

The importance of capturing hearts and minds: The impact of parental ideologies in supporting children's minority language acquisition in the education system

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ABSTRACT

Gaelic is an endangered indigenous language of Scotland. As intergenerational language transmission has declined, the education system has increasingly become one of the main foci of the formal language management initiatives, in particular Gaelic Medium Education (GME): an immersion programme focussing on naturalistic language acquisition through the delivery of content in the target language. The sociolinguistic profile of the Gaelic language in Scotland means that most, if not all, children entering GME are English-dominant and live in homes and communities where English is the main language of interactions, with the education system the only domain of Gaelic language exposure, input, and use of the language in these young people. This article discusses the findings of a small-scale study, conducted in one GME setting in the north of Scotland during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. The extended school closures and the subsequent expectations around home learning exposed the complexities and tensions in the ideologies of parents towards GME: on the one hand having made an active choice to send their children to be educated through the medium of Gaelic, but, on the other, also experiencing feelings of invalidation as educational partners in not being able to support their children's learning. This duplicity negatively affected the Gaelic language acquisition and attitudes of the children on their return to in-person learning, which has long term implications for future Gaelic language use.

RESUMEN

El gaélico es una lengua autóctona de Escocia en peligro de extinción. A medida que ha ido disminuyendo la transmisión intergeneracional de la lengua, el sistema educativo se ha convertido cada vez más en uno de los principales focos de las iniciativas formales de gestión lingüística, en particular la Educación Media en Gaélico (en el artículo, en sus siglas en inglés, GME): un programa de inmersión centrado en la adquisición naturalista de la lengua mediante la impartición de contenidos en la lengua meta. El perfil sociolingüístico de la lengua gaélica en Escocia significa que la mayoría de los niños que ingresan en la GME (si no todos) son de habla inglesa y viven en hogares y comunidades donde el inglés es la principal lengua de interacción, siendo el sistema educativo el único ámbito de exposición, aportación y uso de la lengua gaélica en estos jóvenes. En este artículo se analizan los resultados de un estudio a pequeña escala, realizado en un entorno GME en el norte de Escocia durante el apogeo de la pandemia de Covid-19. El cierre prolongado de las escuelas y las expectativas subsiguientes en torno al aprendizaje en el hogar pusieron de manifiesto las complejidades y tensiones en las ideologías de los padres con respecto a la GME: por un lado, haber tomado la decisión activa de enviar a sus hijos a recibir educación en gaélico, pero, por otro, experimentar sentimientos de invalidación como socios educativos al no poder apoyar el aprendizaje de sus hijos. Esta duplicidad afectó negativamente a la adquisición de la lengua gaélica y a las actitudes de los niños a su regreso al aprendizaje presencial, lo que tiene implicaciones a largo plazo para el futuro uso de la lengua gaélica.

1. INTRODUCTION

Immersion minority language education can contribute to language revitalisation efforts (Smith-Christmas, 2016), especially in contexts where intergenerational transmission is limited (Baker, 2007; Romaine, 2006), as is, for example, the case for Scottish Gaelic (hereafter: Gaelic). Gaelic is an indigenous Celtic language of Scotland which has categorised as ‘definitely endangered’ according to the World Atlas of Languages (UNESCO, 2021) has suffered a dramatic decline in the size of the speaker population since the start of the 19th century (McLeod, 2014). Today around 1.1 % of the Scottish population (around 57375 individuals) claim to be able to speak the language (National Records of Scotland, 2015). The changes in to the language use patterns, which resulted in the move away from the use of Gaelic as the language of the home, the family, and community (MacKinnon, 2011), has meant an increasing focus on ‘institutionalising and professionalisation’ of the language support initiatives (McLeod, 2010) to maintain, or even increase the number of Gaelic speakers to strengthen the position of the language (McLeod, 2020). The education system, and in particular

Gaelic Medium Education (GME), has been identified by Bòrd na Gàidhlig (the Gaelic language Board) — the main public body in Scotland for the promotion of Gaelic — as the main mechanism to create “new speakers” (see McLeod & O’Rourke, 2015 for a discussion about new speakers) of the language.

Gaelic Medium Education (GME), in its current format, was first established in the early 1980s after a grassroots campaign by parents who wanted their children to be educated through the medium of Gaelic, which, at the time, would have been the language of the home or (extended) family). Starting initially in two urban locations, one in the north of Scotland (Inverness) and one in the south (Glasgow), with 12 children in each setting, provision grew and spread rapidly through the 1980s and 1990s with the support from the government who made (and continues to make) funding available to support the establishment and delivery of Gaelic education (MacLeod, 2003). This expansion has since plateaued (McLeod, 2020) (see Birnie, 2021 for a discussion of the factors impacting on the growth of GME). GME is currently available in 61 locations throughout Scotland (Morgan, 2021), with the majority of the settings providing this minority language immersion education located in the north and west of Scotland, the traditional heartland communities of the language (Mac an Tàilleir, 2010).

In the first few years after GME was established it was primarily, but not exclusively, aimed at giving children an opportunity to use the language of the home and the family as their medium of instruction in the formal education system (with informal preschool provision through the medium of Gaelic having already been established by parents in the late 1970s) (MacLeod, 2003). However, ongoing “runaway language shift” (MacKinnon, 2011) and the subsequent erosion of Gaelic as the first language of the home, the family, and the community (McLeod, 2010; Munro, 2011) means that today almost all children begin as *ab initio* learners on enrolment – with approximately 87 % of children enrolled in GME living in households where the language is not spoken by one or both parents (National Records of Scotland, 2015).¹ Children in Scotland typically start their statutory formal education in the August after they reach their fifth birthday, although for many the introduction to the education system begins when they are three or four years old through the provision of free early years childcare — although attendance is not compulsory. Children can enter GME Primary 1 (P1) after attending a Gaelic Medium (GM) early years group or directly, either with or without, any prior knowledge of Gaelic. GME deals with diversity in the language learning pathways of children entering P1 by promoting language acquisition in a naturalistic way: this means that the language is not formally taught with neither the grammatical structures nor vocabulary explicitly taught (Ellis & Shintani, 2013) but, instead, through immersing the children in Gaelic learning environment. As explained by MacLeod et al. (2014), “the national curriculum means there is little opportunity to focus on Gaelic as a language;

¹ This article uses the term ‘parent(s)’ to indicate the main care-giver(s) of the children – regardless of their (biological) relationship to the child(ren).

rather the learning is achieved through using the Language” (Macleod et al., 2014, p. 20). This means that all teaching and learning activities are delivered through the medium of Gaelic, with the teachers expected to use Gaelic only in their interactions with the children (Hermanto et al., 2012).

GME in Scotland is split into two phases. The first one of these phases covers the first three years of primary school (P1 to P3) which is the ‘total immersion phase’ where all teaching and learning is expected to be delivered through the medium of Gaelic, this is then followed by the immersion phase for the last four years of primary education (and sometimes beyond throughout secondary school), where all educational activities are still expected to take place in Gaelic but where English is introduced as a subject (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education [Scotland], 2011). In practice, however, as children progress through primary school, and especially in the immersion phase, the use of English gradually increases for teaching and learning activities (O’Hanlon, 2010), ostensibly to prepare children for secondary school where the provision of Gaelic continues to be more limited (Morgan, 2021). This more (pragmatic) bilingual approach towards teaching and learning in the immersion phase also mirrors the officially expressed aims of GME by the education authorities, namely equal fluency and literacy in English and Gaelic, with children having the ability to use both English and Gaelic in full range of situations, both within as outside of the education system (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education [Scotland], 2011).

However, studies looking at both the short and the long-term linguistic outcomes of GME have found that in many instances the acquisition of Gaelic is not complete (Landgraf, 2013; Müller, 2006). Furthermore, the use of Gaelic outside of the classroom and education system is limited (Nance, 2020; Ó Giollagáin et al., 2020; Smith-Christmas, 2016), with young people not considering the language and culture to contribute to their identity formation (Oliver, 2006, 2010), with only around 20 % of adults who acquired Gaelic through the education system continuing to use the language to any extent after they leave school, typically in the professional domain rather than in the personal spheres of the home, the family and the community (Dunmore, 2017).

Studies on the outcomes and results of GME have typically focussed on the role of education system in supporting language acquisition, including the role of the teachers and the way that teaching and learning is conceptualised (see also, for example, Macleod et al., 2014). Learning does not only take place in the classroom and the education system, but also in the private domain of the home and the family (Fitzmaurice et al., 2020), with schools typically expecting parents to act as educational partners to support the (language) learning of the children (Patall et al., 2008).

As part of a wider study to evaluate the impact of the Covid-19 school closures on children’s language acquisition resulting from the absence of a language immersion environment (Scottish Government, 2020), this article focusses on the hitherto unexplored contribution of the home

environment and specifically the role of parents in supporting minority language acquisition in contexts, such as Gaelic, where the language is not spoken in the home and where language proficiency of the adults in the home is limited. The Covid-19 school closures, which brought the demands of the school and the education system directly into the home, allowed pre-existing tensions between the expressed ideologies of parents, which favour their children learning Gaelic, and their implicit attitudes towards the language, resulting, in part at least, from their own inability to support their children's learning to surface, affecting the ideologies of the children towards Gaelic and their willingness to engage with the language in the education system.

2. GAELIC MEDIUM EDUCATION AND THE ROLE OF PARENTS

To gain an understanding of complexity in the ideologies and attitudes of parents towards Gaelic and GME it is important to explain the wider sociolinguistic context of Gaelic in Scotland. Gaelic in Scotland has all but disappeared from day-to-day linguistic practices and the public social linguistic soundscape (Birnie, 2018a; Birnie, 2022), even in communities where the majority of the population has self-reported to be able to speak the language (Munro, 2011; Ó Giollagáin et al., 2020), even where those that are able to speak Gaelic recognise that the language could be used in social and community interactions (NicAoidh, 2006). This gradual shift in linguistic practices, which accelerated in the last few decades of the 20th century (MacKinnon, 2006; MacLeod, 2017; Munro et al., 2011; The Scottish Council for Research in Education, 1961) has resulted in a decline in the intergenerational transmission of Gaelic as the main mechanism for language acquisition (McLeod, 2010), even in households where one or more parent can speak the language (Birnie, 2018b). Furthermore, Dunbar (2011) has suggested that even in contexts where young people acquire Gaelic in the home, English will be the language that they speak most frequently and with the greatest ease. This change in the language use patterns, coupled with the continued decline in the size of the Gaelic speaker population (as measured by the decennial census), has resulted in the education system becoming recognised as the main mechanism for Gaelic language acquisition in young people by Bòrd na Gàidhlig (2012, 2018).

Despite the growth in provision since the 1980s, GME is not universally available across the country, with most of the provision based in the traditional heartland of the language: the north and west of Scotland. Although numbers have increased from the initial 24 children that were the first cohort to enrol in GME in 1983 (Macleod, 2003) to 3701 children at the time of this study (Morgan, 2021), this constitutes only around 0.9% of all primary aged children which leaves it, metaphorically speaking, very much on the edge of the education system. This marginalised position is further emphasised in the way that GME is provided within schools. Across Scotland there are currently only 6 stand-alone Gaelic schools where all children are enrolled in GME, in all other contexts the Gaelic

immersion is provided in Gaelic units: one or two classrooms within an otherwise English-medium school. This means that GME is often provided in multi-composite classes, with different age groups being taught together in the same classroom and with the same teacher, often with P1 to P3 (the total immersion phase), and P4 to P7 (the immersion phase) taught together.

As identified by McCartney (2018), having multi-composite classrooms poses challenges for the teacher in terms of ensuring meaningful learning and progression for all children, whilst also recognising that this brings benefits in terms of (language) modelling and support by other (older) children (Kasten, 1998; Macleod et al., 2014). Baker (2003) has, however, suggested that all children will have a similar level of language (in this case Gaelic) and might not necessarily result in increased language proficiency in the younger children in the class. The immersion context is further complicated, and compromised, by being surrounded with English outside of the GM classroom: Gaelic will be the language of instruction for only a small proportion of the children in the school, and that means that the language of the wider social life of the school and the playground will be English (Macleod et al., 2014; Peace-Hughes et al., 2021). The majority of the children in GME will be English-dominant, and this will be the language that they use with the greatest ease and frequency (Dunbar, 2011) and this means that these outside the classroom, where the teacher acts as a micro-language planning agent (Nahir, 1998) and language use gatekeeper, children will use English with their GM-educated peers (Nance, 2020).

In settings where GME is available, it is open to all children, regardless of their linguistic or cultural background, with enrolment based on parental request with default option for all children entering the education system is to be placed in an English-medium classroom.² This raises important questions around the reasons for parents to send their children to be educated through the medium of Gaelic, especially, and as is the case for most families, where the language of the home and the community is English. Research by O'Hanlon (2014), following on from her earlier studies (O'Hanlon et al., 2010) has shown that the reasons given for enrolling children in GME by parents are varied and frequently complex. One reason that is frequently cited by parents in the studies by O'Hanlon is "heritage". The interpretation of the term heritage can be personal, meaning that Gaelic might have been spoken in the (extended) family. In many instances this refers to the grandparents or great-grandparents of the children, although there are also some instances where the parents are able to speak Gaelic but have chosen, for whatever reason, not to use the language in the home (see Birnie, 2018b). The term heritage is also used by parents to indicate that they have enrolled their children in GME to raise an

² With the exception of children in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, the most north-westerly administrative region of Scotland, where all children are enrolled in GME upon starting primary school.

awareness of Gaelic linguistic and cultural traditions, either at a local community level or at a national, Scotland-wide level.

In reality, these notions around supporting and fostering Gaelic heritage and culture through GME are ideological rather than practical: the GME curriculum mirrors the English-medium curriculum, with the same expectations and outcomes (called “experiences and outcomes”) across all areas of the curricular framework (called the Curriculum for Excellence), with the only difference between the Gaelic medium and the English medium classes being the language in which the content is being delivered (McPake et al., 2017). Conversely, it might be exactly the fact that the GME curriculum mirrors the English medium experiences and outcomes that lowers the barrier for parents to enrol their children: the children will be getting the same educational experience albeit in a different, additional language. This notion is also indirectly supported by Bòrd na Gàidhlig (n. d.) in their advertising campaigns and promotional materials aimed at parents who consider GME for their child. This does not focus on the development Gaelic language skills and gaining an understanding of the culture, but, instead emphasises the advantages associated with being able to use and speak multiple languages (Cape et al., 2018; Hermanto et al., 2012; Morton & Harper, 2007; Nicols et al., 2020), for example being able to learn other languages more readily and being able to multitask — typically associated with simultaneous rather than sequential bilingualism. These bilingual advantages were subsequently also cited by parents as a reason for enrolment (O’Hanlon, 2014), especially as earlier research suggested that those children that were educated through GME outperformed their English-medium peers across all curricular areas (Johnstone et al., 1999).

3. STUDY

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of Strathclyde School of Education Ethics committee. This study was conducted in a typical GME setting in the north of Scotland: an English-medium school with two multi-composite classes offering GME, one covering the total immersion phase and the other the immersion phase. The school is situated in a community where the proficiency in Gaelic is generally low, with less than 1.0% of the population being able to speak the language, similar to most other communities on the mainland of Scotland (Mac an Tàilleir, 2010). Using the practitioner enquiry paradigm (Baumfield et al., 2012), where the principal researcher was also one of the classroom teachers and known to all the children, data in this study was collected in a number of different ways including through observing the children in the classroom environment. The overall aim of the study was to evaluate the impact of the Covid-19 school closures on the children’s language acquisition resulting from the absence of an immersion setting (Scottish Government, 2020) with a view to using the results of this research to support the children in this setting in their Gaelic language acquisition post-Covid.

In Scotland all schools closed in March 2020 for face-to-face learning and teaching activities until August of that year. The schools then closed again at the winter break and stayed closed for a further 12 weeks before re-opening fully in spring of 2021. This multimodal study was conducted at the resumption of the in-person learning and teaching in August 2020 and continued until March 2021. The research consisted of classroom observations, language proficiency assessments conducted as part of the day-to-day learning activities, semi-structured focus groups and learning conversations with the children, as well as a parental questionnaire, issued to all parents with children enrolled in GME. The overall study aimed to evaluate the impact of the Covid-19 school closures, and thus the lack of an immersion learning environment, on the children's language proficiency. The focus of this article will be mainly on the findings from the parental questionnaires which focussed on three main themes: the use of Gaelic in the home and the wider family, engagement with home-learning tasks both before, during and after the Covid-19 school closures, the availability of digital devices to access online materials. The questionnaire included some multiple-choice items but also open-ended questions which allowed parents to provide more extended answers or explanations.

Due to the relatively small sampling population and acquaintance of all the participants with the researcher in this study, all parents were invited to complete the questionnaire anonymously and online, via the school communications channels, with the responses analysed thematically. The questionnaire was completed by 68 % of the parents and represented 52.3 % of the children in the immersion phase (the P4 - 7 class) and 47.6 % of the children in the total immersion phase (P1 - 3) — with 11 % of the respondents having a child in each of the classes. The findings of this part of the study provided not only an indication of the level of engagement of the children with the tasks set by the school, but also, and perhaps more importantly, the role of parents in supporting language acquisition, but especially how their ideologies impact on the views of the children towards the use of Gaelic, both inside and outside of the classroom.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results from the in-class teacher observations and the routine language assessments have shown that, in line with similar findings from other educational contexts (Hammer et al., 2014), the absence of the in-school immersion, in this instance caused by the extended school closures, impacted significantly on language proficiency. The children's proficiency improved after the return to school (from 42.9 % accuracy in August 2020 to, on average, 58.6 % accuracy in October after the first term). The extent of this improvement was not uniform, with the class teachers noticing significant differences between the children in terms of readiness to (re-)engage with using Gaelic for learning activities. To evaluate the various factors that might have impacted on these differences in proficiency and motivation of the children, the responses to the parental questionnaire were analysed. These

showed significant difference in the exposure to Gaelic during the Covid-19 school closures, which was directly linked to the level of support that the children had received in accessing and completing home learning tasks by the parents.

The first aspect that was evaluated was the extent to which Gaelic was used in the homes of the children. The results from the questionnaire showed that this setting was typical in terms of the sociolinguistic profile of the families with children enrolled of GME, with the majority of parents not able to speak the language proficiently (McLeod, 2010; National Records of Scotland, 2015; O'Hanlon et al., 2010). However, even in those households where one or both parents were able to use to Gaelic to some extent, for example simple words and phrases, responses to the questionnaire indicated that the language was not used as part of the daily communications. Parents of children in this GME setting expressed anxiety over using Gaelic and did not consider themselves to be 'fluent' enough' and worried that they would not be good language role models, mirroring the findings of a similar study in Ireland which evaluated the role of parents in Irish-medium educated children (Hickey, 1999; Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013).

The parental responses also indicated that 32 % of the children had another adult (not a parent) in their lives who could speak Gaelic. However, restrictions on face-to-face social contacts during the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in limited opportunities for (spontaneous) interactions with other family members or acquaintances in Gaelic. This meant that during the school closure period, the main opportunity for the children to communicate in Gaelic was the conversation circle provided by the class teachers through synchronous online sessions four times a week. The overall dominance of English in their overall linguistic soundscape (Birnie, 2022): the home, the community, and the media would have meant very limited 'natural' exposure to the language outside of the sessions provided by the classroom teacher. This was also evident from the responses of the parents who indicated that the GME are the 'language gatekeepers' – supporting, encouraging, and expecting the children to use Gaelic. This makes teachers micro-language planning agents, with the GME classroom being a "language planning cell" (Nahir, 1998, p. 337).

During the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures the role of the (GME) teacher changed: no longer were they able to act as micro-language planning agents for the children during the school day, but, instead, they found themselves tasked with communicating expectations and activities for home learning tasks with the parents. This was especially the case for the younger children in the total immersion class who would have only just started their literacy development in Gaelic and would not have been able to access written content and instructions themselves, either in English or in Gaelic. This would have meant that the parents would have responsible for accessing and facilitating the resources for completion of the home learning tasks (Safriyani, 2022), together with

the expectation that they would have been able to provide support and guidance on the completion of these by their children (Daniela et al., 2021). The responses to the questionnaire revealed issues that were specific to the Covid-19 context, including the availability of internet enabled devices in the home to allow access to the online learning platforms and enable children to participate in the synchronous activities, but it also highlighted and exposed the complexities of ideologies of parents towards Gaelic and GME with had hitherto been hidden and surfaced amongst the additional tensions created by the school closures (Hajar & Manan, 2022).

Prior to the Covid-19 school closures homework for GME children in this setting would have been incidental, and, in line with their English-medium counterparts, based around literacy tasks such as reading and the acquisition of Gaelic (speech) sounds (Fitzmaurice et al., 2020). These tasks were intended to create a link between the school and the home (Núñez et al., 2017) but would have formed only a small part of the children's wider (Gaelic) learning. Parents would have been expected to support these homework tasks but the open-ended nature of these meant that there would have been no, or only limited, mechanisms for evaluating whether the homework had been completed. During the school closures, what would have been a 'trickle' of once-a-week homework tasks turned into a 'flood' of daily home-learning tasks. Parents in this study reported that they found the expectation to facilitate these tasks challenging, and affected the extent to which they felt they could be involved in their children's learning.

These challenges and difficulties were not unique to GME educated children and their parents (see, for example, Head, 2020; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011), the language of education proved to be an additional barrier which impacted on engagement with home learning tasks. Children associate Gaelic language use with the educational domain (Smith-Christmas, 2016), and more specifically the classroom (Macleod et al., 2014), whereas English is the language of all other domains, including the private domain. The Covid-19 closures created an expectation that Gaelic was brought into the home to complete learning tasks and parents reported that this mismatch between established linguistic norms and these new expectations resulted in children not wanting to participate with the online synchronous sessions with the class teacher, or, where children did participate, that they did not engage with or contribute to these sessions, choosing to listen rather than be an active contributor. This implicit expectation that Gaelic was used in the home to accommodate the learning activities heightened any existing tensions around homework tasks, with parents in this study reporting that they felt 'stressed' when their children were issued with Gaelic (language) tasks.

Lack of proficiency in Gaelic was cited by parents in this study as contributing to these feelings of stress and was identified as one of most significant barriers to supporting their children. Sometimes this was explicitly identified in the questionnaire by parents who indicated that they did not feel

confident enough to help their children, but sometimes this was more implicit. Examples of this implicit signposting that they did not feel confident were statements that related to time pressures (“too busy with work to help”) or by stating that Gaelic homework tasks were “difficult to get to grips with” and that Gaelic reading books “seemed very difficult compared to English books”. This last statement was particularly interesting in that the reading books used in GME are typically translations of the English books, including those intended to support phonological awareness. Parental attitudes towards the tasks issued are important as they are the gatekeepers of homework (Farrell & Danby, 2015) and this resulted in some families abandoning the use of Gaelic for learning altogether, with parents opting instead to offer their children learning activities through the medium of English, which were considered more readily available.

Children’s educational outcomes and motivations are shaped and influenced by parental involvement (Daniela et al., 2021) and the choices that parents made to offer learning activities in English had significant repercussions when the children returned to the classroom for in-person teaching in August 2021. The group of children that was offered predominantly English-medium learning activities, on their return to the classroom, indicated that they would prefer to continue their learning through the medium of English. This manifested itself through their use of English rather than Gaelic in the classroom, including in contexts where they would previously have used Gaelic: affecting the overall linguistic soundscape of the classroom. The Gaelic talking and listening skills of these children also regressed, resulting in children showing less confidence in using the language and limiting their classroom contributions. Additionally, children also showed signs of frustration when asked to engage with learning tasks, especially those based on literacy development in Gaelic, which then required additional teacher input to get them to (re-)engage with learning and teaching activities through the medium of Gaelic.

5. CONCLUSION

Gaelic medium education is considered a prime mechanism for Gaelic language acquisition in children (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2012), this despite previous studies (see, for example, Dunmore, 2015; Landgraf, 2013) indicating that the learning of Gaelic as a new speaker in the education system might not lead to complete proficiency and use of the language later in life. This study allowed for an exploration of a hitherto underexplored factor in the precarious nature of children’s Gaelic language use in homes where parents have actively opted to send their children to receive an education through the language, but in many instances cannot use the language themselves. Parents in this study have actively opted into GME for their children, with the implicit understanding and expectation that (Gaelic) learning would be confined to the classroom and the school. However, the Covid-19 school closures and the subsequent expectation that educational tasks were completed in the private domain, this

created a dichotomy between the investment parents made in their children's educational outcomes and their own ability to support the learning, mostly associated with their proficiency in Gaelic.

This dichotomy was present prior to the school closures and the period of home-learning and affected engagement with homework tasks. Normally these tasks only formed a small part of the child's learning experience and was countered by the class teacher's language gatekeeping, but during the Covid-19 pandemic the Gaelic immersion classroom environment was replaced by an environment where English was the dominant or only language in the linguistic soundscape: the home. Attempts by teachers to 'bring Gaelic into the home' through home learning tasks exacerbated feelings of 'invalidation as educational partners' in parents (Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013) which existed prior to the pandemic, and resulted in avoidance strategies, for example by citing a lack of time to help or providing English-medium learning materials for their children. This resulted in the children openly challenging Gaelic as a medium of instruction on their return to the classroom and lower levels of language proficiency than children who were supported in engaging with the Gaelic medium home-learning tasks.

These findings have important implications for the future of GME in Scotland. Previous research from (O'Hanlon, 2014) have indicated that parents enrol their children in GME for mainly ideological reasons associated with bilingualism and wider notions of Gaelic language and culture rather than expectations around fluency and Gaelic language use later in life as explicitly (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education [Scotland], 2011) and implicitly (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, n.d., 2018) promoted by the authorities. These studies have indicated that the issues around supporting children in completing Gaelic homework tasks act as a barrier to enrolment in the first instance (O'Hanlon, 2014) but this study also shows that this is also is an ongoing issue for parents who have decided to have their children educated through the medium of Gaelic: with ideological reasons meaning that parents are supportive of GME as an immersive language learning environment for their children, as long as they are not expected to make an active contribution to supporting the children in their Gaelic learning through homework or home-learning tasks, which is mainly attributed to their lack of proficiency in the language.

Although many local authorities offer language classes for parents to but, similar to the other minority language contexts (see, for example, Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013), these are not necessarily aimed at supporting the development of school-based language or even the vocabulary required to introduce Gaelic as a day-to-day language in the home. This means that even while or after attending these classes, that the confidence and proficiency in the language is unlikely to be enough to either change the linguistic norms of the home to include Gaelic, nor support the children's Gaelic language development. On a practical level this means that teachers and educators need to consider any homework tasks that 'take Gaelic into the home' to ensure that these do not rely on expectations that

parents feel confident in supporting their children's language learning, for example by providing audio- or video-materials that can be accessed and completed independently by the children, regardless of the age and stage of language.

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