATION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Munster – EM | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. More fun activities</li> <li>2. Talking Irish the whole time</li> <li>3. Speaking more Irish in class time</li> <li>4. Better opportunity to go to Irish-speaking parts of Ireland and speaking Irish during class more.</li> <li>5. Less writing</li> <li>6. Make it easier in school.</li> <li>7. If it was taught more like how English was taught when we were young so we would grow up learning it</li> <li>8. If there was more Irish spoken at home/in the community and if there was Irish spoken in school outside of Irish class, e.g. if the school took on something like Seachtain na Gaeilge and promoted Irish to be spoken at school and home. Simple</li> </ol> |



|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <p>phrases such as "Can I go to the toilet?" could be translated to Irish in other classes.</p> <p>9. I don't know.</p> <p>10. My experience would be better if we learned about the culture.</p> <p>11. I'm not sure.</p> <p>12. I would rather we practice talking to people and expand our vocabulary instead of studying poems.</p> <p>13. It's just not good.</p> <p>14. Learning more Irish</p> <p>15. If it wasn't taught like English, for example, doing poems and books and learning rules and words along the way instead of learning them in categories like food, verbs, nouns, etc., and learning the rules for them and then going on to poems and books.</p> <p>16. If we got more help for the people who find the subject harder</p> <p>17. If we get to watch videos or movies in Irish</p> <p>18. Write less and speak it with my friends more.</p> <p>19. If I didn't have to learn it</p> <p>20. Non-exam</p> |
|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <p>21. More Blookets.</p> <p>22. Maybe if it was more fun and we did more activities, or it was more interactive.</p> <p>23. I don't know.</p> <p>24. Less Irish</p> <p>25. Go on trips and do outside things.</p> <p>26. Nothing really</p> <p>27. Nothing</p> <p>28. No homework</p> <p>29. Nothing</p> <p>30. I don't know.</p> <p>31. Getting more help, explained in English to help me understand it more.</p> <p>32. Getting an exemption</p> <p>33. Not learning it</p> <p>34. I don't know.</p> <p>35. I struggle with spelling and grammar.</p> |
|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <p>36. More Irish spoken throughout the school rather than just in the classroom. I think Irish should also be used more in general around the country.</p> <p>37. The way it's taught... It's very much like the English curriculum. It assumes you already know a lot of Irish when you go into secondary school, whereas I knew very little Irish in 1st year. I can speak and write French much better, and I've only been learning it a year and a half. If Irish was more focused on actually learning the language than memorising long essays, and was taught more like French, I would enjoy it a lot more.</p> <p>38. Teach the basics and make it fun instead of making it all very technical.</p> <p>39. I think the experience of learning Irish would be better if I went to an Irish-speaking primary school.</p> <p>40. Study the language.</p> <p>41. No Irish homework</p> <p>42. If it wasn't taken as an exam subject and you could learn it in your own time and at your ease</p> <p>43. If the teachers actually made us learn the verbs properly instead of giving us comprehensions for homework</p> <p>44. If it was an optional or non-exam subject and there wasn't so much pressure</p> |
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|  | <p>45. It would be better if we spent less time writing essays and learned more Irish outside the classroom setting.</p> <p>46. If we did games in Irish and had easy homework</p> <p>47. If I was better at it because I was bad at it in primary school too. I want to learn more, but I don't like Irish.</p> <p>48. If the work was a bit easier and slower-paced, and if the teachers were a bit more laid back.</p> <p>49. If the teachers spoke more English and explained things more clearly instead of just giving instructions in Irish</p> <p>50. I don't learn it.</p> <p>51. More interactive</p> <p>52. If Irish was a non-exam subject and it was a fun class where we didn't take notes but learned about Irish history, culture, and language.</p> <p>53. More interactive elements</p> <p>54. If there were fun games to play</p> <p>55. I don't do Irish but I'm in the class.</p> <p>56. Getting rid of the language or making it a choice subject in school</p> |
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|  | <p>57. More fun and games</p> <p>58. Fewer classes</p> <p>59. More help understanding it.</p> <p>60. Being born in Ireland</p> <p>61. Change the way it's being taught.</p> <p>62. More speaking in Irish</p> <p>63. Nothing</p> <p>64. If it were taught slower and more calmly</p> <p>65. Not having exams</p> <p>66. Fewer poems and stories and more Blookets</p> <p>67. Making Irish optional</p> <p>68. Teachers</p> <p>69. If we were taught to speak Irish rather than read and write it. I don't think learning grammar helps, it's boring and difficult. I can form sentences in French and German without grammar, and I can speak and understand Irish with bad grammar.</p> <p>70. Shorter tests and not having to memorise long paragraphs.</p> |
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|  | <p>71. Talking Irish more</p> <p>72. If it was taught differently</p> <p>73. More interesting teaching, it's currently boring and makes the language boring.</p> <p>74. Not doing it</p> <p>75. If I understood it better</p> <p>76. No Irish exams: Irish lessons should be enjoyable and about culture, history, and speech rather than grammar and textbook questions.</p> <p>77. Don't just show us a few words and expect us to make sentences.</p> <p>78. Fewer classes</p> <p>79. Teach Irish like French, going through each verb one at a time.</p> <p>80. Make the Junior and Leaving Cert courses easier.</p> <p>81. Change the way it's taught.</p> <p>82. A bit more English used</p> <p>83. More revision after each chapter to make sure everyone understands.</p> <p>84. Games</p> |
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|  | <p>85. Fewer classes and having to learn pictures in 6th year.</p> <p>86. More craic, orals, and change the curriculum.</p> <p>87. Learn outside.</p> <p>88. To have both Irish parents</p> <p>89. Practice listening to Irish like watching shows or going to the Gaeltacht.</p> <p>90. Make learning Irish more fun with quizzes and friends; speak Irish but translate after speaking.</p> <p>91. Be more engaging and helpful.</p> <p>92. Making it easier</p> <p>93. More fun and group work</p> <p>94. The way it's taught is so different from French, but it should be similar.</p> <p>95. If we were taught how to say things before writing and reading them</p> <p>96. Less pressure</p> <p>97. If I started learning from a younger age</p> <p>98. If it was taught in a more fun and interesting way</p> |
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|  | <p>99. If it was optional</p> <p>100. More videos and listening activities.</p> <p>101. Learning more about Irish culture and how the language works</p> <p>102. Learning how to speak fluently instead of reading stories</p> <p>103. More focus on speaking and less on writing.</p> <p>104. Irish should be optional.</p> <p>105. More conversations in Irish</p> <p>106. Make it optional.</p> <p>107. Learning Irish like we learn French.</p> <p>108. If there was less focus on grammar</p> <p>109. I want to learn more basic Irish for everyday use.</p> <p>110. More speaking practice</p> <p>111. More modern ways of learning, like podcasts and apps</p> <p>112. Not having to memorise long answers</p> <p>113. If the class was more chill and less stressful</p> |
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|  | <p>114. I want to learn Irish through fun activities, not exams.</p> <p>115. Make it easier to understand for beginners.</p> <p>116. Less emphasis on literature</p> <p>117. Let students speak freely in Irish.</p> <p>118. More trips to the Gaeltacht</p> <p>119. Make the subject feel more useful in real life.</p> <p>120. Don't compare it to English.</p> <p>121. Teach it like a living language, not just an exam subject.</p> <p>122. Start from the basics again.</p> <p>123. Group work and conversation practice.</p> <p>124. Less focus on writing stories</p> <p>125. Irish should be more present in daily life.</p> <p>126. Don't treat Irish as just another subject.</p> <p>127. If the class wasn't focused on exams</p> <p>128. If teachers made it fun</p> |
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|  | <p>129. Teaching methods should change.</p> <p>130. If Irish was not a requirement for college</p> <p>131. Easier tests</p> <p>132. More time to practice speaking.</p> <p>133. Teach Irish in a way that we remember it.</p> <p>134. Include music and pop culture.</p> <p>135. Make grammar less complicated.</p> <p>136. Don't treat Irish as a punishment.</p> <p>137. Use Irish for fun things.</p> <p>138. More interaction</p> <p>139. Not so repetitive</p> <p>140. Include more everyday phrases.</p> <p>141. More variety in lessons</p> <p>142. Add creative writing.</p> <p>143. Watch Irish shows and discuss them.</p> <p>144. Use simple Irish in all school announcements.</p> <p>145. Teach Irish like a foreign language.</p> |
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|  | <p>146. Use more online resources.</p> <p>147. Make lessons more personal.</p> <p>148. Let students pick what they want to learn.</p> <p>149. Make learning Irish feel less like a chore.</p> <p>150. More speaking activities, less focus on essays</p> <p>151. Teach Irish the way we learn French.</p> <p>152. More modern Irish</p> <p>153. Fewer essays</p> <p>154. More conversation-based learning</p> <p>155. Teach Irish like Duolingo does.</p> <p>156. We should speak it more in school.</p> <p>157. Don't just teach us poems and stories.</p> <p>158. Focus more on how to actually use Irish.</p> <p>159. Less pressure on getting everything perfect.</p> <p>160. Don't make it just about exams.</p> <p>161. Teach us useful phrases for real life.</p> |
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|  | <p>162. Stop making us memorise essays.</p> <p>163. Learn through games.</p> <p>164. Let us watch Irish TV or listen to Irish music.</p> <p>165. Use technology more.</p> <p>166. Let us write about topics we enjoy.</p> <p>167. Don't mark us so harshly.</p> <p>168. Don't make it feel like a dead language.</p> <p>169. Allow for creativity.</p> <p>170. Teach Irish in a way that feels natural.</p> <p>171. More time to speak in class.</p> <p>172. Teachers should speak more Irish too.</p> <p>173. Learn Irish through drama or acting.</p> <p>174. Make Irish class feel less rigid.</p> <p>175. Start with what we know and build up.</p> <p>176. Teach Irish like we're learning to actually use it.</p> <p>177. Let us speak more, even if we make mistakes.</p> <p>178. More pair work</p> |
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|  | <p>179. Don't just follow the book.</p> <p>180. Use stories and media we relate to</p> <p>181. More chances to talk in groups.</p> <p>182. Encourage us to speak, not just write.</p> <p>183. Learn Irish through storytelling.</p> <p>184. Add Irish subtitles to English shows.</p> <p>185. Don't punish mistakes so harshly.</p> <p>186. Make it feel relevant.</p> <p>187. Give us choice in what we learn.</p> <p>188. Teach with a mix of English and Irish</p> <p>189. Teach slang and informal Irish.</p> <p>190. More time practicing Irish outside class.</p> <p>191. Teach us to think in Irish.</p> <p>192. Less copying from the board</p> <p>193. Let us choose topics to write or speak about</p> <p>194. Teach Irish like we're learning it for travel.</p> |
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|  | <p>195. Use roleplay to practice.</p> <p>196. Don't make us memorise stuff we don't understand.</p> <p>197. Let us ask questions without judgment.</p> <p>198. Give us real-life situations to practice.</p> <p>199. Don't just teach us for the test.</p> <p>200. Bring in native speakers.</p> <p>201. Make class feel relaxed.</p> <p>202. Stop teaching it like it's a dead language.</p> <p>203. Give us confidence to speak.</p> <p>204. Focus on basic conversation.</p> <p>205. Make the language feel alive.</p> <p>206. Let us use our phones to learn.</p> <p>207. Play Irish language podcasts in class.</p> <p>208. Let us make videos in Irish.</p> <p>209. Give us creative assignments.</p> <p>210. Less pressure, more encouragement</p> <p>211. Focus on what's practical.</p> |
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|  | <p>212. Make Irish fun.</p> <p>213. Give us space to make mistakes.</p> <p>214. Let us talk without being corrected every second.</p> <p>215. Stop focusing so much on marks.</p> <p>216. Make Irish relevant to our age group.</p> <p>217. More fun projects</p> <p>218. Show us Irish can be cool.</p> <p>219. Don't just make us learn off poems.</p> <p>220. Learn Irish through music.</p> <p>221. Let us have conversations in Irish class.</p> <p>222. Don't make it feel like a chore.</p> <p>223. Add humour to lessons.</p> <p>224. Use memes or pop culture.</p> <p>225. More field trips to Irish-speaking areas</p> <p>226. Let us listen to how people really speak Irish.</p> <p>227. Teach Irish like it's for life, not just school.</p> |
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|                | <p>228. Let us act out scenes in Irish.</p> <p>229. Use apps like Quizlet or Kahoot</p> <p>230. Include sports or hobbies in Irish lessons.</p> <p>231. Bring in guest speakers.</p> <p>232. Show us why Irish matters.</p> <p>233. Give us more responsibility for our own learning.</p> <p>234. Let us teach each other.</p> <p>235. Don't make it all about exams.</p> <p>236. Show us Irish being used in the real world.</p> <p>237. Make the class feel like a community.</p> <p>238. Help us find our own reason to learn Irish.</p> <p>239. Use different teaching styles.</p> <p>240. Teach Irish like it's fun.</p> <p>241. Make it feel like we're learning something useful.</p> <p>242. Help us enjoy it, not fear it.</p> |
| Leinster - EMD | 243. I don't know.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |



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|  | <p>244. More work on Chromebooks and not just using our copies and books all the time.</p> <p>245. Instead of learning Irish we could use this opportunity to study other subjects like Maths.</p> <p>246. Irish games</p> <p>247. A person helping me to understand.</p> <p>248. Maybe like fun things to entertain us so we can pay more attention.</p> <p>249. I don't know.</p> <p>250. Nothing</p> <p>251. Spelling words in Irish was easier.</p> <p>252. I don't know.</p> <p>253. If people around me spoke more Irish</p> <p>254. By not learning it or going asleep</p> <p>255. Keep focusing and taking classes and participating.</p> <p>256. Getting to speak it more</p> <p>257. If it was easier to remember and was taken slower</p> <p>258. If we did fun activities to do with Irish and if the teacher explained what the words in Irish mean</p> |
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|                     | <p>259. If it was an easier language</p> <p>260. Not doing Irish</p> <p>261. Letting us talk to each other instead of writing.</p> <p>262. More interactive games and prizes for speaking Irish.</p> <p>263. I don't really know.</p> <p>264. I don't know.</p> <p>265. Not having to do it</p> <p>266. Doing fun activities that have Irish and not do boring work.</p> <p>267. I don't know.</p> <p>268. If I actually put my mind into learning Irish I would, but I think I would rather finish learning my language before I move to another language.</p> |
| Munster - Gaeltacht | <p>269. Kahoot</p> <p>270. I don't know</p> <p>271. Do more reading in Irish</p> <p>272. I love learning Irish and I don't think there is anything that could make it better than it is</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

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|  | 273. Bad                                                                                   |
|  | 274. Kahoot                                                                                |
|  | 275. I 🗨️                                                                                  |
|  | 276. Meeting other Irish schools more often to talk Irish                                  |
|  | 277. Meeting up with other Irish schools more often to make friends through Irish speaking |
|  | 278. Dul ar thuras go dtí áiteanna le Gael Linn á úsáid againn                             |
|  | 279. Different ways of it being taught                                                     |
|  | 280. I don't know                                                                          |
|  | 281. Níos mó dul amach agus ag déanamh rudaí                                               |
|  | 282. School trips to Irish places                                                          |
|  | 283. Má bhíonn gach duine ag caint as Gaeilge                                              |
|  | 284. Níos mó am a chaitheamh ag caint agus úsáid an teanga atá againn                      |
|  | 285. Different ways of it being taught                                                     |
|  | 286. Speaking it more                                                                      |

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|  | 287. Not being nervous about learning it and being wrong when answering questions and speaking     |
|  | 288. Bíonn gach duine ag caint as Gaeilge                                                          |
|  | 289. If teachers wouldn't go to extreme lengths to avoid translating a word to English to help us  |
|  | 290. Less homework                                                                                 |
|  | 291. Gan obair bhaile                                                                              |
|  | 292. More oral tasks instead of writing most of the time                                           |
|  | 293. Nothing. I already have loads of Irish                                                        |
|  | 294. Less homework                                                                                 |
|  | 295. Go to the Gaeltacht                                                                           |
|  | 296. More talking, less writing                                                                    |
|  | 297. Summer camp                                                                                   |
|  | 298. Less homework, fewer handouts                                                                 |
|  | 299. Gael Linn on social media                                                                     |
|  | 300. Commentary on sport in Irish                                                                  |
|  | 301. Irish books with the Irish we speak in Kerry instead of Irish from other parts of the country |

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|             | <p>302. If we didn't get as much homework</p> <p>303. Apps as Gaeilge</p> <p>304. I don't know</p> <p>305. If it was more fun</p> <p>306. If there was more Irish spoken</p> <p>307. More games</p> <p>308. I don't know. I love it</p> <p>309. To speak it more at home</p> <p>310. To talk it more</p> <p>311. More interesting subjects through Irish</p> <p>312. If we were included in more Irish-related activities</p> <p>313. Nothing really</p> |
| Ulster - IM | <p>314. Idk</p> <p>315. Good</p> <p>316. More help with speaking Irish</p> <p>317. I think different learning programmes for Irish would make my experience better.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

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|  | <p>318. An experience that would make learning Irish better would be if everyone talked Irish in the town and if there were more activities outside school that involved Irish.</p> <p>319. It would help me a lot if I got a little bit more help with my work in Irish.</p> <p>320. If they would explain it more</p> <p>321. Taking part in quiz teams or the likes would make my experience better.</p> <p>322. Less pressure</p> <p>323. I think if the awkwardness and stigma around speaking Irish outside of the classroom at school wasn't as strong, it would be a lot easier</p> <p>324. An Ghaeltacht</p> <p>325. If we could learn in fun ways, like fun Irish-playing games that everyone participates in</p> <p>326. Gaeltacht and events and clubs</p> <p>327. Níos mó am sa rang Gaeilge</p> <p>328. If we were to learn more interesting seanfhocail and work more on aimsir chaite</p> <p>329. Every summer the whole year goes to the Gaeltacht</p> |
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|  | <p>330. If teachers don't speak English in the middle of the Irish class.</p> <p>331. Make the lessons more interesting.</p> <p>332. More after-school clubs for speaking Irish and learning the Irish language.</p> <p>333. Níos mó teicneolaíocht</p> <p>334. Chun é a labhairt níos mó</p> <p>335. I think that if we did more writing in Irish, it would be better so that we are learning Irish and learning how to spell in Irish</p> <p>336. If it could be more practical and less book work and not as much stress about grammar and if the stories could be more interesting</p> <p>337. I think having a good teacher really matters and that you get along with them.</p> <p>338. Ag labhairt é go minic.</p> <p>339. Having more activities in Irish e.g. clubs</p> <p>340. To have it taught like French and not just doing rules and stories most of the time.</p> <p>341. Audiobooks and putting your phone in Irish.</p> <p>342. Ríomhaire a úsáid níos mó i ranganna</p> |
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|  | 343. Fun teachers to help with the learning experience.                                                                                                                           |
|  | 344. Úsáid ríomhairí níos mó in áit leabhar a úsáid                                                                                                                               |
|  | 345. It would make my experience of learning Irish better if I got to have one-on-one learning with my teacher.                                                                   |
|  | 346. I would like fewer strict rules in school.                                                                                                                                   |
|  | 347. More Irish-speaking groups/clubs outside of school would make my experience much better as I would be able to improve my conversation skills in Irish.                       |
|  | 348. Maybe if the teachers say something in Irish and if I or others don't understand, they could translate it.                                                                   |
|  | 349. If we went through the hard words before reading a book or paragraph in Irish                                                                                                |
|  | 350. My experience of learning Irish is very good but the one thing that I think could help the most is if the books had dictionaries of all complicated Irish words at the back. |
|  | 351. I think to make my experience better we should interact in class more.                                                                                                       |
|  | 352. More oral learning                                                                                                                                                           |
|  | 353. Games                                                                                                                                                                        |
|  | 354. Níos mó rudaí Gaeilge ar siúl sa tír                                                                                                                                         |



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|  | <p>355. I think going to the Gaeltacht and playing games would make Irish more fun to learn.</p> <p>356. I think going to the Gaeltacht and an Irish secondary school.</p> <p>357. Maybe learning more modern terms</p> <p>358. I don't know.</p> <p>359. Doing more games</p> <p>360. Ba bhreá liom dul chuig an nGaeltacht nó contae a labhraíonn iomlán Gaeilge. Úsáidim féin teanglann nuair atá mé ag scríobh scéalta nó ag lorg focail. Má raibh níos mó aipeanna mar seo, bheadh sé ina chabhair</p> <p>361. More people around me who speak Irish so I can have conversations and improve.</p> <p>362. Read more Irish books.</p> <p>363. More in-school games and activities about Irish</p> <p>364. Less grammar till 2nd/3rd year and more speaking/talking in Irish in 1st year.</p> <p>365. More fun games</p> <p>366. That more people around me wouldn't speak English and we did games to help with learning</p> |
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|  | <p>367. Things to do outside of school that require speaking Irish.</p> <p>368. Talking to a family relative who speaks Irish.</p> <p>369. If we had more enjoyable classes and learned interactively instead of just doing grammar</p> <p>370. I think you could play games or something.</p> <p>371. Learn more conversational Irish instead of just correct terms, speak like a native with phrases.</p> <p>372. More Irish clubs nearby and people to talk to that only speak Irish.</p> <p>373. It would be better to learn Irish if I had help with my reading and spelling.</p> <p>374. If people around me would talk more Irish, it would definitely help</p> <p>375. If we had more events in Irish, not school trips, but actual events or places that speak Irish regularly.</p> <p>376. Learning more commonly used words in everyday conversations and repeating until learned would help.</p> <p>377. Translating through English</p> <p>378. Other students listening</p> |
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|  | <p>379. I feel like more Irish schools and activities would make it more enjoyable, especially for those who dislike the language.</p> <p>380. Doing more of it at home</p> <p>381. If teachers made us speak it more often</p> <p>382. Camps and more social skills</p> <p>383. Immersion in Irish outside of school and maybe at home or extracurriculars</p> <p>384. If they didn't focus as much on grammar and more on literature and poetry</p> <p>385. Ag caint as Gaeilge taobh amuigh den scoil</p> <p>386. Ag caint as Gaeilge taobh amuigh den scoil</p> <p>387. Gaeltacht</p> <p>388. If the language was more spoken and used in day-to-day life</p> <p>389. If Irish was used more outside of school and normalised</p> <p>390. Having more places and people who speak the language so I could use it after school. Having more job options besides teaching</p> <p>391. Ag caint Gaeilge taobh amuigh den scoil</p> |
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|               | <p>392. If there were more opportunities outside school to speak Irish and learn it</p> <p>393. If the teacher made it more fun</p> <p>394. If there were níos mó extracurriculars in Irish in my town, as I would love to live in the Gaeltacht</p> <p>395. I have had a good experience of learning Irish since I started secondary school. The only way it could be better is if there were more opportunities to learn outside of school</p> <p>396. Doing more activities to make it more enjoyable and easier for people who learn better by engaging and going on a trip to see what we are learning about</p> |
| Leinster - EM | <p>397. To do less literature and instead do more spoken Irish.</p> <p>398. To make my experience of learning Irish better, I think that teachers could make it fun and not painful.</p> <p>399. Make it more fun.</p> <p>400. If teachers would help out more to the students that are struggling more with Irish.</p> <p>401. Having some fun ways to learn.</p> <p>402. Add school trips to the curriculum such as to the Gaeltacht.</p>                                                                                                                                                                           |

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|  | <p>403. The teacher would ask questions to different people.</p> <p>404. Make the classes fun and play games to learn.</p> <p>405. Play fun games, not do boring stuff, learn Irish in an easy way, and maybe just not speak any more Irish in Ireland because it is not important apart from some universities not accepting you because you are bad at Irish or at ordinary level, and that is really stupid. Other subjects are way more important than Irish, for example, maths, English, history, science.</p> <p>406. Have more fun activities to do instead of mindless work.</p> <p>407. Teachers explaining things in English so that we understand rather than in Irish.</p> <p>408. Getting a better teacher.</p> <p>409. If it was less just reading from books and other writing.</p> <p>410. I personally already speak fluent English and Polish and I won't use Irish for anything. It's hard to remember all the grammar when I'm already fluent in English, Polish, and study Spanish and try to learn Japanese in my spare time. I don't want to do Irish at all. It won't help me get a job, and I'm not good at Irish, and failing it is worse than not doing it at all.</p> <p>411. Make it fun.</p> |
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|  | <p>412. If the teacher would explain more simply because most didn't learn much Irish in primary school, so I have no clue what the teacher is saying.</p> <p>413. If the teachers were to actually help us learn instead of putting us down and saying we don't listen if we get a question they find to be simple wrong, and acting as if we should know everything they want us to know, despite us not necessarily having learned it prior to being in their class.</p> <p>414. Making the lessons more interactive would make the experience of learning Irish better.</p> <p>415. I would like to be able to play games and sports in Irish so that we can learn to speak it more fluently.</p> <p>416. By making the lessons more interactive.</p> <p>417. Making the lessons more interesting.</p> <p>418. If we were learning it more at my level and if we went over the same topics more and more.</p> <p>419. Allow us to watch Irish shows in class and play Irish games on laptops.</p> <p>420. If teachers taught Irish through English instead of Irish through Irish.</p> <p>421. I think trips to some historical place or a place that had lots of Irish examples and words people do not use as much would be very enjoyable to learn.</p> |
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|  | <p>422. Start teaching from scratch instead of assuming what students already know.</p> <p>423. Focusing on speaking it, not grammar and spelling.</p> <p>424. If the teacher spoke slower.</p> <p>425. Make the classwork and homework easier.</p> <p>426. Teach it in the way they teach foreign languages such as Spanish, French, or German.</p> <p>427. If we learned it like we learn English or other languages in school.</p> <p>428. It being taught a bit differently, where the teacher isn't only speaking in Irish. It would also be better if we did fun activities helping us remember, and it just being taught clearly so I can actually understand what's going on.</p> <p>429. If it was more focused on learning the language than memorising poems, stories, and plays.</p> <p>430. If it was a bit easier.</p> <p>431. To speak Irish in class and not English so we get to understand it better.</p> <p>432. Maybe talking one-to-one in it, so other techniques.</p> |
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|  | <p>433. I think learning how to have a proper conversation in Irish could make learning more enjoyable, as I am more likely to speak Irish in the future than writing it lots.</p> <p>434. If I know people that can speak Irish so that they can help me learn.</p> <p>435. To start speaking Irish in Irish class so we learn more useful words.</p> <p>436. If there was more speaking and making sure everyone understands it.</p> <p>437. I think incorporating some sort of fun into the Irish curriculum would be handy. I love studying parts of the literature, but I think parts of the textbook are quite grammar-heavy. If there were more Irish clubs, etc. in school, that would also be helpful as it would give us a chance to practice Irish without having to take grinds, etc. I think I enjoy the class more than the subject itself, as I have a really great teacher who makes it fun to learn the language and is always a laugh. The Irish culture is fascinating, and I can't wait to learn more about it.</p> <p>438. I would like to learn (through Irish) more about our culture, e.g., Irish music, because that would be a lot of fun to me, and I think it's a good way to learn. Also, trying to have conversations with other people, even if it's just something like how is the day going. Thank you.</p> |
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|  | <p>439. Being in a class with more of my friends.</p> <p>440. If the teacher explained what to do in English rather than in Irish because it can be hard to understand, doing games through Irish and not just reading and writing.</p> <p>441. Some more games that would help with the learning.</p> <p>442. Not learning as much Irish at one time, and make the classes shorter.</p> <p>443. The teacher being more interactive.</p> <p>444. Making it more fun but also helping me to understand some stuff instead of rushing past it and taking it slower.</p> <p>445. Going to a Gaeltacht with school.</p> <p>446. If we learned more about the culture and it was more interactive.</p> <p>447. Irish games.</p> <p>448. Speaking in Irish more.</p> <p>449. Going over base-level topics more.</p> <p>450. Irish films and games.</p> <p>451. More games to help learn or watching Irish television shows.</p> |
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|  | <p>452. If it was taught the way Spanish, French, and German are taught.</p> <p>453. I don't think that there is a problem with the language (besides how some of the most common stuff is irregular), but I do think that the way it is taught is done poorly. I, however, either don't know or remember any ways it could be improved.</p> <p>454. Activities.</p> <p>455. To make Irish easier and more Irish activities instead of just doing questions and reading.</p> <p>456. If the classes were more fun and we spent less time learning certain stuff and spent more time doing practical stuff such as speaking the language more.</p> <p>457. Explain a bit more of what to do in English.</p> <p>458. More games and maybe to go on school trips to Irish-speaking places.</p> <p>459. If it were easier.</p> <p>460. I've gone to the Gaeltacht, so I feel like everything I'm learning in class I already know. I'd love for an after-school activity to learn new things instead of revision.</p> |
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|  | <p>461. I think that Irish should be taught in a better way for day-to-day use instead of poems and stories we probably won't need/use again.</p> <p>462. If the class was more about topics that we will actually use instead of topics about our house or hair colour.</p> <p>463. I think that focusing on conversation would be better than learning loads of useless tenses that we will most likely forget. I know it is important to use these tenses to fully understand the language, but most people will only be learning basic Irish, and I feel like it would be nicer to learn better conversation words rather than the tenses we will forget straight after learning!</p> <p>464. Learn in a different and engaging way, and get Irish-speaking assignments in the classroom, rather than just writing and taking notes.</p> <p>465. If we had it fewer times a week because it hurts my head.</p> <p>466. If teachers taught different parts of Irish differently, whereas now we kind of have everything bundled together since primary school.</p> <p>467. Make the classes more about speaking Irish instead of writing and reading because it's more practical.</p> <p>468. Do more games or interactive activities and go on more trips to do with Irish.</p> |
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|  | <p>469. Watching Irish TV shows.</p> <p>470. Duolingo.</p> <p>471. If it was explained in English a lot more, it would make it easier to understand certain things that I find hard.</p> <p>472. That you do not have to speak the CBA out loud in front of the whole class if you do not want to. I think it should be optional and should also have the choice to instead do the speaking, like a project or a poster or something along those lines (this should go for all languages).</p> <p>473. If it was more fun and more games-oriented and more free of speech as opposed to making it like other classes because trying to learn a language you don't enjoy where you have to put your hand up. I just am not too fond of Irish either, and I think there is too much homework as well. I like my Irish class but wish Irish was easier in general.</p> <p>474. I think if you were taught Irish from birth as well as English, it would help with learning the language massively.</p> <p>475. If spelling mistakes didn't count.</p> <p>476. If it was taught more clearly, and activities that would make us remember better.</p> |
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|  | <p>477. Less homework and if a student does not want to read out their Irish CBA in front of the class, then they do not have to.</p> <p>478. Having Irish events in school or playing games in Irish class that can make Irish more enjoyable and interesting. Instead of only learning some grammar all the time, maybe it would be more helpful to educate us on where specific words come from in the Irish language. Anything to make it more enjoyable, really.</p> <p>479. If I could learn from an Irish teacher outside of school.</p> <p>480. Taking it slower.</p> <p>481. To engage in Irish activities during class time might make the experience more enjoyable and effective. Also, perhaps only speaking in Irish, similar to a Gaeltacht, might make me learn a bit more. However, Irish class is mostly very enjoyable.</p> <p>482. I think it would be better if we did some games.</p> <p>483. I think it would be better if we did fun games to make Irish more enjoyable.</p> <p>484. If I was taught it more, and instead of my teacher just talking on about it, actually teaching it. I just feel like the teaching is very poor for it.</p> <p>485. Speaking and after-school activities.</p> |
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|  | <p>486. To further improve the curriculum and learning experiences of the Irish language, I would have students partake in far more exercises that involve both verbal communications and aural communications. My reason for suggesting this improvement in the existing Irish language curriculum is that we will partake in verbal and aural communications far more than we will partake in writing and reading of the language. Therefore, students should talk and listen in class as it will further their learning capabilities.</p> <p>487. I think to make my experience better learning Irish, it could be shown in a more fun way so myself and kids being taught Irish will be more involved and interested. Maybe show videos and stuff from years ago of people learning and discovering what Irish is for the first time; it would make people think a lot more about it and get them more interested in the language.</p> <p>488. It should be more interactive and fun.</p> <p>489. If it wasn't so stressful trying to learn it for exams, and in class it was a bit more fun rather than all note-taking. I also would like if the classes were smaller so that we can learn more without as much noise and pressure.</p> <p>490. Playing more games would make my experience of learning Irish better.</p> |
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|  | <p>491. More Irish games and fun activities, like watching Irish shows to help us learn even more Irish.</p> <p>492. Maybe go to a Gaeltacht with the school like you go to Spain for Spanish in TY. Do more activities in Irish. Learn Irish like all the other languages.</p> <p>493. Speaking it more in class and doing activities speaking it instead of just writing to learn to pronounce things.</p> <p>494. Having no tests or exams in Irish and having it as a fun class to play Blookets about Irish. I think people would enjoy it more.</p> <p>495. No homework because I get stuck sometimes.</p> <p>496. If you guys made it easier and less complicated, and watch and read more Irish, and if the teachers can help us understand, and learning more vocabulary like types of hair (e.g., curly, straight) or types of books or movies you like to read.</p> <p>497. I feel that learning and speaking Irish is not worth it. I learn and speak Irish because I have no choice but to learn it. I'm constantly told by my parents that if I don't do good in Irish, my graduation result will be bad, and I won't get a good job. I don't think I should be learning it because I think that in at least 10 years people my age won't be learning Irish in primary schools and post-primary schools.</p> <p>498. Yuh.</p> |
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|  | <p>499. I think it would be better with no exams and learning games.</p> <p>500. Games in class.</p> <p>501. Talking.</p> <p>502. Speaking it more in class and outside of class.</p> <p>503. Ma bhfuil gach duine ag labhairt Gaeilge sa seomra ranga?</p> <p>504. I feel like I have the perfect experience of learning Irish, so I wouldn't change a thing.</p> <p>505. Not learning it.</p> <p>506. I would like to take down more notes and go through it rather than jumping straight into work and not understanding it.</p> <p>507. I think that it would be easier to learn Irish if it was more fun because I can only understand what's going on 80% of the time; the other 20% I am clueless, which is boring and stressful because I know that I need to understand Irish for exams.</p> <p>508. If the school got rid of Irish.</p> <p>509. For the teacher to do more online games like Blooket and Kahoot, also to do less written work.</p> |
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|  | <p>510. Teaching it the same way we teach Spanish.</p> <p>511. I would like to do more games in Irish and less of the full-blown work.</p> <p>512. I think my experience of learning Irish would be better if it wasn't so heavily focused on as I personally think we wouldn't use it very often in the real world because no one speaks it.</p> <p>513. If we did less Irish and if it was more fun and we could do Kahoot quizzes.</p> <p>514. Boring, it doesn't help me at home because it brings my grade down.</p> <p>515. Having a different way of teaching, as in rather than starting off with grammar, learn to master oral Irish and then go into more detail.</p> <p>516. Dunno.</p> <p>517. More games and not getting it drilled into us and making us scared.</p> <p>518. If the teacher slowed down and went through the topics properly.</p> <p>519. I would like to do more games in Irish and watch shows in Irish with English subtitles.</p> <p>520. I would like Irish to be more enjoyable and make it easier to understand.</p> |
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|  | <p>521. I would prefer taking more time on topics because when we only learn a topic for a week or two, it goes completely over my head.</p> <p>522. More interactive resources for learning.</p> <p>523. Making it more fun, e.g., games, songs, less homework, etc.</p> <p>524. Speaking Irish in class more often.</p> <p>525. If we did it in a more enjoyable way and memorised things until we knew them off by heart.</p> <p>526. Nothing can make it better because it's so bad, I won't lie.</p> <p>527. Work harder.</p> <p>528. Being able to have my friends with me so it's more comfortable for partner work.</p> <p>529. If my teacher let us have conversations with each other in Irish instead of writing stuff.</p> <p>530. Doing more fun stuff, for example, games, videos.</p> <p>531. If the teacher spoke more English, and sitting beside my friend because when I'm with my friends I feel confident to ask them for help.</p> <p>532. Have more fun instead of work.</p> |
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|  | <p>533. Try to do a small survey at the end of a category and see if everybody understands, so everybody is caught up.</p> <p>534. If teachers helped us more.</p> <p>535. If there was more time to dedicate to Irish in class time.</p> <p>536. If my teacher focused more on how to have a conversation in Irish.</p> <p>537. The teacher might give us notes for Irish so that studying is easier at home.</p> <p>538. If my Irish teacher explained to us clearly what he was saying in Irish in English, it would help me pick up new Irish words and phrases and make studying easier when it comes to doing my exams.</p> <p>539. Learning Irish less times a week.</p> <p>540. Play more revision games in class and make it fun like English, not boring droning on about stuff we don't even remember.</p> <p>541. Sometimes in Irish, I have to guess some of what is said based on the more basic Irish that is spoken during the lesson. It makes it easier to understand if I don't have to guess any of what is said.</p> |
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|  | <p>542. If I understood more, it would be easier to learn, so it would make it better as sometimes I get confused with words and the endings of words in Irish.</p> <p>543. If we spent longer on each chapter and got less homework.</p> <p>544. To speak it more inside and outside of school.</p> <p>545. Playing Irish-related games during class that would make it a bit more entertaining.</p> <p>546. If we had more writing and oral learning and learned how to structure sentences and not just the words to make them.</p> <p>547. More fun things.</p> <p>548. If my teacher would get around to the whole class and not just the top of the class and if we were able to talk to each other in Irish.</p> <p>549. I don't know.</p> <p>550. School trips/tours in Irish-speaking places.</p> <p>551. I like my experience of learning Irish. My teacher is very nice and makes it very enjoyable.</p> <p>552. It to be used in sports.</p> <p>553. Probably to speak it more outside school and try speaking to people fluent in Irish.</p> |
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|  | <p>554. Sitting next to my friends so I can ask questions when I need to.</p> <p>555. I think partner work would make Irish more enjoyable and easier to speak as you are speaking Irish instead of only reading and writing.</p> <p>556. Make it easier since many families can't read or write Irish, so it's hard for some people to learn.</p> <p>557. Making learning clearer and more fun</p> <p>558. Try listening more.</p> <p>559. Everybody being the same level in a class.</p> <p>560. I think watching programs, playing games, or fun interactive activities would benefit learning Irish and having a greater understanding of the language.</p> <p>561. Schools teach topics too briefly, making it harder to remember and learn everything being taught.</p> <p>562. Trying harder and asking more questions when I don't understand.</p> <p>563. The teachers help me a bit more.</p> <p>564. To write more of my own stories in Irish to get experience using vocabulary, etc.</p> <p>565. For Irish to be spoken more in class</p> |
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|  | <p>566. I cannot think of anything.</p> <p>567. It would make it better if teachers spoke more English to help us understand the Irish better.</p> <p>568. Doing more Irish comprehensions helps me to read and write more in Irish, which I think would make my experience of learning Irish better.</p> <p>569. It is very boring to learn, and I feel like I missed a lot that I need to know.</p> <p>570. To make my experience better would be if we played Irish games to have fun.</p> <p>571. Maybe starting to teach us Irish that we could use in the real world, like how to order food.</p> <p>572. I think that teachers should try to make activities more fun.</p> <p>573. Doing more oral and pair work</p> <p>574. Make learning Irish more related to games and make it a bit more enjoyable and only make it necessary to learn the basics of Irish instead of doing loads of grammar.</p> <p>575. Watching something in Irish would make it more understandable.</p> |
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|  | <p>576. If we had more Irish lessons during the week to learn.</p> <p>577. Idk</p> <p>578. More help by teachers for students who find Irish hard.</p> <p>579. Make it optional.</p> <p>580. In my opinion, the teachers are not very good at teaching Irish. They speak very fast and don't use English very often to explain topics that the class may not understand. I believe that if less time was spent on Irish, especially on more prominent and useful modern languages, it would benefit students all around Ireland greatly. In my personal opinion, I believe that Irish is useless in our modern society. There are very few people who speak it anymore, except some people in Connemara. I pick up languages quite easily, already speaking 5, and I have never seen the importance of learning this language. It might be a nice tradition, but it won't really benefit anyone anymore. Irish is not a living language. I think this valuable time could be well spent on our modern foreign languages or any other topics where people may fall behind often.</p> <p>581. Going to Irish grinds</p> <p>582. For teachers to use both English and Irish</p> <p>583. Playing games for revision would be fun and helpful.</p> |
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|  | <p>584. If the teachers did more one-to-one</p> <p>585. I hate Irish.</p> <p>586. Everyone being just as good as each other.</p> <p>587. I think my experience would be better if our Irish teacher was better because he thinks we know the things, and we don't know all of them.</p> <p>588. Doing more fun stuff</p> <p>589. Not much really, it's not the school's fault I'm bad at Irish. I try, but I'm not too interested. I will try though.</p> <p>590. It would be better if my teachers would go between English and Irish so I can make out what he's saying.</p> <p>591. I think less written work and more games and speaking of the language in class would make the experience better.</p> <p>592. Go on Irish trips often throughout the school year for experience.</p> <p>593. I think if we translated more vocabulary and words onto English from Irish, we would have a better understanding of it. I also think we should have more oral Irish, as I sometimes find myself knowing how to write something in Irish but not knowing how to say it. Another thing would be if we had after-school activities to help us with our Irish. I think personally</p> |
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|  | <p>it is very important to learn Irish for our culture and heritage. I think if we had a better understanding of Irish and how to say Irish orally, it would help, especially the students who went to an English-speaking school.</p> <p>594. If we did more interactive stuff</p> <p>595. I personally think Irish can still be a school subject, but it doesn't need to have as much class time and for the class to be more productive. Also, I would prefer it to be optional for Leaving Cert.</p> <p>596. Idk</p> <p>597. By explaining in English and then Irish</p> <p>598. I think the teacher could speak Irish and then say what they said in English.</p> <p>599. More interactive Irish learning things</p> <p>600. Having good teachers</p> <p>601. Talking Irish with each other</p> <p>602. I think there should be more Irish games as they help a lot and would make Irish so much more fun.</p> <p>603. Nothing</p> <p>604. I would like if we got to do sports and say it in Irish.</p> |
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|  | <p>605. Maybe to learn more things that would benefit us in real-life situations.</p> <p>606. Watching Irish programs</p> <p>607. If I had a better Irish teacher</p> <p>608. Explain it in English, then Irish</p> <p>609. If I had a new teacher because my teacher does not teach us well. He only talks in English and never teaches us anything from the book. He only tells us stories about his life. I wish we would not have to do Irish because no other country speaks it, and I find it useless.</p> <p>610. The teacher to speak Irish.</p> <p>611. Play more games and speak it aloud more often to make it more enjoyable.</p> <p>612. Play more games and don't learn everything so fast.</p> <p>613. I think if the teacher would use English to translate when we are reading or writing, I think it would help understand the words and help me learn new vocabulary.</p> <p>614. No offense, but a new teacher. Our current teacher doesn't really teach properly in my opinion. He talks about people's hairstyles a lot and tells us about himself, and while he is doing that, he speaks English. He makes a ton of jokes making everyone laugh, but</p> |
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|               | <p>I think we should be taught more. It's good to have a funny class every once in a while, but on most days, all students should be taught in order to do well in upcoming exams. That's what would make my experience of learning Irish better. Maybe for other students, they like learning through a lot of jokes, but me personally, definitely not.</p> <p>615. For teachers to find better ways of teaching the language and to make it more interesting.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Leinster – IM | <p>616. If my mother tried more to learn the language, maybe it'd help with mine (so I can help her)</p> <p>617. Make it more fun.</p> <p>618. If we could play Irish games and quizzes</p> <p>619. More trips about Irish history</p> <p>620. I think if the teachers put small games into Irish learning it would make it more enjoyable for non-Irish speakers.</p> <p>621. I don't think that it could be any better because I don't have any trouble learning Irish in school, but I would like to play more games in class that help the class learn Irish in a more fun way.</p> <p>622. Patient teachers and fun ways to learn that make it interesting.</p> <p>623. I would rather less classes during the week.</p> |

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|  | <p>624. I think that PowerPoints shared on Teams would help my experience of learning Irish better because then it will be very accessible if I want to do some work at home or study for a test.</p> <p>625. I think that there's not much the teachers aren't doing. They're explaining difficult words in simpler Irish words and if there is a must they say it in English. The one thing is that there isn't a lot of very good books in Irish so if more books would be made in Irish it would help learning the language.</p> <p>626. It would make it better if the teachers explained stuff more easily and gave us easier books to learn and to be able to write.</p> <p>627. If the teachers would explain it better and go over it instead of moving on</p> <p>628. Don't make us do so many novels and poems because it removes all the little enjoyment that can be retrieved. Focus more on useful conversation tools that we may actually use and stop making us feel like we are worse than those who grew up speaking Irish. Also, be stricter on people trying to use Irish to exclude kids from different countries that have recently moved.</p> <p>629. The thing that would make my Irish learning better is that the state tests for Irish were marked less harshly. Simply because we are in an Irish school, the English-speaking schools have the exact same paper as Irish schools for English but for Irish the marking</p> |
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|  | <p>scheme is terrible 55-75, that is too much of a difference for a Tuilteanas.</p> <p>630. Getting a bit more extra help by the teacher like they say it to me personally after they tell the whole class how to do it, they come over and explain it to me.</p> <p>631. Patient teachers and make it more interesting and fun!</p> <p>632. If we could read some more short Irish books, and do less of all the past tenses, present tenses, and future tenses because I know most of it already. If we could do more on learning new words and get the teacher to explain them well to us.</p> <p>633. I really don't know, maybe make a few interactive activities and make it more interesting and keep people more like paying attention to the class if you know what I mean.</p> <p>634. Group work would make my learning of Irish better and easier.</p> <p>635. Have the teachers explain stuff better.</p> <p>636. That the teachers explain stuff clearer and more games.</p> <p>637. To make it more clear and fun</p> <p>638. I think that if I were told the word in English, it would help me understand the word in Irish more. I</p> |
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|  | <p>also think that some words I haven't heard before should be explained through Irish.</p> <p>639. I would like if we were taught more Irish through a more fun way instead of constantly doing grammar. I would also like if teachers explained through English if a pupil doesn't understand instead of trying to explain something in Irish that we don't understand and refuse to say the English.</p> <p>640. Doing fun things in class often to make us look forward to Irish class and want to go more.</p> <p>641. If more people in English schools learnt the same as we do in Irish schools it would help Ireland be a better Irish-speaking country as it is our language and if we all spoke it, it would be good for the whole country to show that we are proud of our language.</p> <p>642. Maybe more speaking Irish tests because then the teachers would be able to know how well they can pronounce things and there is less stress on the student over spelling.</p> <p>643. I think that if we were to play fun games or play sports and other activities inside and outside of school through Irish it would encourage me and help me to speak Irish more often and to improve it as well. I think going on trips to different Gaeltacht or places where Irish can be spoken and learning about a certain monument or history through Irish on a trip would make me enjoy learning Irish and learning about Ireland's history also.</p> |
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|  | <p>644. To make my Irish learning experience better I would like better books.</p> <p>645. If we went to places where a lot of Irish history happened, I think it would help us enjoy the language more.</p> <p>646. To make it less of a punishment and encourage people to try their best.</p> <p>647. To watch movies in Irish and not have to read out loud if I don't want to.</p> <p>648. To play games and have more fun in class to give me a more enjoyable experience at learning Irish as I do not enjoy learning the language in school but it does help me talk to other people in school and help my mam and dad learn the language better than playing Duolingo. 😊😘</p> <p>649. If there is a word that is new, the teacher could give an English translation instead of explaining it in more confusing words in Irish.</p> <p>650. I think if we made it a fun language to teach by playing games and doing nice things, it would make it a lot more fun to listen to. I think I would definitely enjoy the subject a lot more if it was like that and an enjoyable, fun teacher that likes to teach that subject would be amazing because then if he/she enjoys it, I might enjoy it too.</p> |
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|  | 651. If we did fun activities to remember Irish words                                                                                                           |
|  | 652. It would make learning Irish better if we could do more projects with friends or work with friends. It makes learning easier and more enjoyable.           |
|  | 653. Ag dul go dtí an Gaeltacht le mo scoil gach bliain                                                                                                         |
|  | 654. Ag dul go dtí an Gaeltacht le mo rang i gach bliain                                                                                                        |
|  | 655. Making Irish fun like doing Irish games and a lot of stuff through Irish and everything in school in Irish                                                 |
|  | 656. Má raibh níos lú daoine ag cur isteach orm agus mé ag déanamh mo obair                                                                                     |
|  | 657. I do not know                                                                                                                                              |
|  | 658. I'm happy with it                                                                                                                                          |
|  | 659. If we did grammar and after learning it, we would do something different in groups and then grammar and so on.                                             |
|  | 660. To make it easier to learn Irish, if you don't follow the rules of Irish you should be punished and they have to learn more Irish if they break the rules. |
|  | 661. I think the learning experience is good and there's nothing missing.                                                                                       |
|  | 662. Ag dul go dtí an Gaeltacht le mo scoil gach bliain                                                                                                         |



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|  | <p>663. If there was a visit to the Gaeltacht in first year it would probably encourage me to try harder.</p> <p>664. I think going to the Gaeltacht twice a year with the school and doing other things in class would be better.</p> <p>665. I think it would make learning Irish easier if teachers would write the hard words on the board or the spellings of words on the board.</p> <p>666. To make my experience of learning Irish better, I would introduce more of a speaking environment instead of writing all the time. I sometimes find it more helpful to speak in Irish when trying to add Shéimú or similar than trying to remember what I wrote down in class.</p> <p>667. I don't know</p> <p>668. I think that if the teacher would do exercises with us to help us remember what we learned throughout the years of school. Because, for me, it's hard for me to remember the rules if we only go over it once, and then it gets stressful at the tests.</p> <p>669. If we could play games through Irish if we finish the work on time and if we could do less grammar and maybe read books in Irish</p> <p>670. Ag imirt níos mó cluichí chun an Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim + Leabhar Gaeilge spéisiúil</p> |
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|  | <p>671. I think that playing games would make Irish better as I can practice but still have fun.</p> <p>672. There is nothing that would make it better because it's already really good for learning Irish</p> <p>673. I'm in an Irish school but the learning system is old school. Like everything is done through Irish, maths, business, and are very difficult to do in Irish. I think though subjects like them should be done through English as when I go to college everything is done through English and we do Irish too much.</p> <p>674. Taitníonn an bealach a fhoghlaimimid Gaeilge go mór liom ach b'fhéidir má léimid níos mó leabhar suimiúla i nGaeilge beidh an t-ábhar níos suimiúla ar an iomlán!</p> <p>675. If we had a little bit more time to be able to get to talk to our friends and teachers more in Irish</p> <p>676. If in the class we would occasionally revise all the basic rules</p> <p>677. It would be made better if you could have no seating plan as you would be more social towards the people next to you and talk more Irish. It would also be nice if we had less homework.</p> <p>678. If it was taught a bit simpler to me, I think I would understand it and enjoy it a bit more</p> |
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|  | <p>679. Less homework would help with my experience better because there is no teacher to answer any questions. Even though my parents help if I need help, homework doesn't help me learn</p> <p>680. I think that Irish as a subject should be taught more seriously and less repetitively. Every year I went to school, the same stuff was taught again and again, e.g., Aimsir Chaite. I think it should be taught a bit more seriously and a bit more strictly. We mostly spend our time playing Irish games instead of learning.</p> <p>681. Make it more enjoyable and easier to understand and maybe speak a bit of English to help me understand better.</p> <p>682. I think that it would be better if we had Irish twice a week instead of three times a week and it would be more fun if we learned it through games sometimes instead of writing more.</p> <p>683. Muinteoirí deas nach bhfuil ró-dian orainn :)</p> <p>684. The experience that would make learning Irish that little bit better would be the option to be able to have someone else in the classroom to help if you don't understand a question in particular</p> <p>685. I feel as though I need to do more work on my Irish grammar and the way that I conduct myself while speaking in Irish. That being from a grammatical point of view. I feel as though I am enjoying learning</p> |
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|  | <p>through Irish and I look forward to the Irish class. My Irish teacher is very experienced with the Irish language and I feel like I will very much improve with him teaching us.</p> <p>686. No homework would help because it's a hard subject without people helping you where at home there's no teacher to help you with work and it's hard enough from doing more at home</p> <p>687. Learning it more</p> <p>688. Beidh cluiche Gaeilge go maith mar beidh mé agus duine eile a ghlac páirt níos fearr.</p> <p>689. That people would correct my mistakes in grammar. I think instead of giving out about using English, just help us understand more.</p> <p>690. I think that the Irish language is wonderful to learn about and I really enjoy it. Most of my family, aside from me, my mother, and sister, don't speak any Irish at all. They hate it, but I feel that is only because they can't speak it. I feel that if the people learning it should put more effort into learning the language. That would make my experience better. More people speaking it.</p> <p>691. Maybe in an Irish class you can make it a bit funnier?</p> <p>692. It would make experience better if sometimes in class the word nobody knows can be told in English</p> |
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|  | <p>so students could have a better understanding of the meaning of the word.</p> <p>693. I would like there to be more Irish classes and I would like to do games that would help improve my Irish</p> <p>694. Go to the Gaeltacht</p> <p>695. I think it would be better if there were more activities or groups in class. Or maybe some stuff on the iPads could also help too. More of listening and a little less reading and writing.</p> <p>696. To make my experience of learning Irish better would be if they did extra Irish.</p> <p>697. If more people learned Irish and more people would talk Irish in public.</p> <p>698. Ceapaim tosú leabhair Gaeilge a léamh sna ranganna i do aonair nó leis an rang ar fad mar cabhróidh sé le do chaint agus fiú conas rudaí a litriú i gceart agus ár foclóirín a mhéadú.</p> <p>699. I think to make my Irish learning experience better, don't just spend the full class learning grammar. Maybe learn grammar by reading a book, watching a show, or writing a story instead of just taking notes the whole class.</p> <p>700. If it was funnier and less writing and more games.</p> |
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|  | <p>701. I think that learning Irish would be better if everyone in the class was passionate about learning Irish and if we had breaks during or between classes in which we could relax and have conversations in Irish.</p> <p>702. If it was funnier and if you could watch documentaries on people speaking/or learning Irish and being able to speak fluently.</p> <p>703. If I was better at it and the classes were more fun.</p> <p>704. More fun in the classroom.</p> <p>705. If it was funnier.</p> <p>706. Nothing.</p> <p>707. I think if I went to the Gaeltacht a few times, it would expand my vocabulary in Irish and I'd get used to using it outside of school.</p> <p>708. I would like to not learn about Irish books or verbs or any doing words like stuff and spend less time in the Irish class learning about things like the briathra neamhrialta and Aidíochtaí and trying to sing English songs and translating them to Irish because it makes no sense to me to sing in Irish. The words aren't syncing to the English like the closer one of the lines in "Closer" is: "So baby pull me closer," but in Irish it's "So babín tarraing mé isteach," it makes no sense to me in my opinion, sorry.</p> |
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|  | <p>709. If it was less pressure and more fun and games involved.</p> <p>710. From someone in a Gaelcholáiste, Irish is just another subject we have to get through, as easy as English. So if this question is asking, “How to make learning Irish easier?” I won’t be much help. The way my school encourages the Irish language is punishments. If you’re caught speaking in English, you will get a “droch-nóta” (bad-note). Students hate this method, but it works. You could fix this by rewarding the Irish language. My school does this, but not nearly enough to make an impression. And it’s also not necessary to reward the Irish language, as we can all speak fluent Irish. You wouldn’t reward English being spoken in an English-speaking school. So why would you do something different for us? In my opinion, the only way to make learning Irish “better” is by making Irish lessons as fun as possible, and letting the students know what’s at stake if they do not use our language. Go raibh míle!</p> <p>711. More fun throughout the class.</p> <p>712. Béidir níos lú tógáil síos nótaí agus níos mó foghlaim faoi cad atá á dhéanamh agat ag an am sin.</p> <p>713. I could travel the world. I could do an interview in Irish, I could go on a television show because of Irish. I could go on a radio station because of knowing Irish. It could be useful in life, and lastly, I could teach students Irish if I were a teacher, or people could teach others Irish when they’re here. Like when exchange</p> |
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|  | <p>students come over from other countries, and then when they go back home, they can tell all of their friends and family and then teach them Irish, and then they tell everyone else, and at that point, everyone will know a tiny bit of Irish.</p> <p>714. Learning more about the culture.</p> <p>715. More.</p> <p>716. I don't know?</p> <p>717. A more interesting way of learning the language would help make it less tedious and dull for students, and easier to pay attention instead of getting distracted.</p> <p>718. I think it would be beneficial to do chapter summaries whilst reading the novels, as sometimes the storyline can be confusing and difficult to process.</p> <p>719. AN GAELTACHT!!!!!!</p> <p>720. Nothing really.</p> <p>721. Less writing and something new.</p> <p>722. Ag déanamh an rang níos spraoiúla agus nach ag déanamh scríobhneoireacht an rang ar fad.</p> <p>723. I go to a fully Irish school so I find it easy enough, maybe just more games during Irish classes rather than writing notes.</p> |
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|  | <p>724. If we played kahoots and made songs to remember aimsir chaite or whatever.</p> <p>725. If we didn't get in trouble for not speaking Irish.</p> <p>726. More trips to the Gaeltacht.</p> <p>727. More games, more learning with different stuff, not just notes and reading. More acting, more fun stuff would get people like me to enjoy learning Irish a bit more.</p> <p>728. I go to an Irish school, so I only struggle with certain things, but maybe some fun activities during class and more ways to learn our language would be a good idea because I don't think there's many clubs outside of school to speak Irish with my friends, and as for people in English schools, they only get Irish classes which maybe they don't like and want to learn it outside of school in a fun way.</p> <p>729. If there were more chances to speak Irish outside of school.</p> <p>730. I think going to the Gaeltacht every year would really benefit my learning in Irish because it's nice to experience living in a world where only Irish exists.</p> <p>731. If we don't get in trouble for not speaking Irish.</p> <p>732. Make it more fun and interactive than just reading and writing.</p> |
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|  | <p>733. Ba m'aimínghrúpa chaora toilets.</p> <p>734. More fun in the class instead of lessons all of the time.</p> <p>735. Maybe if we didn't have such strict teachers that give out all the time.</p> <p>736. If we did not have to read Irish books.</p> <p>737. Make it more fun than just sitting in a class taking notes.</p> <p>738. Involving games and conversational language instead of verbs and understanding not everyone finds it enjoyable.</p> <p>739. Níos mó Gaeilge ó béal seachas ag léamh.</p> <p>740. No homework.</p> <p>741. If the school taught Irish better to make it more enjoyable.</p> <p>742. Week of just speaking English.</p> <p>743. Using English in the Irish class to explain words would help me learn.</p> <p>744. I'd like to do more activities that encourage Irish as it's hard to remember to constantly speak Irish, especially when there are such dire consequences for</p> |
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|  | <p>speaking English when English is our first language. I feel as though I should be allowed to speak a little English without the consequences for speaking it.</p> <p>745. Is breá liom Gaeilge &amp; na ranganna Gaeilge ach beidh sé níos fearr má bhí na leabhair a léann muid níos suimiúla. An chuid is mó den am bíonn na úrscéal Gaeilge saghas seafóideach &amp; leadránach. Seachas sin is breá liom ag foghlaim Gaeilge ar scoil, ag labhairt Gaeilge le mo chairde &amp; ag labhairt Gaeilge sa bhaile, ceapaim go bhfuil sé mar cheann de na hábhair is tábhactaí.</p> <p>746. I think if they took the lessons slower and helped by explaining in English and not giving droch nótaí out for saying something because we might not know or understand that easily.</p> <p>747. Níos mó piotsa.</p> <p>748. If I didn't feel judged every time I raise my hand in class to answer a question and I feel like if there were more fun things to do to learn Irish like in school activities and just make Irish fun to learn, listening to Irish music and watching Irish films and all like Kneecap or something, and learn more about Irish culture but in Irish.</p> <p>749. Make it less boring and more fun.</p> <p>750. If I would be able to play football while speaking Irish, it would be great.</p> |
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|  | <p>751. I think it would help if we were able to use our phones to help us, and even better, let us wear our own clothes.</p> <p>752. Better stories written in Irish.</p> <p>753. Going through topics a bit slower.</p> <p>754. Watching more Irish movies.</p> <p>755. If we went to the Gaeltacht more.</p> <p>756. Chapter summaries after reading novels because it's difficult to understand the plot line.</p> <p>757. Béidir ag dul chuig an Gaeltacht níos mó, agus ar thréimhse níos faide. Beidh sé an spraoiúil mar is breá liom an Gaeltacht agus ceapaim gur aontíonn roinnt daoine liomsa.</p> <p>758. If we didn't get in trouble for speaking English.</p> <p>759. I don't know exactly what would make it better, but I think that it's a different language and it needs to be taught in a different way, but it isn't. It's a very unique language but it's treated like any other.</p> <p>760. Games like Kahoots to help learn and remember things better so it's not as boring as just writing notes.</p> <p>761. Personally, with my experience of learning Irish, I have found it very interesting and the Irish subject helps me with a lot of things. I find when we are in the</p> |
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|  | <p>Irish class that when we are reading Irish books, it makes me lose interest in the subject... I would love to go to the Gaeltacht again; that would help me learn a lot more Irish.</p> <p>762. If we could listen to the Irish book instead of reading as well as reading it. If we did more fun things to learn it.</p> <p>763. I think by making Irish a more fun and enjoyable subject, it would help, also by covering interesting topics. I have friends in English-speaking schools who do the same topic from first class to first year, and that won't really help promote the Irish language one bit. Also, I think that Irish should be made more important than foreign languages such as English, German, French, etc., in school. More time should be spent in English primary schools to teach them the grammar in Irish so that they are not making simple mistakes. I also believe that in a few years, we should switch over to Irish language schools only so that the Irish language would be more prominent and used.</p> <p>764. Béidh mo tháim ag foghlaim Gaeilge níos fearr má labhraímid níos mó faoin gcultúr atá ag an teanga agus an bealach go bhfuil an teanga chomh speisialta seachas díreach ag foghlaim rudaí mar gramadach!</p> <p>765. I understand that this is an Irish school, but the way the teachers deal with people speaking in English is a bit harsh. I also shouldn't be expected to have perfect grammar in Irish. I have spoken English all my life, and I still make mistakes in my grammar.</p> |
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|  | <p>766. Playing sport in school.</p> <p>767. If the teachers spent more time trying to make learning Irish more enjoyable rather than making it feel like a chore, then it would be more interesting and encourage people to learn Irish. Although not a lot of teachers do it, some teachers don't teach, they only read off of a PowerPoint, which leaves students confused and makes them believe that Irish is much harder than it needs to be. Instead of always just doing work, if we did activities sometimes as well, like Blookets or Kahoots, to help us learn things, it would be easier for people who have trouble learning in class to take in the information better.</p> <p>768. Smaller classes would make it easier to learn Irish.</p> <p>769. Maybe the teachers saying what the words mean in English or a simpler explanation because I feel they talk too fast and it's hard to understand what they are saying sometimes, but I do have difficulty understanding what people say because if someone is talking to me, I feel like their voice isn't coming out of their mouth and somewhere else, so it's harder to learn with every subject, and I'm not sure if I should say, I would like to know what I can do to understand people speaking better.</p> <p>770. Níos lú gramadaí a drilláil isteach in ár gceann, níos spraoiúil.</p> <p>771. Learning Irish culture.</p> |
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|  | <p>772. I think my experience would be better if we could watch Irish movies in class and do more games instead of writing out notes because most people don't learn from notes; they learn from fun activities, including myself.</p> <p>773. Probably going to the Gaeltacht and immersing in the language. Meet others that have similar levels of Irish and learn with them. Try your best to watch TV as Gaeilge and understand.</p> <p>774. Games.</p> <p>775. Learning more Irish</p> <p>776. I think if we got an extra Irish class a week we would learn more Irish and get even better at it. I also think doing activities outside of school in Irish will really help me improve. For example, the Gaeltacht or an event where you can only speak Irish. Those are the things that would make my experience of learning Irish better.</p> <p>777. More help</p> <p>778. My experience would be made easier and better if we didn't read as many Irish books, as I find them boring and difficult to understand. I prefer writing out notes as it helps me remember things and it is easier to look back on. Irish lessons are very serious, and I think I would enjoy them more if they were more fun.</p> |
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|  | <p>For example, if we played games or did quizzes more often.</p> <p>779. If the things that are read in Irish don't have a lot of new Irish that doesn't make sense, or if there is, make sure that the English of the word is beside it so I know what is going on.</p> <p>780. I dislike how teachers give the students bad notes and ceim bearla because we are the ones who joined the Irish school and shouldn't get punished for speaking a bit of our own language when we are surrounded by people who speak English, whether it is in our family or friends around us. We put the effort into getting ready and going to a full Irish school to learn our native language while others go to English schools. I think it's very unfair to give out ceim. 😊</p> <p>781. I think that the Irish course is very repetitive, and the way it is taught is hard to understand. Often, too much grammar is thrown at you at once, and it is hard to make sense of it all. I personally think that reading Irish books with very complex and advanced Irish is very beneficial.</p> <p>782. As someone who speaks Irish fluently, I think the best way to learn Irish is to be exposed to the language and to be around it and people who speak it as much as possible. I find it's a great way to pick up the language. Something like going to the Gaeltacht is a great way to learn because I feel like they don't teach it properly in English-speaking schools.</p> |
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|  | <p>783. I think being able to work more on grammar and asking more questions would definitely make my experience of learning Irish better as I don't really ask many questions in class, whereas if I did, I think I would have a better understanding of it. Also, I think doing games and working in groups when learning Irish can also be helpful to make the experience fun, and also that you're still learning a lot.</p> <p>784. I feel to make my learning experience better, more outdoor activities showing us what everything is rather than telling us and making us sit in a classroom all day.</p> <p>785. Sa bhunscoil chaith mé am ag scríobh scéalta as Gaeilge agus cheapaim go mbeidh sé suimiúil agus cabhrach má dhearna mé é sin arís.</p> <p>786. I think it would help if the teachers made PowerPoints or notes and put them up on Teams so that we could use them if we need them to study or do homework. I also think doing more games like Kahoots or Blookets would make the class more fun and interesting. I also think making a OneNote for Irish would help.</p> <p>787. I think that my school does a good job since it is an Irish school, but maybe they could make learning the grammar a bit easier somehow because even though I'm fluent at speaking it, I struggle with the grammar. My friends in English schools, on the other hand, are terrible at speaking Irish, and quite a lot of English schoolgoers I've met hate the language, which</p> |
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|  | <p>personally I believe is completely the fault of the education system and how Irish is taught in English schools. I'm sure you'll see a lot of people from English schools saying they hate the language, and honestly, I don't blame them. I probably would too if I was being taught like that. It's truly a shame how little the education system here and our government care about preserving and saving what little we have left of our language. I think we, as a country, need to do better with Irish, but on a positive note, there seems to be a resurgence of Irish in media for young people, especially, and that might help with the learning of Irish.</p> <p>788. Nothing</p> <p>789. What would make my experience of learning Irish better would be learning more Irish songs and translating some English songs into Irish so we can sing them together. Another would be to have more Gaeltachts and fun ones where you can sing, like the ones you would see in music videos, such as Cheerleader. I enjoy watching that music video, and I would like to see more of that and be able to go in the future. I feel like I would enjoy it a lot.</p> <p>790. If we were to do more than just learn poems and stories in Irish. For example, games in Irish or conversations together in Irish in Irish class.</p> <p>791. I think if we had different activities like filming a video through Irish or watching a short film through Irish, it would help learning Irish. I know we still have</p> |
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|  | <p>notes to write, but if some of my suggestions were used, it would help.</p> <p>792. Níl</p> <p>793. I think if second year could go to the Gaeltacht again, that would be really good because it was really enjoyable and fun, but as well as all that, I found that I was speaking more Irish, picking up new words, and really learning the Irish culture through our native language. My year and I really enjoyed it and thought it was one of the best trips, and it nearly pushed us to speak Irish more. So, I personally think that we should go to the Gaeltacht again because it really helped us understand our language.</p> <p>794. I am already fluent in Irish since I went to an all-Irish primary school where no English was spoken. However, I have a lot of friends who go to English schools and can barely have a conversation in Irish. I think that this is because their Irish teachers expect them to be able to speak Irish, and they would benefit from Irish being taught to them as if they don't have a word of it.</p> <p>795. I think that maybe if we did more fun things in the Irish class, that would make it better, and even though we already have visited the Gaeltacht this year, I think it would be good if we did it again before fourth year. Also, I think that the base classes should be mixed up during the Irish lesson so that we can have time to be with our other friends instead of always being with the same people.</p> |
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|                | <p>796. If I were to go to Irish places like the Gaeltacht, etc.</p> <p>797. Nothing</p> <p>798. Better stuff to do when learning it and more interactive ways to learn the language.</p> <p>799. To make my Irish learning experience more enjoyable, I think I would need to work harder to understand things and words a little bit better. Also, maybe simplify some things as I feel I'm a little bit slower and less intelligent when it comes to remembering certain new words or terms. Overall, I enjoy learning my language as I feel it's a very important thing in all of our lives, and I hope one day we can all know a little more than we do now.</p> |
| Gaeltacht Deis | <p>800. If I understood it more</p> <p>801. Knowing how to spell better</p> <p>802. I live in the Gaeltacht and it's very unfair that we have to do a higher-level test because we live here. I am doing Higher Level Irish and in my school they encourage us to speak Irish, and we are only allowed to. To make it better to learn, I'd say that there should be more stuff on the internet like <i>focloir.ie</i>. I use it all the time when I'm stuck with my homework. But the only show that I know of that's in Irish is <i>Ros na Rún</i>, and there should be more. Just like English, it would be nicer to do film studies in Irish.</p>                  |

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|  | <p>803. Make it more fun to learn Irish and force the public to try harder to speak it.</p> <p>804. I want more Irish-speaking courses.</p> <p>805. No T1 for people in the Gaeltacht, or if it was to be kept, why don't schools that aren't in the Gaeltacht do T1 in English tests?</p> <p>806. Nothing</p> <p>807. The grammar needs to be changed because I think that is why people are not so keen on the subject.</p> <p>808. Nothing ;-;</p> <p>809. If my Irish was better, it could make things easier. However, I choose not to speak it due to the fact that everyone in Conamara speaks English fluently. Also, I find it very hard to answer questions in Irish, such as questions where you must translate the English sentences into Irish, I find that very difficult. So in conclusion, I believe I could benefit from more assistance learning Irish.</p> <p>810. We did more things like Kahoot</p> <p>811. If there were more shows/series in Irish. For example: if Netflix added Irish to their language options, we could watch our favourite shows while learning.</p> <p>812. I do not know</p> |
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| Munster - EMAD | <p>813. If it was more practical-based and not just sit down and listen, games, Kahoots, etc.</p> <p>814. If I could go into town and speak Irish to people and have them understand what I am saying.</p> <p>815. Incorporate more fun activities in learning, and if necessary, speak in English to explain more clearly.</p> <p>816. If the teacher would explain more things in the classroom, even if it's just new little words.</p> <p>817. Nothing</p> <p>818. Irish games</p> <p>819. If we could learn Irish by doing fun things like games.</p> <p>820. If we could go to the Gaeltacht, meet other schools who speak Gaeilge, and teach it to English-speaking schools. I think it's a disgrace that our massacred language is ignored more than helped, it is terrible.</p> <p>821. Nothing, because my Irish teacher is brilliant.</p> <p>822. Learning the Irish culture</p> <p>823. Not doing it</p> <p>824. No</p> |
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|               | <p>825. Getting rid of it</p> <p>826. Not giving Irish homework and tests</p> <p>827. Games in class</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Leinster - IM | <p>828. Speaking it more often outside of school</p> <p>829. I think that more Irish activities outside of school would make my experience better</p> <p>830. It would make it better if we watched more videos</p> <p>831. More people speaking it in school</p> <p>832. I don't know</p> <p>833. I think if people cared more for the Irish language and put more effort in, it would make it much more enjoyable, as well as maybe more trips for a chance to speak Irish outside of school and with my friends</p> <p>834. Meeting more people who have the language by going to events, the Gaeltacht, etc.</p> <p>835. Idk lol 🙄😏</p> <p>836. Níl mé cinnte</p> <p>837. Try ask for more help with understanding certain words</p> <p>838. If harder words got explained more</p> |

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|  | 839. Playing Irish games                                                                                                                                                |
|  | 840. I would like to play games in Irish                                                                                                                                |
|  | 841. What would make it better would be maybe more sports in Irish or overall activities in Irish to inspire more to speak it, maybe more Irish schools etc.            |
|  | 842. If there were a bit more extracurricular activities outside of the school                                                                                          |
|  | 843. Speak more out of school                                                                                                                                           |
|  | 844. Nothing                                                                                                                                                            |
|  | 845. If we were watching Irish shows every Irish class                                                                                                                  |
|  | 846. More activities and not so much writing                                                                                                                            |
|  | 847. I learn by using pictures and easily broken-down words. I don't understand big, bold words very well                                                               |
|  | 848. If we did more fun games in Irish                                                                                                                                  |
|  | 849. If the curriculum was not so focused on making the students' Irish dictionary bigger, and tried to focus on grammar and their reading and spelling the words right |
|  | 850. I don't know                                                                                                                                                       |



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|  | <p>851. More entertaining ways of teaching us, as just writing notes and reciting can get quite boring</p> <p>852. It would make it better if everyone spoke Irish all the time, even at lunch, so then it would be a lot better</p> <p>853. More trips and fun things revolving around the Irish language</p> <p>854. Making the Irish lessons a little more fun while learning, because I find that better</p> <p>855. A teacher who enjoys and is good at teaching</p> <p>856. More help if I didn't understand some pieces</p> <p>857. To show us more Irish-speaking songs and videos to help with Irish being applied to things you'd see or hear daily</p> <p>858. I think if we involved games in our Irish class it would help improve our Irish because we are having fun while learning</p> <p>859. If we did more experiences through Irish and had more days about Irish to make it more fun, such as Gaeilge 24</p> <p>860. More reading different novels in Irish would help, if the novels were more interesting and had a more engaging storyline to help intrigue people into reading them</p> |
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|                  | <p>861. I think if we involved more games and read more books it would improve our Irish and give us more chances to learn</p> <p>862. Less homework</p> <p>863. If we learned more Irish rather than just reading books</p> <p>864. More outside activities</p> <p>865. More outside activities</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Ulster – EM Deis | <p>866. If we made learning Irish fun with games</p> <p>867. Maybe involving more games would make the class time more fun</p> <p>868. More games</p> <p>869. Maybe watch some videos or more games</p> <p>870. More fun activities maybe</p> <p>871. Translate everything the teacher says into English, as I have no clue half the time what they are saying</p> <p>872. I think I would have a better experience if I could understand the words better. I feel as if there was a dictionary work class</p> <p>873. If we were separated into classes more suited to our own level</p> |

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|  | <p>874. Nothing really, I think the way we learn Irish in our secondary school is perfect</p> <p>875. The use of visual and oral resources to show what the word is and how to say the word</p> <p>876. Less writing things in our copies</p> <p>877. I think Irish should be taught like other foreign languages. Many important concepts are skipped over and only slightly mentioned, so marks are lost in exams. I don't notice this issue in other subjects. I don't like how you could be barred from good colleges because you can't speak Irish. Jobs are really hard to get and the stress of exams and knowing your future relies on it is NOT a nice feeling</p> <p>878. For example, if we get to play a game, maybe do it in Irish</p> <p>879. If the teachers can start from the basics because I started learning Irish at 11 years old and still find Irish really difficult to understand, so I fall behind in class and struggle with the language</p> <p>880. Games and doing fun stuff</p> <p>881. No Irish and maybe more games, and try to speak more English because I don't speak Irish</p> <p>882. More learning of Irish in school</p> |
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|  | <p>883. I think that since we don't get an opportunity to speak Irish outside of school, there isn't much point learning it. Although it might be the area that I live in, I think people should start speaking Irish in shops</p> <p>884. More extra help</p> <p>885. Not having to put words in front of other words</p> <p>886. Making it more enjoyable with artwork and whatnot</p> <p>887. Irish games or Kahoot and Duolingo</p> <p>888. My Irish learning experience would be better if Irish was taught at a slower pace</p> <p>889. More interactive learning</p> <p>890. Maybe being required to use Irish dictionaries, but I'm not really sure</p> <p>891. More conversational lessons rather than literature</p> <p>892. Learn more, try to put my hand up more, and try to ask people who know more Irish than me to help me</p> <p>893. Learning conversational Irish instead of poems/stories</p> <p>894. Learn more and put my hand up more in lessons and try harder</p> |
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|  | <p>895. Focusing on conversational Irish rather than literature would make it far easier to learn. Learning the most common conversational phrases would be far better than reading something you don't understand</p> <p>896. More chances to speak Irish rather than just focusing on the grammar, more interactive lessons, and more focus on Irish pronunciation</p> <p>897. A better teacher</p> <p>898. Doing more activities in Irish would make my experience of learning it better</p> <p>899. Something that would make my experience of learning Irish better would be speaking and reading it out loud rather than only doing mainly grammar and written work</p> <p>900. I think if there were more websites like Duolingo that make it fun to learn, it would make learning Irish much easier</p> <p>901. The way Irish is taught is wrong. For example, I know Spanish better than Irish. I have been doing Spanish for 1 and a bit years, and I have been learning Irish for 8. If they taught it the same as other languages, we would be able to speak Irish</p> <p>902. More conversation learning instead of poems and stories, more use of Duolingo or websites like it, and slow down the listening exercises</p> |
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|  | <p>903. No grammar or poems or stories</p> <p>904. I think that it would be far more interesting for me if we actually got to speak and not be writing stuff down and reading poems or stories because they don't help me understand and they are boring. I think we need to speak more and do more communication work because then I will remember it</p> <p>905. I'd like to listen to more songs in Gaeilge</p> <p>906. Don't know</p> <p>907. If there were more enjoyable topics involved in the class or more games to help us learn how to spell words in Irish</p> <p>908. Games, Duolingo, and activities not out of books</p> <p>909. Irish games or more Irish speaking</p> <p>910. More games and more interesting topics</p> <p>911. If we did more games</p> <p>912. More games</p> |
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## 9.20 Appendix 20: Pilot teacher interview schedule

### Teacher Observations and Experiences

#### Teacher Interview Schedule (Linked to Student Data Findings)

#### PILOT

| Section                                                            | Interview prompts                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Link to student data findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
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| <b>Section 1:<br/>Teaching background and classroom experience</b> | <p>1. What is your own linguistic background and first language?</p> <p>2. Do you have experience of teaching Irish in Irish-medium and/or English-medium post-primary settings? In which context are you currently teaching?</p> <p>3. Are you aware of the linguistic backgrounds of your students? Is this information assumed, shared by school management, or something you actively try to find out?</p> <p>4. How do you feel about teaching Irish in a multilingual classroom? How do students' language backgrounds affect their learning of Irish?</p> | <p>Student survey and open-ended responses indicated that many learners come from multilingual backgrounds. Some students expressed confidence in managing multiple languages, while others reported limited exposure to Irish outside school. Narrative data also suggested that some multilingual students felt connected to languages used at home, such as French or Italian, but less connected to Irish.</p> |
| <b>Section 2:<br/>Classroom Irish and spoken participation</b>     | <p>5. How often do students speak Irish in class? Do you think this is enough?</p> <p>6. What methods do you find most effective in supporting students' spoken Irish?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>Student data highlighted a need for more speaking practice, particularly in informal and meaningful contexts. Some students reported that classroom Irish was often limited to greetings, instructions, or short teacher-led exchanges. Narrative interviews also suggested that some students felt their spoken Irish had declined after moving from primary to post-primary settings.</p>                     |

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| <b>Section 3:<br/>Motivation and<br/>identity</b>     | <p>7. What motivates your students to learn Irish?</p> <p>8. Do multilingual students appear to have different reasons for learning Irish?</p> <p>9. Is there anything you actively do to motivate students to learn Irish? Do you use any specific approaches with multilingual students?</p> <p>10. Do you think learning Irish helps students feel connected to Irish culture or community? How do you encourage this?</p> | <p>Survey and narrative data suggested that students' motivation was shaped by cultural identity, family influence, perceived usefulness, and personal connection to the language. Some students viewed Irish as central to identity and belonging, while others saw it as culturally important but less practical for future careers or everyday communication.</p> |
| <b>Section 4:<br/>Challenges and<br/>support</b>      | <p>11. What are the main challenges students face when learning Irish?</p> <p>12. How do you support students who struggle with Irish?</p> <p>13. How do you adapt your teaching for students with different levels of Irish, especially those with less exposure to the language outside school?</p>                                                                                                                         | <p>Student responses identified challenges relating to grammar, vocabulary, fluency, confidence, and limited opportunities to use Irish outside school. Differences were also evident between students with experience of Irish-speaking homes or immersion schooling and those with little exposure beyond the classroom.</p>                                       |
| <b>Section 5:<br/>Language use<br/>and engagement</b> | <p>14. How do you encourage students to use Irish outside class?</p> <p>15. What could help students use Irish more in real-life situations?</p> <p>16. What strategies or changes would improve</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <p>Student data showed a desire for more real-life use of Irish and more opportunities to practice the language in meaningful contexts. Students also expressed interest in more interactive, enjoyable and dynamic approaches, including games, videos, technology, trips, and extracurricular activities.</p>                                                      |



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|                                                                    | students' engagement with Irish in school?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Section 6:<br/>Confidence,<br/>resources and<br/>future use</b> | <p>17. What role do extracurricular activities or media play in motivating students to learn Irish?</p> <p>18. How do you help students feel more confident using Irish?</p> <p>19. Do students see themselves using Irish in the future, for example in their career, community or personal life?</p> <p>20. How do you think the current Irish language curriculum and available resources support students' learning?</p> <p>21. What improvements or changes would you recommend to better support students, especially those with less exposure to Irish outside school?</p> | <p>Student survey and narrative data indicated that many students lacked confidence in using Irish and were unsure of its relevance beyond school. Students suggested that more speaking activities, role-play, discussion, technology, media, and real-world opportunities could make Irish learning more engaging and meaningful.</p> |

9.21 Appendix 21: Abbreviated teacher interview schedule (linked to student data findings)

| Section                                                            | Abbreviated teacher interview prompts                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Link to student data findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Section 1:<br/>Teaching background and classroom experience</b> | <p>1. What is your linguistic background and mother tongue?</p> <p>2. What type of school context do you currently teach in: Irish-medium or English-medium? What other experience do you have of teaching Irish?</p> <p>3. How aware are you of your students' linguistic backgrounds? Is this something you actively find out, or are you told by the school?</p> <p>4. What other languages are taught in your school, and how does multilingualism impact students' learning of Irish?</p> <p>5. How often do students speak Irish in class, and what strategies help them use it more?</p> | <p>Student data suggested that many learners came from multilingual backgrounds, while students from non-Irish-speaking homes often experienced limited exposure to Irish outside school. Some multilingual students described stronger connections to home or additional languages than to Irish. Indicative comments included: "My mom speaks French, so I hear that all the time. Irish, not so much." Students also expressed frustration about limited speaking opportunities: "The most Irish we speak is just greeting the teacher."</p> |
| <b>Section 2:<br/>Motivation and identity</b>                      | <p>6. What motivates students to learn Irish?</p> <p>7. Do multilingual students appear to have different motivations for learning Irish?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <p>Student data indicated that motivation was shaped by cultural identity, family influence, perceived usefulness, and personal connection to the language. Some students viewed Irish as integral to identity and future family life: "I want to pass on the Irish language to my children in the future." Others recognised the heritage value of Irish but questioned its everyday relevance: "Irish is a dying</p>                                                                                                                          |

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|                                                   | 8. How do you foster a sense of cultural connection through Irish?                                                                                                                                                                                                             | language, so we should keep learning it in school and speaking it outside school.”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Section 3:<br/>Challenges and support</b>      | <p>9. What are the biggest challenges students face in learning Irish?</p> <p>10. How do you support students who struggle?</p> <p>11. How do you adapt your teaching for students with different levels of Irish, particularly those with little exposure outside school?</p> | <p>Students identified challenges relating to grammar, vocabulary, confidence, fluency, and limited use of Irish outside school. Exposure emerged as an important factor in fluency and retention: “I’d like to speak it more, but no one else really does.” Some students from English-medium settings also described a decline in spoken Irish after primary school: “We did loads of Irish in primary school, but now it’s mostly comprehensions.”</p>                                                                            |
| <b>Section 4:<br/>Language use and engagement</b> | <p>12. How do you encourage students to use Irish beyond the classroom?</p> <p>13. What would help increase real-life usage of Irish?</p> <p>14. What teaching strategies or changes could enhance student engagement?</p>                                                     | <p>Students wanted more real-life opportunities to use Irish and more dynamic approaches to learning. Many felt there was a gap between school-based Irish and everyday language use: “I never use Irish outside of school. We need more real-world opportunities to speak it.” Students also requested more active and interactive learning: “I’d like more speaking activities, like role-playing or discussions.”</p>                                                                                                             |
| <b>Section 5:<br/>Confidence and future use</b>   | <p>15. How do extracurricular activities and media impact students’ motivation and confidence in Irish?</p> <p>16. How do you build students’ confidence in speaking Irish?</p>                                                                                                | <p>Student data indicated uncertainty about the long-term relevance of Irish, although some students expressed pride in their abilities and a willingness to use Irish in community contexts: “I’ll probably use it in my community but not in my career.” Extracurricular experiences, particularly Gaeltacht trips, were described as beneficial for confidence and fluency: “Going to the Gaeltacht really helped me a lot.” Students also highlighted the value of interactive and technology-supported learning: “Games and</p> |

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|  | <p>17. Do students see themselves using Irish in the future, for example in their career, community, or personal life?</p> <p>18. How well do the current curriculum and available resources support students? What improvements would you suggest?</p> | <p>apps like Duolingo make learning Irish fun. We should use them more in school.”</p> |
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## 9.22 Appendix 22: Common themes from L1 & L2 teacher experiences

### Common Themes from L1 Teachers' Experiences

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Multilingualism in the Gaeltacht - The Unexpected Shift</b><br/> <i>"Over the past three years, I've noticed an increasing number of students with little to no Irish, which surprises me considering our school's immersion setting."</i> </li> </ul>               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Linguistic Shock Among Gaeltacht Students</b><br/> <i>"Some of our L1 students don't realise how little Irish they actually have until they try to use it outside school. Then it hits them."</i> </li> </ul>                                                        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>The Confidence Crisis – Fluent Students Choosing English</b><br/> <i>"One of the things that breaks my heart is hearing fluent speakers choose to speak English instead. Why? Why are you abandoning your language?"</i> </li> </ul>                                 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Grammar Paradox – L2 Students Stronger than L1 Students</b><br/> <i>"I've found that L2 students often have a better grasp of grammatical concepts than L1 students."</i> </li> </ul>                                                                                |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Gaeltacht Schools Under Surveillance</b><br/> <i>"We're a scoil Gaeltachta, and we're constantly being inspected, are we teaching in Irish? Are we offering extra Irish? But at the same time, we're accommodating students with very little Irish."</i> </li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Peer Pressure and the 'Silent Irish Speaker'</b><br/> <i>"Teenagers are really insecure at that age. If they start speaking Irish and no one else does, they feel embarrassed."</i> </li> </ul>                                                                      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>'The Gaelscoil Bubble' Bursts in Secondary School</b><br/> <i>"The biggest challenge with the Gaelscoil students is for them to realise they're not amazing. It's awful to say, but they do think they know it all and they don't."</i> </li> </ul>                  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Shifting Identity - Do They Still See Themselves as Irish Speakers?</b><br/> <i>"Some students grow up speaking Irish but never see themselves as 'true' Irish speakers because their social life happens in English."</i> </li> </ul>                               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Pressure on L1 Students to Carry the Language</b><br/> <i>"L1 students feel the weight of responsibility. They know they're</i> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                          |

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| <p><i>expected to be the ones keeping Irish alive, and that can be exhausting for them.”</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>The Struggle to Maintain Intergenerational Irish</b> <p><i>“Their parents spoke Irish at home, but the students switch to English. It’s a hard habit to break, even if they’re fluent.”</i></p> </li> </ul>                                                    |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Student Resistance to Writing in Irish</b> <p><i>“I have students who can hold a full conversation in Irish, but if you ask them to write, they freeze.”</i></p> </li> </ul>                                                                                   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>The Social Stigma of Speaking Irish in Public</b> <p><i>“I had a student tell me they were laughed at in the shop for ordering in Irish. That kind of thing makes them hesitate.”</i></p> </li> </ul>                                                          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>The Battle Between Irish and English Media Consumption</b> <p><i>“They’re fluent in Irish, but they watch everything in English, listen to English music, follow English-speaking influencers. That’s where the real challenge is.”</i></p> </li> </ul>        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Gaeltacht Schools No Longer Guarantee Fluency</b> <p><i>“Just because a student is in a Gaeltacht school doesn’t mean they’ll leave with Irish. More and more, we’re seeing students choosing English whenever they can.”</i></p> </li> </ul>                  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>The Disappearance of the Oral Exam and Its Consequences</b> <p><i>“Since the oral is gone, by the time they reach fifth year, we have to actively build up their confidence again, even getting them to read out loud can be a challenge.”</i></p> </li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Lack of Academic Support for Strong Irish Speakers</b> <p><i>“If a student is weak, they get supports. But what about the fluent students who need to be challenged? There’s nothing for them.”</i></p> </li> </ul>                                            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>The Passive Fluent Speaker – Understands Everything but Won’t Speak</b> <p><i>“I have students who understand 100% of what I say, but they’ll still respond in English.”</i></p> </li> </ul>                                                                   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>The Role of Traditional Irish Music and Culture in Identity</b> <p><i>“Some of my students are really engaged with the language because</i></p> </li> </ul>                                                                                                    |

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| <i>they're into sean-nós singing or Irish trad music. That keeps it alive for them."</i>                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Bilingual Workforce - An Untapped Motivation?</b><br/><i>"Many students didn't realise they could get good jobs with Irish. Once they see the opportunities, they change their attitude."</i></li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The L1/L2 System - A Failing Model?</b><br/><i>"No, I'm not happy with it at all. I think the L1 and L2 system is a disaster."</i></li> </ul>                                                                |

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### Common Themes from L2 Teachers' Experiences

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Over 70 Nationalities in One School - The Multilingual Irish Classroom</b><br/><i>"On the L2 side of our school, we have over 70 nationalities, so you've got a massive mix in both levels. I have a little Russian student, a couple of Polish students... Some who have other languages at home but were born in Ireland. You've got all the combinations. It's so multicultural."</i></li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Students Who 'Fake' Not Knowing Irish</b><br/><i>"Some students who claim, 'Oh, I don't have any Irish,' when they do. They're well able, they're just being lazy."</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The False Equivalence Between Irish and Foreign Languages</b><br/><i>"In Spanish, students are starting from zero, but in Irish, some are fluent, and some can barely say a sentence. The curriculum doesn't account for that difference."</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                           |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Shock of Multilingual Students Excelling at Irish</b><br/><i>"I have kids from all over the world learning Irish, and sometimes they are the top of the class."</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Exemptions Are Not Always About Ability</b><br/><i>"You can see the nationality gap feeding into the exemption numbers."</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Technology in the Classroom - A Game-Changer or a Crutch?</b><br/><i>"Duolingo only goes so far, but the confidence it builds is great."</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Grammar is a Crisis, But Repetition Helps</b><br/><i>“Repetition, repetition, repetition, especially with the weaker classes, that's what I find works for me.”</i></li> </ul>                                                                                         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Intimidation by Gaelscoil Students</b><br/><i>“There is big intimidation there.”</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Dying Art of Reading Aloud</b><br/><i>“Even getting them to read out loud can be a challenge.”</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Practicality is the Key to Motivation</b><br/><i>“We should teach them how to use Irish online and in everyday interactions.”</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                                           |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Emotional Weight of the Language</b><br/><i>“They don't want to stand out. They don't want to be bullied.”</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>A.I. - A Friend or Foe to Irish?</b><br/><i>“A set of class dictionaries is the only way I have found to stop some of them using AI and ChatGPT.”</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                       |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>‘Comórtas na dTithe’ - Gamifying Irish Learning</b><br/><i>“It gets them to speak Irish, but they're not as conscious of it because they're doing it for the points.”</i></li> </ul>                                                                                   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Stronger Irish Skills Among Some Non-Native Speakers</b><br/><i>“Some of my students from non-Irish backgrounds actually perform better than native Irish students because they approach it with discipline, like learning any other foreign language.”</i></li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The ‘Irish is Hard’ Mindset Starts Early</b><br/><i>“I think the confidence issue comes from primary school. We have this mindset that Irish is hard, and that's it. They get afraid, they shy away from it.”</i></li> </ul>                                           |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Curriculum's Unrealistic Expectations</b><br/><i>“The expectations for Irish are higher than for other languages because students are assumed to already know it, but in reality, they don't.”</i></li> </ul>                                                      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Unexpected Top Performers in Irish</b><br/><i>“I have a Lithuanian student who was failing English but is excelling in Irish because they find the grammar structure easier.”</i></li> </ul>                                                                           |



- **The Power of Competition in Language Learning**

*“We also have 'Comórtas na dTithe' between the tables. It's like you're in the Gaeltacht, and they get points if they make an effort to speak Irish.”*

- **The Future of Irish Depends on Social Relevance**

*“We need to stop treating Irish as just a school subject and start treating it like a language that exists outside of school walls.”*

- **The Exemption Mentality and Its Consequences**

*“Some students assume they'll get an exemption, so they don't even try.”*