



An Investigation into Irish Primary Teachers' Experiences and Perspectives of Teaching  
Children with English as an Additional Language in the Mainstream Classroom

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Date of Submission: 11th of May 2020

Word Count: 10996

This dissertation is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Professional

Master of Education, Marino Institute of Education

**Supervision Meeting Form Number 4**

**Marino Institute of Education**

**PME**

**2019 – 2020**

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## **Declaration**

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme leading to the award of the degree of Professional Master of Education, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work. I further declare that this dissertation has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this Institute and any other Institution or University. I agree that the Marino Institute of Education library may lend or copy the thesis, in hard or soft copy, upon request.

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## **Acknowledgments**

Firstly, I would like to give a sincere and profound message of thanks and gratitude to my parents, my sister Julie and brother Seán. Their endless support of my educational journey and my work for this degree has been the main factor which has brought me to this point. Their belief in my abilities and potential strengthened me when I needed it most and their unrelenting guidance and support will never go unappreciated.

I would like to thank my advisor Olive Hogan for her guidance and support during the completion of this dissertation. Her patience and encouragement have been hugely appreciated. Olive has gone above and beyond to guide me through this process and help me produce a successful research study.

Also, I wish to thank my lecturers throughout the duration of the course for their skills and expertise in their fields. Their guidance has inspired me to embed the various modules into this research project. I would like to share a special word to thanks to the Inclusive and Intercultural Education team for the inspiration for this dissertation. I am confident that the theory, practice and appreciation of academia I have gained from my time spent in Marino Institute of Education during this course will carry me through the rest of my life.

I also would like to pay tribute to the excellent library staff of the college who have always been on hand with advice and support, especially during the last few months of this research study. Their efficient response to the global pandemic was paramount to my access to papers online, and in turn my completion of this research study.

In order to protect anonymity, the participants of the research cannot be named but I do wish to take this opportunity to thank them for their contribution to this study.

## **Abstract**

This study critically explores the experiences and perspectives of Irish primary teachers in the mainstream setting, who welcome children with English as an additional language into their classrooms. With use of the relevant literature, this study sought to express the perspectives of teachers in the context of Irish mainstream classrooms and to identify the key challenges teachers face in this area of teaching and learning.

Adopting a qualitative study methodology, data was collected through nine semi-structured interviews, whereby all participants were employed in Ireland as mainstream teachers. The study findings indicate that while participants faced a wide range of challenges in their everyday experiences with children learning English as an additional language (EAL), all participants had a positive and open outlook. Recommendations from the research include Continued Professional Development (CPD) and the need for accessible resources to be made available to teachers to enable them to provide the best support possible for children learning EAL.

*Key Words: English as an Additional Language, first language recognition, culturally responsive, mainstream classroom, Ireland*

## **List of Abbreviations**

|     |                                    |
|-----|------------------------------------|
| EAL | English as an Additional Language  |
| CPD | Continued Professional Development |
| ASD | Autism Spectrum Disorder           |
| SNA | Special Needs Assistant            |
| SEN | Special Educational Needs          |
| ROI | Republic of Ireland                |
| DES | Department of Education and Skills |

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

According to the Central Statistics Office (2017), the migrant population in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) stands at “11.6% and there are currently 200 nationalities in the country with approximately 182 different languages”. Ireland has experienced “rapid economic and population change since the mid-1990s. The period of economic boom between 1995 and 2007 transformed Ireland’s global profile, changing it from a nation in economic hardship, necessitating emigration, to a country of prosperity and immigration” (Darmody, Tyrrell & Song, 2011, p. xi). Ireland became a country in which people could thrive and succeed. It became a country where people could come to start a new journey. Immigrant motivation was often employment-led or economic-led. Child immigrant populations often overtake adult immigrant populations because immigrants are often in a “family-building stage of life” (UNICEF, 2009).

Although there is a trend of emigration following the end of the Celtic Tiger in 2008, when the economy fell and the opportunities available to people began to decline, many immigrants have made Ireland their permanent home. Therefore, there are many children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) in mainstream classrooms throughout Ireland. As well as this, the Irish education system moved away from offering separate provision, to the current position where the majority of students with special and additional needs, language needs included, are now educated in mainstream schools (Day & Prunty, 2015).

As Ireland has developed into a pluralist, multilingual society, children are entering the education system, which is delivered through either English or Irish, having never spoke either language in their homes. Some children join the system in junior infants, others join later. Some children join the system during the academic year. No matter the circumstance, teachers must ensure that children with EAL are not hindered academically by a barrier to

additional language learning and to ensure they are included in the school life socially. As Igoa (1995, p. 8) clearly highlights:

Regardless of policies, philosophies, theories, and methodologies, the success or failure of an individual child – the way that child experiences school – depends on what happens in the child’s classroom, what kind of learning environment the teacher is able to provide, and how well the teacher is able to investigate and attend to the particular needs of that child.

Schools have a duty to keep up to date with the latest educational initiatives, utilising these where and when possible in contributing to the advancement of learning for children with EAL. Whilst teachers feel that the arrival of immigrants has enriched our society and our classrooms, most struggle to differentiate with the goal to fully integrate these children with EAL into the classroom. This poses a concern on how these pupils will advance in their language and learning needs, as a lot of this depends on the mainstream teacher.

Scott (2008, p. 1) believes that teaching children English as an additional language “has the potential for a curriculum of its own”. Scott (2008) discusses the busy school day and stresses that it can be difficult to provide consistent provision for children with EAL. There is no doubt that the teaching and learning of children with EAL presents a challenge to mainstream teachers in creating an atmosphere of inclusiveness for all. It is of fundamental importance that the curriculum is accessed by every child in every school, regardless of their ethnicity, language, religion, and many other factors. The curriculum must not discriminate.

A research study in relation to the topic of children with EAL in the mainstream classroom is vital at this time for a number of reasons. This topic area applies to almost every primary school teacher throughout their teaching career. This qualitative research study aims to investigate the perspectives and experiences of mainstream teachers teaching children with

EAL. It strives to investigate the key challenges for mainstream teachers and to investigate teachers' perspectives towards the theory and practice of teaching children with EAL. This research study also aims to identify best practice and provide recommendations for further research.

This research study is comprised of five chapters. Chapter one introduces the research study. Chapter two provides an overview of current literature pertaining to this topic. Chapter three discusses the methodologies used to approach this research study including data collection, data analysis, ethical issues and positionality of the researcher. Chapter four provides a critical and detailed account of the main findings of the study with reference to the interviews conducted and the literature. Finally, the concluding chapter presents the summary of the overall findings and provides recommendations for future research.

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

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an insight into the leading literature concerned with the teaching and learning of English as an additional language. The chapter explores two main approaches to teaching and learning of EAL which are the Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis and the Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Both are approaches which could be employed in the classroom to help children who are learning EAL. Both approaches explore the theory of how recognition of the child's first language in their school setting can help the child to acquire the additional language and have a positive school experience in an inviting, inclusive setting. This chapter also explores the recognition of first language in practice, resources which are available currently for teachers and communication between home and school life for families with EAL.

In line with the statistics outlined in Chapter 1 from the CSO, the incidence of having children learning EAL present in the mainstream classroom has increased and must be addressed through focused approaches and differentiated instruction by teachers. "Teachers must ensure that these students are fully included in teaching and learning, and that their achievement is on a par with their English-speaking peers." (Skinner & O'Toole, 2018, p.4). Therefore, it is vital that teachers are equipped with various pedagogies and strategies which they can employ and implement in their classroom to help support literacy development for children learning EAL. Kelly (2014, p.860) demonstrates that how well students succeed academically will "greatly depend on the pedagogical practices they encounter in both the mainstream and language support classroom." Various literature will be explored which demonstrate that pedagogical practices, teacher's understanding of acquiring an additional language and the recognition of the first language in the mainstream classroom every day

should be considered the gateway for the student to integrate into mainstream classes and acquire English.

### **Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis**

Two main approaches to teaching EAL had the strongest arguments within the relating literature. They are the Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis devised by Cummins and the Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Used together, these approaches appeal to first language recognition as the key to enhance a child's learning of an additional language. They highlight the academic value in first language recognition as well as the value it has to make a child feel welcome and comfortable in their school community.

Cummins (2011) found that a bilingual approach to teaching children with EAL is more favourable than an English-only approach. He summarises the meta-analysis of 17 studies conducted by Rolstad, Mahoney and Glass (2005, p, 1979) which reports that bilingual education was “consistently superior to all-English approaches and that developmental bilingual programs that were designed to develop academic proficiency in both languages were superior to transitional programs that focused primarily on the development of English academic skills”. This contradicts a common misconception amongst some parents and teachers that complete immersion in the additional language and avoidance of the first language is effective and sometimes can be detrimental to the achievement of the child within the educational system (Cummins, 2011).

Cummins (1979) developed a hypothesis called the Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis in which he explains his understandings of how both the first language and the additional language can work together to enable a learner to acquire the additional language, both socially and academically. He presented his hypothesis as follows.

To the extent that instruction in Lx is effective in promoting proficiency in Lx, transfer of this proficiency to Ly will occur provided there is adequate exposure to Ly (either in school or environment) and adequate motivation to learn Ly. (Cummins, 1981, p. 29).

To illustrate this hypothesis in a possible situation which may arise in an Irish mainstream classroom, Lx can be substituted by the first language and Ly substituted by the additional language. According to this theory, if a child is given an opportunity to continue to develop their reading and writing skills in their first language, this opportunity is not only developing their skills in that language but “it is also developing a deeper conceptual and linguistic proficiency that is strongly related to the development of literacy in the additional language.” (Cummins, 2011, p. 1980).

Fishman (2011, p. 299) agreeingly acknowledges that “cultivating multilingualism and fostering competencies in children’s mother tongues are the best means for assuring students’ progress both in learning new languages and in learning school subjects”.

Lindholm-Leary (2005) illustrated that children who have literacy skills in their first language are able to transfer some of these skills to the learning of an additional language as well. This is also backed up by Baker and Prys Jones (1998) as they state that experience of an additional language is thought to have a number of benefits for children, including enhancing cognitive development and increasing the capacity for learning subsequent languages. They share this reasoning with Cummins and many other researchers in this area.

### **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Another such approach is known as the Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. This pedagogy situates language use in its cultural and social contexts (Hawkins, 2010). In a culturally responsive classroom, teaching and learning occur in a culturally supported learner-

centered context, whereby the strengths children bring to school are identified, nurtured, and utilized to promote student achievement (Richards, Brown & Forde, 2007). Cummins (2000) agrees with this sociocultural approach to EAL and found that the extent to which students' language and culture are recognised and affirmed within the school directly impacts on their achievement. Twenty years ago, it would have been assumed that children were to leave their first language at the school gate (Kirwan, 2018). Teachers would have discouraged children speaking in their first languages with each other in school and promoted the speaking of English as a means to fully immerse the child in the English language.

This sociocultural approach of engagement with the first language has been praised for improving child's achievements in school. This is because it directly involves the child. The child can feel included and welcome in their own learning, and therefore they are motivated. It allows the child to explore the relationship between their two languages. de Jong (2010) argues that schooling should affirm bilingual learners' identities and that language and literacy in the additional language should build upon strengths in the first language. He defines this as "additive bilingualism" and states that "multilingualism is to be seen as a resource to children learning EAL, rather than a detriment to their learning" (de Jong, 2010, p.9). Little (2010, p. 16) agrees with this concept that "use of the home language at school affirms the migrant pupil's identity and helps to counteract any tendency to stigmatise him or her for membership of a group that is perceived as linguistically inferior". Ladson-Billings (1995) also found a child's self-esteem and academic abilities increased when their cultural identities are affirmed by their class teacher, including their first language. Ó Laoire (2012, p.23) also acknowledges the role and the "pedagogical positioning of the teacher" as "critical to understanding how the minority language is legitimised and affirmed in the classroom." The teacher must be culturally responsive to utilise this thinking in the classroom.

## **Recognition of First Language in Practice**

Although the research clearly points towards the importance of first language recognition in theory, investigations have shown that it does not always feature in practice in mainstream classrooms. Schools often cite logistical reasons or tradition rather than research in their approach to teaching children learning EAL (Moore, 1999). In a survey conducted by Lyons (2010), teachers revealed a limited understanding of language learning and expressed a need for further training in the area of EAL pedagogy and how a language is learned. In this survey, teachers also identified inadequate provision of language support and lack of appropriate and funded language support training as the two greatest drawbacks of the system.

Educators often see the culturally responsive pedagogy as a cultural celebration rather than a gateway for children learning EAL to achieve their full potential. Sleeter (2011, p. 13) highlights that perhaps these educators have not “examined their own expectations for minoritized students, and whose attention has become focused on learning about other cultural traditions as an end itself”. He continues with “Learning “about” culture then substitutes for learning to teach challenging academic knowledge and skills through the cultural processes and knowledge students bring to school with them (Sleeter, 2011, p. 13). The culturally responsive pedagogy is deemed ineffective for EAL learners if it is not implemented properly.

McDaid (2011, p. 19) declared that there was no “systematic approach” to teaching EAL in the Irish mainstream classrooms which therefore causes the wide range in experiences across schools for students and teachers alike. Murtagh & Francis (2012) also call for a standardised method across initial teacher training and CPD for preparing mainstream teachers to teach children with EAL to enable teachers across Ireland to deliver a

shared approach to teaching EAL. Although there is no systematic approach, class teachers are held to expectations that their general teaching skills can be adapted to successfully support EAL learners through on the job learning (Skinner, 2010). Mainstream teachers, graduating with initial teacher training, are typically not provided with training specific to this area but are given the huge responsibility in terms of the educational input of children with EAL (Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2006). Devine (2005, p. 20) highlights that “no teachers mentioned the multilingual capacities which many of the children had” suggesting that these teachers were unaware of the positive impact the multilingual capacities can have on the child’s development through school.

It has also been found by Wallen & Kelly-Holmes (2006) that schools tend to operate under a system that effectively assigns all the responsibility to the language support teacher and so the mainstream teacher is under the impression that they don’t have a role in the child’s acquiring of English. They revealed that language support teacher is often responsible for the inclusive displays and organising the various cultural events that is held in the school and as a result the first language is often left out of the mainstream classroom. In reality, the contribution of the class teacher is a key factor, and appropriate awareness would greatly enhance a child’s additional language acquisition (Sears, 1998). Drawing conclusions from literature discussed and the seminar series organised by O’Toole and Skinner, McDaid (2018) presents that there is a very real need for further CPD in the area of teaching and learning for minority ethnic children with EAL.

### **Resources for Mainstream Teachers**

La Morgia (2011, p.3) illustrates how projects have developed with the aim of “supporting minority languages, to promote awareness of linguistic diversity and to understand the benefits of multilingualism.” However, it is stated how these independent

initiatives are “often run by individuals, community groups and non-governmental organisations” (La Morgia, 2011, p.3). This poses the question as to what the government are doing to support minority languages and teachers who have children with EAL in their mainstream classrooms.

Schools have a duty from the government of Ireland to “promote the language and cultural needs of students having regard to the choices of their parents” and to “have respect and promote respect for the diversity of values, beliefs, traditions, languages and ways of life in society” (Education Act, 1998, p. 10). The Department of Education and Skills (DES) have released various guidelines and circulars which address EAL. The Special Education Teaching Allocation circular for 2019 “provides all schools with a baseline teaching allocation to assist pupils who have learning and literacy difficulties, including those arising from English Additional Language (EAL) needs” (DES, 2019, p. 13). If a school has over 20% children learning EAL in their community, they are in a position to appeal to ask if additional posts could be approved to meet the educational needs of such pupils. (DES, 2019a).

It is clear the provision of language support teachers has fluctuated over the past twenty years. In the academic year 2001/2002 there were only 260 EAL resource teachers in primary and post-primary schools across Ireland. The provision reached its peak, just at the end of the Celtic Tiger in 2008/2009 when there were 2,200 EAL teachers. As immigration trends rose, there was an increase in demand for language support teachers in the schools. There was a notable decline in 2010/2011 as only 1,400 EAL resource teachers were supplied. Many immigrant families moved out of Ireland when the economy collapsed which resulted in less demand for EAL resource teachers. But funding was also cut in a time of economic crisis for Ireland. The provision of language support in schools became limited again as a result of cutbacks. (DES, 2011).

Some practical advice for teachers working with children learning EAL in the mainstream classroom has been provided by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), however these guidelines have not been updated since 2006. These include the Intercultural Guidelines (2006) and the English as an Additional Language in Irish Primary Schools Guidelines for Teachers (2006). There are various approaches and methodologies listed which teachers could employ in their classrooms for children learning EAL. This includes the provision of dual language books in the classroom, encouragement of child to share some of their language with the class and the use of pictorial or multilingual signs in classroom to avoid only one language being present.

The Intercultural Guidelines (2006, p. 167) stress that “the most important thing the classroom teacher can do for the learner of a second language is to demonstrate a positive attitude towards language and linguistic diversity and to communicate this to the other children in their class.” Not only does this recognition of the first language enable the child to acquire the additional language, more importantly it is a message about what kinds of identity are acceptable in the classroom and society (Cummins, 1997). Agreeingly McDaid (2011) reports that if teachers exclude first languages within the mainstream classroom, it can have significant long-term effects for minority language children both linguistically and socially. Ignorance of the child’s first language will mean that the child’s identity is not recognised and represented, which will make the child feel uncomfortable and perhaps unwelcome in the school. The aim is so the child is not put under pressure to fit into the norm of the school, but the child’s identity is recognised positively in the classroom. The child should not have to conform to their classroom but be made feel welcome and included without having to change anything about themselves.

## **Communication between home and school**

Exclusion of first languages within the education system can have significant implications for relations within minority language families. As McDaid (2011, p. 23) suggests, “minority language children who experience language loss can no longer communicate freely with members of their family and communities.” In this situation, the education system is causing problems for children in school as well as their home life. In his research, McDaid (2011, p. 17) interviewed children learning EAL. He quoted one child who proclaimed, “My grandmother would kill me!” This was because the child forgot a word in her first language of Lithuanian. This comment suggests a deeper issue with regard to the importance of first language recognition in identity and family relations. Tensions at home can lead to distraction in school and therefore negatively affect performance in school. Treating children who are learning EAL as the people they can become means that students are seen not in terms of lacking academic English but “as capable and intelligent learners who, with the right kind of support, are as able to participate in learning and achieve academically as their English-speaking peers” (Gibbons, 2002, p. 3).

Although teachers are responsible for their class and what happens during the school day, they also have a duty to communicate with home and to build a relationship with all parents. This can sometimes prove challenging because of a language barrier with parents of children with EAL. Although there are initiatives to promote parental involvement, it is recognised that the willingness of schools to partner with parents is a huge factor towards success. (Conley and Albright, 2004). In a study about barriers to home-school communication with parents of children with EAL, Rodriguez-Brown (2009) concluded that parents had respect for teachers and interest in school but had concerns about their own lack of formal education. It was announced that although it seemed like parents did not have an interest in their children’s education, they had insecurities in regard to their own education

and abilities. Teachers have an obligation to work on this communication to secure a bond between school life and home life for the benefit of the child learning EAL.

## **Conclusion**

The literature overwhelmingly shows that inclusion of a child's first language in their immediate school environment is paramount to ensure the child has a positive experience in future education. If a child is attending a place where he/she feels valid and their identity is affirmed, and this in turn will lead to engagement with school life and academic achievement.

The next chapter will provide an in-depth account of the methodologies used by the researcher to carry out the research study.

## **Chapter Three: Research Methodology**

### **Research Overview**

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for this qualitative study which aims to investigate perspectives and experiences of teachers teaching children with EAL in the mainstream classroom. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences and provided a way to develop theory from the data in order to understand what perspectives the teachers have in regard to teaching children with EAL. The applicability of qualitative data research for this study is discussed in-depth in this chapter. The research plan, including the chosen methodology, study participants, procedures, limitations, data analysis method, positionality of the researcher and ethical issues are also primary components of this chapter.

A qualitative study is appropriate when the goal of research is to explain a phenomenon by relying on the perception of a person's experience in a given situation (Stake, 2010). This naturalistic, ethnographic style of educational research provides the researcher with "in-depth, intricate and detailed understanding of meanings, actions, non-observable as well as observable phenomena, attitudes, intentions and behaviours... It gives voices to participants, and probes issues that lie beneath the surface of presenting behaviours and actions" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2013, p. 219).

Citing Dawson, (2009, p. 14) qualitative research investigates the "attitudes, behaviour and experiences through such methods as interviews. As it is attitudes, behaviour and experiences which are important, fewer people take part in the research, but the contact with these people tends to last a lot longer". Because the purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and perspectives of teachers teaching children with EAL, a qualitative approach was the most appropriate choice.

## **Research Design and Method**

The methodology chosen by the researcher is the theoretical inquiry which is also known as grounded theory. The grounded theory methodology is “the discovery of theory from data” which was introduced to the research community in the 1960s (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 1).

Grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves. Grounded theory begins with inductive data, invokes iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods, and keeps you interacting and involved with your data and emerging analysis (Charmaz, 2006, p. 1).

Glaser and Straus (1967) created this methodology where theory could emerge by methodically coding interviews with terms that summarize each phrase. Firstly, data are collected by “interviewing people or observing and recording the way they act and interact with others. The data are then coded in a range of ways to build theory which helps us understand human phenomena” (Horsfall & Grace, 2009, p.10). The aim of grounded theory methodology is “not to test a hypothesis in a deductive fashion, nor to generalize from cases to a wider population, but to discover or generate theory.” (Schwandt, 2014, p. 1). The aim of this study is to find out how teachers perceive teaching children with EAL and that is why the grounded theory methodology was chosen.

## **Study Participants**

Teachers who had specific experience in teaching children with EAL in their mainstream classroom were the target population to participate in this study. From here going forward these teachers will be referred to as participants. Therefore, this is a purposive

sample. The researcher purposely chose the participants based on their experience teaching children with EAL to generate data in regard to teacher's experience and perspectives in working in this field. The sample was drawn from a population of teachers who obtained either a Bachelor of Education or Professional Master of Education and have worked in a primary school setting as a mainstream teacher. The participants were provided with a letter of information regarding what the study was about and how it was to be conducted (Appendix A). The participant could respond if they wanted to take part in the study

They were asked to respond to a brief questionnaire via email to help the researcher select participants (Appendix D). They were asked how many children with EAL were in their class and how many different languages were spoke in the class. They were also asked if they had any reasons which could mean that a telephone interview could not take place. The researcher aimed to interview teachers whose class was at least 25% children with EAL. An informed consent form was required from each participant prior to participating (Appendix B). The final number of participants was nine. Participants could be working full- or part-time and there was no age limitation.

Through this approach of purposive sampling, the researcher aimed to illustrate the experiences and perspectives of a small group of people. This choice of sampling can provide insights into the behaviour of the wider research population, but it is accepted that "everyone is different and that if the research were to be conducted with another group of people the results might not be the same" (Dawson, 2009, p 49). It is acknowledged that there can be multiple interpretations of single events and situations and that reality is complex. But through minimising the sample to teachers with experience teaching children with EAL, it is hoped that similarities between perspectives of participants from this sample will be drawn.

## **Data Collection**

This study used semi-structured interviews. The interviews were carried out over the telephone. Face to face interviews with participants in a school setting were initially planned. However, as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic which dominated the world at the time of the study, face to face interviews could not take place.

Acknowledgments of the benefits and drawbacks of using telephone interviews were made. Telephone interviews are time and cost efficient. As noted by Robert Groves (1978), the speed of questioning is greater in telephone interviews than in face-to-face interviews. If a researcher is under time constraints, this mode of data collection is efficient to cut time. Gubrium and Holstein (2001) highlight a particularly relevant advantage of using telephone interviews which is researcher safety. During the time of this study, both researcher and participant safety had to be of paramount importance because of the pandemic. The example given by Gubrium and Holstein (2001) relates to reaching interviewees in difficult-to-visit or dangerous neighbourhoods, especially late at night. However, the research must still be conducted, and the telephone interview method enables researchers to continue their work.

One of the major challenges in conducting data collection through interviews is getting participants to agree take part in the first place, and then securing a time and place to conduct the interviews. Glogowska, Young and Lockyer (2010) have reported that the vast majority of people have access to a telephone which this makes it easier to organise a time which suits both researcher and interviewee.

There are disadvantages to the process as well. Sykes and Collins (1988) explain that the faster pace of telephone interviews can lead to less thoughtful responses. This can lead to gaps in the data or insufficient data. Groves (1978) also observes that the faster pace is linked to shorter answers to open-ended questions. Gubrium and Holstein (2001, p. 5) further this

point by stating “the absence of visual clues is central because with face-to-face interviews, there are many visual signs to encourage respondents to elaborate, clarify, or amend what they say.” These visual signs are not available by telephone and therefore can result in less developed or less thought out feedback. The lack of visual cues, concentration and energy can lead to lack of rapport between researcher and participant and allow the participant to become disengaged and distracted by things around them (Glogowska, Young and Lockyer (2010).

These issues were taken into account when conducting telephone interviews as part of this research study. Sufficient time was left between questions in order to slow the pace and to allow the participant to develop answers to the open-ended questions further. Participants were also prompted for more information where necessary and allowed to self-generate whatever was on their minds with gentle probes. Glogowska, Young and Lockyer (2010) developed suggestions on how to carry out effective telephone interviews. These suggestions were used as a guide to in preparation for the interviews. Time was allowed for debriefing as the interviews drew to a close to allow the participants to feel that they were listened to and to allow them to add any final contributions which could have got lost in the pace of the interview.

Field notes were used to capture observations and thoughts during and after each interview. The interviews were recorded electronically. Open ended questions were used with the intent to gather data with more depth on experiences and perspectives (Charmaz, 2006). Each participant was asked the same questions (Appendix C). Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain data and compare answers efficiently when all the data had been collected. The recordings were transcribed after each interview. The transcriptions were then used for coding during data analysis to draw similarities and differences between the data and to recognise themes throughout. Each participant interview took place in a single telephone interview session.

A pilot study was carried out before the commencement of official interviews, which is not used in the findings and data analysis chapter. Interview questions were created, and a telephone interview was carried out in order to allow reflection on preparation for the study and to ensure that the methodology chosen was suitable for the research. The pilot study was found to be extremely useful, in line with Sampson's (2004) findings who also deems pilot work to be invaluable. Following the pilot study questions were altered to include an introductory script to build a rapport with the participant before beginning the interview

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis undertaken sought to provide a rich thematic description of the entire data set. Thematic analysis was employed when analysing the data collected. "One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). In line with the grounded theory, which is flexible in itself, the researcher critically searched through and analysed any comparisons which could be drawn across the data to allow for the immersion of themes and theories. This was done through the coding of the transcripts. Each interview was transcribed verbatim. Coding was used to aid in understanding the perspectives of the participants and in analysing their combined experiences and to draw similarities and differences between them. Connections were drawn between codes and the importance of each code was decided. The most appropriate codes for this research study were then selected. The interview schedule sought to achieve a reflective, personal account of the participant's own perspectives. A firm attempt was made to approach analysis from the starting point of the data only and avoided preconceptions.

### **Positionality of the Researcher**

An aspect of interpretative critical thinking was employed to the data produced in order to draw conclusions from the evidence and present arguments and findings. With

regards to the researcher's positionality, it is important to confirm that, as a final year student undertaking the Professional Master of Education, the researcher has received lectures about teaching EAL as part of an Intercultural Education lecture series. The lecture series provided overviews of a range of topics but did not provide a depth of detail in any particular topic. The rationale for this research study stems from the researcher's personal motivation and interest in this topic. While the researcher is yet to experience teaching a child learning EAL, it is hoped that this research can help in preparation for future teaching career and enable implementation of best practice in the mainstream classroom. The interview consisted of mainly open-ended questions. This is because the researcher influences the answers of these types of questions the least. Researchers are enabled to give participants considerable leeway to take their answers wherever they want if open-ended questions are used (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). The researcher strived to be attentive, encouraging, non-judgemental and aimed to hide her bias which was known or unknown to her.

### **Limitations of the study**

Although care was taken to ensure this study is reliable, dependable, creditable, and transferable, the limitations of the study must be acknowledged. This study is limited because of its sample size. The study had nine participants who shared their experiences and perspectives of teaching children with EAL. If more participants could have been interviewed, more data would have been collected, presenting further experiences and perspectives in this area of teaching, which would have provided a wider insight. As previously mentioned, positionality of the researcher can be a limitation of the study. The researcher's personal interest during the interview process can present bias. This bias can be hindered by careful planning and reflection. Limitations were also highlighted through discussion of disadvantages regarding telephone interviews.

## **Ethical considerations**

Ethics remained a top priority throughout the study. An informed consent form from each participant was received before interviews began. The interviews were recorded electronically and will not leave possession of the researcher, with whom consent was granted to take the recordings. The interviews were only transcribed by the researcher alone and these will never be submitted. The recordings and transcriptions are labelled as a pseudonym for each participant so their identities will not be compromised. Throughout the data analysis chapter, the pseudonyms are scripted as P01, P02... P09, and so forth for participants 1-9. Participants were informed that their contribution towards this research could be withdrawn at any time upon their request and the researchers email address was provided as a first contact point.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this research methodology chapter was to outline the research method used to conduct this study. A discussion of the methodology, study participants, data collection, data analysis, positionality of the researcher and ethical considerations outlined the specifics of how the study was conducted and who participated in the study. A constructivist grounded theory methodology was used to develop theory on teachers' perspectives and experiences of teaching children with EAL in the mainstream classroom. All study participants contributed to this theory by sharing their experiences in their classroom. The data analysis will follow in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Four: Data Analysis**

### **Introduction**

The focus of this research study is to gain an insight into the experiences and perspectives of teachers in the mainstream setting teaching children learning EAL through analysing the data collected and recording the findings. The relevant literature explored in chapter two highlighted the importance of recognition of the child's first language as a key aspect for their progress whilst learning EAL. The Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis (Cummins, 1979) emphasises the positives of using the first language in additional language learning whereby the language conventions and understandings of language can be transferred across languages. The Culturally Responsive Pedagogy focuses on the recognition, affirmation and respect of the child's first language in the mainstream classroom and how this recognition can lead to a positive, social experience of school for the child.

The researcher approached the data collection and data analysis as outlined in the methodology chapter and now the data will be analysed, interpreted and delivered in the following chapter. The perspectives of the participants are presented in this chapter, along with connections to relevant literature and critical thought. The following key themes, and subthemes were identified from the data. The four key themes to be explored are as follows.

- Benefit of first language recognition
- Challenges facing teachers
- Strategy, Practice and Pedagogy
- Continued Professional Development

The data analysis will be presented through a subjective interpretation of the context of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes.

Methodological rigour will be applied as the findings are interrogated, ensuring the work is credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable.

### **Recognition of First Language**

**Theory vs Practice.** The study aimed to find out from the participants if they recognised the first language of the children with EAL in their class and which angle this recognition took. The study strived to investigate if the participants encouraged the use of the first language to enable the child to transfer language skills or if they did it from a social inclusion angle.

The majority of the participants seemed to value the recognition of the first language from a social inclusion angle rather than the language transfer angle. Only P09 acknowledged the benefit of first language recognition explored by Cummins (1979) whereby language skills are transferred and shared across languages. P09 shared from experience that “reading and writing strategies can be transferred across languages and, I suppose, therefore help them to pick up English quicker”. This participant communicated their firm view that this was a positive approach to help the child as they endeavoured to learn EAL.

**Language and Identity.** Most participants appeared to recognise the value of the child’s first language in terms of identity and links to home life. P01 shared that the recognition of the first language allowed the children to feel welcome and safe in school, enabling them to “grow in confidence and self-assuredness in school”. P01 discussed how children became visibly content after acknowledgment of their language. “I could see the child was very excited to be given the opportunity to share their language with their friends. Like, they seemed to be very proud of themselves and smiled, which I was very happy to see.” P01 continued after a short pause to share “I suppose he felt proud of himself to be able to share that part of him with his friends”. This highlights the child’s appreciation of an

opportunity to share a part of their identity with their class. This participant also added that from experience, the children with EAL feel valued and have a sense of security using their first language and therefore if they are given the opportunity to do so, they are motivated and encouraged in school, resulting in positive outcomes. P04 shared “from discussions in class about diversity and identity, I noticed one of the children with EAL becoming more confident and therefore more motivated with their school work as the year went on, which I was delighted to see.” These findings are in line with Little (2010) and de Jong (2010) whereby the recognition of the child’s first language at school affirms the identity of the child with EAL.

**Translation from first to additional language.** When asked questions about the first language recognition in the classroom, two participants did not cite value in first language in additional language acquisition or in sociocultural aspects. They simply stated that if another child in the class or in the school spoke the same language as the child in their class, they allowed them to speak their first language to each other. P02 said “if there is another pupil who speaks the same language but has more fluent English this can be a very useful way to communicate information to the new pupil while they are still picking up English as well”. This can be viewed in a positive light. Talking to another child in the same language could develop oral language and communication skills, or if there was a buddy system set up whereby a younger child reads with an older child in their first language reading skills could be developed. However, it is important that a buddy system be approached with the benefit of the children in mind as the sole motive, rather than the benefit of the teacher. P07 stated that they had asked an older child to translate what the younger child was saying. As argued by McDaid (2011) in relation to family relations, this can put an expectation on a young child to act as a translator, almost out of obligation. This thought can be applied to the expectation put

on a child in school as well as home. It puts them in a position that children would not usually be put into.

**International Celebrations in School.** Most participants acknowledged the role of International week, whereby language and cultural diversity is celebrated during one week of the school calendar. Although accounts varied slightly across participants, most said that this week involved children from other countries (usually children with EAL) presenting their heritage and background to the class. P04 shared “in our school, we celebrate all the nationalities which are within the school. This is an opportunity for the children to show off their national dress, culture and language. It does be a wonderful experience for all the children”. In line with Sleeter (2011), who challenged learning about culture as a substitute for meaningful engagement with culture, the question remains, who really benefits from activities like these. The teachers must ensure that celebratory weeks like this are delivered in such a way which is sensitive to the linguistically and culturally diverse children. From the literature derived from Cummins (1997) and McDaid (2011), it is important that the first language recognition becomes the norm on a day to day basis, and therefore should be recognised in a constant, informal manner. As P05 stated,

I believe that as teachers, our aim is to promote holistic development of the child and if we eliminate their language we are preventing a part of them from developing and ignoring their individuality. We cannot expect children to conform to the uniformity but celebrate and encourage openness to diversity in our classroom.

This coincides with the Intercultural Guidelines (2006) which state that the classroom should be inclusive. There is no doubt from these data that all participants saw value in first language recognition, but this value varied and came from widely different viewpoints in terms of benefits for the child learning EAL.

## **Challenges facing teachers**

**Initial Teacher Training.** A number of participants reported feeling unsupported in their roles. Some participants mentioned that they received minimal to no training in this area in their initial teaching training course and felt as though they were expected to use their general teaching to cater for the needs of children with EAL with no guidance or support to help them approach this. This finding is in agreement with findings by Wallen & Kelly-Holmes (2006) whereby specific training was not provided in initial teacher training. P05 questioned her own capabilities in responding to the needs of children with EAL stating, “perhaps if we had covered more in college, I would be a bit more confident in myself”. P04 shared a similar viewpoint, “when I started working in this school I felt very overwhelmed by the additional needs of children with EAL and I felt like I wasn’t providing for them as well as I should... I think this is probably because we didn’t cover this in detail in college”. This concern was echoed by P07 when they shared “I felt like I was trying to change how I usually taught to cater for children with EAL needs, but the changes didn’t seem to be working. The changes weren’t EAL specific and I think that was the problem”. The pedagogical approaches used by teachers in their practice with children with EAL were informed by adaptations of general practice rather than being informed by principles of additional language acquisition.

**Curricular Demands and Time Constraints.** Many participants commented on the demands placed on them by the curriculum. Time constraints was mentioned by the majority of participants, as a factor that negatively impacted the ability to meet the needs of children with EAL in their class. Participants mentioned the heavy curricular load as reducing their opportunities to give sufficient time to children with EAL. This point is expressed by P03. “We would encourage children to use greetings in Polish... but due to the busy classroom and constraints of the timetable, there would not be many other opportunities” to engage with the child’s first language. Some participants also commented on the fact that their class sizes

were big and felt that a lot of the suggested interventions for children with EAL required one-on-one time which they could not provide in the midst of the busy mainstream classroom setting with many curricular areas to cover. As P06 communicates “it is especially hard when a child joins the class during the year and needs to learn the routine of school and things but you also have 29 other students to teach. It is so hard to have enough time to give that child”. P08 also acknowledged how difficult it can be for a child moving from their home country, half way through the school year. “It takes the child much longer to settle and become familiar with the new school environment, never mind the language barrier.” P08 continued “beginning to access this curriculum half way through the school year, in fourth class is a real challenge for a child with EAL”.

P02 noted that teachers are working within a system that, in no real way, provides for or acknowledges EAL pupils’ first languages, on an official basis. This is in line with Scott (2008) who suggests the need for a curriculum for additional language learning. There is no allowance for this in the curriculum and therefore teachers are left to their own devices to deal with it. This participant felt that in an ideal world, children with EAL should still be taught some content in their first language to ensure there is no gap with comprehension. P02 particularly was of the opinion that comprehension was important in SESE, but felt that some children with EAL were not picking up on the concepts due to lack of comprehension of the words. P02 shared that “in a history lesson about the Normans for example, sometimes it is hard to tell if the child has actually understood something you have said, or if they are only picking up words without the context of the lesson”. Therefore, the concern here is that some children were not able to access parts of the curriculum.

**Governmental Support and Funding.** Speaking from experience of a managerial role held for a period of time, P01 described the struggle to secure support from the government which he felt his school particularly needed.

I had to appeal to the department to maintain our provision of two EAL teachers numerous times and we almost lost a teacher. This is despite having over 130 pupils in the school (circa 65% EAL), but it was due to us having 5 pupils less than our projected figures. This was extremely stressful and frustrating for me that common sense does not always prevail. With the help of local councillors and much persistence, we were allowed to keep the second EAL teacher. That said, the allocation is definitely not enough and tokenistic, unfortunately, at times.

Others agreed, referring to cuts in funding as affecting their capacity to ensure a high quality of teaching and learning for the children with EAL. P09 reflected to around 12 years ago when there were large numbers of children with EAL arriving to school. P09 said that the teachers were “provided with language support materials and an advisory support teacher came into school termly to support staff.” She felt it was a “huge loss” that funding was cut for these facilities, because she felt that both teachers and children alike benefited from the extra support. P06 felt that there is not enough governmental support or guidance and that the duty mainly falls on a school-by-school level to determine their own procedure and resources. “From my experience, it seems to be up to the Principal and teachers of each school to do what they feel is the right approach for children learning EAL. There is no clear way to approach it”. There is a link between these findings and the work of Lyons (2010) whereby teachers also reported a considerable lack of resources from the government in regard to funding and support.

**Additional needs in the classroom.** Some participants mentioned a concern in their own personal ability to support the needs of children with EAL within the limits of the educational system and mainstream classroom climate. They explained how they felt a strong responsibility to be able to develop every child’s potential even though they lacked specific training and support. They did not feel confident in their own work and felt unable to provide

adequate support for some of the children with EAL. P01 explained one of the challenges experienced in the mainstream classroom.

On top of the high ratio of children with EAL, there are numerous children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in my class, with three being earmarked for assessment and one child recently diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Unfortunately, I have no additional help in my classroom from a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) as these needs were not identified before entering Junior Infants. This makes my job of teaching the children significantly more difficult.

The participant has a wide range of needs in his mainstream classroom and feels responsible for catering to all needs. The lack of SNA support here is notable. This participant is responsible for every child in the class, not only the children with EAL or ASD and this makes it difficult for a teacher to find a balance without the support of another adult in the room.

**Communication with Parents.** Most participants highlighted communication with parents as a challenge when working with children with EAL. Some participants struggled to form a connection with parents, which they blamed on the language barrier. P03 highlighted the difficulty she has had from experience when communicating with parents.

We use interpreters for formal parent teacher meetings once a year, but sometimes you have an issue to discuss with them and it's quite difficult, because you are aware of the need for confidentiality, and do not want to liaise through another person, but you also want to ensure that they have understood you.

P06 called for further CPD training based on EAL to include how to converse with parents and strategies to help teachers communicate and welcome the parents in to the school community. As highlighted by Rodriguez-Brown (2009), there may be many reasons for why

parents are perhaps holding back from getting themselves involved with school life.

Participants of this study have recognised these challenges and expressed a desire for CPD to help provide strategies to overcome this.

P08 commented when an engagement was made with the child's first language in school, the efforts were credited by parents and therefore a bond was created between home and school, which was viewed as a positive thing. P09 echoed this view, sharing that this "promoted a transition between home and school, which I believe is a very important part of school life and creating a community in school". P01 announced from experience that parents "appreciated the effort" made to include a child's first language in the classroom and this created a stronger bond between the family and the school.

### **Strategy, Practice & Pedagogy**

All participants shared some of their key strategies, practices and pedagogies which help them support the children with EAL in their classroom.

**Comfort of the Child.** It was acknowledged by most of the participants that the child's comfort and connection in their school environment was recognised as central and key to the children's development and progression through school. Some participants noticed that if a child felt valued and recognised in the classroom, they were more motivated to work hard and thrive. P06 and P09 mentioned having linguistically diverse wall displays and using greetings in different languages with all the children in the class as two fundamental ways in which they tried to normalise the language variance present in their classroom and to make it part of all the children's everyday lives. P09 shared "I have classroom equipment labelled in English and the other languages in the classroom". This is in line with the Intercultural Guidelines (2006) which highlight the importance of normalising linguistic diversity. This in turn helped the children to feel welcome in their classroom.

**Key Strategies.** One of the key strategies which was mentioned most throughout the interviews was the use of visuals as a support of children learning EAL. Providing pictures and symbols helps the child learning EAL to link new vocabulary to an object. Some participants also reported that they use a visual timetable to help the child learning EAL become familiar with the routines of the class and to help them to understand what is coming next that day. P06 shared “my room is very visual orientated. I use props and visual cues daily to help children understand”.

In regard to when a child learning EAL first joins a class, or joins the school throughout the school calendar, three participants described their use of a buddy system to help the child feel welcome and included and to promote friendship. P02 explained how she strategically planned the classroom layout so that EAL learners could sit with monolingual children in the hope that they could pick up some conversational English and be encouraged to speak as much English as they could. “I think it helps to sit the child with EAL with monolingual children to help them to pick up key everyday phrases that children use.” P02 also encouraged group work in these table groups again to push the conversational English use.

Participants shared how they model language for the children in the class. P08 mentioned “I ensure that my voice is slow and clear”. Many also employed repetition as a strategy to help children learning EAL to hear words or phrases more than once in the hope that they would pick it up. P06 stated that from her experience she found that “repetition is key for children with EAL”. They also ensured they used explicit explanation every time the class had a task and also ensured the child’s understanding of the task before letting them proceed. P09 explained how she used explicit instructions to cater for children with EAL by engaging with “short and snappy instructions and use of wording which pupils already know”.

This range of strategies highlighted by the participants contradicts findings by Wallen & Kelly-Holmes (2006). They found that mainstream teachers viewed the language support teacher as the first point of contact to help the children with EAL in their classrooms. This study recognises that the participants have made a conscious effort to help children with EAL to learn, without placing responsibility on someone else. The fact the participants and including these strategies show that they recognise the part they place in the teaching and learning of a child with EAL.

**Resources.** Some of the participants revealed they had to create suitable resources themselves or access through searching online. Whilst acknowledging that every mainstream setting is different, and presents its own needs, participants struggled to find resources which would work in their classroom only. Some participants saw the value is having dual language books readily available in their classroom library as a way to allow the child learning EAL to access their first language within the comforts of their classroom. As P01 shared “not only were the children with EAL engaging with the dual language book, other children picked them up which I think is a positive thing. It is like normalising different languages”. Having these books available for everyone in the class further helps to normalise linguistic diversity for all students. This is in line with the English as an Additional Language in Irish Primary Schools Guidelines for Teachers (2006) document whereby dual language books were recommended.

Some participants expressed interest in the use of ICT in enabling support for children learning EAL. Participants found that using a range of technology in the classroom, from interactive whiteboard to iPads, helped to meaningfully engage children learning EAL. P06 called for further guidance on iPads training to help overcome communication barriers she had experienced with EAL learners. She cites an app which had used previously to help communicate with children with ASD and pondered at the thought of something similar

being introduced in the classroom to help support children learning EAL. P06 explained, “I am aware of the app ‘PECS’ that is used to support language communication with children with ASD and I am wondering if something similar could be used to communicate with children learning EAL.”

**Differentiation.** Most participants mainly struggled with differentiation overall as they felt unsure if the activities were at the right level for the children. Some spoke of the difference in ability between the monolingual children and the children who were learning EAL. P07 spoke specifically of the difference in ability between children with EAL as some children had developed conversational and academic English quicker than others, leaving a great range of abilities in the class. “Some children have a better grasp of English than others. I find that because everything revolves around English, if they struggle with the language then it impacts them academically in all areas, not just in literacy.”

All participants highlighted the importance of differentiation and to allow different expectations of work from the children with EAL, whilst still challenging them at their level so they continue to progress. P04 had a positive outlook on her differentiation approaches.

One thing a lecturer told our class at college that will always stick with me is that whatever strategies you use to help children with SEN or EAL learning will benefit all the children in the class. Therefore, I try to ensure my lessons are multisensory for the benefit of all children rather than making an obvious difference between learners.

### **Continued Professional Development (CPD)**

The researcher wanted to gauge from the participants what they felt could be done to help overcome any challenges that they faced from the potential language barrier in the mainstream classroom. All nine participants reported a desire for more CPD to be available

on the topic. Therefore, it is clear that the results have put an emphasis on the additional support needed by mainstream class teachers to help them to meet the needs of the children with EAL.

A common trend which emerged from the interviews was a lack of confidence in the participants' ability to meet the needs of the children with EAL in their classrooms. They each shared a sense of feeling unprepared for the real demands and expectations which teaching children with EAL can bring. It was felt that these challenges could be overcome through further CPD.

P01, P05 and P09 expressed a desire for training on assessment of the child with EAL specifically. McDaid (2011) speaks of the lack of a systematic approach to teaching children with EAL and with that comes the lack of a systematic approach to assessment of learning. P01 suggested the potential use of ICT to engage the child with EAL, if implemented effectively. However, he was not sure himself of any particular programmes and expressed interest in further training of using ICT with the child with EAL to enhance their learning. P03 expressed a desire to know more about "promoting and enhancing sentence structure and reasoning to ensure higher level of thinking" amongst her EAL students. P06 shared the need for CPD to help to build school/home relationships and to help implement effective communication with parents who do not have English as their first language either. These data show that there are many elements involved with teaching a child with EAL and that these issues should be addressed through CPD.

These data coincide with the findings concluded by McDaid (2018) in regard to the call for further CPD in this area. As mentioned by Wallen & Kelly-Holmes (2006) and Skinner (2010), the expectation is on the teacher to adapt their approach as they meet children with EAL in their classrooms. They are expected to deal with it as they come to it and learn

on the job. They are trusted to have enough background training and confidence to rise to the situation. It is clear that many teachers do not feel like adapting their own teaching is enough to play an effective role in the teaching and learning for the child with EAL. Evidently from data collected and relevant literature, it is acknowledged that additional teacher training and participation in CPD is key to helping mainstream teachers teach children with EAL.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

### **Conclusion**

This research study sought to investigate the experiences and perspectives of Irish primary school teachers on the teaching of English as an additional language in the mainstream classroom. This study was carried out because of the ever changing impact of immigration in Irish primary schools. It is believed that the aims of this study have been met. Perspectives of mainstream teachers were gathered, analysed, and presented under subjective circumstances. It is hoped that the findings and recommendations from this study will contribute positively to the expanding areas of research relating to the teaching and learning for children with EAL in the Irish context. The conclusions of the study and recommendations will now be presented.

Whilst most participants addressed the importance of first language recognition for a child learning EAL, it seemed that actual implementation of this in the mainstream classroom proved challenging. In other words, putting best practice into play in the classroom presented a struggle for many reasons. Time constraints and curricular demands emerged as one of the biggest challenges associated with implementing best practice for children learning EAL in the mainstream classroom. Communication with parents and the lack of resources also presented themselves as challenges for teachers to overcome.

The participants of the research study identified initial teacher training and CPD as being key to the successful implementation of best practice and all participants called for more CPD to be available for this area. To be culturally aware educators, teachers need CPD on issues relating to diversity and the importance of first language recognition for children learning EAL. From the responses of the participants, it is clear that commitment to and funding for the provision of CPD for teachers is urgently required to ensure that teachers are

fully informed as to the particular issues faced by children learning EAL in the mainstream classroom and how to implement best practice to deliver effective teaching and learning for the child with EAL. The need for better resources, catered for children learning EAL was highlighted to enable teachers to incorporate best practice is evident from the findings. These findings are not new. As mentioned in the literature, Moore (1999) called for changes to be made to further educate and support the mainstream teachers in this regard. McDaid (2018) also called for further CPD in this area.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

As called for from the data, further emphasis on CPD in this area is recommended. Participants explained that this enhanced training could help them to support the children with EAL in their mainstream classrooms further.

Further research into the relationship between the school and parents of children with EAL could be explored. As participants presented this relationship as a challenge, research could be undertaken to explore the importance of this relationship within the school community and how to support mainstream teachers and parents within these relationships. Whilst the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy within the mainstream classroom was presented, further research could be undertaken to investigate the comparison between a class to class basis approach and a whole school approach. There is scope to further examine how the whole school can approach the recognition of first language. A whole school approach could in turn help to support individual class teachers. Observational research or action research on how teaching of children with EAL is implemented could also be carried out. A study investigating the perspectives of children learning EAL in the mainstream classroom could also be undertaken whereby the experiences of children themselves working through the system would be examined and analysed. This would have the potential to

present an account of the challenges facing these children are and how the children feel about their educational experience so far whilst learning EAL.

Similar research could be carried out but on a larger scale, with more participants from a range of areas in Ireland which would provide a greater insight into the experiences and perspectives of teachers teaching children with EAL

These recommendations suggest further investigation, which highlights the benefits and value of exploring the topic of children learning EAL in the mainstream classroom.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Letter of Information



Dear participant,

My name is Laura Bogan and I am conducting research on the teaching of English as an Additional Language as part of my Professional Masters of Education course at Marino Institute of Education. My study centres on the perspectives and experiences of class teachers in mainstream settings of children for whom English is not their home language.

This research requires the gathering of data from mainstream class teachers, through means of an interview. It is anticipated that the interview will last between 25-30 minutes. A list of questions will be asked and additional questions may also be asked to clarify or expand on certain points mentioned. I will aurally record the interview to ensure that I record and report the information accurately.

Your name will not be mentioned in the research. A pseudonym will be used instead to ensure this data remains confidential. All information will be stored safely on a password protected device and access thereto will only be available to my supervisor and the external examiner. I want to make it clear that you do not have to take part in this research and that you are free to withdraw from the research at any time with no questions asked.

If you have no objections, and are willing to participate in this study, I ask you to complete this consent form and return back to me.. Thank you in advance.

Laura Bogan

## **Appendix B: Consent Form**

I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Please tick beside the following statements if you agree to each.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained until the exam board confirms the results of my dissertation.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years from the date of the exam board.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of research participant and date

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I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Signature of researcher

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## **Appendix C: Interview Questions**

### Introductory questions

- Do you have children in your mainstream class who do not speak English as their first language?
- How many? How many children are in the class altogether?
- How many different languages are spoken within the class?

### Personal Experience

- What are your experiences of teaching EAL in the mainstream setting?
- What are the main challenges (if any) you face in a classroom with such a diverse language population?

### Use of first language in classroom

- Do you encourage or discourage the use of their first language? Why?
- Do you think there is value in promoting the child's first language in the classroom?
- What measure do you take to encourage children to speak their first languages in your class?
- Do you think there are any benefits from incorporating a child's first language into the mainstream classroom?

### Teaching and Learning

- How do you differentiate instruction to cater for the needs of EAL learners?
- What strategies do you use in the classroom to support the integration of EAL learners?

- How do you assess learning for EAL learners?
- What are your views on state provision for EAL learners and state support for teachers?
- How do you perceive the role of the language support teacher? How does it differ from your role?
- Would you benefit from continued and updated training in the area to further enhance your ability to facilitate the EAL children in their classroom? Can you give examples of specific training you would benefit from?

## Appendix D: Sample Selection Questionnaires

Participant Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. How many children are in your class? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many children have English as an additional language? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many different languages are spoken in your class? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What are these languages? \_\_\_\_\_
5. These interviews will be conducted over the phone. Do you have any of the following conditions which would mean that you could not take place? Communication difficulties, a hearing impairment, speak English as a foreign language, are physically frail or cognitively disabled, other.

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