

**A Mixed Methods Investigation of Parental Involvement in Irish Immersion Primary
Education: Integrating Multiple Perspectives**

Lauren Kavanagh, BA (Hons.)

**The thesis is submitted to University College Dublin in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

School of Psychology

College of Human Sciences

Head of School: Prof. Alan Carr

Principal Supervisor: Dr. Tina Hickey

Doctoral Studies Panel Membership:

Dr. Tina Hickey

Prof. Aidan Moran

Dr. Suzanne Guerin

January 2013

Table of Contents

	Page
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	viii
Acknowledgements	ix
Abstract	x
 Chapter One: Review of Parental Involvement Literature	 1
1.0 Overview	1
1.1 Review of Empirical Parental Involvement Literature: Outcomes of Involvement	1
1.1.1 <i>Parental Involvement and Student Outcomes</i>	1
1.1.2 <i>Outcomes for Parents</i>	7
1.1.3 <i>Outcomes for Schools</i>	8
1.1.4 <i>The Importance of Different Forms of Parental Involvement</i>	8
1.2 Review of Empirical Parental Involvement Literature: Correlates and Predictors of Involvement	10
1.2.1 <i>Parent Characteristics</i>	10
1.2.2 <i>School Characteristics</i>	11
1.2.3 <i>Age of Child</i>	12
1.2.4 <i>Barriers to Parental Involvement</i>	12
1.3 Theoretical Approaches to Parental Involvement	14
1.3.1 <i>The Problem of Definition</i>	14
1.3.2 <i>Changing Conceptualisations of Parental Involvement: From Deficit to Empowerment</i>	14
1.3.3 <i>Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence</i>	17
1.3.4 <i>Epstein's Typology of Parental Involvement Practices</i>	18
1.3.5 <i>Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model of Parental Involvement</i>	19
1.4 Implications for the Present Research: Theoretical Framework	23
1.5 Summary: Lessons Learned from the Review of Parental Involvement Literature	25
1.6 Conclusion	27
 Chapter Two: Review of Immersion Education Literature	 28
2.0 Overview	28
2.1 Defining 'Immersion Education'	28
2.1.1 <i>Origins of Immersion Education and Its Adoption Internationally</i>	28
2.1.2 <i>Core Features of Immersion Programmes</i>	29
2.1.3 <i>Different Models of Immersion Education</i>	31
2.2 The Irish Model: Irish and Irish Immersion	32
2.3 Evaluating Immersion Programmes: International and Irish Evidence	34
2.3.1 <i>Second Language Learning</i>	35
2.3.2 <i>First Language Learning</i>	36
2.3.3 <i>Other Curriculum Areas</i>	37
2.3.4 <i>Attitudes and Social Adjustment</i>	38

2.4 Research on Parental Involvement in Immersion	38
2.5 Parents in Irish Immersion	41
2.6 Summary	44
Chapter Three: The Present Research	45
3.0 Overview	45
3.1 Ireland as a Context for the Present Research	45
3.1.1 <i>Parental Involvement in Ireland</i>	45
3.1.2 <i>Sociolinguistic Context of Ireland</i>	51
3.2 Rationale for the Present Research	52
3.2.1 <i>Exploration of Parental Involvement Theory in Non-Mainstream Schools</i>	53
3.2.2 <i>Multidimensional Conceptualisation of Parental Involvement</i>	53
3.2.3 <i>Need for Consistency of Definition in Parental Involvement Research</i>	53
3.2.4 <i>Need for Distinct Knowledge Base in Heritage Immersion Contexts</i>	54
3.2.5 <i>Need for Research on Parents in Irish Immersion</i>	54
3.2.6 <i>Need to Move Beyond Demographics in Parental Involvement Research</i>	54
3.2.7 <i>Need for Parental Involvement Research Integrating Multiple Perspectives</i>	55
3.2.8 <i>Need for the Voice of the Child in Parental Involvement Research</i>	56
3.3 The Present Research: Objectives, Research Questions	57
3.4 Summary	57
Chapter Four: Design and Methodology	58
4.0 Overview	58
4.1 Mixed Methods Research: An Overview	58
4.2 Design of the Present Research	61
4.3 Study 1: Parental Involvement in Irish-Medium Education: Parents' Perspectives	61
4.3.1 <i>Role of the Qualitative Component</i>	62
4.3.2 <i>Role of the Quantitative Component</i>	62
4.3.3 <i>Qualitative Methodology</i>	63
4.3.4 <i>Quantitative Methodology</i>	64
4.3.5 <i>Construction of the Parental Involvement Survey</i>	64
4.4 Study 2: Educators' Experiences of Parental Involvement	68
4.5 Study 3: Pupils' Experiences of their Parents' Involvement in their Education.	69
4.6 Methods of Analysis Employed	70
4.6.1 <i>Qualitative Content Analysis</i>	70
4.6.2 <i>Relational Analysis</i>	72
4.6.3 <i>Overall Analysis Plan</i>	73
4.7 Summary	73
Chapter 5: Study 1, Phase 1: A Qualitative Investigation of Immersion Parents' Experiences of Involvement	74
5.0 Overview	74
5.1 Design	74

5.2 Participants	74
5.3 Ethical Considerations	75
5.4 Procedure	76
5.4.1 <i>Recruitment of Participants</i>	76
5.4.2 <i>Data collection</i>	76
5.5 Research Questions	77
5.6 Overview of Qualitative Analysis in Study 1	77
5.7 Inter-Rater Reliability	78
5.8 Qualitative Findings	79
5.9 Response to Research Sub-Questions	119
5.10 Conclusion	126
Chapter 6: Study 1, Phase 2: Parental Involvement Survey	127
6.0 Overview	127
6.1 Design	127
6.2 Ethical Considerations	127
6.3 Procedure	128
6.3.1 <i>Recruitment of Participants</i>	128
6.3.2 <i>Data Collection</i>	128
6.4 Response Rates	129
6.5 Participants	130
6.6 Aims of the Present Study	130
6.7 Data Analysis	131
6.8 Results	131
6.8.1 <i>Sociodemographic Profile of Parents</i>	131
6.8.2 <i>Linguistic Profile of Parents</i>	135
6.8.3 <i>Reasons for School Choice</i>	140
6.8.4 <i>Involvement Activities</i>	144
6.8.5 <i>Inferential Analyses: Exploring Relationships</i>	153
6.8.6 <i>Identifying Subgroups of Parents based on Overall Involvement Levels</i>	163
6.8.7 <i>The Multinomial Logistic Regression Model</i>	171
6.9 Summary of Main Findings	173
6.10 Conclusion	174
Chapter 7: Study 2: A Qualitative Exploration of Irish-Immersion Educators' Experiences of Parental Involvement	175
7.0 Overview	175
7.1 Design	175
7.2 Participants	175
7.3 Ethical Considerations	175
7.4 Procedure	176
7.4.1 <i>Recruitment of Participants</i>	176
7.4.2 <i>Data Collection</i>	176
7.5 Research Questions	177
7.6 Qualitative Analysis	177
7.7 Inter-Rater Reliability	178

7.8 Qualitative Findings	179
7.9 Relational Analysis	215
7.10 Conclusion	217
Chapter 8: Study 3: A Qualitative Exploration of Irish-Immersion Pupils' Experiences of Parental Involvement	218
8.0 Overview	218
8.1 Design	218
8.2 Participants	218
8.3 Ethical Considerations	219
8.3.1 <i>Informed Consent/Assent</i>	219
8.3.2 <i>Confidentiality and Anonymity</i>	219
8.3.3 <i>Planning for Participant Distress/Disclosure</i>	220
8.4 Procedure	220
8.4.1 <i>Recruitment of Participants</i>	220
8.4.2 <i>Data Collection</i>	220
8.5 Qualitative Research Questions	221
8.6 Data Analysis	222
8.7 Inter-Rater Reliability	222
8.8 Qualitative Findings	222
8.9 Response to Research Sub-Questions	238
8.10 Conclusion	240
Chapter 9: Integration and Discussion of Findings	241
9.0 Overview	241
9.1 Aims of the Present Research	241
9.2 Summary of Study 1 Findings	242
9.3 Summary of Study 2 Findings	249
9.4 Summary of Study 3 Findings	251
9.5 Considering the Findings in Light of the Theoretical Framework	253
9.5.1 <i>Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence</i>	253
9.5.2 <i>Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of Parental Involvement</i>	254
9.5.3 <i>Empowerment Approach to Parental Involvement</i>	260
9.6 Integration of Findings	261
9.7 Appraising the Present Research	268
9.7.1 <i>Overall Research Design and Informants</i>	268
9.7.2 <i>Methods of Analysis Employed</i>	269
9.7.3 <i>Methodological Considerations: Study 1</i>	270
9.7.4 <i>Methodological Considerations: Study 2</i>	271
9.7.5 <i>Methodological Considerations: Study 3</i>	272
9.8 Implications of the Research	274
9.8.1 <i>Recommendations for Future Research</i>	274
9.8.2 <i>Recommendations for Practice</i>	274
9.9 Conclusion	281
References	282
Appendices	296

List of Tables

	Page
Table 1.1	Epstein's typology of parental involvement activities 19
Table 5.1	Research sub-questions for Study 1, Phase 1 77
Table 5.2	Summary of topics and themes identified in Study 1 qualitative data 78
Table 5.3	Inter-rater reliability: Percentage agreement for Phase 1 interview data 79
Table 5.4	Inter-rater reliability: Percentage agreement for Phase 2 survey responses 79
Table 5.5	Main themes and frequencies relating to reasons for school choice 80
Table 5.6	Main themes and frequencies relating to attitudes towards Irish 87
Table 5.7	Main themes and frequencies relating to involvement activities 91
Table 5.8	Main themes and frequencies relating to Irish in the home 98
Table 5.9	Main themes and frequencies relating to home-school communication 101
Table 5.10	Main themes and frequencies relating to barriers to involvement 105
Table 5.11	Main themes and frequencies relating to facilitators of involvement 113
Table 5.12	Main themes and frequencies relating to overcoming challenges to involvement 115
Table 6.1	Response rates for each participating school 129
Table 6.2	Sociodemographic characteristics of participants 132
Table 6.3	Language(s) used in parents' homes while growing up 135
Table 6.4	Language medium of schools attended by parents 136
Table 6.5	Parents' self-assessed receptive and expressive Irish abilities 137
Table 6.6	Proficiency level combinations in two-parent families 138
Table 6.7	Percentage frequencies of responses to potential school choice factors 141
Table 6.8	Frequencies with which each factor appeared in parents' top three factors 142
Table 6.9	'Crunch' factors in parents' decisions 143
Table 6.10	Parents' ratings of satisfaction with their choice of school 144
Table 6.11	Frequencies of responses to items relating to home-based involvement activities 145
Table 6.12	Percentage frequency responses for home use of Irish scale 146
Table 6.13	Percentage frequency responses regarding child's use of Irish in the home 146
Table 6.14	Percentage frequency responses to items relating to home Irish use 147
Table 6.15	Parents' reports of contact with their children's schools 149
Table 6.16	Language(s) used by parents on school premises 149
Table 6.17	Percentage frequency of agreement with school language use statements 150
Table 6.18	Parents' reports of changes in specific involvement activities over time 151
Table 6.19	Usefulness of potential parental supports 152
Table 6.20	Descriptive statistics for FIQ factors as a function of demographic data 154
Table 6.21	Descriptive statistics for FIQ factors as a function of school ID 157
Table 6.22	Cross-tabulation table for BOM membership by proficiency level 158
Table 6.23	Cross-tabulation table for Parents' Association membership by proficiency level 158
Table 6.24	Distribution of the continuous measures included in the cluster analysis 164
Table 6.25	Final Cluster Centres 165
Table 6.26	Relationships between involvement clusters and additional involvement variables 167
Table 6.27	Parental profile of the three involvement clusters 170
Table 6.28	Likelihood ratio tests 171
Table 6.29	Multinomial logistic regression model showing the impact of parent 172

	characteristics on low, medium and high involvement	
Table 7.1	Research sub-questions for Study 2	177
Table 7.2	Summary of main topics and themes for Study 2	178
Table 7.3	Inter-rater reliability: Percentage agreement for Study 2 interview data	179
Table 7.4	Main themes and frequencies relating to aspects of parental profile	180
Table 7.5	Main themes and frequencies relating to reasons for school choice	183
Table 7.6	Main themes and frequencies relating to definitions of parental involvement	187
Table 7.7	Main themes and frequencies for attitudes towards parental involvement	190
Table 7.8	Main themes and frequencies for experiences of parental involvement	194
Table 7.9	Main themes and frequencies relating to home Irish use	200
Table 7.10	Main themes and frequencies relating to policies and practices regarding parents	202
Table 7.11	Main themes and frequencies relating to facilitators of parental involvement	209
Table 7.12	Main themes and frequencies relating to barriers to parental involvement	211
Table 8.1	Research Sub-Questions for Study 3	221
Table 8.2	Inter-rater reliability: Percentage agreement for Study 3 interview data	222
Table 8.3	Summary of main topics and themes in Study Three	223
Table 8.4	Main themes and frequencies for out-of-school Irish use	223
Table 8.5	Main themes and frequencies relating to literacy and reading	230
Table 8.6	Main themes and frequencies relating to parents' involvement in the school	232
Table 8.7	Main themes and frequencies relating to parents' involvement in home-based activities	235
Table 9.1	Comparison of Present Sample to Samples from Other Studies	246

List of Figures

Figure 1.1	A visual representation of Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence model	17
Figure 4.1	Model of analysis plan for individual studies within the overall research project	73
Figure 6.1	Respondents' and partners' Irish proficiency combinations	138
Figure 6.2	Attitudes to Irish: Respondents' attitudes and respondents' reports of partners' attitudes	139
Figure 6.3	Parents' reported attitudes towards Irish while growing up	140
Figure 6.4	Parents' reports of the frequency of their contact with child's school	148
Figure 6.5	Parents' satisfaction with their level of contact with child's school	148
Figure 9.1	Model depicting the factors which obstruct successful home-school relations in Irish-medium primary schools	266
Figure 9.2	Model depicting factors which facilitate home-school partnerships in Irish-medium primary schools	267

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Tina Hickey, for all of her support, guidance and patience over the past few years. Her generosity with her time and her knowledge has been invaluable, and it is sincerely appreciated. I also gratefully acknowledge the contribution of An Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta in supporting the research.

I would like to offer a huge thank you to all of the principals, teachers, parents, and children who took the time to participate in the research. I am indebted to your generosity. Thank you also to Alvina Lim, Eithne Dunne and Kevin O'Hanrahan for their practical support with the project. I am grateful to all in the School of Psychology who have been so supportive throughout this process. In particular I would like to thank my Doctoral Studies Panel members, Prof. Aidan Moran and Dr. Suzanne Guerin, and also Drs. Teresa Burke and Ela Polek for their guidance at various stages of the research.

I would like to thank Deirdre, Aileen, Ellen, the Aislings, and all of my postgraduate friends who were always so eager to help and to support me, even with huge workloads of their own. Thank you to my sisters, Ailbhe and Doireann, for all their listening and assistance. Thank you to my very best friends, Niamh, Lorna and all of the Dalkey Girls for their constant support and cheerleading. Thank you to Robin, who challenges and inspires me.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Colette and Ken, from whom I experienced the many benefits of parental involvement firsthand. I'm sure they never thought they'd have to be involved for *quite* so long, but their support for me, and for my education, has never faltered. For that, and for everything, I am truly grateful.

Chapter 1

Review of Parental Involvement Literature

1.0 Overview

There is now near-universal consensus among educators and policy makers that parental involvement in children's education is important for their academic and social success at school. The present research aims to explore parental involvement in the particular educational context of Irish immersion primary schools. It explores home-school relations in this less usual educational context, where the language of the school and the language of the home differ. It is notable that the fields of 'Immersion Education' and 'Parental Involvement in Education' have thus far, on the whole, constituted two broad but distinct bodies of scholarship, with a dearth of research that bridges the gap between these two fields. Relatively little research has been conducted on the role of parents in the immersion education context; less still has been undertaken in the unique Irish context. The present research aims to address this gap in the literature.

Before fully outlining the rationale for, and potential contribution of, the present research, it is first necessary to consider the relevant literature pertaining both to parental involvement in education and to immersion education in general. In the present chapter, the body of parental involvement literature is reviewed. First, the evidence for the widely accepted conclusion that parental involvement influences student achievement is critically examined. Next, the correlates and predictors of parental involvement which have been identified in other contexts are reviewed. Historical conceptualisations of the parental role in education are then considered, and 'parental involvement' as it is operationalized in the present research is defined. Finally, a significant portion of the chapter is devoted to outlining the theoretical framework underpinning the present research. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

1.1 Review of Empirical Parental Involvement Literature

1.1.1 Parental Involvement and Student Outcomes

In recent decades, the belief that parental involvement positively influences student outcomes has become an increasingly widespread and popularly held one. Increasing or enhancing parental involvement has thus featured as a central component in major educational policies and reforms worldwide, for example in North America, Australasia, Continental Europe, and the United Kingdom (Desforjes & Abouchaar, 2003). Promoting parental involvement and increasing home-school collaboration has also been a notable feature of educational policy and

planning in the Irish context over recent decades (INTO, 1997). The idea that parental involvement positively affects students' performance is so intuitively appealing and has such support from educators, policy makers, parents, and indeed, many researchers, that it has been accepted in some sectors with relatively little examination of the evidence base (Fan & Chen, 2001; Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez & Kayzar, 2002). In the following sections, the empirical literature relating to parental involvement and student achievement will be critically reviewed.

Academic Achievement

The student outcome which has received the most research attention with respect to its relationship with parental involvement has been that of students' *academic* achievement. While the overwhelming majority of studies have shown a positive association between parental involvement and children's academic success (e.g. Miedel & Reynolds, 1999, Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996), a small number (particularly earlier studies) found a negligible or even negative association between parental involvement practices and student academic outcomes (e.g. Bobbett, 1995; Ford, 1989; Natriello & McDill, 1986). Several potential explanations have been posited for these inconsistencies, particularly, the fragmentation in the research due to the lack of guiding theoretical frameworks, the failure to reach consensus on a definition of 'parental involvement' and problems with measurement (Baker & Soden, 1998). As a result, the need for rigorous, systematic meta-analyses of the literature in this domain was recognised.

Jeynes (2005a) conducted a meta-analysis of 77 cross-sectional studies (which included over 30,000 children) to examine the relationship between the academic achievement of pupils and parental involvement, variously defined by the studies selected for inclusion as: involvement with homework, attendance/participation at school functions, communicating with school staff, parent educational expectations and parents' reading to/with their children. The results of the metaanalysis indicated that the involvement of parents was positively related to the academic performance of schoolchildren. This finding emerged over a wide range of outcome measures, including standardized test scores, grades and teacher ratings (Jeynes, 2005a).

Fan and Chen's (2001) meta-analysis looked at twenty five cross-sectional studies which met their inclusion criteria and aimed to establish whether there was a relationship between involvement and achievement, and if so, to establish the strength of this relationship. Studies included in the meta-analysis assessed dimensions of parental involvement such as parent-child communication, parents' educational aspirations, contact with school, participating in school activities, and supervising homework. Achievement was assessed by a range of measures including test scores in mathematics, reading, other subject areas, and combined grades or

GPA's. The findings revealed "*a small to moderate, and practically meaningful*" (p.1) relationship between the involvement of parents and the achievement of students (Fan & Chen, 2001).

However, it is important not to draw conclusions on the relationship between parental involvement and students' academic achievement solely on the basis of cross-sectional studies. Such findings may be biased, as they do not take into account the fact that the causal direction of home-school relationships can be ambiguous. Contemporaneous studies do not take account of students' prior performance, and this can be problematic. For example, parents of children who are struggling at school may make more attempts to contact their child's school and to talk to their child's teacher about their child's progress. Conversely, parents of children who are performing well at school may take a more relaxed approach to involvement. Indeed, Catsambis (1998) found that certain parental involvement behaviours, including making contact with school, were negatively associated with student achievement. When she controlled for problem behaviours, these negative effects disappeared. Thus, the relationships between parental involvement and student achievement may be misrepresented in cross-sectional studies. It is thus important to consider also studies which have adopted longitudinal designs, such as that by Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow and Fendrich (1999), which explored relationships between teacher reports of parental involvement and student performance in the United States. Four measures of parental involvement were included: frequency of teacher-parent contact, quality of this contact, involvement in school-based activities, and involvement in home-based educational activities. Student performance was assessed by mathematics test scores, reading comprehension scores, number of absences from school, school engagement scores and socioemotional adjustment scores. Over three consecutive years, teachers provided this information for children in their classes (n=1205) and the children's parents, from kindergarten to third grade in urban elementary schools. Each of the parental involvement variables was significantly positively correlated with student performance in the first and second year, and accounted for a significant amount of the variance in student performance in the third year when prior performance (Year 1 performance) was controlled for.

Englund, Luckner, Whaley and Egeland (2004) utilised a prospective, longitudinal design to investigate the relationships between parent behaviours, parent expectations and children's achievement. Participants in the study were 187 mothers and their children, who were studied from birth to third grade using methods such as laboratory observations, interviews with the children's mothers and teachers, and intelligence tests conducted with the children. Englund et al. (2004) found that the quality of the mother's instruction prior to the child starting school had significant direct effects on IQ and indirect effects on achievement in first and third grades. Quality of parental instruction, parental involvement in the school and parental

expectations were all found to have effects on achievement in third grade over and above children's IQ, previous achievement and educational level of the mother.

While Englund et al. looked at the *quality* of parental involvement and its relationship with student achievement, Miedel and Reynolds (1999) looked at the *frequency* of parental involvement and its relationship with student performance, using a retrospective, qualitative approach. Over seven hundred (n=704) interviews with parents were conducted, eliciting parents' reports on their involvement when their children were in pre-school and in kindergarten. In order to confirm parents' reports of involvement, teacher ratings of parent participation were also obtained, which closely reflected the reports of parents. Miedel and Reynolds (1999) found that the number of parental involvement activities engaged in was significantly positively correlated with reading achievement, lower grade retention and fewer years in special education.

The findings outlined thus far have related to naturalistic cross-sectional and longitudinal studies which have examined correlations between parental involvement practices and students' academic achievement. While causality cannot be inferred from these findings, some evidence of a causal relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement can be found in studies which have examined the effects of programmes or interventions which set out to raise levels of parental involvement. Starkey and Klein (2000) showed the effectiveness of such a programme to increase parental involvement in maths. The intervention involved the provision of classes and maths activity kits to parents. Both experimental groups in this study had children who showed enhanced maths knowledge and skills compared to the children of parents in the control group. A number of such interventions have been evaluated. Van Voorhis (2001) reported that children of parents participating in the *Teacher Involving Parents in Schoolwork* programme (TIPS) earned overall higher grades than those in a control group. Jordan, Snow and Porche (2000) implemented *Project Ease* which involved provision of home literacy activities for parents and children and also included training of mothers in developing literacy. Children involved in the programme showed significantly more improvement in reading scores than did children in a control group. Shaver and Walls (1998) found that workshops informing parents of what their children were learning and about how to help their children at home were significantly linked to pupils' achievement as assessed by reading and mathematics test scores.

Controversy arose when, despite such positive findings, Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez and Kayzar (2002) published a synthesis of research on the effectiveness of parental involvement programmes which concluded that there was no evidence to suggest that parental involvement programmes had any impact on student achievement. A number of weaknesses in

this synthesis, however, serve to undermine confidence in their conclusion. A significant flaw was the failure to include several prominent studies in their review, and approximately half of the studies which they did include were unpublished and therefore not peer-reviewed. Jeynes (2005b) argues that since unpublished research tends to feature statistically insignificant results, the Mattingly et al. review's inclusion of many unpublished results which support their conclusion, and omission of several published studies which contradict their position, raises the risk that their results are biased. Jeynes (2005b) also noted errors in that Mattingly et al. (2002) concluded that several studies of programmes which reported statistically significant effects actually had no impact. Finally, Mattingly et al. (2002) did not utilise meta-analytical methods to statistically assess the results of the individual studies in combination.

A more systematic review and a meta-analysis of studies investigating parental involvement programmes and student academic achievement was conducted by Nye, Turner and Schartz (2006). Noting the negative findings of Mattingly et al.'s (2002) synthesis, and concerned that previous reviews (such as Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005a, 2005b) had only *suggested* that parental involvement positively influences achievement, their objective was to '*summarize the most dependable evidence on the effect of parental involvement intervention programs for improving the academic performance of elementary school age children.*' (p. 8). They thus limited their analysis to studies which utilised a randomised control trial design. Eighteen studies which met their inclusion criteria featured in the meta-analysis. Their analysis revealed that the parent involvement programmes included had a significant, positive effect on students' academic achievement at the global level. Nye, Turner and Schartz (2006) concluded that the effect ($d=0.45$) is large enough to have practical implications for educators, parents and policy makers.

Henderson and Mapp (2002) also reviewed the literature relating to the impact of school, family and community connections on student achievement. They included 51 studies published between 1993 and 2001 which were deemed methodologically sound, including pre-experimental studies, quasi-experimental studies, correlational studies, and experimental studies. They concluded that:

These studies found a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and benefits for students, including academic achievement. The relationship holds across families of all economic/ethnic, and educational backgrounds, and for students of all ages. (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p.24)

Most of the research in this area has focused on the outcome of global academic achievement (as assessed by grades, scores on standardized tests, teacher reports, etc.), but other studies have suggested relationships between parental involvement and specific outcomes relating to literacy, motivation and behaviour, which are briefly outlined below.

Literacy Development

Sénéchal, LeFevre, Thomas and Daley (1998) posited that children's literacy development is influenced by two types of family practices: informal exposure to words and books (e.g. through storybook reading), and more formal instruction about reading and writing from their parents. They found that the frequency with which parents reported teaching their children about reading and writing was positively related to children's literacy outcomes as assessed by knowledge of alphabet, beginning reading and invented spelling (Sénéchal et al., 1998). Evans, Shaw and Bell (2000) also found that the amount of time parents spent teaching their children the alphabet was related to their children's recognition and knowledge of letter names and sounds.

Sénéchal (2006) reported the results of a longitudinal study which examined the relationships between children's early literacy experiences at home and children's literacy development during kindergarten, their reading and spelling at Grade 1, and their reading comprehension, fluency, spelling and reading for pleasure at Grade 4. She found that the two distinct types of parental practices which support literacy (informal exposure and formal teaching) were related to different aspects of children's achievement. Exposure to reading material was related to children's language skills, such as increased vocabulary, but was not found to be related to children's early literacy or phoneme awareness. Storybook exposure was also found to be related to more advanced reading comprehension at Grade 4. Conversely, parental teaching was related directly to children's early literacy development, was indirectly related to phoneme awareness, but was not found to be related to children's vocabularies.

Darling and Westberg (2004) conducted a meta-analysis to assess the effectiveness of interventions which aimed to improve students' literacy skills by increasing parental involvement in reading-related activities in the home. The researchers limited their analysis to peer-reviewed published studies which utilised an experimental or quasi-experimental design, tested the specific hypothesis that parental involvement affects children's reading, included at least five participants, and reported effect sizes (or reported statistics which allowed effect sizes to be calculated). Twenty interventions which involved 1583 families met the criteria for inclusion in this meta-analysis. Darling and Westberg (2004) concluded that parental involvement in reading activities positively affects children's reading achievement. Training parents to teach their child to read with specific exercises was found to be more effective than having parents listen to their child reading (either with training or without). However, training a parent in *how* to listen to their child reading was twice as effective as having them listen to their child read without training. The studies all involved interventions with parents of children from kindergarten to Grade 3. The positive effects were found for children from all of these grade levels.

Student Motivation

Gonzales-deHass, Willems and Doan Holbein (2005) found positive relationships between the involvement of parents and the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of students in both primary and secondary school, their engagement at school, self-regulation, perceived competence, perceived control, motivation to read, and goal orientation. Deutscher and Ibe (2002) also found a positive relationship between volunteerism of parents and the motivation of thirteen- to seventeen-year-olds students (n=400) to attend out-of-school educational venues such as museums and zoos. They also noted that parents who regularly made contact with the child's teacher and checked their child's progress online were more likely to have children who were motivated to find out extra information about a topic outside of school.

Brooks, Bruno and Burns (1997) designed and implemented a programme to increase the motivation of kindergarten, first- and second-grade pupils through increased parental participation. Children's motivation was assessed by means of teacher, parent and pupil surveys, while student performance was examined using observations, checklists and assessments. The programme involved parent workshops, a Read Aloud programme, home activities and an initiative aimed at reducing the television watching of children. Evaluation of the programme demonstrated an increase in children's motivation and performance.

Student Behaviour

Hill et al. (2004) looked at parents' involvement in their adolescents' education and found it to be negatively related to students' behavioural problems. The involvement of parents has also been found to be related to decreased truancy and to teacher ratings of positive classroom behaviour. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) conducted a longitudinal study which found that specific parent-school partnership practices predicted an increase in daily attendance and a reduction in chronic absenteeism. Rumberger (1995) also found higher levels of parental involvement to be related to lower school dropout rates.

1.1.2 Outcomes for Parents

In addition to positive outcomes for students, benefits of educational involvement for parents themselves have been documented. Positive experiences of involvement have been shown to give rise to a greater sense of parental efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; 1997) and parent-child communication can also improve when parents are actively involved. Working in partnership with schools allows parents to feel more engaged in their children's lives and to derive satisfaction from feeling that they are positively contributing to their child's education (Pena, 2000). Parents who are involved garner more respect from their children's teachers than uninvolved parents (Henderson & Berla, 1994) and are more likely to further their own education (Henderson & Berla, 1994, 1997).

1.1.3 Outcomes for Schools

Looking at the wider impact of parental involvement, there is also evidence suggesting that parental involvement in home-school partnerships benefits both schools and school personnel (Jordan, Orozco & Averett, 2001). Research has identified nine characteristics common to high-performing schools, one of which is high levels of community and family involvement (Pushor, 2007). Similarly, among Lezotte's (1992) seven correlates of effective schools, one relates to the quality of home-school relations. Involving parents has benefits for schools in terms of providing resources, such as volunteer hours and practical support for the school (Chavkin, 1989). Studies have also shown that schools that welcome parental involvement have more positive school climates (Desimone, Finn-Stevenson & Henrich, 2000) and that schools with higher levels of home-school collaboration have teachers with greater job satisfaction and higher morale (Henderson & Berla, 1994). It has been suggested that parental involvement also influences teacher efficacy (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsy, Bassler & Brisslie, 1992).

1.1.4 The Importance of Different Forms of Parental Involvement

A major feature of parental involvement literature is that 'parental involvement' has been defined in such a wide variety of ways. Some researchers have chosen to focus on particular dynamic aspects of parental participation (such as parent aspirations) or specific behaviours (such as attendance at parent-teacher meetings or volunteering activities). However, as has been outlined above, it appears that there is a wide variety of practices in which parents can engage, which can, in turn, positively influence children's school experience. As a result, it appears more appropriate to think of 'parental involvement' as a multidimensional construct (Fan, 2001; Anderson & Minke, 2007). While some studies have adopted a narrow conceptualisation of parental involvement, others have assessed parental involvement more globally, by merging several types of involvement into one composite variable (Englund et al., 2004), with studies differing considerably in the measures included in these composites. Such merging of several types of parental involvement into one variable makes it difficult to assess the relative contributions of each, where a relationship is found between involvement and achievement.

Attempts to disentangle the effects of different types of parental involvement have yielded conflicting results (e.g. Englund et al., 2004). Several researchers have found that involvement in home-based learning activities has the greatest influence on achievement (e.g. Ingram, Wolfe & Lieberman, 2007; Bizzo et al., 1999; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Van Voorhis, 2003) while others have found that school-based parental involvement is more strongly (positively)

correlated with achievement (e.g. Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992; Lee & Bowen, 2003; Shumow Miller, 2001). It is possible that these conflicting findings may result from the fact that, in addition to studies assessing many different indices of parental involvement, there is also considerable variation in the outcome measures used to indicate student achievement. Shumow, Lyutykh and Schmidt (2011) found, for example, that different dimensions of parental involvement affected student outcomes differently.

Another factor is the probability that different forms of involvement have differential effects depending on the age or class level of the child. While having a structured system for parental monitoring of homework may be beneficial for primary school children, this may be counterproductive for adolescents who are attempting to assert their autonomy (Cooper, Lynsey & Nye, 2000). As might be expected, Miedel and Reynolds (1999) found that parental involvement improved the reading scores of children in kindergarten but had no effect on the reading of high school students. Similarly, Hill and Tyson's meta-analytic study (2009) found that what they termed 'academic socialisation' was the type of involvement most strongly linked with achievement of young adolescents. Academic socialisation refers to parents communicating with the child about the value/utility of education, fostering educational and career aspirations in the child, the linking of school work to current events, and making plans/preparations for the child's future (Hill & Tyson, 2009). This was found to be more strongly related to academic achievement than helping with homework in a sample of post-primary school children. The researchers claim that this due to the students' desire for increased autonomy at this later stage of their school careers.

Given the different effects of parental involvement on different student outcomes, and the potential change in the relative contribution of these effects at different stages of a child's educational career, it is not possible to conclude on the basis of the extant literature which form of parental involvement is most important for children's success. What is clear is that there is a wide variety of ways in which parents can be, and are, involved in their children's education and there is evidence suggesting that all of these may potentially be beneficial to children's outcomes (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

1.2 Correlates and Predictors of Parental Involvement

Building on this growing body of evidence that involved parents have higher-performing children at school, research attention has also turned to the task of establishing which factors facilitate and obstruct such involvement, and these will now be reviewed.

1.2.1 Parent Characteristics

The majority of studies examining correlates and predictors of parental involvement have been focused on parent (or family) background factors and their relationships to involvement. Higher levels of involvement have been found to be related to certain demographic characteristics of parents (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Socioeconomic status has been found to be a strong predictor of parental involvement (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski & Apostoleris, 1997). Many researchers have found that parents from higher SES groups are more likely to take an active role in the education of their children (e.g. Davis-Kean, 2005; Pena, 2000). Conversely, parents from lower socioeconomic groups have been found to be more likely to experience practical barriers to involvement, ranging from lack of resources to transportation problems (Finders & Lewis, 1994).

Another demographic characteristic which has been found to be related to involvement is that of gender. Repeatedly, studies have shown that mothers are more likely to be involved in the education of their children than are fathers (e.g. Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). Elements of family structure have also been linked to levels of involvement. Living with two parents predicts higher levels of parental involvement at secondary school level (Astone & McLanahan, 1991). Parents with several children report lower levels of involvement than those with fewer children (Baker, 1997). Mothers who work part-time have been found to be more involved than those in full-time employment (Muller, 1995).

Parents' educational background has been found to be particularly important in terms of their likelihood of adopting an active role in their children education. Fantuzzo et al. (2002) found that college-educated parents were significantly more involved in school-based and home-based involvement than were parents with just a high school education. Conversely, parents with lower levels of education or those who have had negative experiences of education are less likely to take an actively involved role. In such cases, parents may have worries or fears surrounding contact with their child's teacher or other school staff (Lareau, 1996).

While well-established, such sociological trends do not tell us much about parents' motivations for involvement, or about the individual or psychological barriers which may prevent such participation. They also cannot explain the variation of levels of involvement within demographic groups. In fact, very few research studies have moved beyond demographics and attempted to understand parents' decisions to take an actively involved role in their children's education (Georgiou, 2007), and this lacuna will be addressed in the current research.

1.2.2 School Characteristics

Several researchers have posited the impact of general school characteristics on parental involvement. Despite this, little research attention has been directed at identifying *which* aspects of schools are related to higher levels of parental involvement (Griffith, 1998). Eccles and Harold (1993) argued that there are two main ways in which schools influence parental involvement: their organisational structure and the attitudes and behaviours of staff. Research has shown that school variables such as the setting of the school (rural, urban or suburban), size, school climate and sense of community are related to levels of parent participation (Shouse, 1997; Feuerstein, 2000). Looking at the effect of school size, Griffith (1998) found that higher levels of involvement were reported in schools with larger populations of students and in schools with larger student-teacher ratios. Schools which have explicit programmes aimed at including and involving parents were found to have higher levels of involvement than those that do not (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders & Simon, 1997).

Teachers' attitudes towards, and beliefs about, parental involvement are also directly related to their practices of outreach to parents (Caspe, 2003). Teachers who regard parents positively and who view parents as the primary educator of their children are more likely to invite the involvement of parents (Epstein & Dauber, 1991), and conversely, those who perceive parental involvement as a threat to their professional status are less likely to elicit such involvement (Epstein, 1986). Teacher knowledge contributes as well as attitudes: teachers who feel that they know *how* to effectively involve parents and those who are convinced of the benefits of involving parents are more likely to do so (Dauber & Epstein, 1993), while those who lack knowledge of parent involvement strategies or those who feel ambivalent towards its potential effectiveness are less likely to make involvement overtures to parents (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Garcia (2004) found that teacher efficacy was positively correlated with, and a predictor of, five different parental involvement practices. Anderson and Minke (2007) examined the relationship between four variables: parental role construction, parental sense of efficacy, parents' resources and parental perception of invitations from teachers (based on Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model, discussed below) and three home- and school-based involvement activities. They found that teacher invitations had the greatest effect on all three of the involvement activities which they examined.

1.2.3 Age of Child

Research has consistently demonstrated that levels of parental involvement decrease as children grow older (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003), and several reasons have been suggested for this decline in involvement. Dauber and Epstein (1993) reported that parents of older children felt less able to be involved when their children reached middle school than they had

previously been due to the increased difficulty of the school/homework. Other findings indicate that as their children progress through to the later stages of school, their involvement is neither required or welcomed by their children. Despite this, the benefits of involvement, when undertaken by parents, have been shown to extend from pre-school right through to third-level. What is clear, however, is that particular parental involvement activities may have different effects on a student's performance depending on the age of the child (Jordan et al., 2001).

1.2.4 Barriers to Parental Involvement

Baker (1997) conducted a qualitative study with parents which explored barriers to parental involvement. The study focused on parents' experiences of involvement in school-based activities. Among the barriers frequently identified by parents in this study were: practical issues such as time constraints due to working outside the home, being a lone parent, and having younger children. Another barrier reported by parents was a lack of money required for some parent activities offered by schools which require a financial commitment, such as book fairs, cake sales and social events (Baker, 1997).

Another common barrier reported by parents in Baker's study related to the nature of the relationship between the home and school. Parents reported having previously had negative experiences of involvement which led them to believe that it would be better for their children if they were not involved. Others described their feelings that their involvement was not welcomed by their child's school and so these parents were not as involved as they would like to be. It was also reported that parents felt that they were warmly received at particular occasions to which they were *invited*, but that if they came to the school outside of these fixed occasions, they felt unwelcome.

Parents in Baker's study also reported barriers to involvement which related directly to their children and which took two main forms. First, parents reported that their children frequently lost correspondence from the school and so information and invitations were not always successfully delivered to parents. Second, some parents reported feeling that their children did not want them to be present in their school, either in the classroom or on school trips. Baker primarily found this with parents of adolescent children rather than those at primary level. The final barrier which emerged in Baker's study related to parents feeling that they lacked information and knowledge on how they should be involved. Not knowing what forms their involvement should take prevented many parents from taking an actively involved role.

Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin and DePedro (2011) argue that barriers to parental involvement also arise when parents and teachers have different expectations or beliefs about how parents

should be involved. They cite Lawson (2003) who found that a lack of consensus on this issue led teachers to blame parents, and to parents feeling underappreciated by teachers. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) also argue that parents and teachers have different agenda and different goals for parental involvement, which lead to tensions and conflicts, which can in turn limit the type, extent and success of parental involvement practices.

There is also research identifying language differences between home and school as creating barriers to the involvement of parents. However, this research has generally been undertaken in the context of submersion, with migrant families, rather than in immersion education with majority language families. For example, Tinkler (2001) undertook a review of the literature on Hispanic/Latino parents in English-medium schools in the U.S. Low parental participation by this group was found, and this was explained by a number of factors. Among them, and a considerable barrier to home-school relations, was parents' lack of proficiency in the language of the school. Not speaking English, or not speaking it well, may lead to parents feeling reluctant to go to the school or to interact with school staff. However, another factor noted by Tinkler (2001) was that in Latino culture, teachers and schools are highly respected, so that parents worry that any interference on their behalf would be seen as showing a lack of respect. Tinkler (2001) also points to migrant parents' previous lack of education, or their negative experiences of school in their home countries, as preventing their current involvement.

Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008) discussed the challenges of involving English as a second language (ESL) families in education in the US, arguing that low parental proficiency in the language of the school is one of the most salient barriers to involvement of these parents. They found that ESL parents could not help their children with homework as effectively as first language (L1) English parents, nor could they express their concerns to school staff. In addition, they, too, mention the role of culture, of different parent expectations and knowledge of the educational system as contributing to low levels of involvement in this group.

It is important to note that submersion contexts such as those described above cannot be equated to Irish immersion, where parents speak the majority language of the country but opt to have their children educated through a minority language (which they may or may not speak themselves). It is expected that a variety of different psychological and socio-cultural factors may influence the nature of involvement in this setting, and that parental involvement in such a context as this thus merits study in its own right.

1.3 Theoretical Approaches to Parental Involvement

1.3.1 The Problem of Definition

As discussed above, what is meant by ‘parental involvement’ as it appears in the literature is not always clear (Georgiou, 2007) and a frequent criticism which has been levelled at a large proportion of this research has been the lack of consistency in the definitions of ‘parental involvement’ operationalised by the researchers (Baker & Soden, 1998). Parental involvement may be defined broadly as any allocation of resources by the parent to their child’s educational endeavours (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). However, moving beyond such a general definition of parental involvement is necessary if the aim is to undertake a comprehensive exploration of parental involvement (as is aimed in the present research), and if consistency is to be achieved across parental involvement studies. It is clear that parental involvement is a multidimensional construct, but that identification of these dimensions has been problematic resulting in them being redefined over time. A review of different conceptualisations of the construct is now presented.

1.3.2 Changing Conceptualisations of Parental Involvement: From Deficit to Empowerment

In the 1960s, the importance of parents’ involvement in their children’s schooling began to be acknowledged by researchers and (to a degree) educators. This recognition inevitably brought with it an interest in identifying ways in which such involvement could be investigated and increased. This in turn led to the development of a number of ways to classify or describe the ways in which parents can, or should, be involved in the education of their children (Bauch, 1994). Typologies of parental involvement activities have differed in the roles which they assign to parents and the degree to which they perceive parents as being partners in the education process.

Early models of parental involvement tended to focus on the limitations of parents in becoming successful and effective partners in their children’s education. So-called ‘deficit models’ were models which viewed parents as lacking the necessary skills, resources or willingness to support their children’s education effectively. Intervention programmes aimed at increasing parental involvement designed with such an approach tended to focus heavily on parent education and training as core components of their interventions, and remediating parents in some way was the primary focus.

An example of such a deficit model is Gordon’s Systems Approach, a popular method in the 1970s of representing parental involvement in education. Gordon (1970) divided parental involvement into categories which were based on the institutions that would be influenced by their involvement. His work was largely influenced by Bronfenbrenner and Brim, and his model can be said to be an ecological model of systems; it is often referred to as the

Community Impact Model. Gordon (1970) placed the parent and the child in the centre of his model i.e., they are the microsystem. According to this representation, the family can be seen to have a strong influence on the successful educational development of the child, but effecting change in this domain requires major effort and energy, as it was believed that extensive training of parents would be required before they would be capable of becoming effective partners in the education process. The mesosystem in this representation is the neighbourhood activities or institutions such as recreation, local business etc., which affect the child and families in less direct ways. The exosystem involves the influence of local policies (such as the availability of social services, the family leave policy of a local employer, etc.) which can impact on the quality and nature of family life. Finally, the macrosystem involves the major social, societal, political and economic forces of society at large.

Gordon argued that if one chooses to focus on effecting change in the microsystem in order to improve parental involvement in education, then parents should be helped to assume the following roles:

1. Parents as Teachers
2. Parents as Volunteers
3. Parents as Paraprofessionals
4. Parents as Adult Learners
5. Parents as Adult Educators
6. Parents as Decision-makers

Gordon's model, reflecting the commonly held view at the time, included educating parents as one of the major goals of parent involvement programmes. Such a 'deficit' approach has been criticized for failing to give consideration to contextual factors and for the implied belief that the standards and values of the school are superior to those held by families (Bauch, 1994). Also, Gordon's model gave scant attention to the *interaction* between parents and teachers, and failed to highlight the importance of open and trustful communication between teacher and parent which has been identified as a crucial component of parental involvement in later models (see Epstein below).

As a result of these criticisms, deficit models began to be replaced by what are known as '*difference models*', based on the assumption that the home and school cultures can often differ and that children can be helped to adapt to the new culture by building on their unique learning styles (Bauch, 1994). These models characterised the parental involvement literature throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. An example of such a model is Berger's classification of 'role categories'. Berger (1991) suggested six roles that parents should play in their interaction with their child's educational life, which are as follows:

1. Parent as teachers of their own children
2. Parents as spectators
3. Parents as employed resources
4. Parents as temporary volunteers
5. Parents as volunteer resources
6. Parents as policy makers

It can be seen that there are significant similarities between Berger's categories and the earlier classifications of Gordon. However, it is also clear that there is a noticeable shift in focus away from *parent education* as a primary aim of parental involvement programmes. In other words, there is a shift away from the deficit model which pervaded the ways in which parent involvement was viewed in earlier decades. In such a model as Berger's, parents are not viewed as inferior educators of their children, rather as having *different* roles to play than their children's formal educators in school. Again, however, there is little emphasis in Berger's classifications on 'parents as communicators'. The school and the home are both seen as important but *separate* domains, with no importance given to the aim of bridging the gap between the two, i.e. in forging meaningful, mutually respectful and mutually beneficial partnerships between home and school.

Unlike deficit or difference models, which seem to perpetuate the view of parents as playing a separate and less important role, 'empowerment models' view parents as valuable sources of information, and as having the ability to contribute meaningfully to their child's learning. Unlike difference models, they focus on the importance of collaboration between parents and teachers, and characterize how parent involvement is more likely to be viewed currently. Swick and Graves (1993) summarise empowered parents as having the ability to:

- A. Make effective use of resources
- B. Be effective problem-solvers, and
- C. Interact effectively with others.

Shepard and Rose (1995) argue that, if education professionals wish to support parents to become more empowered, they need to accept several assumptions. First, an acknowledgement that the parent has a role as the child's principal educator and is thus entitled to be treated as a respected partner by the child's school is necessary. Second, a shift to emphasizing a family's strengths as opposed to any perceived deficits is needed. Third, there must be a move towards teachers taking a more holistic view of children and seeing them within the context of their family, school and community environments. Finally, Shepard and Rose highlight the need for parents to be seen as a valuable source of information and as the 'best experts' about their child. This is the framework within which parent involvement models have been based since the 1990s (e.g. Rasinski & Fredericks' 'Hierarchy of Involvement', 1989; Shepard & Rose's

‘Empowerment Model’, 1995). A further example of a theoretical model which advocates an empowerment approach and which informs the present research is now presented.

1.3.3 Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence

The most commonly accepted contemporary framework for viewing parental involvement was inspired by the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) and designed from a social and organisational perspective (Epstein, 1987, 1992, 2001). It identifies three major contexts within which children develop and learn: the family, the school, and the community (see Figure 1.1). The Overlapping Spheres of Influence model recognizes that there are some practices that family, school and community conduct separately and that there are others that they conduct jointly in order to influence the growth and learning of the child. According to Epstein, successful partnerships must be forged between these three spheres in order best to meet the needs of the child. This model is thus philosophically aligned with an empowerment approach to parental involvement.

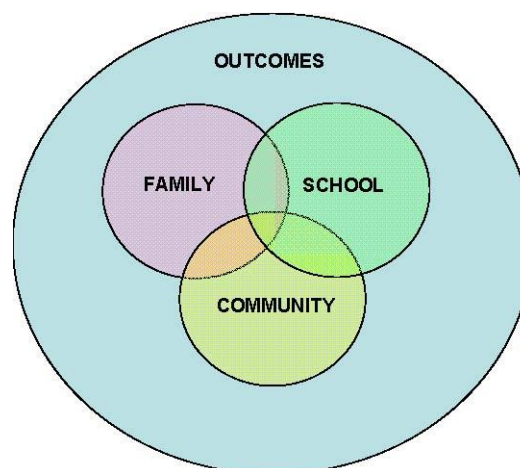


Fig. 1.1. A visual representation of Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence Model

The family and the school constitute the two primary contexts within which children develop, both socially and academically. Epstein (e.g. 1987, 1992, 2001) emphasises that student outcomes are improved when schools and families share goals and work in collaboration to achieve these goals. Epstein (1992) noted that the overlapping spheres of family and school are brought closer together or pushed apart depending on three major forces:

When schools and families cooperate and the spheres are pushed together, this leads to the generation of “family-like schools” where there is a welcoming and accepting atmosphere in the school for families, and also “school-like families” where the importance of school and learning activities is emphasised in the home environment. The zone of overlap between the spheres consists of the social interactions between school staff, parents and students. The model emphasises the reciprocity of the interaction between school and home; interaction will

increase when teachers encourage parental involvement in education. Similarly, when parents choose to become more involved, the zone of interaction is increased. This interaction is maximised when strong partnerships are formed between parents and teachers, when these relationships are based on mutual respect and open communication, and incorporate shared activities. When schools and families avoid contact with each other and fail to work together collaboratively, then the spheres are pulled apart.

The present research is guided by Epstein's Model of Involvement. It recognises that there are some practices that parents and school conduct separately and some they conduct jointly towards their shared goal of maximising children's outcomes. While theorists and researchers have moved towards such a conceptualisation of parental involvement; seeing children's education as the shared responsibility of families and schools, there is also evidence that, in practice, a deficit approach still pervades in some contexts. Moore and Lasky (2001) argue that 'deficit' approaches to parental involvement are 'still alive and well when it comes to inclusion of minority, single parent and low socioeconomic status families' (p. 17). The present research will consider whether such an approach is prevalent in an immersion context, where parents may not be proficient in the language of the school and thus may be seen as lacking the necessary tools for successful involvement.

1.3.4 Epstein's Typology of Parental Involvement Practices

Epstein and colleagues expressed concern that early work on parent involvement neglected to offer insights about what schools could do to promote more extensive parental involvement (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Dietz (1997) argued that when a school limits parental involvement to a particular type of involvement (e.g. fundraising, committee membership) then only a small proportion of parents become involved. As a result the school neither really involves parents, nor reaps the potential benefits from involvement. Instead, a more comprehensive model of parental involvement which elicits a wide variety of parental involvement is advocated (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Epstein and colleagues (Epstein, 1992, 1996) thus developed a typology which aimed to comprehensively categorise the variety of involvement activities in which parents could potentially engage. These are summarised in Table 1.1 According to Epstein's theory, all six of these types of involvement are conducive to successful partnerships between parents (or family), school, and community. The categories can also be subsumed into three broader categories: Home-based involvement, school-based involvement and home-school communication (Fantuzzo et al., 2000)

Table 1.1 Epstein's Typology of Involvement Activities

Activity Type	Description
Parenting	Parents' basic obligations towards their children, such as providing them with guidance, supervision and materials.
Communicating	Sharing of knowledge between home and school, for example about the child's progress.
Volunteering	Parental involvement in school activities such as helping in the classroom, attending school occasions, etc.
Learning at home	Activities such as helping with homework, talking to the child about school and learning, providing encouragement etc.
Decision making	Involvement in organisation or planning in the school, such as on parents' associations or councils.
Collaborating with the community	Parents within the same community working together and exchanging information in the best interests of the children

Each type of involvement elicits many different practices of partnership and the implementation of these practices will vary. However, Epstein argues that, if done well, all can lead to positive outcomes for students. While other theorists have posited alternative models of parental involvement, only Epstein's has undergone widespread examination from the research community (Jordan, Orozco & Averett, 2001). The typology owes its popularity to the ease with which it can inform research and its practicality for those interested in increasing parental involvement. This typology will be used to guide the present research, where parental participation in each of the identified categories will be explored in a sample of Irish immersion parents. First, however, a final variation within this model is outlined, as the one which most influences the current study.

1.3.5 Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model of Parental Involvement

How parental involvement affects students' achievement

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model (1995, 1997; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005) offer a significant complement or extension to Epstein's model, as it not only posits that parents can be involved in education in the home, in the school, and in engaging with communication with the school, but it also attempts to explain *how* each of the types of involvement can positively influence student outcomes. The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model highlights four primary mechanisms through which the involvement of parents affects students' achievement:

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995; Walker et al., 2005) argue that parents can influence their children's educational outcomes by **modelling** school-related behaviours and attitudes. By choosing to become involved in various aspects of their child's school life, parents demonstrate to their children that activities relating to school are important, valuable, and worthy of adult time. In this way, *all* parental involvement practices are potentially important because they display to the child that the parents deem school and education to be worthwhile, and significant to both the parent and the child. Because parents are usually positively regarded by their children, modelling theory predicts that children will emulate specific behaviours of their parents. Thus, any investment of time in school-related activities by the parent gives the child an opportunity to model school-focused attitudes and behaviours (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). As well as modelling positive *attitudes* towards school and education, parents' modelling of appropriate school-related *skills* to their child is another important way in which parents can positively influence their children's performance at school (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker & Sandler, 2005).

Parents can also influence their child's educational outcomes by **reinforcing** aspects of their child's school learning. By choosing to become involved in school-related activities, parents often give their children attention, interest, praise and other rewards related to behaviours which are important for a child's success at school. Such reinforcements are important due to the role they play in the elicitation and maintenance of positive behaviours related to a child's educational outcomes. Providing that parents use appropriate reinforcements (i.e. those which are valued by the child) in relation to areas which are central to a child's school success (e.g. completing homework, paying attention in class, revising for tests, etc.) then reinforcement theory predicts that children will be more likely to engage in these positively reinforced behaviours, and thus perform better at school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

Parents can support their children's learning and improve their performance at school through **direct instruction** activities in the home. As Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler note, this direct instruction can take one of two main forms: close-ended instruction and open-ended instruction. Parents who provide direct close-ended instruction tend to focus on their child's factual learning and knowledge, rather than promoting higher levels of cognitive ability and complexity in their children. Such parents thus utilise methods such as giving commands, orders, and requests for correct answers, focusing on 'the correct way' to solve a problem (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Practising or drilling spellings and multiplication tables are examples of closed-ended direct instruction. By contrast, parents who adopt a primarily open-ended approach to direct instruction engage in questioning of their children, encouraging them to plan and anticipate, and to explain how they reached answers or solved problems. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) argue that both approaches can potentially influence

student educational outcomes, with the former type likely to increase children's factual knowledge, and the latter likely to contribute to higher-level thinking skills in their children.

A fourth mechanism through which parents can promote pupil achievement is through the provision of **encouragement** (Walker et al., 2005), i.e. by giving affective support to children's school-related behaviours. Parental encouragement for children to engage in important learning behaviours can improve children's academic self-efficacy, self-regulation and motivation to learn, all of which have been demonstrated to improve students' academic achievement (Katenkamp, 2008).

Why parents choose to become involved

For the purposes of the present research, which examines the nature of parental involvement in a previously under-researched context, it is pertinent to look at both *how* and *why* parents become involved; to explore the conditions that facilitate that involvement. Hoover-Dempsey, Sandler and colleagues (1995, 1997, 2005, 2007) claimed that parents choose to become involved in their child's education mainly for the following reasons:

- (1) Their personal construction of the parental role;
- (2) Their personal sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed in school;
- (3) Their perception of opportunities and demands for involvement presented both by their children and their children's schools, and
- (4) Their perception that life context variables allow for successful involvement.

Role Construction

Several investigators have contended that parents must construe their role as parents as including an obligation of personal involvement in their child's education if they are to become involved (e.g. Eccles & Harold, 1993; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Walker, Wilkins, Dellaire, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). They suggest that parents' role construction is learned largely from their own parents' school-related involvement and their friends' involvement in children's schooling, among other factors. A construction of the parental role as including a role in their child's education is important because it enables parents to imagine, anticipate and act on a range of educational activities with their child (Walker et al., 2005). Role construction has been found to be intimately related to involvement in a range of studies. Clark (1983) looked at high-achieving students from low income schools, and found that what distinguished parents of these children from others in the school was their beliefs that they should be actively involved in the education of their children, i.e. they construed their role as a parent as including a role as co-educator of their child. Similarly, Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski and Apolosteris (1997) found, in their study of 208 mothers, that it was a belief that they had a role as educator of their children that predicted

these mothers' involvement in cognitive-intellectual activities. Conversely, mothers who perceived the job of educating their children as the sole responsibility of the school were less likely to engage in these activities.

Personal Efficacy

While such a personal construction of the parental role appears to be necessary for parental involvement, it does not appear to be a sufficient condition for the emergence of parental involvement in education. It is posited that it is the combination of such a personal role construction with a parent's sense of personal efficacy that most often results in parents adopting an active role in their child's education. This sense of personal efficacy (based on the work of Bandura, 1989) refers to parents' belief that their involvement is helpful and will have a positive influence on their children's performance. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) argue that parental efficacy comes from four main sources: the direct experience of having been successfully involved in other involvement activities; the vicarious experience of the success of others in involvement activities; verbal persuasion that involvement is important and is achievable by the parent; and the emotional arousal brought about when issues important to the parent, e.g. the success of the child, or his or her own success as a parent are believed to be 'on the line'

In support of this aspect of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model, Grolnick et al. (1997) found that mothers who felt efficacious were more involved with a range of cognitive-intellectual involvement activities, such as exposing the child to intellectually stimulating activities and discussing current events with them. Conversely, those who believe that their involvement will not make a difference are less likely to engage in a range of involvement practices (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Eccles and Harold (1996) found that the most salient predictor of parental involvement was parents' confidence in their own intellectual abilities. Anderson and Minke (2007) found a direct effect of parent efficacy on parents' levels of home-based involvement. Parents who believe that a child's success at school is determined by innate or fixed factors will be less likely to believe that their involvement will be effective in any way (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Opportunities, Invitations and Demands for Involvement

Parents also become involved, in part, because they observe opportunities, invitations or demands to do so, either from their child, or their child's school. These may include specific invitations, such as a child asking for help with homework, or general opportunities, such as a child being eager to talk about their day in school. General opportunities from the school may include a welcoming school climate and parents' perceptions of favourable attitudes towards involvement on the behalf of school staff. Specific invitations from the school may include

encouraging parents to volunteer in the classroom, asking them to fundraise for materials, or requiring parents to monitor their child's homework. Those who feel that their input is welcomed by their child and their child's school are more likely to be active in their child's educational life (Eccles & Harold, 1993). Smith et al. (2011) found that parents' perceptions of opportunities or invitations for involvement significantly positively affected their involvement both in the home and in school. Parents who perceived such invitations were also less likely to report barriers to involvement. Patrikakou and Weissberg (1998) looked at eight sociodemographic variables of parents and a measure of parents' perceptions of teacher outreach, and investigated the relationship of each of these to two parental involvement activities. They found that the only significant predictor of parental involvement in the home and in school was parents' perceptions of teacher outreach to parents. Similarly, Anderson and Minke (2007) found specific teacher invitations for involvement to be strongly related to both school- and home-based involvement activities.

Life context variables

A fourth condition under which parents will choose to become involved in the education of their children relates to their perception that life context variables allow and enable their involvement. In other words, if the parent believes that he/she has the skills and knowledge for involvement, or that he or she is able to find alternative sources of knowledge and skill if they become necessary, then he/she is more likely to be involved. This condition relates to whether parents believe they have the time and energy for successful involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model of Parental Involvement is used to guide the present research. The research aims to increase understanding of how parents' construction of their role in their children's education, their sense of self-efficacy for involvement, the invitations and opportunities for participation they perceive, and their belief that they have the necessary resources and skills for involvement are affected in the context where the language they speak is not the language through which their children are learning.

1.4 Implications for the Present Research: Theoretical Framework

The present research is guided by a combination of these theoretical approaches. Epstein's model of parental involvement presents a global, holistic view of parental involvement and provides a typology which encompasses the various practices which constitute successful involvement. It highlights the importance of parental involvement in the home-based activities, school-based activities, and the crucial roles of home-school communication and collaboration. The present research aims to investigate the nature and extent of parents' involvement in each of these types of activities in an immersion context. Some of the questions addressed include:

Can parents be involved in home-based educational activities if they cannot read their child's homework? Do they play a role in decision making or volunteering in the child's school if they cannot speak the language used there by children, teachers and other school staff? And, in the situation where the language of the school and the language of the home differ, how is home-school communication and collaboration undertaken?

Epstein also emphasises that parental involvement is mediated by parent characteristics, school characteristics, and the age/class level of the child. The present research also thus takes each of these into account while examining the involvement of parents in the schools under investigation, exploring demographic characteristics of immersion parents (such as marital status, educational and linguistic backgrounds, employment status, etc.) and how these relate to involvement levels, school characteristics (size, ethos, location etc.) and school policies and practices, and also examining the influence of the age of children on involvement types and levels. Epstein's model thus provides an overarching structure for the present research.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model of Parent Involvement further aids understanding of the factors involved in parents' decisions to become involved in the education of their children. While acknowledging that there are sociological factors involved in parental involvement, this model focuses on the psychological factors at play in whether or not parents will become involved. The present research aims to explore each these conditions for involvement in an immersion setting. How do parents construe their role in this less traditional educational model? How is parents' personal sense of efficacy for involvement affected when they are not fluent in the language through which their child is learning? And do parents in such a setting as this perceive that their involvement is welcomed and encouraged by their child's school and by their child? The present research not only aims to explore which types of activities immersion parents engage in and how often, but also *why* they make these choices. A primary aim of the research is to identify barriers to and facilitators of involvement in this context, and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of why parents become involved provides a psychology-based framework for this exploration.

Empowerment models emphasise the importance of recognising the skills and competencies parents have and how they can positively contribute to their child's learning. They highlight the importance of viewing parents as valuable partners in the education process as opposed to focusing on the skills that they may not have. The present research aims to explore whether an empowerment approach to parental involvement is being incorporated into planning and policy in Irish-medium schools, or whether, in this context, where parents may not be proficient in the target language, a deficit approach still pervades. Taken together, these complementary models

of parental involvement (Deslandes, 2001) comprise the conceptual framework within which the present research is undertaken.

1.5 Summary: Lessons Learned from the Review of Parental Involvement Literature

Despite the multitude of studies which claim to examine ‘parental involvement’, the existing corpus of research can be criticised on several counts. Firstly, the inconsistencies in the definition of ‘parental involvement’ used across studies means that any claims about ‘parental involvement’ must be interpreted with caution. Also, the lack of studies in this area undertaken with an experimental design is cause for concern. The vast majority of studies conducted in this domain have been correlational in nature and thus our ability to infer causal relationships about parental involvement and student outcomes is limited.

Despite the weaknesses and inconsistencies observable in early parental involvement research, the emergence of promising theoretical frameworks such as those of Epstein and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler has brought with it new direction and structure to parental involvement research. Increasing acknowledgment of the limitations of many of the studies conducted in this area (such as weak design, failure to adequately define constructs and often a failure to report statistical findings and effect sizes) has meant that more recent research endeavours have taken a more empirically rigorous approach. Such studies do consistently point to the positive relationships between parental involvement and student achievement. Meta-analyses which have focused exclusively on studies which are methodologically sound have illustrated this (e.g. Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005). Promising findings have also emerged from evaluations of parental involvement interventions. The best conclusion to be made on the basis of the available evidence is that parental involvement is indeed a potent enabling vehicle for student achievement. Relationships between involvement and achievement have been demonstrated across a wide range of ages and across a variety of contexts (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). They have been found using both quantitative and qualitative (Comer and Haynes, 1991; Epstein, 2001; Lareau, 1989) methodologies.

The emergence of Epstein’s typology has meant that researchers have had a framework covering a range of parental involvement practices on which to base their studies. The same variation has not been seen in relation to student outcomes. Instead, a heavy concentration of the research has been on the relationship between involvement and students’ *academic* achievement (Domina, 2005). Such a narrowing of focus may be unwise and costly (McNeal, 1999). Domina (2005) notes that researchers have tended to ignore the potentially far-reaching effects of parental involvement other than those which can be measured using educational tests or teacher administered grades. A review of the, admittedly limited, studies examining these

additional effects suggests that parental involvement is also positively related to students' motivation, behaviour and socioemotional adjustment.

Parental involvement research has attempted to explain variations in levels of parental involvement by trying to establish demographic trends. Less research has focused on factors such as teacher attitudes and practices and the potential mediating effects of child variables on the home-school relationship. If one is to take an ecological approach, such as that advocated by Epstein and others, it could be argued that it is inappropriate to examine parental involvement by looking at parents in isolation. Hill and Taylor (2004) note that a major challenge in parental involvement research is the integration of perspectives and the question over who should be consulted when investigating parental involvement. They argue that multiple perspectives are important for a full understanding of the phenomenon. It seems evident that to truly understand home-school partnerships necessitates that all of the primary stakeholders i.e. parents, teachers, principals and children themselves be consulted. Very few studies have consulted teachers on their experiences of parental involvement. The voices of children in particular have been noticeably absent from the literature.

While sociological, demographic trends in parental involvement may be informative, they have not yet been demonstrated in an immersion context, where it is possible that additional factors, such as proficiency in, or attitudes towards, the language of instruction in the school may be more strongly related to involvement than SES indicators such as education level or employment status. Several commentators (e.g. Georgiou, 2007) have also advocated the need for parental involvement research to move beyond demographics. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model provides a framework, built on psychological literature; within which parents' decisions to become involved in their children's educational lives can be explored.

Finally, a major gap in the parental involvement literature has been the lack of research which has been conducted in alternative educational models, such as that of immersion. The theory discussed above suggests that immersion parents may experience many barriers to successful involvement in a range of parent participation practices. Such involvement has been linked to student outcomes and may also be related to students' attainment of their second language (L2). It is thus surprising that in general, researchers have tended to neglect to investigate the involvement of parents in less traditional models, such as that of immersion. The present research thus aims to address this gap in the literature.

1.6 Conclusion

The present chapter has presented a review of the literature on parental involvement, outlining empirical findings and presenting the conceptual underpinnings of the present research. For the purposes of the present research it is also necessary to consider the literature on immersion education and on Irish-medium education in particular. This forms the basis of the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Review of Immersion Education Literature

2.0 Overview

Immersion education has become an increasingly popular educational option for Irish parents, and the present research seeks to explore the involvement of these parents in the educational lives of their children. The current chapter focuses on reviewing the relevant literature on immersion education, and the term ‘immersion education’ as it is utilised here is defined. Some detail is provided on the historical origins of immersion education worldwide, and different models of immersion education are considered. The history of immersion education in Ireland is outlined, followed by an account of its current context, which includes a consideration of the status of Irish in Ireland. The pertinent empirical literature conducted on immersion education is then discussed. A review of research findings relating to the role of parents in immersion education is presented. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

2.1. Defining ‘Immersion Education’

2.1.1 Origins of Immersion Education and its Adoption Internationally

‘Immersion education’ is a term which emerged in the 1960s to describe pioneering programmes being established in Canada in which French was used as the language of instruction for children whose first language (L1) was not French. While teaching students through a second language was not a novel practice and had been a common occurrence for several centuries (Swain & Johnson, 1997; Cummins, 1998; Johnstone, 2002), these Canadian programmes represented a ‘new wave’, and were the first to be subjected to rigorous and intensive long-term research. They also have various features which distinguish them from merely teaching through a second language and from other forms of bilingual education (Ó Duibhir, 2009) and these will be discussed below.

Since its modern inception in Canada, the immersion model has been introduced in a variety of forms in many different countries, such as the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Spain, France, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. While most immersion in Canada has been French-medium education, as French is the second official language of that country, Johnstone’s (2002) review of immersion education points out that there are also examples in many different countries of ‘foreign’ language immersion programmes (such as English-immersion in Austria), and ‘community’ immersion, reflecting new communities which have settled in particular countries (e.g. Mandarin, French, Japanese, and Indonesian immersion in Australia). Sometimes a particular immersion programme may serve two of the above functions (e.g. Japanese

immersion in Australia may serve as a community language programme for those of Japanese heritage, and as a foreign language programme for those of Australian background). Finally, 'heritage' language immersion programmes involve second language (L2) learners being immersed in a heritage language, i.e. a language which forms part of a country's national heritage, but is not the majority language of that country (Johnstone, 2002). Examples of this include Welsh immersion in Wales, Scottish Gaelic immersion in Scotland and, as focused on in the present research, Irish immersion in Ireland.

2.1.2 Core features of Immersion Programmes

Swain and Johnson (1997) posit that whatever the purpose of the various bilingual programmes in these different countries (foreign language, heritage language, etc.) to be classified as 'immersion' the programme must have the following core features:

- (a) The L2 is the main language of instruction
- (b) The immersion L2 curriculum parallels the local L1 curriculum
- (c) Overt support exists for the L1, both from home and the school
- (d) The programme aims for additive bilingualism
- (e) Exposure to the L2 is largely confined to the classroom
- (f) Learners generally enter with similar (and limited) levels of proficiency in the L2
- (g) The teachers are bilingual
- (h) The classroom culture is that of the local L1 community.

Thus, in all immersion contexts, the immersion language (which is not the L1 of the majority of pupils) is the main language through which most or much of the learning and instruction is conducted. Pupils in an immersion school follow the same curriculum as their peers in other schools who are being educated through their first language. Pupils in immersion programmes make use of their L1 at home and in the community, and support for this first language also occurs at school. Immersion programmes can thus be distinguished from other types of second language acquisition (SLA) forms of education by the fact that immersion programmes aim to produce additive bilingualism in its students. 'Additive' and 'Subtractive' bilingualism were terms coined by Lambert (1964) to describe two distinct types of bilinguals, and the important factor which divides the two is essentially a social one (Bournot-Trites & Tellowitz, 2002). Subtractive bilingualism occurs largely in the case where minority (often migrant) children are submerged in the majority language of the country (for example, the case of Hispanic migrant children in the U.S.). In such a context, where a child is educated from the beginning of their school life in their new L2, this second language slowly replaces their L1. Such bilingualism is characterised by less frequent use of the home or ethnic language, i.e. the L1 is being

‘subtracted out’ (Lambert, 1992), as it is not receiving overt support in the community. By contrast, immersion programmes aim for *additive* bilingualism, meaning that the L2 will be acquired without loss of the L1. As the L1 receives support in the home, at school and in the community, it is not replaced by the L2, which is not the primary language used in interactions outside of school. Baker (2006) presented a typology of ten bilingual education programme types which were characterised as either weak or strong forms of bilingual education. Weak forms of bilingual education merely contain bilingual students and the aim is to achieve monolingualism, or limited bilingualism, in students. Given the aim of achieving full bilingualism and biliteracy in pupils, immersion is classified as a strong form of bilingual education.

Another core feature is that the language of instruction is the second language of all of the students in the classroom, who enter the programme with limited (or no) knowledge of the L2. To be classified as immersion, the teachers must be proficient in both the target (immersion) language and the majority language of the country. Finally, the classroom culture should reflect that of the local community. If a bilingual programme meets all of these criteria, it is then deemed an immersion programme.

As a result of increasing immigration to Canada and a corresponding increase in the ethnic diversity of pupils attending immersion schools, these core features have been latterly revised for that context (Swain & Lapkin, 2005). As the language in which the children are immersed may be their third or fourth language, the first feature has been revised to state that the *immersion* language is the language of instruction. The third feature changes to state that overt support must be given to *all* home languages. Statements five and six now highlight that exposure to the *immersion* language (rather than the L2) is mostly confined to the classroom, and that students enter the programme with similar levels of proficiency in the *immersion* language. Finally, the eighth feature has been revised to reflect that the classroom environment should recognise the cultures of the ‘multiple immigrant communities to which students belong’ (p. 172). Swain and Lapkin (2005) argue that these changes have important implications for pedagogy and practice in Canadian immersion schools.

As Ó Duibhir (2009) has noted, despite the fact that immigration also increased rapidly in Ireland throughout the 2000s, there is as yet no evidence to suggest that considerable numbers of immigrant parents are selecting an Irish-medium education for their children. If this was to change, and considerable ethnic and cultural diversity was to become a feature of the Irish-medium educational landscape, then responses such as those in Canada could be important. As this is not yet the case, the term ‘second language’ will be used interchangeably with the

‘immersion language’ and ‘target language’ in the present research, as Irish is the L2 for the vast majority of Irish immersion pupils.

2.1.3 Different Models of Immersion Education

As Johnson and Swain (1997) explain, in addition to these core features of immersion, there are a number of variable features associated with immersion programmes. These include: the class/age level at which immersion is introduced; the amount of time spent in the L2 relative to the time spent learning in the L1; and the status of the immersion language. A number of different ‘models’ of immersion education have thus been employed in different settings. These models all have the core features outlined above, but differ with respect to the variable features, namely the class level at which the target language is introduced as the primary medium of instruction (early, delayed or late immersion) and the amount of time which is dedicated to instruction in the target language (partial or total immersion) (Genesee, Holobow, Lambert & Chartrand, 1989). The main models are thus: early total immersion, early partial immersion, delayed total immersion, delayed partial immersion, late total immersion and late partial immersion. Early immersion programmes tend to start at the beginning of primary school or at pre-school level. Delayed programmes tend to start in the late primary or early secondary years, whereas the ‘late’ models tend to be aimed at adolescents or at adults. Additionally, schools can differ as to whether the entire school population are receiving their education through their L2 or not. Immersion schools in Ireland tend to be whole-school immersion centres, rather than mainstream schools which feature an optional immersion stream or track (as found in other countries), however there are some immersion tracks at second level in Ireland (Ó Duibhir, 2010).

In early total immersion programmes (the focus of the present research) pupils are immersed in the target language from their first day of school. In several countries (e.g. Canada) the proportion of learning through the L2 decreases over time, normally to about 50% (Harley, 1993). In others, such as Ireland, it is a distinguishing feature that full immersion is maintained throughout the child’s school career, with the L1 introduced (in the majority of cases) at some stage during the child’s second year of school. From then on, it is taught as a subject only, with the remainder of the subjects taught through the immersion language (in this case Irish language). Language learning and content learning are thus integrated and conducted simultaneously, and less time is given to formally supporting the L1 in the Irish immersion model (approximately 15% of the time) than in the Canadian model (building to about 50% of the time over a child’s school career) (Ó Duibhir, 2010).

The differences in time allocation to the immersion language and the L1 are largely due to differences in the status of the languages in different contexts. Before continuing, it is thus necessary to provide some detail on the background to Irish immersion, and to consider the status of the Irish language as compared to other immersion language contexts worldwide.

2.2 The Irish Model: Irish and Irish Immersion

The Irish language has been in decline since the seventeenth century, with efforts to revive the language having been made since the final quarter of the nineteenth century. The school system has been the primary vehicle for the attempted revival of the language (Coady & Ó Laoire, 2002). After gaining independence from British rule in 1922, the new Irish Constitution recognised that two languages were significant in Irish society and, despite that fact that it was spoken by only 18% of the population, Irish was granted status as the first official language of the Republic of Ireland (Coady, 2001). The government introduced a range of language policies and programmes to support the Irish language, using schools as the main vehicle for policy implementation. Since schools in Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking) regions were already, by definition, all-Irish schools, Irish language revival efforts were directed towards the development of all-Irish schools in English-speaking, or *Galltacht* areas. In the 1940s, the number of all-Irish schools outside of the Gaeltacht reached an all-time high. There were over 250 such schools in operation, representing approximately 4% of all primary schools in Ireland. However, while the intention of the schools was to spur an Irish language revival, the language was in fact being taught in a manner which was largely held to be traditional and rigid (Ó Riagáin, 1997), with teachers focusing more on issues such as grammar than on the spoken language. Also, teachers' competence for employment was based almost entirely on their ability to teach Irish, with little regard given to how well they could teach other subjects (Coady, 2001). These factors, in combination, led to a decline in parental support for Irish language immersion schools, as well as for public support for the language in general (Ó Riagáin, 1997). This consequently led to a dramatic decrease in the number of all-Irish schools; a decrease which spanned from the 1950s through to the 1970s (in 1972, there were only 10 all-Irish schools in the country).

Unfavourable public attitudes towards the language and language policy led the Irish government to begin a series of policy realignments, starting in the early 1970s (Coady, 2001). Among these was the establishment of various governmental bodies who aimed to promote the use of the Irish language outside of the school setting. One such body was the Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research (CILAR) which was established to assess the attitudes of the public towards the Irish language, and Irish language policy. The report resulting from the first comprehensive CILAR (1975) study conducted in 1973 confirmed the general feeling that

the vast majority of the population were not satisfied with the way that Irish was being taught in the schools. Another policy shift which occurred at this time was the government's elimination of the requirement of passing the Irish language examination to pass the Leaving Certificate. The role of education in the Irish language revival was thus de-emphasised.

These shifts in policy led to a new movement of Irish-medium schools, or *Gaeilsoileanna* (Coady, 2001), which were distinct from the all-Irish schools associated with the Irish language revival and can be seen as more similar to the Canadian movement. According to Ó Riagáin (1997):

The new generation of all Irish schools were founded in response to parent groups rather than state pressure and they are, by and large, additions to the school system rather than reconversions of the existing schools to bilingual teaching. Thus, any suggestion that they represent a reversal of trends needs considerable qualification. They are more accurately seen as the start of a substantially new trend. (p. 24)

The number of Irish immersion schools in this new wave grew throughout the 1970s, and experienced a dramatic growth spurt in the 1980s. Over the past two decades, the immersion education sector in Ireland has continued to experience considerable growth (Watson & Nic Ghiolla Phádraig, 2011). This growth has been attributed by some researchers to parents recognising the considerable advantages of all-Irish schools; advantages that are not exclusively linguistic in nature and include such considerations as parents' perceptions of smaller class sizes and more committed teachers (Ó Laoire, 2008). The number of Irish-medium primary schools in the Republic grew from a low of 10 in 1972 to 139 in 2012. Research has indicated that there is the potential for considerable further growth in the sector, as a study conducted by Ó Riagáin (2007) found that 23.4% of survey respondents indicated that they would send their children to an Irish-medium school if there was one located in their local area. Thus, Irish-medium schools are seen as 'key players' in current efforts at the revitalisation of the language.

The revitalization role of *Gaeilsoileanna* distinguishes them from schools in many other immersion programmes, where the language of instruction is a world language such as Spanish, French or English. The Irish immersion context is more similar to the context of Gaelic immersion in Scotland or Welsh immersion in Wales. It is in a stronger position however, than Maori in New Zealand (May & Hill, 2005) or the aboriginal language immersion programmes in Canada (Richards & Burnaby, 2008). As Ó Duibhir (2009) notes, if a French immersion pupil in Canada fails to acquire target-like features of French from a French immersion programme, the future of the French language will not be under threat. Similarly, such a pupil also has the opportunity to access large French-speaking populations in Canada and worldwide in which they can immerse themselves in the language if they should

wish. The future of the Irish language is not so secure and is thus more dependent on the quality of the language acquired by Irish immersion students (Ó Duibhir, 2009). Further detail on Ireland as a context for the present research will be provided in the following chapter (Chapter 3).

Having defined ‘immersion’ and given a description of the Irish immersion context, the empirical literature relating to immersion education generally, and Irish immersion specifically, is now reviewed.

2.3 Evaluating Immersion Programmes: International and Irish Evidence

Baker (2006) cites a number of essential features that are related to the *success* of SLA and immersion programmes. These include the core features of immersion as outlined above (such as the bilingualism of teachers and the additive bilingualism that immersion provides), but also include the *optional* nature of immersion and the motivation of teachers and parents for the children to become bilingual as important for the success of immersion. Similarly, Branaman and Rennie (1988) highlight parental support for immersion as a key condition for immersion programmes to succeed. Baker (2006) also argued that a societal, political or economic rationale for an immersion is also linked with its success or otherwise.

However, Baker (2006) noted several limitations of, or problems with, French immersion in Canada. McKendry (2006) notes that some of these can also be seen as relevant to the Irish context:

- a) Immersion pupils do not always achieve grammatical accuracy
- b) Few students use French outside of school hours or after finishing school
- c) Difficulty identifying the crucial factors in the effectiveness of immersion programmes, e.g. length and intensity of exposure, pedagogy, teachers’ preparation, parental attitudes, etc.
- d) Potential effects on mainstream schools (such as redistribution of teachers, changes in the linguistic and ability profile in mainstream classes, etc.)
- e) The increased opportunities for political, social and economic enhancement of Anglophones through gaining extra linguistic and cultural capital which may lead to conflict with the minority francophone community (less of an issue in Ireland)
- f) There is a danger of generalising from the Canadian experience to other educational contexts in the world.

Despite these limitations, immersion programmes have, on the whole, been deemed to be very successful (Cummins, 2000). Most of the research which has been undertaken on immersion education has been ‘outcome-focused’ rather than ‘process-oriented’, as early immersion research was largely focused on addressing parents’ concerns about their child’s progress while in immersion schools (deCourcy, 2002). Early research tended to reach negative conclusions about outcomes of bilingual and immersion education. In Ireland, Macnamara’s (1966) study of children in Irish-medium education concluded that immersion in a second language led to deficits in mathematics and reading achievement. However, a number of flaws can be identified in Macnamara’s research (see Cummins, 1977), including the methodological approach of testing Irish-medium students through their L2 and comparing them with English-medium students tested in their L1, which may have confounded the results.

The various reviews of immersion education undertaken more recently (e.g. Swain & Lapkin, 1982; Genesee, 1987; Johnstone, 2002) have tended to identify four main outcomes of immersion education and these have been more positive as to the effects of immersion education. Each of these outcomes will be dealt with in turn below. The vast majority of the research conducted on these outcomes of immersion has been conducted in Canada and North America. However, McKendry (2006) and others warn of the danger of generalising from these contexts to that of the Irish context. In the minority language context of Ireland, a variety of different sociolinguistic processes are at play. In such a context as Ireland, there is not a readily accessible speech community outside of the classroom and, as such, immersion students have little prospect of interacting with native speakers. Furthermore, in Canada and internationally, French is a high prestige language and thus achieving English-French bilingualism may have many social and economic benefits for French L2 learners which may not necessarily be conferred on English-Irish bilinguals. In addition, in Ireland, the (de facto) minority status of the Irish language also means that learning resources in the language are limited compared to those of dominant languages (Coady, 2001). As such, it is inappropriate to rely solely on findings from other countries when evaluating Irish immersion programmes. In the sections that follow, both international and Irish literature will be reviewed.

2.3.1 Second Language Learning

As would be expected, it has been found that the L2 proficiency of immersion students surpasses that of students in mainstream education who are given L2 lessons for short periods of time a day. Such ‘drip-feed’ L2 students generally fail to progress beyond attaining Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (Cummins, 1978). By contrast, most research has found that the vast majority of immersion students attain competence in two languages (Johnstone,

2002). However, it is now clear from the literature in the area that immersion pupils do not necessarily achieve full bilingualism in all aspects of L2 use (McKendry, 2006). Most students in early total immersion programmes, like those being focused on in the present research, succeed in having native-like receptive language in their L2 by around 11 years old. However, the same levels are not attained in their productive (speaking and writing) language skills (Swain & Johnson, 1997), which often feature non-native-like forms which persist over time (Swain & Lapkin, 2008). A lack of spontaneous or contrived opportunities outside the classroom to use the immersion language, as well as a lack of cultural occasions offering the chance to actively and purposefully use the target language, may partly explain this (Baker, 2006). Swain and Johnson (1997) note that for many immersion students, the target language may be seen as solely the language of the school, and such students may not use their L2 outside of school hours any more than their ‘drip-feed’ counterparts. This is a particularly salient feature in heritage language contexts, such as that of Ireland, where opportunities to use the language outside the classroom environment are particularly limited (Coady & Ó Laoire, 2002).

In line with the evaluations of other immersion programmes, a number of nationwide studies comparing the Irish achievement of immersion pupils with that of their English-medium counterparts has indicated that the proficiency of all-Irish students is indeed superior to that of pupils receiving Irish lessons in English-medium schools (Harris, 1984; Harris, Forde, Archer, Nic Fhearaile & Ó Gorman, 2006). While many of these surveys were conducted over two decades ago, Harris et al. (2006) found that this difference in L2 proficiency between mainstream and immersion pupils held relatively stable over time for the main listening and speaking objectives which they assessed. Despite this, the authors note that there was significant decline in the percentages of Irish immersion students gaining mastery of some aspects of grammar and morphology, something which they note as a cause of concern. There is some evidence that Irish immersion students often make use of syntactical structures in their Irish which are heavily influenced by those of their L1 (Ó Duibhir, 2009). Given that immersion pupils have little access to native speakers of the language, immersion students’ Irish often becomes a school-only language, the variety of which is thus limited. The type of Irish spoken by immersion students has been termed *Gaelscoilís* (Walsh; as cited in Ó Duibhir, 2010), a type of interlanguage similar to what has been termed ‘immersion speak’ or ‘Frenglish’ in other contexts (Lyster, 1987; Hammerly, 1991). This type of interlanguage is characterised by high levels of communicative competence, but features many grammatical inaccuracies and the borrowing of syntactical structures from the L1.

2.3.2 First Language Learning

A concern for many parents who contemplate sending their children to an immersion school is the question of whether first language skills suffer as a result of pupils' improved L2 proficiency. Early immersion students do tend to lag behind their mainstream counterparts in terms of their L1 literacy skills for about three or four years. For example, L1 spelling, punctuation and reading tests results show a lag in immersion students for the first few years, compared to students whose medium of instruction is their L1 (Johnstone, 2002). However, this imbalance is not permanent and after approximately four to six years of education, the tests scores of early total immersion students have generally caught up with those of their monolingual peers. The same pattern has been found for early partial and total immersion students; late immersion also has no detrimental effect on L1 test scores. All the research evidence thus points to the conclusion that immersion students learn their second language at no cost to their performance in their first language. In fact, once immersion students catch up in terms of their L1 they often then actually surpass their monolingual counterparts in terms of their L1 language skills (Bournot-Trites & Tellowitz, 2002).

Evaluations in the Irish context support these findings of L1 test performance in Irish immersion. In the National Assessment of English Reading and Mathematics in Irish-medium schools (NAIMS: Gilleece, Shiel, Clerkin and Miller, 2011), it was found that Irish-medium students in Second and Sixth classes had significantly higher scores on a measure of English reading than were found in a national assessment of their peers in English-medium schools in 2009. Similarly, in their study using data from a large-scale longitudinal data-set (Growing up in Ireland: GUI), Strickland and Hickey (in preparation) found that nine-year-old pupils of Gaelscoileanna performed as well as their English-medium peers in a standardised test of English vocabulary. The findings on L1 development in Irish immersion are thus in line with international findings.

2.3.3 Other Curriculum Areas

If immersion students become bilingual, there exists the question as to whether this happens at a cost of their learning and achievement in other subject areas, such as maths, science, geography etc. (Baker, 2006). The existing international literature tends to suggest that immersion students perform as well as, if not better than, their mainstream counterparts in all areas of the curriculum (e.g. Krashen, 1984; Genesee, 1987). In Ireland, Gilleece et al. (2011) found that children in Second class in Irish-medium (IM) schools had significantly higher mathematics scores than their counterparts in English-medium schools, and IM pupils in Sixth class had higher scores than their mainstream peers, but the differences did not reach significance. Similarly, Strickland and Hickey (in preparation) found that nine-year-old Irish-

medium students in the Growing Up in Ireland dataset had comparable mathematics achievement to English-medium students.

2.3.4 Attitudes and Social Adjustment

Aside from academic achievement in various curricular areas, evaluations of immersion programmes have explored whether immersion has any positive or negative effects on students' attitudes, motivation and study skills. The most positive results in this area have been associated with early total immersion programmes such as those available in Ireland. Early immersion students tend to have more positive attitudes towards themselves, education and towards other cultural groups (Bostwick, 2004). In Maori-immersion in New Zealand, Jacques (1991) found that immersion programmes were very successful in the promotion of student self-esteem and cultural identity.

In Ireland, Harris and Murtagh (1999) and Murtagh (2007) showed more positive attitudes to Irish among immersion pupils than among mainstream school pupils. Strickland and Hickey (in preparation) also found that children attending Irish immersion schools had more favourable attitudes towards the Irish language than English-medium peers, but interestingly, they also found that such pupils were significantly less likely to say that they enjoyed school than either English-medium pupils, or pupils attending Gaeltacht schools. This will be explored further in Chapter 9.

2.4 Research on Parental Involvement in Immersion

Some research has been conducted on the role of parents whose children are learning through a second language (e.g. Bermudez & Marquez, 1996; Faltis, 1995). This research has pointed to barriers to effective home-school relations as a result of low parental proficiency in the language of instruction. These studies, however, have for the most part been conducted with immigrant parents whose children are being educated through the majority language (where the L1 is slowly subtracted out over time). Unlike immersion parents, submersion parents are not L1 speakers of the majority language. They also tend to lack knowledge of the education system, be of low socioeconomic status and may believe that the education of their children is the sole responsibility of the school, i.e. they do not construe a role for themselves as educational partners (Tinkler, 2002). Low levels of parental proficiency cannot be taken as the only reason for low participation levels on the behalf of minority language parents.

A more limited number of studies have also been carried out on the role of parents in two-way (or dual) immersion programmes. Dual immersion is common in the United States and

involves roughly equal numbers of majority and minority language children taking part in programmes in which they spend 50% of their school day taught through the minority language (usually Spanish) and 50% through the majority language, English (Genesee, 2008), so that both groups of children get both L1 support and L2 immersion. A number of studies of parents in such two-way immersion schools have focused on exploring parents' motivations for choosing two-way immersion (Baig, 2011; Parkes, 2008; Whiting & Feinauer, 2011). Parkes and Tenley (2011) studied parental satisfaction with two-way immersion programmes and a number of studies have explored parental attitudes towards, and beliefs about, dual immersion (e.g. Giachinno-Baker & Piller, 2006; Stritikus & Garcia, 2005). However, it must be noted that two-way immersion represents a qualitatively different context to one-way immersion where all (or most) parents are L1 speakers of the majority language of the country and are opting to have their children educated through a minority language which they may or may not be proficient in.

Baig (2011) notes that there is much less literature on parents in one-way immersion programmes than in dual language immersion programmes. Indeed, when Cummins (1998) summarised the 'state of the art' in an article entitled '*Immersion education for the millennium: What we have learned from 30 years of research on second language immersion*' there was no mention of research on the role of immersion parents in the education of their children. This is particularly surprising given that immersion programmes have been so parent-driven, and because in this alternative educational setting parents may have a "*heightened desire for information about curricular content, student progress and, above all, a need for reassurance about achievement*" (Walker & Tedick, 2000, p. 22). Interestingly, Walker and Tedick (2000) framed this as a challenge for immersion *teachers*, the participants in their study, which sought to make the voice of the teacher more salient in immersion research. Clearly the research agenda in immersion is still evolving towards fully taking account of the experiences and perspective of all of its stakeholders. Cummins (1998) emphasised that a major problem that faces immersion education is student attrition, a high proportion of which is attributed to children's academic and behavioural problems (Keep, 1993). Given the research reviewed in Chapter 1, which demonstrated that parental involvement is related to lower behavioural problems, higher academic achievement, and lower drop-out rates, it seems particularly important and timely to investigate parental involvement as a potential strategy for addressing the attrition problem in immersion; parents are clearly key players in the decision to move children to another school.

It should be noted that parental involvement has featured, somewhat tangentially, in immersion education research in some contexts. Hill's (2010) research was undertaken with a multiple case study design, and investigated English transition programmes in Maori-medium

education. One case study was undertaken in a Maori immersion school. While Hill's research was not focused on parental involvement, and as such did not involve consultation with parents, his conclusions on the basis of his research with school staff commented on the low levels of parental involvement in this setting. Hill (2010) posited two main explanations for this.

First, as most Maori parents were LI English speakers they were less able to support their children's Maori language development at home. In this situation, the school can become an island where parents send their children to be educated within a Maori-medium context. This situation therefore can create barriers, and could affect relationships between home and school, and more importantly, the level of te reo Maori development attained by students. Overcoming these barriers is an ongoing challenge for Maori immersion schools. (p. 195)

Second, he commented that this language barrier is exacerbated by the fact that most Maori parents come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and experience economic stresses which may also limit their involvement. This is a feature which distinguishes these immersion parents from the majority of parents in settings such as Canada and Ireland (although not entirely, as will be discussed below), which means that there is a need to be somewhat cautious about generalising from the Maori to the Irish immersion setting. It should also be noted that Hill's (2010) conclusions about low levels of parent involvement in immersion were based on the reports of educators and did not include consideration of the perspectives of parents themselves.

Bishop et al. (2001) conducted research in New Zealand which aimed to effectively identify teaching and learning strategies in Maori-medium education. There was a particular emphasis in their research on identifying features which were common to effective teachers. They found that effective teachers created positive learning environments in a number of ways. These included pedagogical strategies such as using positive and constructive feedback to students, encouraging students to engage in self-evaluation, and matching learning strategies to children's prior experiences and knowledge, as well as to their abilities. However, most pertinently to the current study, Bishop et al. (2001) found that effective teaching also includes consideration of the home environment. Effective teachers create caring and respectful relationships with students and their families, and family values and principles were used to help to guide teacher practices. They also noted that successful teachers create positive and structured environments with a focus on cooperation, for example in the case of teachers involving parents in helping with literacy activities both in the home and at school. Finally, effective teachers adopt a power-sharing approach which promotes home-school communication and facilitates parental involvement at home and at school. Facilitation of parental involvement and committing effort to creating meaningful home-school relationships

can be seen to improve outcomes in an immersion context. Again, however, it must be noted that the Maori-medium education may represent a very different context to Ireland, given the differences in socioeconomic, linguistic and attitudinal characteristics found among these parent bodies.

2.5 Parents in Irish Immersion

Unlike Maori immersion schools in New Zealand, Gaelscoileanna in Ireland have at times been stereotyped as elitist, and the preserve of the educated middle-classes. Harris et al. (2006) did find that IM parents were, on the whole, more advantaged than their counterparts with children in mainstream schools with respect to a number of demographic variables. However, Borooah, Dineen and Lynch (2009) noted: '*allegations of the comfortable middle class ambience of Gaelscoileanna have remained at the level of anecdote*' (p.435). While this may have referred mainly to the situation in Northern Ireland, where the parent body of Irish-medium schools appears to include significant numbers of lower SES families as measured by those in receipt of free school meals (McVeigh, 2012), it may also be relevant to some of the parent body in the Republic also. Most visibly in this regard, there are now a number of Irish immersion schools in areas of social disadvantage (Gaelscoileanna 2011), and in smaller towns in Ireland, where such schools tend to include pupils from a range of social strata. Harris and Ó Laoire (2006) acknowledged this growing heterogeneity, noting that there is now more diversity among the Gaelscoileanna parent body in terms of education, socioeconomic status and proficiency in Irish than would have been the case in earlier decades.

In assessing the impact of social factors on achievement, Harris et al. (2006) argued that the differences in Irish achievement between English-medium pupils and Irish-immersion pupils in their sample were not primarily explainable by home background variables such as parents' Irish proficiency, attitudes towards Irish and educational background. They found that Irish-medium pupils who were disadvantaged in respect to these variables still outperformed their English-medium peers who were advantaged with respect to these variables. However, it is not surprising that immersion students on the whole consistently outperform their English-medium counterparts in this regard due to the vast differences in exposure to the language they receive. It is argued, however, that differences in these home variables may be important in explaining the between-pupil and between-school variance in all-Irish pupils' attainment of the language.

Indeed, Harris et al. (2006) did find that parent background variables and parental use of Irish in the home were significantly related to all-Irish pupils' proficiency in the target language. As outlined above, there has been significant growth in the Irish-medium education sector. This rapid rise in popularity of immersion schools in Ireland has likely brought with it associated

changes in the profile of a ‘typical’ immersion parent (Harris & Ó Laoire, 2006). Cummins (1974; as cited in Coady & Ó Laoire, 2002) found that in 1974, nearly half of the children enrolled in Gaelscoileanna were from Irish speaking homes. Also, many of the parents who chose to send their children to these schools appeared to use the Irish language in the work sphere, or at least needed competence in the language in order to qualify, with 51% of fathers with children in Gaelscoileanna employed in government or semi-state jobs which required Irish (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979). The traditional profile of the Irish-immersion parent as someone who is highly committed to, and proficient in, Irish has changed. It is reasonable to assume that there are increasing numbers of parents of low socioeconomic status and of low proficiency in Irish among the parent body.

Harris and Ó Laoire (2006) noted that it is surprising how little research has been conducted on Irish-immersion parents, given that the Gaelscoileanna movement has been so parent-driven. They made a call for research on parental involvement in Gaelscoileanna, arguing that further research on parental profile and parental involvement may be useful in understanding one of their findings, the declining numbers of immersion pupils who master specific grammatical and morphological forms in Irish, as well as having implications for planning and policy in these schools. It is argued here that rising numbers of lower SES parents and falling numbers of parents with high proficiency in Irish may not only mean a decline in numbers of parents able to support their child’s L2 development (and thereby achieving the outcome of higher levels of accuracy in Irish). It may also mean that there are now increasing numbers of parents experiencing barriers to a broad range of potential involvement activities, either because of lower parental SES factors, or even among the higher SES parents, a greater likelihood that they do not speak the language through which their children are learning.

More information on the social profile of IM parents was gathered by Gilleece et al. (2011), who noted that a larger proportion of parents of pupils in sixth class in Irish immersion schools came from a high SES background (45%), compared with 30% of parents in a 2009 national assessment of largely English-medium schools. However, they also noted that 20% of the parents in their Irish immersion sample fell into the lowest SES bracket (as assessed by parent occupation). While this constitutes a smaller proportion of low-SES parents than in the English-medium schools in the national assessments (32%), nevertheless, it indicates that Irish-medium parents are a less homogenously high socio-economic group than has previously been assumed, with 55% in middle or low-SES categories. It is therefore possible that there are significant numbers of parents who may experience some challenges to becoming involved in their child’s education through Irish, if the socioeconomic trends in involvement found in other contexts are also found to translate to the Irish immersion context. Despite this, research on Irish immersion parents has continued to focus largely on identifying elements of the parental

profile, without consideration of how this may impact on the nature and extent of actual involvement in the education of their children.

An exception to this is Mac Giolla Phádraig's (2003) study which examined differences between mainstream and Irish immersion parents' perceptions of their involvement in three areas (parental access, parental involvement in policy formation and provision of information). He found that the two groups of parents did not differ in the importance they placed on receiving information from the school. Irish-medium parents were more satisfied with the information they received on administrative and organisational matters (such as enrolment brochures, information on policies and procedures), but there was no difference found in the provision on information on learning and other child-related matters. The two groups were not found to differ in relation to how much access parents thought they should have to the principal, to teachers, to their child's school work, or to their child's school record. However, Irish-medium parents reported that they felt that they had more access to the school principal, and to discussing school policies with members of the Board of Management and Parents' Association. It was noted that while Irish-medium parents were found to place more value on parental involvement in school policy formation than were mainstream parents, they were not found to be more involved in this than their mainstream counterparts.

Mac Giolla Phádraig (2003) argued that the higher levels of involvement in Irish immersion schools, in a limited number of school matters, may be attributable to the fact that parents were the driving force in the establishment of these immersion schools, and so involvement in general school matters may be more salient or explicit in this context. He also argues that since many Gaelscoileanna are relatively new, they may still be in an 'establishment stage' rather than a 'maintenance phase' (which is the case with most mainstream schools), and this may account for the greater parental involvement noted in policy formation. This point is discussed further in Chapter 7 in relation to the study of immersion teachers' experiences.

Overall, the research on parental involvement in Irish immersion is relatively scant. There *has* been (limited) consideration of these parents' use of Irish in the home (Harris et al., 2006) and of parental involvement in general school matters (Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2003) but these have involved comparisons with English-medium parents without consideration of the variation *within* the distinct subset of parents in Irish immersion. In addition, these studies have adopted narrow conceptualisations of parental involvement and thus do not offer the comprehensive analysis of parental involvement in home-school relations in Irish immersion education which the present study seeks to provide.

2.6 Summary

The present chapter has involved an overview of immersion education, providing some background on its origins internationally and in Ireland, defining the term ‘immersion’, and considering different models of immersion education worldwide. Detail was then presented on the Irish immersion context specifically. Evaluations of immersion programmes were considered before an overview was provided on the existing research pertaining to parents in immersion. The review of the literature highlighted the need for comprehensive, in-depth exploration of parental involvement in the Irish immersion setting, a need which the present research aims to address. The full rationale for the present research is provided in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

The Present Research

3.0 Overview

Having reviewed the relevant theoretical and empirical literature in Chapters 1 and 2, the present chapter aims to draw together the key points from these preceding chapters in order to present a clear rationale for the present research. The chapter also aims to contextualise the research and delineate its scope. To this end, an overview is given on the role of parents in the Irish education system. This is followed by consideration of the sociolinguistic context of Ireland. Next, a rationale for the present research is given, which includes discussion of both theoretical and methodological motivations for undertaking the research project as it has been designed. The chapter also provides detail on the overall research objectives and the specific research questions which the research project aims to answer. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the major points covered within it.

3.1 Ireland as a Context for the Present Research

3.1.1 Parental Involvement in Ireland

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Epstein's theory posits that parental involvement in education is influenced by three major forces: parent characteristics, school characteristics and the age/class level of the child. However, involvement in some of the categories in Epstein's typology, such as communicating with school and involvement in decision making are also contingent on *national* policies and structures. The extent to which parents can be involved in a decision making capacity, and the ways in which formal home-school communication is conducted differs from country to country. It is thus necessary to outline the role of parents in the *Irish* education system. Some detail is presented on the historical role of parents in this regard, and their current status as educational partners is then considered (for a more comprehensive review, see INTO, 1997 and for an overview of the developments from 1970 see Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2010). Pertinent information relating to the Irish education system is presented to further contextualise the research. Fox and Buchanan (2008) summarise the most salient features of the Irish education system for those who are unfamiliar with it as: the involvement of religious denominations in what is a public education system; the national, centralised nature of the system in terms of funding, curriculum, the certification of teachers and assessment of schools; the unique role of the 'Patron' in Irish schools; and the system of local Boards of Management. Each of these is briefly summarised here, with a particular focus on how they relate to the role of parents as educational partners.

Prior to the establishment of a national school system under British rule in the first half of the 19th century, parental involvement was a marked feature of the educational landscape of Ireland:

Visitors to Ireland and observers of the social scene marvelled at the evidence of such keen interest in education exhibited by indigent Irish parents, and contrasted it with the apathy and lack of interest in schooling found among the common poor in European countries of the time (Coolahan, as cited in INTO, 1997, p.1).

The formal national school system in Ireland was established in 1831 as a result of the Irish Education Act which sought to establish, with the support of the Catholic Church, a multidenominational national school system (Hyland, 1989). The aim was to unite children of different faiths and creeds into this one system, and the National Board was to ‘look with peculiar favour’ (Hyland, 1989, p. 89) on applicants who sought to establish schools which were to be jointly managed by Catholics and Protestants. As Fox and Buchanan (2008) note, the quality of this new system was criticised almost immediately. The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Primary Education 1868-70 (the Powis Commission) was strongly critical of the state of Irish education and produced 129 recommendations as to how it could be amended and improved (Coolahan, 2000). Among these was the recommendation that a retreat from multidenominational education be embarked upon. The Catholic Church had made representations to this Commission to the effect that the vast majority of national schools *were*, in reality, denominational in nature and that there should be a change in national school rules in order to reflect this reality (Hyland, 1989). The system became a denominational one with the local clergyman (Catholic priest or Church of Ireland rector) acting as the manager of the local school. With control of the emerging system in the firm control of church authorities and the State: ‘*Parents were removed from centre stage to outside the school gates, a place where they remained until the recent past.*’ (Coolahan, as cited in INTO, 1997, p.3)

This Church control continued throughout the 19th century and in the post-independence era, despite the Constitutional acknowledgement that parents were the primary educators of their children. Article 42.1 of Bunreacht na hÉireann states that:

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

Despite this Constitutional recognition, the practice which evolved with regard to parents was very different. One of the recommendations of the Central Council of the Catholic Managers Association which were adopted in 1934, for example, stated: ‘*that no lay committee of any kind should be associated with the manager in school management*’ (as cited in INTO, 1997 p.

3) The Church exercised full control over the education system for over a century and a half, and were reluctant to relinquish any of this control to parents:

There is little doubt that in the past, parents or lay persons were not welcome by church authorities as participants in managing primary education. Effectively, parents were excluded from any involvement in the management of primary schools despite a publicly stated policy that recognised and upheld parental rights in the education of their children. (INTO, 1997, p. 3).

Additionally, it has been argued that the State were complicit in the exclusion of parents from the education of children, despite public proclamations to the contrary: *‘Parental rights and involvement in education were little more than a flag of convenience to be embraced and discarded as opportunities arose’* (INTO, 1997, p.3). While politicians publicly made reference to the role of parents as the natural and primary educators of their children, they did virtually nothing to include parents in the education system.

This changed little over the following decades, despite the widespread recognition worldwide from the early 1960s onwards that parental involvement in education was important for children’s outcomes. This began to change slowly in the 1970s, a decade which saw the broadening of societal power structures internationally, with governments worldwide beginning to introduce ways of increasing participation of citizens in decision making (Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2010). The growing focus on civil rights at an international and national level, including the Women’s Rights Movement in Ireland, saw the traditional power structures in Irish society being challenged. Such societal changes, when added to the increasing politicisation of education, led to the idea of parents as educational partners being targeted as a potential source of electoral support (Bastiani, 1988).

A major milestone in the devolution of some power over education to parents came in 1975, when management of schools was delegated to Boards of Management, on which parents were allowed representation. A Board of Management can be defined as a local school board with *‘the duty to manage the school on behalf of the patron and for the benefits of the students and parents’* (Education Act, 1998, p.19). For a primary school to be recognised on a national level requires that it is established under the authority of one of a limited number of individuals or organisations which have been approved by the State. These are known as ‘Patrons’. Traditionally, schools were established under the patronage of local bishops, but the term has expanded to include a variety of organisations with differing religious or other ethos (Fox & Buchanan, 2008). Boards of Management are responsible to the patron for upholding the characteristic spirit or ethos of the school and also have the primary responsibility of managing and overseeing individual schools (Fox & Buchanan, 2008). Initially, Boards of Management were comprised of four patron nominees: the principal of the school, one teacher and two

elected parents (one of each gender) (INTO, 1997). There was some restructuring of the Boards in 1980, but parents were excluded from these negotiations (evidence of the ‘*slow but uncertain thinking of the State and the churches in the matter of parental involvement*’ (INTO, 1997, p.6).

In the 1970s, the Gaelscoileanna movement took hold, followed by the multidenominational school movement in the 1980s. What set these movements apart from traditional primary schools was that they arose in direct response to parental demand and thus challenged the Church/State control of the education system (Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2010), offering viable alternatives to parents for the first time. Both movements have seen rapid growth in recent years. Multidenominational schools fall under the patronage of a limited company called ‘Educate Together’. Irish-medium schools may be under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop, of Educate Together in the case of multidenominational Irish-medium schools, or of the limited company An Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán Ghaeilge Teo (under which schools may have a Catholic or an interdenominational ethos). There are thus Irish-medium schools with a Catholic ethos and Gaelscoileanna which are interdenominational or multidenominational.

Another milestone which saw increasing power being afforded to parents came with the establishment of the National Parents’ Council in 1985 by the then Minister for Education Gemma Hussey. The Council has two major branches catering for primary and post-primary parents (NCP-P and NCP-PP). The intention to establish such a Council can be traced to the Programme for Government 1982-1987 (INTO, 1997, p.6) which stated that:

Recognising the primary role of parents in education and the important contribution they have made to educational development, parents will be facilitated in organising themselves into a Parents’ Council through which the views of parents may be expressed. The Department will consult with the Council, once established on a national basis, on matters relevant to educational development. The Council should be broadly representative of all parents.

The NCP-P was also instrumental in ensuring that, in 1997, the composition of Boards of Management changed in order to allow equal representation of teachers, patron, parents and community, despite fierce opposition from representatives of church patrons (Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2010). Since its formation, the Council has had a significant impact on national education policy by providing formal structures through which parents can express their views. The OECD (1997) stated that the establishment of the Council ‘*has probably been the most important development so far in recognising the legitimate role of Irish parents in the educational process*’ (p. 146).

In 1990, a report was published by the Primary Education Review Body which included a chapter entitled 'Parents as Partners in Education'. This review concluded that parents should not be seen merely as consumers of a service, but rather as willing and interested partners in the education process (INTO, 1997; Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2010). It also stated that parents should have the power to influence national education policy and the way in which it is implemented on a local level. The report suggested that schools should, wherever possible, invite parents into support roles within the classroom; it also made calls for the free flow of information between school and home.

Another important development in the role of parents in Irish education can be traced to Circular 24/91 (Department of Education, 1991) which tasked each Board of Management to ensure that a Parents' Association be established in their schools and which also encouraged effective partnership between schools and these Associations (INTO, 1997). In addition, the Circular highlighted that cultivating partnerships for parents in education was a policy aim for the government, and that the promotion of parental involvement was an '*essential strategy of educational policy and practice*' (p. 1). The Circular required schools to provide as much information as possible on all aspects of the education of their children and to devise policies for parental involvement.

The current organisational structures of the Irish education system are articulated in the Education Act of 1998. As Fox and Buchanan (2008) note, several of the features of the Act can be seen as important to the role of parents in education. Article 6e states that parents will have the right to send their child to the school of their choice and Article 6g commits to promoting 'effective liaison' between home, school and community. The Act also elaborates on the role and functions of Parents' Associations. The primary aims of a Parents' Association are to represent the views of parents, to inform parents on school and education developments and to promote cooperation between parents, teachers and school management (INTO, 1997). The NCP-P has described a number of issues which are important to the effective running of Parents' Associations. One of these relates to representation; specifically that it should be ensured that the elected committee is representative of the overall parent body.

The developments in the role of parents in the Irish educational system discussed thus far have been at a system-wide level. There have also been a number of initiatives targeted at improving parental involvement in areas of disadvantage as a means of improving outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The first of such schemes, introduced in 1984, was the Scheme of Assistance to Schools in Designated Disadvantaged Areas (DAS). Schools were given grants to purchase books and materials, and to foster home-school relations. The resulting success of the scheme led to an increase in funding to schools in order to establish the

Home-School Liaison Coordinator Scheme which was extended to all DAS schools in 1999, with the aim of fostering partnership between families and schools as a means of counteracting educational disadvantage (INTO, 1997; Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2010). The scheme *'is concerned with establishing partnership between parents and teachers in the interests of children's learning. It focuses directly on the salient adults in children's educational lives and seeks indirect benefits for the children themselves'* (DES, 1997, p.2). The aims of the scheme include: raising awareness in parents of their own capabilities to enhance their children's education and assisting them to gain relevant skills; to promote active collaboration between school, home and community to promote the education of the children; and to enhance children's retention in education, their continuation to post-primary and third level education, and to enhance their lifelong attitudes to learning. Schools are assigned a local coordinator who is tasked with working towards these aims, known as a Home-School Liaison Coordinator (HSCL). HSCLs serve many functions, such as establishing contact with parents, organising and implementing activities/programmes to develop parents' roles as educators, supporting the principal to formulate a policy in relation to parental involvement, conducting home visits and supporting teachers to work in partnership with parents (INTO, 1997).

Mac Giolla Phádraig (2010) notes that early developments in promoting parents' involvement were based on a 'deficit' approach (as defined in Chapter 1) where parents were largely viewed as supporters/learners, lacking the necessary skills to be true partners in their children's education. When children were experiencing difficulties it was believed that these were best tackled through professional intervention alone rather than in concert with parents. He notes that the Home-School Liaison Scheme was a departure from such an approach, placing as it does the emphasis on partnership and collaboration, so that an empowerment approach (see Chapter 1) underlies this scheme.

When the DAS scheme was replaced by the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools scheme (DEIS), the Home-School Liaison Scheme was retained as a central part of the policy to address educational disadvantage. DEIS schools also receive additional supports such as targeted literacy and numeracy programmes, increased teaching and financial resources, and the appointment of administrative rather than teaching principals with a lower enrolment threshold than required for other schools.

Schemes aimed at addressing educational disadvantage in Ireland have been systematically evaluated and have thus evolved in a nuanced manner, while system-wide policies have been 'quite static and linear'. They assume parents to be a homogenous group and thus assume that all parents are equally capable of effective involvement. Mac Giolla Phádraig (2010) cites the example of Boards of Management:

The means through which they are constituted and their rules of procedure may not reflect power inequalities between various cohorts of parents which can often lead to the effective alienation of large sections of the parent body from managements structures while parental involvement is limited to a small group of 'elite participationists' (p.89).

In contrast to the regular evaluation of disadvantaged schemes, there has been no empirical examination of the impact of system-wide policies, and no evidence of whether schools are complying with recommendations relating to parental involvement (Conaty, 2002).

To summarise, parents were effectively excluded from participating in the education process from the establishment of the national school system until the 1970s when, slowly, efforts were made to increase this involvement. These efforts can be seen as two-fold: policies at a system-wide level and those targeted at areas of disadvantage. The role of parents has been enshrined in recent educational policies, although little evidence exists as to what this has meant in practice at a system-wide level. Parents now have the right to representation at a school level in Parents' Associations, at a management level on Boards of Management, and at a national level with the NCP-P. It remains to be seen how much of this representation reflects the parent bodies in different schools and reflects the experiences of individual parents.

3.1.2 Sociolinguistic context of Ireland

As mentioned above, there is an identified need to avoid generalising from research findings in different immersion settings (such as that in North America) to the heritage immersion context, which needs a distinct corpus of research conducted in heritage immersion settings. However, even *across* heritage immersion contexts there are differences in the sociolinguistic processes at play, and so this section aims to give information on Ireland as the specific context for the present research. Findings presented later should be considered in light of this context.

Despite the status of Irish as the first language of the Republic of Ireland, and the existence of a small number of Irish speaking districts (known as *Gaeltachtaí*), Ireland is a predominantly English speaking country. Irish has been in decline since the 17th century, with efforts to revive the language having been made since the final quarter of the 19th century. The school system has been the primary vehicle for the attempted revival of the language (Coady & Ó Laoire, 2002). All children attending school study Irish as a subject from the time they enter primary school until the time they complete secondary school. A minority of children attend Irish-medium schools at primary level. The most recent figures available show that there are currently 29,733 primary school pupils in Ireland being educated in Gaelscoileanna (Gaelscoileanna, 2012), constituting approximately 6% of the total number of primary level schoolchildren in the country. These figures refer to Irish-medium schools in Gaeltacht (or English-speaking) regions of the Republic of Ireland. A further 7,302 children are educated in

primary schools in the Gaeltacht, meaning that 7.27% of all Irish primary school children are educated through the medium of Irish. The focus of the present research is the former of these school types. The scope of the research does not extend to Irish-medium schools in Gaeltacht areas, or to Irish immersion schools in Northern Ireland, as it is hypothesised that these may comprise qualitatively different contexts in terms of the sociocultural, socioeconomic and linguistic processes at play (see McVeigh, 2012).

It should be noted that the school represents just one domain in which children learn, and the broader sociolinguistic context should also be taken into account when considering the present study. In addition to the increasing popularity of, and demand for, Irish-medium schools, there are additional signs of vitality in the Irish language. These include the establishment of the national Irish language television channel TG4 and the popularity of its programmes (Ó Laoire, 2007), the 20 year strategy for Irish (Government of Ireland, 2008), and the recognition of Irish as an official working language of the European Union in 2007. Ó Laoire (2007) argues that taken together, these signs of revitalisation in the Irish language provide '*some grounds for a cautious optimism about its survival in the 21st century*' (p.166).

Despite these positive signs, however, Irish remains a lesser-used language which is under continued threat from the dominance of English. Findings from the 2011 national census revealed that 1.77 million (41.4%) of people said that they could speak Irish. However, there is a clear mismatch between Irish ability and use, with only 1.8% indicating that they used the language daily outside of the education system, and a further 2.6% responding that they use Irish on a weekly basis only (Central Statistics Office, 2011). While there are networks of Irish speakers in the country, these are largely dispersed and as a result, the opportunities for immersion (and mainstream) students to use the language in real communicative settings outside of school are very limited (Murtagh, 2007). This, in turn, entails a limitation in the richness of language to which pupils are exposed, but it is also likely to depress their motivation to use the language as a result of being mainly or wholly associated with the school curriculum and not with peer culture (Baker, 2003).

3.2 Rationale for the Present Research

This section outlines how the present research aims to address gaps which have been identified in the literature on parental involvement and immersion education. It also describes how the present research aims to address weaknesses in, and limitations of, the existing literature reviewed. As such, this section aims to present a clear rationale for both *why* the research was conducted, and for the decisions made in relation to *how* the research was approached. The key motivating factors for the present research are thus now outlined in turn. The section concludes

with an explicit summary of the contribution of the current research project to the existing knowledge base.

3.2.1 Exploration of Parental Involvement Theory in Non-Mainstream Schools

An examination of the parental involvement literature supports the conclusion that children who have parents who are involved in their education perform better in school than those who do not. As discussed in Chapter 1, however, much of the research conducted on parental involvement can be criticised for its fragmented nature and the noticeable lack of clear conceptual foundations underpinning it. More recently, promising theoretical frameworks have emerged which have begun to guide research in this domain (namely Epstein, 1992; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997, 2005). However, these models have been largely untested in less traditional educational models, such as that of immersion education. While a considerable body of literature exists on parental involvement in education, and a wealth of previous research has been undertaken on immersion education, in general, researchers have not explored the zone of overlap between these areas, having failed to comprehensively explore involvement in an immersion education setting. The present research thus aims to address this gap in the literature by examining parental involvement and home-school relations in an immersion context, and assessing the appropriateness of existing theoretical models of home-school relations in the context where the language of the school and the language of the home differ.

3.2.2 Multidimensional Conceptualisation of Parental Involvement

Having explored the literature on parental involvement, it is also clear that ‘parental involvement’ is a multifaceted construct. There is a wide variety of parental involvement practices in which parents can participate, and which research has found to be related to student achievement. The importance of home-based involvement, school-based involvement and home-school communication, have been documented in Chapter 1. A major weakness of earlier parental involvement research which was identified in Chapter 1 is the narrow definition of parental involvement utilised by many researchers, who have made claims about the benefits of ‘parental involvement’ on the basis of single indices of such involvement. The present research thus aimed to reflect the multidimensionality of parental involvement in its scope, and to explore parents’ engagement in a wide range of involvement practices which are believed to be related to students’ outcomes.

3.2.3 Need for Consistency of Definition in Parental Involvement Research

Even since the more widespread acceptance of the multidimensionality of the construct of parental involvement, there has been a lack of consistency in the definitions of ‘parental involvement’ operationalized by researchers (Hill & Taylor, 2004). The present research

investigates parental involvement according to Epstein's typology of parent involvement activities. While Epstein's typology is one of several to have been posited, it is the only one that has been subjected to widespread scrutiny by the research community (Jordan et al., 2001) and most researchers now agree on the comprehensiveness and utility of Epstein's categories. As Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) noted, much of the more contemporary parental involvement research has been built on the work of Epstein. Thus, in line with this prevailing trend, and due to the acknowledged need for consistency in conceptualisation of parental involvement, the present research is also guided by this framework of parental involvement activities.

3.2.4 Need for Distinct Knowledge Base in Heritage Immersion Contexts

As noted previously, the majority of research on immersion education has been conducted in Canada and North America. Several commentators have warned of the danger of generalising from such studies to different immersion contexts, such as that of heritage immersion in Ireland, due to different sociolinguistic processes at play in the different settings (McKendry, 2006). It is thus argued that researchers in settings of heritage immersion should aim to build a distinct body of empirical literature which has been conducted indigenously. The present research aims to contribute to this growing corpus of research.

3.2.5 Need for Research on Parents in Irish Immersion

As Harris and Ó Laoire (2006) and McVeigh (2012) note, it is surprising how little is known about Irish immersion parents, given that the Gaelscoileanna movement has been so parent-driven. As discussed in Chapter 2, these authors made a call for further research on parental profile and parental involvement in Irish-medium education as it may be important for understanding declining numbers of immersion pupils attaining mastery of Irish, as well as having implications for future planning and policy in Irish-medium schools. Acknowledging that the rapid rise in popularity of Gaelscoileanna has likely brought changes to the profile of the 'typical' Irish immersion parent, the present study aims to address the dearth of information on the current profile of Irish-medium parents, and its relationship to the nature and extent of parental involvement in these schools.

3.2.6 Need to move beyond Demographics in Parental Involvement Research

Given the widespread acceptance that parental involvement is related to children's educational success, researchers have aimed to establish which factors are related to parental involvement. As described in detail in Chapter 1, the vast majority of studies have focused on pinpointing which demographic characteristics are associated with higher levels of parental involvement, and a number of sociological trends have been demonstrated in particular contexts. However, such sociological trends do not tell us much about parents' motivations for involvement or the

psychological barriers which may prevent such participation. They cannot explain the variation of levels of involvement within these demographic groups, which may be attributable to dynamic parent characteristics such as attitudes, expectations, or to perceptions of opportunities for involvement. As such, it has been argued that parental involvement research now needs to move beyond the near-universal reliance on demographic studies in parental involvement research (Georgiou, 2007).

A parallel consideration relates to the methods which have been employed in previous investigations of parental involvement. As Baker and Soden (1998) note, the majority of parental involvement studies have utilised self-report surveys that rely on closed-ended questions. They argue that such methods cannot comprehensively assess the multifaceted nature of parental involvement and the complex processes and interactions at play in home-school relations. They write:

Many of these processes could better be explored through open-ended and observational techniques, which would produce rich data, shed light on multifaceted interactions and relationships over time, and generate new hypotheses about the role of parent involvement (Non-Objective Measures of Parent Involvement Section, para. 2).

As mentioned above, the present research aims to explore the demographic and linguistic profile of Irish-medium parents and to investigate whether sociological trends which have been observed in other contexts hold true in an Irish immersion context. For these purposes, self-report surveys are the appropriate method of investigation. However, given that the present research also aims to explore stakeholders' experiences of home-school relation in more depth, the current research recognises the need for rich, qualitative data to address this aim. The present research thus aims to capture the lived experiences of the relevant parties, the voices of whom have been largely absent from previous parental involvement literature.

3.2.7 Need for Parental Involvement Research Integrating Multiple Perspectives

As referred to in Chapter 2, a major challenge of parental involvement research relates to the integration of various perspectives. The question of who should be consulted when researching parental involvement has been an enduring one for researchers working in this field (Hill & Taylor, 2004), and yet it has been addressed satisfactorily by very few studies. It is clear from the existing body of literature that the overwhelming majority of research on parental involvement has explored the issue from the perspective of one of the stakeholder groups. In most of these cases, parents themselves have comprised the population under investigation. A smaller number of studies have examined parental involvement from the perspective of teachers. Fewer still have integrated the perspectives of these two groups in the same research, despite the evidence that parents' decisions to become involved are not undertaken in isolation,

but are rather influenced by a number of conditions and actors. Hill and Taylor (2004) note the failure of parental involvement researchers to integrate multiple perspectives as a major weakness of research in this domain and argue, as it is also argued here, that multiple perspectives are important for developing an understanding of parental involvement in education. The present research thus aims to address that this weakness by ensuring that the perspectives of all of the primary stakeholders are included in the present research.

3.2.8 Need for the Voice of the Child in Parental Involvement Research

In the previous section, it was argued that it is inappropriate to consult parents in isolation when researching parental involvement. Epstein's theory posits that levels of parental involvement are influenced by parent characteristics, school characteristics, and the age or class level of the child. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model proposes that parents' perceptions of invitations or opportunities for involvement are one of the influencing factors in a parent's decision to become involved. Involvement theory, on the whole, seems to view children as having parental involvement 'done *to* them', and the perspectives of children have thus, generally, not been included in previous research in this area. Neglecting to incorporate the perspectives of children in parental involvement research presupposes that children are passively in receipt of decisions and practices of parents and educators (Edwards & David, 1997). However, there is some evidence to suggest that children do actively mediate the involvement of their parents in their education and influence home-school relations. The failure to consider this role of children in the process can be seen to be a feature of both research and practice in this domain. In an article entitled 'Where are the children in home-school relations? Notes towards a research agenda', Edwards and David (1997) discussed what they referred to as the 'adult-centric' nature of research in this domain, and argue for the merit of a more child-centred approach. They describe how children have been treated in research on parental involvement in education:

A one-way relationship between 'parent' and 'child' is presupposed, in which it is parents' attitudes and actions alone that are crucial, with no acknowledgment that children themselves may play a part in the process. That children (as boys and girls), individually and collectively, might have interests and priorities in terms of how, in what ways and when, as well as which of their parent/s (as mothers and fathers) should be or should not be involved in particular facets of their schooling and education has received little recognition or attention in research in home-school relations (Edwards & David, 1997, p. 196).

The present research aims to address this glaring omission in previous parental involvement literature. It is argued that consultation with children is essential if the aim is to understand the potentially complex processes involved in home-school relations. It is also argued here that the voices of children may particularly be illuminating in an *immersion* setting. In the context where children may surpass their parents in terms of proficiency in the target language, it is

hypothesised that this may affect how children perceive the role of their parents in their learning, their belief in their parents' efficacy for successful involvement, and thus the extent to which they elicit their parents' participation in their educational lives.

3.3 The Present Research: Objectives, Research Questions

The overall aim of the research project is to investigate parental involvement in Irish-immersion education, from multiple perspectives and using multiple methods. The primary objectives of the present research are as follows:

- To qualitatively explore the lived experiences of parental involvement in Irish immersion education from the perspectives from each of the stakeholder groups.
- To provide a comprehensive picture of the nature and extent of parental involvement in Irish-medium primary schools.
- To investigate the current profile of Irish-immersion parents in terms of socio-demographic and linguistic variables, and to analyse how elements of this profile are related to levels and types of involvement activities undertaken.
- To identify barriers to, and facilitators of, parental involvement in immersion education.
- To integrate findings from each phase of the research project so as to build on existing parental involvement theory in order to develop a comprehensive picture of parental involvement in Irish immersion education.

In order to address each of these main research objectives entails that a number of research questions be answered. Three separate studies were designed in order to answer the research questions posed. The design of each of these studies will be presented in detail in Chapter 4. Further specificity is provided on how these main aims are broken down into research sub-questions in the introductory material of each of the chapters which report the individual studies (see Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8).

3.4 Summary

This chapter has drawn together the key theoretical and methodological motivations for the research, which arose having evaluated the state of the art in the preceding chapters. In order to convey the scope of the research and the educational and sociolinguistic contexts in which the research should be considered in light of, detail was provided on Ireland as the context for the present research. Information was then given on the overall objectives of the research project. Details of the overall design and the methodological approaches adopted in each of these studies will be described in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Design and Methodology

4.0 Overview

The preceding chapters have presented the theoretical underpinnings of the present research, in addition to its empirical bases. The rationale for the present research has been described and the major research objectives which the project aims to address have been presented. Having identified a number of objectives for the present research, it was then necessary to select the most appropriate design to answer the research questions. The present chapter will give detail on the design and methodology selected for the present research. This will involve a description of the approach selected, mixed-methods research, including an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of such an approach. The rationale for the selection of the research design chosen for the present research is elucidated. Next, details on the qualitative and quantitative phases of the research and their respective methods will be given. An analysis plan for each of the studies will also be presented.

4.1 Mixed-Methods Research: An Overview

The present study employed a mixed methods design. Mixed-methods research involves the collection, analysis and interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative data (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006). It has emerged as the third major research paradigm after the ‘paradigm wars’ (Gage, 1989) which denominated research methods debate for decades. Exponents of quantitative and qualitative research methods have long been involved in passionate dispute, with purists emerging on both sides (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Advocates of each paradigm have criticised the other for not only their worldview, but their methods, the rigour of their procedures and the validity of their findings (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Critics of a positivist, quantitative approach have attacked what they perceive as the reductionist and mechanistic view of the world synonymous with quantitative research which, they have argued, undermines life and mind (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011). By contrast, the interpretive, naturalistic approach behind newer, qualitative methods has been criticised for lacking scientific rigour and for the lack of generalisability of the results obtained by qualitative methods. The resultant polarisation between quantitative and qualitative purists has been based on the assumption that the two paradigms are, by definition, mutually exclusive, and wholly incompatible with each other (Howe, 1988).

More recently, however, researchers keen to take a more pragmatic approach to scientific enquiry have begun to integrate the two perspectives. Pragmatism endorses taking a pluralistic and eclectic approach to research methodologies, and advocates that using ‘what works’ when attempting to answer a research question (or questions) should be the guiding principle in researchers’ design selection (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). As Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) wrote: ‘*Mixed methods research is, generally speaking, an approach to knowledge (theory and practice) that attempts to consider multiple viewpoints, perspectives, positions and standpoints (always including the standpoints of qualitative and quantitative research)*’ (p. 113). Mixed methods designs have a number of advantages. A mixed-methods design allows the researcher to simultaneously answer exploratory and confirmatory research questions, thus allowing for the researcher to both generate and confirm theory (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). Mixed methods designs permit researchers to answer questions that cannot be answered by either qualitative or quantitative methods on their own (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003) and can also give a greater understanding of a phenomenon or a research problem than a mono-method study would provide (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). Mixing methods allows the researcher to capitalise on the strengths of different approaches while offsetting the impact of their weaknesses.

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) have posited a mixed methods process model consisting of eight separate steps which must be conducted to carry out a successful mixed methods research project. These steps can be summarised as follows: 1) the research question(s) must be determined, 2) it must be decided whether a mixed design is suitable to address the research questions posed, 3) the type of mixed methods design to be used is then selected, 4) data are collected, 5) data are analysed, 6) data are interpreted, 7) data are legitimated, 8) conclusions are drawn (if merited), and a report on the study is written up. These steps were followed when conducting the present mixed methods project. However, the process just described can be recursive/iterative and the steps interactional; for example, research questions can be reformulated on the basis of data collected/analysed/interpreted in previous phases, as occurred in the present research project (see Study 3 below).

Mixed methods studies can be configured in a large variety of ways. Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007) have grouped the many types of mixed methods designs into four main categories, each of which have a number of different variants. The four main types of mixed methods design they described are: triangulation, embedded, explanatory and exploratory designs. A triangulation design involves the concurrent collection of quantitative and qualitative data, with the results interpreted or integrated at the end. This enables the researcher to compare the results of the different phases. A triangulation design thus allows a research to examine a research problem from different perspectives, tackling it in different ways. If the

results from each phase support each other, this increases confidence in the findings. If the results differ, this also gives the researcher (and the audience) insight into the nature of the phenomenon (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011).

An embedded design is one where a study is undertaken predominantly with one approach (qualitative or quantitative) but features an embedded component of data collection and analysis from an alternative method. Such a design is the least discussed in the mixed methods literature (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). Explanatory designs are two-phase sequential mixed methods studies, where the emphasis tends to be on the quantitative phase, which is conducted first. This initial quantitative phase is followed by a qualitative phase, the aim of which is to somehow explain or expand the findings generated by the quantitative phase. The fourth main category is that of exploratory designs. These are, in essence, the opposite of the explanatory designs just defined. Thus, exploratory designs are also two-phase sequential designs, however, in this instance, the qualitative component precedes the quantitative phase, and in such designs, the emphasis is often placed on the qualitative phase of the study. Sequential exploratory designs are useful in a variety of research contexts. For example, they can be used where there is not a clear theoretical framework driving the study, or where some variables are unknown. It can also be used when a goal is instrument creation or development. Such a design also allows the researcher to explore an issue qualitatively, in an in-depth manner, and then explore the prevalence of issues raised in a larger, more representative sample.

Cresswell (2009) highlights several important factors that must be taken into consideration when selecting a mixed methods research design. Of primary concern should be that the design selected matches the objectives of the research. In addition, the research needs to take into the timing of the stages, i.e. whether the qualitative and quantitative data are collected concurrently or sequentially, and if a sequential design is selected, which phase will be conducted first. The weighting of the phases is also important: will the emphasis be placed on the qualitative data, the quantitative data, or will the two phases be given equal weight? The intended audience should also be considered when deciding how studies will be mixed, and at what level this mixing will take place. Finally, the researcher needs to consider how the findings from each of the stages will be mixed or integrated.

While taxonomies of mixed methods design can be useful guides for researchers, they should not be accepted as exhaustive lists of the ways in which methods can be mixed, and researchers should not be restricted by them. As Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) wrote:

It is important to understand that one can easily create more user specific and more complex designs than the ones shown...For example, one can develop a

mixed methods design that has more stages (e.g. Qual + QUAN + Qual)...The point is for the researcher to be creative and not limited by the designs listed...Furthermore, sometimes a design may emerge during a study in new ways, depending on the conditions and information that is obtained. A tenet of mixed methods research is that researchers should mindfully create designs that effectively answer their research questions; this stands in contrast to the common approach to traditional quantitative research where students are given a menu of designs from which to choose (p.20).

As mentioned previously, the steps involved in conducting mixed methods research can be iterative, and as such the overall design may change throughout the course of the research. The above quote also highlights the potentially organic way in which mixed methods design may grow in terms of phases/studies, as a result of the findings of prior phases. This was a feature of the present research, whereby an additional phase of the research (Study 3) was added in response to the findings of earlier phases.

4.2 Design of the Present Research

The research questions posed necessitated that a number of different phases of the data collection be undertaken. They also demanded that both qualitative and quantitative data be collected. Thus, given the practical advantages of mixed methods research, it was determined that the mixing of methods was indeed the appropriate approach to take in the present research. Study 1 focused on parents' experiences of involvement and can be categorised as a sequential exploratory study. Phase 1 of this study consisted of a qualitative exploration of the experiences of Irish immersion parents. Phase 2 involved the administration of a parental involvement survey. Studies 2 and Studies 3 were qualitative in design and explored parental involvement from the perspectives of the remainder of the primary stakeholders (immersion teachers, principals and pupils). The main purpose of these additional studies was triangulation. Each of the studies carried out will now be outlined in turn.

4.3 Study 1: Parental Involvement in Irish-Medium Education: Parents' Perspectives

As alluded to above, sequential exploratory designs are employed for a variety of reasons. They are often used when there is no guiding theoretical framework, when there are unknown variables, or when an existing measurement tool is unavailable and needs to be developed. They are also used in the case when a quantitative methodology can be used to increase the generalisability of qualitative findings (Harwell, 2011). In the present research, several of these functions were important. Given that similar research had not been conducted before and given the nature of some of the research questions, it was deemed necessary that in-depth qualitative accounts of parents' experiences be sought. The research also aimed to investigate the extent to which parents were engaging in a variety of involvement activities, which meant that quantitative measures were important, in order to examine these issues in a sample more

representative of the population under study. The roles which the qualitative and quantitative played in the present study are now outlined in turn, in conjunction with details of the methodologies employed in each phase.

4.3.1 Role of the Qualitative Component

A stated aim of the research was to explore parents' experiences of involvement in the education of their children. It aimed to explore why (or why not) parents were involved in their children's educational lives and how they felt about this involvement. This exploratory phase was guided in part by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's psychological model of parental involvement (see Chapter 1) and aimed to explore the motivations, decisions and lived experiences of parents in relation to the topic under study. As such, a qualitative design was deemed most appropriate to answer these research questions. The qualitative stage was undertaken first for a number of reasons. First, given the dearth of previous research on such issues as parental motivations for, and experiences of, involvement in an immersion context (and in the Irish immersion context more specifically), a qualitative methodology was deemed the most appropriate first stage of this mixed methods study. In addition, the qualitative phase was conducted first as this phase also had a secondary intended role; namely, to inform to some degree the development of the quantitative measure which would be administered to a larger sample of parents in the latter phase of the study. It was aimed that while the study would provide rich data and comprehensive insight into the subjective experiences of parents, that some of this information could also be incorporated into the planned involvement survey, in order that some of these issues be explored in a sample more representative of the population of interest.

4.3.2 Role of the Quantitative Component

In addition to the aims of exploring parents' motivations for, and experiences, of involvement (which were compatible with a qualitative methodology), the present research also included research objectives which required a phase of quantitative data collection. This second phase of the research aimed to investigate how parents tend to be involved and how frequently they engage in a range of involvement activities which have been shown to be related to students' achievement. The research also aimed to explore whether socio-demographic trends in parental involvement which have been demonstrated in other contexts were also applicable in the Irish immersion context. This necessitated that the socio-demographic profile of these parents be explored and analysis conducted on which, if any, aspects of this profile were related to involvement levels. Thus, a primary goal of this phase of the research was to answer stated research questions which were best answered by a quantitative methodology. A secondary aim of the survey was to explore the prevalence of certain issues which arose in the qualitative

phase using a larger sample of parents. Further detail on the process of developing the survey which was administered to parents is presented below.

4.3.3 Qualitative Methodology

Having selected a qualitative methodology for the first phase of Study 1, it was then necessary to select which specific method would be used to collect qualitative data from parents. The main types of qualitative research include observation, case study, document analysis and interviews (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011). Given the aims of the research, interviews were selected as the method of data collection for this phase of the research. Individual in-depth interviews were chosen over focus group data collection as it was felt that a focus group situation could lead to parents giving socially desirable answers. It was recognised that being 'a good parent' is a socially desirable way to be perceived (Chapman & Wood, 2009), and that the presence of other parents might have inhibited parents to some degree when reporting their experiences. Also, given the range of topics which the interviews aimed to cover, it was decided that the research aims could best be addressed in a one-to-one interview context.

Research interviews span a continuum from highly structured to unstructured. In unstructured interviews, the interaction is participant-driven and the direction taken is led by the interviewee. In structured interviews, a set of predetermined questions are asked by the researcher in a predetermined order, with little or no deviation from the set question list. The present study utilised a semi-structured interview format. In semi-structured (or 'focused', or 'moderately scheduled') interviews, the researcher approaches the interview with a set of topics and questions which are to be covered during the interview. However, the interviewer also has discretion over the order in which the questions are asked, and is also free to probe for further information when necessary. Such an approach also allows the interview to follow trajectories which appear important to the interviewee and may not have been covered in the designed interview protocol. Given that, in this case, the researcher had a number of predetermined topics which needed to be covered, yet had awareness that the study was exploratory in nature and as such, there should be an element of freedom in the interviews, a semi-structured approach was selected as the best fit for this phase of the research. It was decided that face-to-face interviews be conducted, as these have a number of advantages over alternative methods (such as telephone or online interviews). While telephone interviews have practical attractions such as reducing travel time and cost, concerns have been raised in the literature as to the implications for the development of rapport between interviewer and interviewee when interviews are not conducted face-to-face, and the loss of non-verbal information such as gestures which can aid communication. Given these concerns, face-to-face interviews were chosen over distance interviewing methods.

4.3.4 Quantitative Methodology

A self-report parental involvement survey was deemed to be the most appropriate way to collect data for the second phase of the study. This phase thus employed a cross-sectional correlation design, a design which involves the collection of data from a sample of individuals at one stage in time, in order to determine relationships between variables and to provide the possibility of making predictions or inferences from these relationships (Hall, 2008). Given that there was no existing instrument which could answer all of the research questions posed, a survey was designed by the researcher which included questions adapted from previous surveys (to facilitate comparison with previous studies), scales created by the researcher (based on previous involvement and immersion literature and Phase 1 findings), and the use of a standardised measure of parental involvement. Details on each of the separate survey sections are now provided.

4.3.5 Construction of Parental Involvement Survey

A ten page in-depth survey was constructed in order to answer the stated research questions. The survey can be divided into the following sections:

- Socio-demographic questionnaire (designed by author)
- Irish Proficiency (adapted from Harris et al., 2006) and Attitude questionnaire (designed by author)
- Reason for school choice section (adapted from Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1979)
- Use of Irish in the home scales (designed by author)
- Involvement Activities (based on Epstein's categories of parental involvement)
- Contact with School Section (designed by author)
- Change in Involvement Over Time (designed by author)
- Required Supports (designed by author)
- Open-ended Question (designed by author)
- Family Involvement Questionnaire (FIQ: Fantuzzo et al., 2000)

Socio-demographic Questionnaire

Since parental demographic variables have previously been found to relate to levels of parental involvement (e.g. Hill & Taylor, 2004), and to children's achievement in Irish (e.g. Harris, 1999) the questionnaire included a section which aimed to collect information on these variables. Gender, age, nationality, employment status and type, highest level of education

completed, language of the home while growing up, and type of primary and secondary schools attended were assessed. Those with partners were also asked to provide this information on their behalf, where possible. Respondents were also asked about the amount of books they had in their home, whether they had internet access at home, and whether they were in receipt of a medical card.

Elements of family structure have also been linked to levels of parental involvement; therefore these were also assessed by the survey. Respondents were asked to report their marital status, the number of children they had, their relationship to the child about whom they were answering the questions (parent/step-parent/grandparent etc.), and the class level of this child. Parents with multiple children attending the school through which they were recruited were asked to respond to questions in relation to the *eldest* of these children.

Irish Proficiency and Target Language Attitudes

On the basis of the findings of the qualitative phase, it was hypothesised that low parental proficiency in Irish would impact on parents' sense of efficacy for involvement and also the invitations or opportunities which they would receive from a) their child's school and b) their children, thus affecting their levels of involvement in various aspects of their child's education. Parental proficiency has also been found to be important for pupils' attainment of a second language (Harris et al., 2006). Parents' proficiency in Irish was thus assessed by the survey. Proficiency in a second language has been assessed in previous research in a variety of ways. Examination results, teacher reports of a learner's competency, objective standardised tests, and self-assessment of proficiency have all been utilised in previous studies. Self-report of proficiency has been deemed an appropriate way of assessing second language proficiency by many researchers. It is an accurate way to assess L2 proficiency, as evidenced by the fact that self-assessments have reasonable correlations with objective measures. It is argued here that, in fact, self-assessment would provide *more* useful data in the present study than objective measures, as it is hypothesised that it is parents' perceptions/evaluations of their own Irish ability (which may not fully reflect their actual L2 ability as measured objectively) which would be related to their self-efficacy for parental involvement. Participants were asked to report their own perceived proficiency in speaking, understanding, reading and writing the Irish language (on a 5 or 6 point rating scale). Those with partners were also asked to estimate their partner's proficiency across each of these four aspects of proficiency.

Parents were also asked to rate their attitudes towards the Irish language while growing up, their current attitude towards the language, and also to indicate their partner's current attitude towards Irish where applicable. All ratings were given on a 7-point scale with a response of 1 indicating a very unfavourable attitude, a response of 7 indicating a very favourable attitude,

and a response of 4 being indicative of neutrality. Given that modelling theory predicts that children will often model behaviours and demonstrated attitudes of their parents, parents were also asked about if and how they communicated their attitudes towards the Irish language to their child.

Reasons for School Choice

This section aimed to identify which factors had an influence (positive and negative) on parents' decisions to send their children to a Gaelscoil. It also assessed which of the factors played the largest roles in this decision. It is known that the Gaelscoileanna movement was initially parent-driven and schools were set up in response to parental desire/demand for education through the medium of Irish. It is plausible to expect, therefore, that these early immersion parents were committed to the language and its promotion. However, the rapid increase in popularity of Irish immersion education has been attributed by some commentators (at least in part) to parents perceiving benefits of such schools that are non-linguistic in nature. This section thus aimed to explore parents' motivations for choosing this educational option. The question was adapted from Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin (1979) and also included additional factors which emerged during the course of the qualitative phase of the study. Parents were also asked to rate their satisfaction with their decision, and the interest that they would have in partial immersion education if it were an option available to them.

Use of Irish in the Home

While immersion students have consistently been found to achieve higher levels of proficiency in the target language than their 'drip-feed' counterparts, it has been argued that the classroom environment alone is insufficient for pupils to attain fluency, and that classroom teaching must also be accompanied by family commitment and community support (Hinton, 2001). Out-of-school use of Irish has been found to be linked to pupils' proficiency in the language (Murtagh, 2007), as has parents' use of Irish with children (Harris et al., 2006). The survey thus aimed to assess the frequency with which Irish is used by the respondents with their children, and also at what times, or during which activities, parents were likely to do so. In addition, parents were also asked to report the frequency with which they observe their children using Irish in a variety of settings. Finally, parents were asked whether they experienced any barriers to using Irish in their home. The items included in this question were derived from the obstacles listed by parents interviewed in the qualitative phase of the research. Parents were also given the opportunity to list any other barriers they had experienced which were not included in the question.

Involvement Activities

This section aimed to identify parents' practices in relation to a variety of involvement activities as set forth in Epstein's typology. The frequency of parents' involvement in their children's home learning activities (e.g. homework involvement and supporting literacy) was assessed. Parents' level of school-based participation (e.g. volunteering, involvement in decision-making) was also investigated. Parents were also asked to report on their engagement in home-school communication (e.g. discussing child's progress). As Walker et al. (2005) point out, parental involvement affects children's achievement through three main mechanisms: Direct instruction, modelling, and reinforcement. For this reason, the frequency with which parents not only directly engage with their children's schoolwork, but also praise their child's performance in various subjects and activities was also assessed in this section. Involvement in L1 activities, and L2 involvement, were both assessed in this section.

Contact with School Section

Since communication with the child's school constitutes one of the most important facets of parental involvement, and since low proficiency parents in the qualitative phase reported experiencing significant barriers to successful contact with their children's educators, several questions in the survey were devoted to this issue. Parents were asked to indicate how much contact they had with their child's school and their level of satisfaction with this amount of contact. Participants were also asked to rate the frequency with which they were present in their child's school for a range of occasions and activities. Finally, parents were asked to indicate the language or mix of languages which they used while present on school premises, and also to explain the reason for use of this language or language mixture in the school. Again, the items included in these questions were informed to a large degree by the reported experiences of parents interviewed in Phase 1 of the study.

Change in Involvement over Time

The majority of parental involvement literature has demonstrated that levels of parental involvement tend to decrease as a function of a child's age. Parents of older children have consistently been found to be less involved than parents of younger children. However, findings from the qualitative study indicated that the opposite may be true in an immersion context, where some parents reported needing time to improve their Irish and their confidence in using Irish before taking an active role; with this sometimes happening quite late in their child's school career. It was thus deemed important that any change in involvement over time be assessed in the course of the quantitative phase of the research. Parents with a child in the senior half of the school (Third class or higher) were asked to indicate whether their

involvement had increased or decreased over time, and also to elaborate on which particular involvement activities they had increased or reduced their participation in.

Suggestions for Support.

Parents were asked to rate the usefulness of a variety of listed supports for increasing the quality of their involvement in their children's education. Several of the included supports were suggested by parents in the qualitative phase of the study while others were incorporated into the survey from practices used to boost parental involvement in immersion settings in other countries. Parents were also invited to proffer any other suggestions for supports which they felt would help them to take a more active role in the education of their child and had not been included in the survey.

Open-Ended Questions

Parents were given opportunities throughout the questionnaire to elaborate on their responses or to provide 'other' information which the questions did not allow for. They were also given space at the end of the questionnaire to make any other comments they wished to, or to provide any additional information they wished to give in relation to previous survey sections. Open-ended questions are subjective questions which allow participants to respond in their own words. There are two major advantages of open-ended questions in surveys: they allow for the discovery of spontaneous responses and they avoid the biases that may arise when responses are suggested to participants (Reja, Manfreda, Hlebec & Vehovar, 2003).

The Family Involvement Questionnaire

The FIQ is a multidimensional measure of involvement which identifies three family involvement dimensions: home-based involvement (HBI) school-based involvement (SBI) and home-school conferencing (HSC). The questionnaire consists of 42 items, where respondents are asked to indicate the frequency with which they take part in various activities on a four-point scale where a response of 1 = rarely, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, and 4 = always. The scale assesses parental involvement in Epstein's six categories of involvement: Parenting, Learning in the Home, Volunteering, Communicating, Decision Making and Collaborating with the Community.

4.4 Study 2: Educators' Experiences of Parental Involvement

It seems evident from the reviewed theoretical and empirical literature that to truly understand home-school partnerships necessitates that all of the primary stakeholders be consulted. As such, it was also decided that school staff would be consulted in addition to immersion parents. Given that teacher outreach has been found to be associated with higher levels of parental

involvement, it was decided on the basis of the literature reviewed that immersion teachers be consulted as to their attitudes towards, and practices in relation to, parental involvement. Due to the lack of an existing instrument which could adequately address these objectives, and given that the data sought were relating to teachers' motivations, beliefs, and lived experiences, a qualitative methodology was selected for this stage of the research (see Appendix C for interview protocol used for teacher interviews).

In addition to consulting teachers, whose individual attitudes and practices could potentially influence the involvement of parents in their own classes, either by welcoming involvement (e.g. by eliciting frequent communication with parents; assigning joint homework activities, etc.) or by failing to invite (or actively rejecting) the involvement of such parents, it was also aimed to assess school-wide policies or practices relating to the involvement of parents and to home-school relations. School philosophy and school atmosphere is often influenced from the top down, and so it was deemed important that school principals also be consulted as to their policies and practices relating to the parents of children in their schools. Again, in-depth semi-structured interviews were selected as the appropriate method to collect data from school principals (see Appendix C for interview protocol used for principal interviews).

4.5 Study 3: Pupils' Experiences of their Parents' Involvement in their Education

As has been previously mentioned, many studies of parental involvement in education have focused solely on the perspectives and reports of parents. However, theory suggests that school policies, practices, and characteristics also influence involvement and as such, the present research consulted teachers and principals in addition to parents. These studies thus comprised the initial design of the present research. However, given the findings from Study 1 (see Chapter 5), it was also decided to further extend the scope of the inquiry. Parents indicated that their children played a much greater role in influencing the nature and extent of their involvement than had been allowed for in previous parental involvement literature. While previous literature has mentioned the *age* of children as influencing parental involvement, and some studies have looked at the effect of child *gender* on the nature of parental involvement, children's actual voices have been noticeably absent from the discourse on parental involvement. Parents' reports in the present research suggested that, in immersion, when children may surpass their parents in terms of L2 proficiency at an early age, children may influence, encourage, and rebuff the involvement of their parents in a wide variety of ways. Parents also suggested that children may adopt an involvement role in the education of their younger siblings, where parents lacked the skills and knowledge to do so. It was thus deemed important that children's voices be included in the research project and this additional study was planned. Again, a qualitative approach was selected for this phase of the research project. A series of semi-structured interviews were thus conducted. Data were collected from children

who were early in their school career (6-7 year olds) and also from an older group of children (10-11 year olds). Separate (developmentally appropriate) interview protocols were devised for each of these pupil groups (see Appendix D for interview protocols).

4.6 Methods of Analysis Employed

4.6.1 Qualitative Content Analysis

Content analysis was used to analyse the interview data collected from parents, teachers, principals and pupils. It was also the method of analysis utilised with the qualitative data resulting from responses to open-ended questions on the parental involvement survey. Content analysis emerged as a data reduction technique in the 19th century, where original uses included the analysis of the text of the hymns, newspapers, and political speeches (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007). Initial uses of content analysis focused on ascertaining the frequency of particular words of interest in given documents. Content analysis thus emerged primarily as a quantitative analysis measure. More recent uses of content analysis reveal a richer interpretation of the method, illustrating that the principles of systematic research do not need to be compromised or sacrificed in the name of complex engagement with the data (Joffe & Yardley, 2004).

Content analysis has been variously defined as: *‘a research method for the subjective interpretation of text data through the systematic process of coding and identifying themes and patterns.’* (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278); *‘an approach of empirical, methodological, controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytic rules, and step-by-step models, without rash quantification’* (Mayring, 2000, p.2) and *‘any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings’* (Patton, 2002, p. 453). Qualitative content analysis allows researchers to understand social phenomena in a subjective, yet scientific way (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Content analysis has been described as one of the most important methods of analysis in the social sciences (Krippendorff, 2004) and is one of the most widely used analytical techniques (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009)

Content analysis can be either inductive or deductive. In inductive analysis (the more common approach to qualitative data analysis) codes and categories are derived solely from the data (such an approach is also referred to as 'emergent coding' or 'conventional content analysis' in the literature). The names of categories and codes emerge from the data, and are not predetermined by the researcher. Such an approach is usually taken when there is no clear theory which is being tested by the study. By contrast, in deductive analysis (also known as 'directed content analysis' or 'a priori coding'), codes and categories are derived from previous literature. Such an approach is usually taken when the aim is to test or to expand an existing

theory. Inductive and deductive approaches have both strengths and weaknesses. Taking a wholly inductive approach can mean ignoring existing relevant theory and can result in limiting the comparability of the findings to those of other research studies. Bauer (2000) thus warns against taking a solely inductive approach to content analysis. Taking a purely deductive approach can lead to data/themes which do not neatly fit into predetermined categories being excluded or subverted. Indeed as Joffe and Yardley (2004) point out, there is little worth in conducting research if one is not open to what the data might offer in terms of refuting or expanding previous literature. However, while some studies may rigidly adopt one of these approaches, inductive and deductive analyses are not mutually exclusive (Patton, 2002). The approach selected should be determined by the research objectives, and it has been argued that good content analysis involves both inductive and deductive elements (Weber, 1990). It has also been emphasised that content analysis is a flexible technique, and that a researcher's approach may be more standardised or more pragmatic based on the research aims and questions. In the present study, a largely inductive approach was taken, with elements of deductive coding also included.

Content analysis of qualitative data has been variously criticised for being a method which is too 'quantitative' for use with qualitative data, and by others for not being quantitative *enough* to facilitate successful statistical analyses of the resulting data. Qualitative content analysis aims to preserve the systematicity and rigour of quantitative content analysis while recognising that it is only a partially quantitative method that needs to be supported by rich description, interpretation and contextualisation (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007)

Content analysis was chosen over a purely thematic analysis approach for several reasons. These two methods share many of the same procedures and principles (Joffe & Yardley, 2004); both approaches aim to condense text data into distinct themes or categories of meaning. Both can involve inductive or deductive coding, or a combination of both. However, while the steps involved in conducting a content analysis are well-established and accessible, far fewer guidelines are available on how to conduct thematic analysis; this method is often reported in published studies as the analysis technique employed with little or no detail reported on the scientific procedures undertaken (Joffe & Yardley, 2004).

4.6.2 Relational Analysis

The focus when conducting content analysis is the segmentation of the data into reliable, separate themes. As such, there is little attention paid to exploring the relationships between these analytical themes. Robinson (2011) argues that *‘there are more relationships to explore between themes within qualitative data than any existing method has fully elucidated’* (Robinson, 2011, p.199). One way of addressing this shortcoming of existing qualitative methods is through the use of “add-on” techniques, one of which can be termed Relational Analysis (or Semantic Analysis) (Palmquist, Carley & Dale, 1997). Relational analysis aims to go beyond identifying the presence of concepts to explore meaningful relationships between them. While conducting content analysis requires the segmentation of data, exploring relationships between themes helps this segmented data to be reintegrated (Robinson, 2011). As Palmquist (n.d.) notes, there are many ways of conducting relational analysis at researchers’ disposal, and researchers can choose their own methods of exploring relationships depending on their research aims and objectives. It is thus a very flexible technique.

Robinson (2011) outlines ten key relational forms which can be included in a relational analysis: Descriptive Relations, Comparative Relations, Semiotic Relations, Evocative Relations, Contingency Relations, Causal Relations, Reciprocal Relations, Dialectical Relations, Conceptual Part-Whole Relations, and Contextual Part-Whole Relations. Throughout the reporting of the findings for each of the qualitative studies, relationships identified relating to several of these key relational forms will be highlighted. Following the reporting of the main findings in each of the individual qualitative phases of the research, a section will be devoted to consideration of the final of these key relational forms, namely, Contextual Part-Whole Relations. This type of relational form refers to the identification of *‘wholes that are physically, temporally, or functionally greater than the part and thus act as systemic milieu’* (Robinson, 2011, p. 205). Identifying such relations involves identifying phenomena or ideas which transcend but include others, i.e. the identification of overarching themes in the data. Overarching themes are conceptually broader than individual themes and subsume them in a meaningful way, thus acting as context for them (Robinson, 2011).

4.6.3 Overall Analysis Plan

As has been previously mentioned, the project consisted of three main studies; one two-phase study and two additional qualitative studies. A conceptual model of the analyses of the data from each of these studies is presented in Fig.4. Data were collected from immersion parents, principals, teachers and pupils. The first phase of Study 1 involved a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews with Irish immersion parents. Data were analysed using content analysis. Phase 2 was largely quantitative in nature and so data were analysed using a series of parametric and non-parametric tests. Qualitative data collected in response to open-ended survey questions were analysed using content analysis. Studies 2 and 3 also involved the collected of qualitative interview data and were also analysed using content analysis.

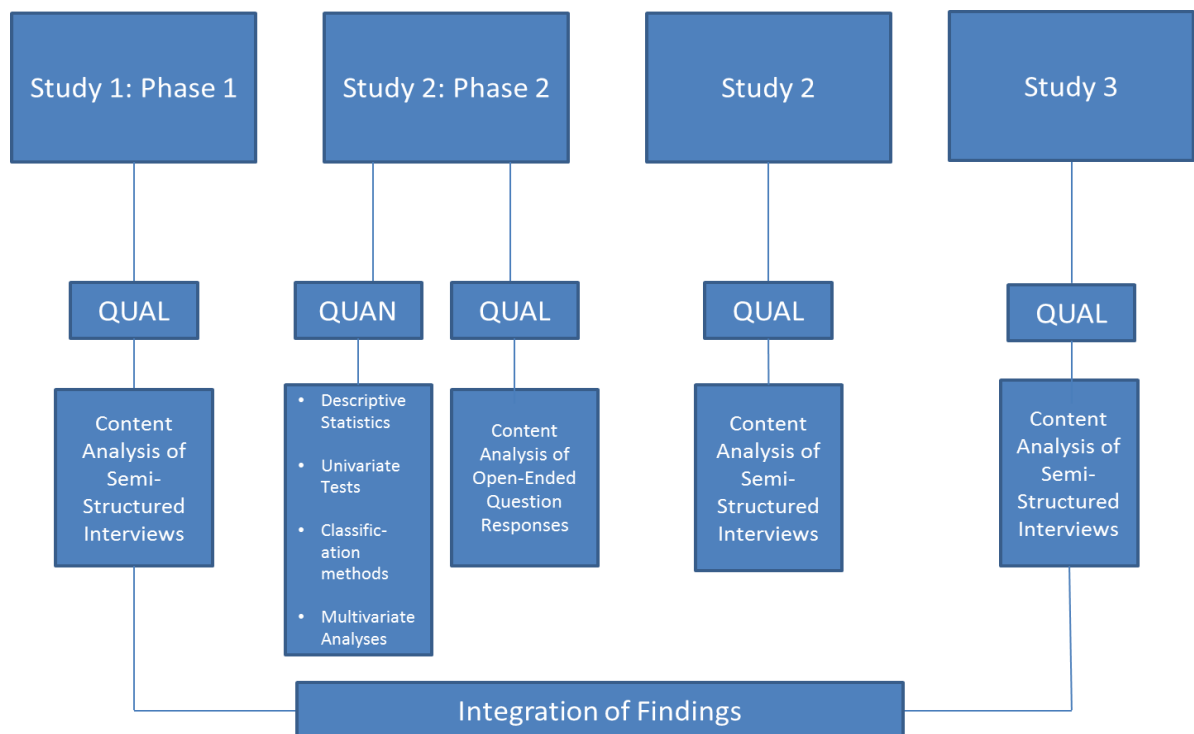


Fig 4.1 Model of Analysis Plan for Individual Studies within the Overall Research Project

4.7 Summary

The present chapter has described the rationale for choosing a mixed methods design for the present research. An in-depth description has been given of each stage of the research project. Details were provided on the qualitative and quantitative methods employed. The design and methodological decisions taken have been informed by the reviewed literature and by each preceding phase of the research. The chapter concluded with an overview of the analysis plan for each of the studies conducted. The data collected and the results of the analyses undertaken in each of these studies will be presented in the following chapters.

Chapter 5

Study 1, Phase 1: A Qualitative Investigation of Immersion Parents' Experiences of Involvement

5.0 Overview

This chapter describes Phase 1 of the first study of this research project. This phase comprised a qualitative exploration of the experiences of involvement of parents with children in Irish immersion primary schools. This chapter outlines the methodology of Study 1, Phase 1, providing detail on the design and the procedure adopted, as well as an outline of ethical considerations. Next, a description of the analysis method is presented and inter-rater reliability results are reported. The findings of the study are then presented. The chapter concludes with an interim discussion of how the findings presented relate to each of the research questions posed for this stage of the research.

5.1 Design

Study 1 adopted a mixed methods sequential exploratory design. Phase 1 of this study, described in this chapter, was qualitative in nature, and was based on individual, face-to-face interviews with parents of children in Irish-medium primary schools. These interviews were semi-structured in nature, and the interview protocol was based on the analysis of parental involvement theory and empirical literature, and refined following a series of pilot interviews. Phase 2 of Study 1 involved the development and administration of a survey based on the findings of the current qualitative study and used a cross-sectional correlational design to elicit data from 563 parents. The quantitative data from that survey will be reported in the next chapter, but the survey included a number of open-ended questions inviting respondents to add written comments about particular topics. The responses to these open-ended questions offer additional data for qualitative analysis which amplify considerably the findings of the interview study, and thus the qualitative data drawn from the survey are also presented in the current chapter.

5.2 Participants

Participants in Phase 1 were ten parents (nine female, one male) of children in Irish-medium primary schools, specifically, parents of children in Senior Infants (5-6 year olds) and Fourth Class (10-11 year olds). Two parents had children attending at both of these class levels, while the remainder were split equally between parents of children in the younger age group and those from the older class. All of the parents were Irish nationals; six were married/living with

partners, while four were single. Eight of these parents had themselves attended an English-medium primary school, while two had attended an Irish-medium primary school. Two of the participants had a third level education; four of the participants had completed their education at Leaving Certificate, and four at Junior Certificate. None of the participants had attended an Irish-medium secondary school.

Participants were asked to rate their Irish proficiency across four main dimensions of language, speaking, understanding, reading and writing (see Appendix A for scales used). Composite scores are used elsewhere in the analysis, but for brevity here it can be summarised as follows: six participants reported low speaking proficiency while four reported high speaking proficiency.

5.3 Ethical Considerations

Phase 1 of the research underwent full ethical review by the university Human Research Ethics Board and was granted ethical approval. Prior to being interviewed, all participants were provided with an information sheet about the study. This included a description of the aims of the research, why participants had been invited to take part, and what participation in the study would entail. Participants were also assured that their anonymity would be protected and that all personal identifiers would be removed from any quotes reported from interview transcripts. For reporting purposes interview parents have thus been assigned identifier codes. Those parents who classified themselves as having low proficiency in Irish will henceforth be referred to here as LP (n=6), and high proficiency parents referred to as HP (n=4). In addition, any names used in the quotes presented here are pseudonyms selected by the researcher. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

After reading the information sheet, participants were given an opportunity to ask any questions they had regarding the research. Once any questions were answered to the participants' satisfaction, written consent to participate in the study was obtained from each parent (for sample information sheet and consent form, see Appendix A). In line with the ethos of the schools involved, all research materials (invitation letters, information sheets and consent forms) were presented bilingually. Given the different nature of data collection for Phase 2, different ethical guidelines prevailed for that stage of the research and these will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

5.4 Procedure

5.4.1 Recruitment of Participants

Participants were recruited from four primary schools in the Greater Dublin Area (a geographical region that includes Dublin City and County and a number of other counties in its hinterland). Principals in each of the schools were contacted and briefed as to the aims and the nature of the study. Each of the principals approached agreed to facilitate recruitment of parents through their schools. Schools were selected in order to ensure a spread of school types. Parents were thus interviewed from schools which were large (circa 500 pupils), which were smaller (less than 120 pupils), which were long-established (more than 40 years), and which were newly established (less than five years). One of the four schools was a designated DEIS school, with disadvantaged status under the Department of Education and Skills scheme for the Delivery Equality of Opportunity in Schools. As outlined in Chapter 3, such schools are granted disadvantaged status based on socioeconomic and educational indicators (such as unemployment levels, housing, medical card rates and basic literacy and numeracy) of the families in the school's catchment area, and receive additional supports accordingly.

In each school, a letter from the researcher was sent home to parents in the designated classes (Senior Infants and Fourth Class). This letter explained the nature of the study and invited the participation of parents. All parents who volunteered were interviewed. The method of recruitment for parents in Phase 2 of the study, from which qualitative data reported here were also derived, is described fully in Chapter 6.

5.4.2 Data collection

Prior to interview, each participant completed a brief questionnaire in order to ascertain basic demographic information and their self-reported proficiencies in Irish. Each interview lasting 25-45 minutes was then conducted. Interviews were semi-structured in nature and audio-recorded to facilitate analysis. An interview schedule (see Appendix A) was devised in order to ensure that the main topics relating to the research questions were covered. In addition, probes were used in order to clarify participants' responses. Some further lines of questioning, which emerged from parents' reports throughout the course of interviews, were also followed. All interviews were conducted through English. Where a participant used Irish in their responses, English translations of these are also provided in the reporting.

The qualitative data derived from Phase 2 reported here derive from survey participants' responses to an open-ended question, inviting any additional comments on their experiences of involvement in their children's education. The survey respondents also had the opportunity to respond to the 'Other' option in several of the questions included on the survey (see Appendix C) and a number of respondents availed of this option in order to provide information which

was not covered in answer options or to expand upon the responses they had provided to questions. As there was significant overlap between these comments and those made by interviewees, both are considered together in this chapter under the relevant topics (Topics 1, 6 and 8) in order to provide the most comprehensive analysis of the parents' qualitative data. Overall, 169 survey respondents provided data for qualitative analysis.

5.5 Research Questions

The overall aim of the present study was to explore immersion parents' experiences of involvement in the educational lives of their children. To this end, a number of research sub-questions were formulated, as summarised in Table 5.1 below. The full interview protocol is included in Appendix A.

Table 5.1: Research sub-questions for Study 1, Phase 1

1.	Why do parents choose to send their children to Irish immersion primary schools?
2.	What are parents' attitudes towards a) the Irish language? b) Irish-medium education?
3.	How do parents construe their roles in their children's education?
4.	How are parents currently involved?
5.	Does the involvement of parents of younger children differ from that of older children?
6.	How does Irish feature in the home lives of immersion pupils and their families?
7.	Is a parent's sense of efficacy for involvement affected when the language of the school and the language of the home differ?
8.	What are immersion parents' experiences of home-school communication?
9.	Do immersion parents experience challenges to parental involvement?
10.	Do immersion parents feel they could be supported to take a more active role in the education of their children? If so, how?

5.6 Overview of Qualitative Analysis in Study 1

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The resulting transcriptions were read and submitted to a content analysis, following closely the guidelines set out by Mayring (2000). Transcripts were reviewed several times until clear sections were identified. Eight main sections were identified which largely (but not exactly) corresponded to sets of questions in the interview schedule. Participants' responses for each section were then isolated. These responses were reviewed in order to establish what they communicated. Responses were then condensed into distinct themes under each section. These theme-categories were adapted for use as a coding frame. The initial coding frame was applied and then reviewed for themes that overlapped or were ambiguous, leading to some revision, as recommended by Braun and Clark (2006). All ten interviews were then coded using this revised framework. Table 5.2

contains a summary of the main topics and themes identified in the dataset. The final coding frame is presented in its entirety in Appendix A.

Table 5.2: Summary of topics and themes identified in Study 1 qualitative data

Topics		Themes
1. School Choice	Cultural Affiliation	Desire for Child to be Bilingual
	Other Educational Advantages	Previous Links to the school
	School Atmosphere	Ethos of the School
2. Attitudes	Current Attitudes towards Irish	Change in Attitude over time
	Attitudes towards IME	Satisfaction with School Choice
3. Involvement	Role Construction	Home-Based Involvement
	School-Based Involvement	Change in Involvement over time
4. Irish in the home	Child's use of Irish with Parents	Child's use of Irish with Siblings/Peers
5. Home-School Communication	Frequency/nature of contact	Language(s) used for home-school contact
6. Challenges to Involvement	Parent Factors	Child Factors
	School/Community Factors	
7. Facilitators of Involvement	School Factors	Child Factors
	Parent Factors	
8. Overcoming Challenges	Current Practices	Suggestions for Support

5.7 Inter-rater reliability

Inter-rater coding was conducted on 20% of the interview data (two interviews) by a researcher experienced in qualitative analysis, as recommended by Nicholas, Geers and Rollins (1999). The percentage agreement for Phase 1 data is presented in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Inter-rater reliability: Agreement for Phase 1 interview data

Topic	% Agreement
1: Reasons for School Choice	94
2: Attitudes towards Irish and IME	93
3: Parents' Involvement	88
4: Irish in the Home	89
5: Home-School Communication	91
6: Barriers to Involvement	83
7: Facilitators of Involvement	78
8: Overcoming Barriers	83
Overall	87

Inter-rater coding was also conducted on the data derived from the open-ended survey responses. In this case, 100% of the data was reviewed by an independent rater. Percentage agreement for each of the topics which these data cover, in addition to the overall agreement, is presented in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Inter-rater reliability: Agreement for Phase 2 survey responses

Topic	% Agreement
1: Reasons for School Choice	98
6: Barriers to Involvement	86
7: Facilitators of Involvement	83
8: Overcoming Barriers	91
Overall	89.5

As can be seen from both Tables 5.3 and 5.4, high levels of inter-rater reliability were achieved over both datasets.

5.8 Qualitative Findings

Findings relating to each of the eight topics and the identified themes are now discussed. Themes are summarised in tables initially and accompanied by frequencies and illustrative quotes. For some of the topics, both interview data and survey responses are presented. In such cases, percentage frequencies have been calculated based on the number of participants in each group (Phase 1 interview participants and Phase 2 survey participants) who provided data relating to that topic. Each theme is dealt with in its own subsection. Within these subsections, words and phrases which encapsulate subthemes within the data are highlighted in bold. To aid the reader, quotes made by interviewees are presented in green font, and given an ID so that it is clear that they are distributed across the interviewees. Those given by survey respondents are presented in purple font, and are not given an ID, as in the vast majority of cases only one such response per survey respondent is used. Following consideration of each of the topics

separately, the findings will be reintegrated in order to identify overarching themes in the data, and to reflect on how the findings serve to answer the research questions posed for this study.

Topic 1: Parents' Choice of Irish-Medium School

This section deals with parents' reports about their main motivations for selecting an Irish immersion school for the education of their children. Four main themes were revealed in the course of the analysis of the interview data which related to parents' reasons for choosing Irish-medium education. Three additional themes were revealed in the analysis of survey responses relating to this topic. Each of these will now be discussed in turn, with quotes presented to illustrate each theme.

Table 5.5: Main themes and frequencies relating to reasons for school choice

Theme	Phase 1 (n=10)	Phase 2 (n=63)
Cultural Affiliation	40	11
Desire for Child to Bilingual/ Multilingual	30	32
Other Educational Advantages	30	19
Previous Links to the School	20	10
School Atmosphere/Staff	-	11
Ethos of the School	-	19

Cultural Affiliation

Four of the parents interviewed reported that their decision to send their child to an Irish-medium school was influenced by their belief that the Irish language is an **important part of Irish culture that needs to be maintained**. As one parent explained:

Well I just felt it was very important for them to know their history, and the background of Ireland...It's gone, the Irish is gone out of Ireland, do you know what I mean? And just to continue it on... I just think it's great to have it for my son' (HP4).

As another parent put it: *'It's part of their culture. It gives them another language'* (HP1). These parents felt that by sending their children to an all-Irish school they were giving their child something valuable, as they felt an Irish-medium education would help to deepen their child's affiliation with Irish culture. They also felt that they were contributing to the maintenance of the Irish language in Irish society.

This was echoed by comments from 11% of the survey respondents. For example, one parent wrote: *'I just think Irish is a dying language and I would like to see it revived.'* Another parent wrote that he chose Irish-medium education for: *'Irish culture, especially exposure to and respect for traditional music which is dying out'*.

One parent interviewed, who had attended an Irish immersion school herself, felt that attending the school in question had contributed to her appreciation of the Irish language and Irish culture. She wanted this same love of Irish instilled in her daughter: *'We went to the school... And I actually like Irish. I like the language... I like the fact that it's part of our culture, and I want them to be able to have that part of the culture that we have'* (HP3).

The Irish language was reported by several survey respondents as something that was believed to be **central to Irish identity**. For example, one parent explained why she chose an immersion school: *'I think it's important for Irish people to be able to speak our language. Every other country's natives know their own language.'* Another cited *'commitment to minority native culture'* as the reason for sending her child to an Irish-medium school.

For some parents, this was felt to be a **particularly important consideration in light of the increasing cultural diversity in Irish society**. For example, one parent wrote: *'I feel that in such a multicultural society it's important to retain our heritage and roots.'* Similarly, another survey parent explained her decision to send her child to an Irish-medium school:

Desire for my child to embrace their Irish culture and heritage and support their cultural identity and place on a global scale. Ireland's education system accommodates and supports external cultures at the expense of its own culture in schools and I don't agree with it.

Overall, therefore, these participants explained their choice of an immersion school as due to their beliefs that it would nurture an appreciation and respect for the Irish language and culture, and/or support the development of national identity in their children.

Desire for Child to be Bilingual/Multilingual

Several survey respondents added comments to indicate that their desire for their child to develop fluency in an additional language was a primary motivation for choosing an immersion education. For some parents, it was important that their children became proficient in the **Irish language specifically**, e.g.: *'To gain fluency in this language.'* And: *'To be able to speak their native language fluently.'* For others, it was **bilingualism itself** which was of interest to parents. For example, one parent wrote: *'I liked the idea of total immersion in any language being learned. It shows the child that it is a living language.'* Another explained: *'I'd preferably have sent him to a French/German etc. primary school if available, I have no love for the Irish language.'* One survey respondent simply wrote that she chose an immersion

school for '*bilingual advantages*'. While interview parents did not explicitly cite a desire for bilingualism among their motivations, some of them did comment on what they believed the advantages of bilingualism to be. Some parents believed that a high standard of Irish would lead to **increased job opportunities** for their children. As one interviewee said: '*If he's ever trying to get into news-casting or anything like that, he'll always have an advantage*' (LP2). Another parent noted that her child already sees the potential career benefits of speaking Irish:

You know, people say "Oh, it's not that important to have, you're not going to get jobs out of it." But it's a really, really good thing to have. And even what Thomas does be saying to me at the moment: "You know, I could be a teacher Mam. I could teach as Gaeilge [in Irish] in schools". So, you know, it's a good start I think. (LP6).

Similarly, one survey respondent wrote that she believed bilingualism would help to: '*Develop child's self-confidence, enhance career opportunities.*' Thus, it appears that some of these parents chose an Irish-medium education for their children based on their belief that it would give their child some advantage of bilingualism or 'edge' over their English-medium educated peers.

Another subtheme related to parents' (n= 8) belief that attaining a second language would **help children to acquire additional languages** in the future. One parent wrote: '*Fact that children educated though 2nd language/bilingual develops and enhances communicative and linguistic abilities.*' Another parent wrote that she chose immersion as she wished her child to achieve: '*Fluency in two languages and the easier ability to learn other languages as a result.*' Another expressed the belief that '*Exposure to one language will foster an 'ear' to other languages.*' Similarly: '*Learning a second language broadens the mind and ability towards learning more languages.*' and: '*Hope that it would encourage her to learn other languages in the future*' were typical examples of this subtheme.

Interestingly, a group of survey parents (n=6) alluded to the fact that their children were **already bilingual or multilingual** as a reason for choosing an immersion education. For example: '*My children are fluent in English and French. It was beneficial to keep creating language and cultural development in them.*' Similarly: '*Multi-lingual home- father speaks Arabic.*' and: '*My child already has 2 languages*' were explanations offered for choosing an immersion education.

Regardless of their motivation for their children to become proficient in a second language, some of the interview and survey parents indicated their belief that early immersion in the target language is the best (or only way) to achieve this proficiency. As one parent said:

I think when it's from an early age like that, it just rolls off the tongue very easy. It's easier when they're... they're like sponges. I just thought it would be

harder for him to learn, you know, if he was just doing it as a subject. But if he had to speak it and talk it, it'd be a second language to him. (LP2)

Another parent echoed this sentiment:

It's not a chore for them. Because, from when they've started, it's all they've heard. That's the good thing about the immersion, they don't hear anything only Irish. It's so natural for them... I think it's the best way for them to pick it up, rather than giving them both, if they just have one, from the beginning. They've English at home and from their friends and things so in school they just have the Irish. They don't hear anything only Irish off any of the adults in the school. (LP5).

Other parents highlighted the **effectiveness of immersion** as impacting on their choice, and lamented their own failure to learn Irish in school when it was taught to them as a subject only. One parent wrote that: *'...having spent 13 years learning Irish in primary and secondary schools I considered it a huge system failing that I and most others did not know how to speak the language.'*

Another parent explained:

My own and partner's Irish education in school was terrible, our children would not be burdened with the ineptitude and disinterest our teachers had in the language. Crunch factor in decision- to be taught properly and with enthusiasm!

Indeed, several parents reported that they themselves regretted their lack of proficiency in Irish and felt that **they had missed out themselves by not attaining fluency in the language**: *'We were taught Irish but it wasn't really important at the time. So I think I missed out on that, because I'd love to be able to speak it fluently.'* (LP6) This is echoed by another parent who is now learning Irish again himself: *'I didn't mind it in school, but I found I didn't appreciate how valuable it is when I was at school'* (HP1). Similarly, another parent stated: *'I never learned the Irish language when I was in school, and I wanted them to know some of our own, their own, culture basically'* (LP1). This parent added that she wished she had the opportunity to attend an Irish-medium school herself, and regretted the fact that she had not:

I went to an all-English school and if I could go back again, if I had the choice... I didn't have the chance when we were younger 'cos there were no Irish schools around, I would've went to one. I would've liked to have picked an Irish school myself. (LP1)

Thus, these parents indicate that their choice was affected by their desire to provide their children with what they viewed as the most effective way of learning Irish and thus with something that they felt that they themselves had missed out on in the course of their own education.

Other Educational Advantages

Comments on advantages of Irish-medium schools were not limited to language learning benefits. Rather than citing such language effects, three parents interviewed said that their decision was mainly informed by the belief that children who attend all-Irish schools tend, in general, to go on to **perform better academically** than their English-medium counterparts. They cited class size, State examination results, and likelihood of child continuing on to third level education as contributing to this view. For example, one such parent listed the size of the school as a factor in her decision to send her daughter there: *‘I liked it because it was a smaller environment than the other schools in the area. I thought she’d get more attention from the teachers here.’* (LP4)

Another parent had friends who had attended the school themselves and had sent their own children there. This parent had thus heard that the school had a very **good reputation**: *‘They all went on to [name of Gaelcholáiste] and then [name of University]... and they all did very well for themselves, you know’* (LP3). One parent explained: *‘It was mostly my wife’s idea... I was keen on the Irish, but I think she thought it would help with grades in the long run’* (HP1).

Interestingly, this theme of educational benefits was developed slightly differently among the survey respondents. Seven of them volunteered comments that learning through a language which is not the child’s L1 would **provide an ‘educational challenge’** for children. One parent wrote, for example, that she was motivated by: *‘The challenge for my child in learning Irish and therefore having him more engaged in school.’*, while another wrote: *‘As an educational challenge. Moving house meant moving school anyway and provided the opportunity’*. An interesting strand of responses was seen in the survey parents who reported that they believed their children to be of above average ability and thus wished to have them stimulated and challenged by learning through a second language. One parent wrote that she chose immersion: *‘To develop cognitive ability as my child was very bright and I felt this would give her a challenge’*, while another parent reported the: *‘Desire to challenge my child as she was showing signs of exceptional ability in language and math.’* Another explained: *‘I chose the Gaelscoil for the extra challenges that learning Irish would give to my child who was bright for his age and would have been bored in an English school.’* This is an issue that has not received much attention in the literature on parental choice, and the topic will be discussed further later.

Another subtheme related to parents’ perceptions that the immersion school was preferable to other local schools, as they believed their children would be free from what they perceived to be **negative influences in local non-immersion schools**. For example, one parent wrote: *‘Not*

to sound racist but I do not want child to suffer due to teacher's time being devoted to teaching English to non-nationals. Just a fact of life now.' This was echoed by another survey respondent who wrote: '*Other educational options in [name of area] not desirable. Too many foreign nationals in other schools.'* Another parent reported that: '*Other English primary schools in the area have bad discipline and learning environment.'*', while another parent not only wanted her child to be educated separately from foreign nationals, but also from children with special educational needs, whom she believed to be less likely to attend an immersion school. She wrote:

I chose an Irish language education because of the lack of a decent English language primary school... kids in Irish language primary school are less likely to be trouble makers, less likely to have special educational needs (they are usually identified and leave by 1st class) and usually better behaved therefore a better learning environment because of increased parental involvement.

Existing Links to the School

Two parents interviewed had actually **attended themselves** the schools that their children were now attending. As one of these parents explained: '*We all went here. My brothers, my sister and me. There was never any question that she'd go anywhere else*' (HP2). This was echoed by survey respondents, e.g.: '*Chuaigh mé féin go dtí an ghaelscoil ar a bhfuil mo leanaí ag freastal.* [I myself attended the Gaelscoil that my children are attending].' Similarly: '*I had attended the school*'. Another parent indicated that she had been involved in the establishment of the school: '*I was a member of the founding committee.*'

For other parents (n=5), **knowledge of other pupils in the school** which they chose was important for them. One parent wrote: '*Bhí cairde mo pháiste ag freastal ar an scoil.* [My child's friends were attending the school].' Similarly: '*Her friends were going there*', '*Cousins in school-helps children.*' and '*Cousins of my child also attend the gaelscoil so I felt my child would have a common ground.*' The potential use of Irish among extended families is an interesting topic that has been considered by McVeigh (2012) and will be discussed further later.

School Atmosphere/Staff

Several survey respondents (n=7) referred to the atmosphere in the school which they had chosen as being a motivating factor in their decisions to send their children there. For example one survey parent attributed her decision to: ‘*The social culture experienced when visited school*’, while another cited the ‘*General atmosphere of the school*’ and another mentioned the ‘*Warmth and positive feeling in the school*’. Such school atmospheres were largely attributed by parents to the staff working there, with typical responses including: ‘*Welcome and encouragement received from Principal*’, ‘*Welcoming friendly staff*’, and simply: ‘*Principal is brilliant.*’ One survey respondent wrote in relation to her choice of school: ‘*Bíonn na múinteoirí go léir sa scoil seo i gcónaí sásta agus mionghaire á dhéanamh* [acu]. [The teachers in this school are always happy and smiling]’ while another cited ‘*Eolas ar dhílseacht and ar dhiagrais an príomhoide i leith na Gaeilge*’ [knowledge of the enthusiasm and commitment of the principal towards Irish] as a motivating factor for her choice of school.

Ethos

As was mentioned in Chapter 3, Gaelscoileanna may fall under the patronage of one of several bodies, and thus there are Irish-medium schools with a Catholic ethos and those with an inter- or multi-denominational ethos. In an educational landscape dominated by local Catholic schools, it was notable that several parents reporting choosing an Irish-medium school as an **alternative to schools with Catholic ethos**, e.g. ‘*Nondenominational school*’, ‘*Co-ed and multi-denominational are key factors for some parents*’ and ‘*Not under the patronage of the Catholic Church*’ were responses provided by these parents. Another respondent indicated that her choice of school would have been different had there been an English-medium interdenominational option available to her: ‘*There was no interdenominational school available at the time.*’

By contrast, some parents living in areas where Educate Together schools are available reported choosing the local Gaelscoil due its **Catholic ethos**. These parents also apparently viewed positively the requirement that these Catholic Irish-medium schools require pupils to wear **school uniforms**, something which is not the practice in Educate Together schools, a factor which was important to some parents. One parent wrote that her choice of Irish-medium was driven by: ‘*Her religion taught in school and school uniform*’ while another simply put: ‘*Uniform/Religion.*’

Several (n=10) parents reported that their choice of school was also motivated by their wish for their children to be educated in a **co-educational** context. For example, one respondent wrote: ‘*Co-ed. At the time it was the only co-ed in the town.*’, while another wrote: ‘*The Gaelscoil could accommodate my daughter and son in the same school.*’

Thus, we see that, while a commitment to Irish culture and language are significant in motivating parental choice of IM schools, other factors such as an awareness of bilingual and general educational advantages also impact on some parents' decision. In an interesting minority of cases other factors representative of either social conservatism or of liberalism was evident such as choice of school for its Catholic or multi-denominational ethos and the influence of other factors that tend to accompany a particular ethos such as single-sex versus co-educational schooling, or the prevalence of uniforms in IM schools, play a part in parents' choice of school.

Topic 2: Attitudes towards Irish and Irish-medium education

Parental support for immersion and for the target language have been posited as essential features of the immersion model (Branaman & Rennie, 1997). In addition, it has been noted that parents' modelling of attitudes constitutes one of the primary ways in which children learn and develop their own attitudes towards education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997, 2003, 2007). Thus, this section will deal with parents' expressed attitudes towards Irish and towards Irish-medium education. The data presented here are mainly drawn from the interviews.

Table 5.6: Main themes and frequencies relating to attitudes towards Irish

Theme	Frequency
T1 –Current attitudes towards Irish	100
T2- Change in attitude towards Irish over time	70
T3- Attitudes towards Irish-medium education	100

Current Attitudes towards Irish

All of the parents interviewed expressed **positive attitudes towards the Irish language**. As one parent put it: '*I'm very keen on Irish and the promotion of Irish.*' (HP1), while another simply stated: '*I love it.*' (HP3). Several parents (n=5) expressed a **desire to increase their own proficiency in the language**: '*I'd love to be able to learn more of it*' (LP6). As might be expected in a group of people who opted to send their children to Irish-medium schools, no parent expressed negativity towards the language. However, they appeared to **differ in terms of their commitment to the language**. For example, one parent explained that while she felt the use of Irish in Ireland should be more widespread; in reality she had not made any attempts to speak it herself:

Eh... I think it's good. I think it should be spoken more. And I have to say that, myself, I really haven't done much about it... Like going and doing a few lessons or that, I haven't bothered, but it is, like... it is our language so it would be nice if more people spoke it, you know? (LP3).

Overall, parents described feeling positively towards Irish, seeing it as a central part of Irish identity and culture, and something to be valued: *'It's kind of like a national treasure I think'* (HP1).

Change in Attitude towards Irish over time

While interview parents were unanimous in their expression of positive attitudes towards the Irish language *now*, the majority (n = 7) of participants said they had developed this attitude later in life, and in fact reported that they actually disliked the language when they themselves were learning it at school:

I wasn't interested in it, because I didn't think at the time it was taught well. I didn't think the teachers put across as a very good subject to learn. You know, we students weren't that interested... She didn't really make it fun or anything. Probably if she did we'd have, you know, more Irish to show for it like. (LP2).

A similar dissatisfaction with the way in which Irish was taught to them was expressed by other parents. For example, one parent noted: *'When I got to more secondary level I found it more tedious and it was the same book you were doing over and over'* (LP4). Similarly: *'In primary school I did [like Irish]. I think it's different when you get to secondary school. It wasn't as good.'* (LP5). Other parents (n=2) remembered finding the language difficult to learn during their English-medium education: *'You used to have to do the Buntús and everything, and it was like a big chore, you know? So I just hated it because it was hard.'* (LP2). As another parent put it: *'To be honest, yeah, I didn't [like it]. It was a really big effort for me.'*

Attitudes towards Irish-medium Education

As explored above, parents' own negative experiences of learning Irish appear to be linked to their motivations for sending their children to Irish-medium schools, with parents expressing the belief that it is a more 'natural' and 'more fun' environment for children to learn the language. Parents (n = 5) reported that they wished their children to find learning the language 'easier' than they had, and believed that immersion education would facilitate this. As one parent noted: *'It just comes so natural to them [in immersion], the Irish language.'* (LP1). Another parent noted that in contrast to the challenges that she faced when learning Irish, she found that immersion removed this level of difficulty for her son: *'Whereas now, it's made, well, it's easy for him'* (LP2). Another parent also commented on what she saw as the better way of teaching Irish in her daughter's school than the instruction she herself had received: *'I*

feel even, seeing her doing it up to Senior Infants, there's more variety, it's more fun.' (LP4). Thus, these parents indicated that their own negative experiences of learning Irish led them to seek ways of giving their children more positive experiences of learning the language.

All of the parents interviewed expressed positive attitudes towards Irish-medium education, and all but one of the parents interviewed expressed the belief that IM education should be more widely available and more widely availed of. For example, one parent stated: '*They* [Gaelscoileanna] *should be more available, and more promoted than they are...*' (LP4).

Interestingly, one parent disagreed with this sentiment, stating that she would not like to see the immersion sector expand, as she valued the exclusivity of the sector in catering for a subgroup of the community and the fact that her child's school is small. She praised the fact that different generations of the same family tend to attend the school and argued that if the school were a more popular or accessible option that it would lose this community atmosphere:

I don't know. I like the way a lot of the people here would know each other. A lot of my friends' children would go here as well now and so, it's kind of past pupils, and you know, it's not that it's tight-knit and it's closed up, but it's like... It's like a community, yeah. And I like that fact.

Parents were also probed further to ascertain how they came to their attitudes and beliefs about immersion education, and how much prior knowledge of immersion education they had before sending their children to the school. While parents had the idea that immersion education would lead to benefits for their children, several admitted that they had **little prior knowledge about immersion** and what it would actually entail. When asked, one parent responded: '*Not really, no. I had kind of heard about it... I didn't really know that much about it though*'. (LP4). Similarly, another parent stated: '*Not really. I knew kind of general information about it, but I didn't know the specifics*' (HP1).

Others **had friends or neighbours** who attended the school and had received positive impressions about the particular school in question: '*No... just...there were a few children in our area at the time going to the all-Irish school and they seemed to be getting on grand with it*' (LP1). Similarly: '*A girl on the road had a little one who was in the first year that it started and from them we heard it was lovely*' (LP4).

Some parents (n=4) reported that their lack of knowledge about, and experience with, immersion manifested itself in the form of **concerns about how their children would progress in the school**. One parent worried that her child's English would suffer at the expense of her acquisition of Irish: '*And you do obviously have your worries at the beginning, 'cause you're wondering how it's going to work, are they going to learn the as Gaeilge more so than the English*' (LP6). Another parent reported that this was a concern held

by many parents: *‘Well a lot of people were saying ‘Oh, will their level [of English] not be the same?’ (LP5).*

One parent considered whether sending her child to an Irish-medium school would be a burden for her child in light of her and her husband’s low proficiency in Irish, and because they had not opted to send her to an Irish-medium preschool:

Well, at first we were thinking, “God, are we putting a lot on her starting off?” Because the two of us have Leaving Cert Irish but we hadn’t really been practising as much... we hadn’t sent her to a naíonra, no, we sent her to Montessori, you know that way? (LP4)

Another parent discussed her concerns about how two of her children who had special educational needs would manage in an all-Irish environment: *‘My eldest, as I say, he has ADHD and I wasn’t sure whether he’d pick... up on the Irish... and [another child], she has severe [learning difficulty]... I was worried.’ (LP1).*

For some parents, these fears had been allayed and they expressed their satisfaction with their choice of an immersion school. This was echoed by several survey respondents:

My three children have gone or are going through the gaelscoileanna primary education and I can say that it is fantastic. None of their other subjects have suffered, quite the opposite – they have excelled.

However, this experience was not universal and several survey parents expressed dissatisfaction with their choice of school in relation to English and reading:

I have three boys in the Gaelscoileanna. My oldest has problems with his English and has been a worry for both us as parents and for my son. We have grinds outside school work in order to help him and he had resource for 1 year in the school. However his English is still very weak despite all the efforts from Gary and us as parents and all the money spent but I feel more English should be done in the school.

Similarly, another parent reported:

I had other concerns from an early age that my child was dyslexic. The school dismissed my concerns for 3 years. Finally he was diagnosed with dyslexia at the age of 7 which was very late. I would encourage that Irish schools in particular run some sort of programme test for students where maybe dyslexia could be diagnosed earlier.

Topic 3: Parents’ Involvement Activities

This section opens with parents’ reports about the ways in which they construe their role in the education of their children. It then covers parents’ reports about the involvement activities in which they currently engage in the home, as well as how they are involved with their children’s schools. Parents of older children also described how the nature and extent of their involvement has changed over time. These data are mainly drawn from the interviews.

Table 5.7: Main themes and frequencies relating to involvement activities

Theme	Frequency
Role Construction	100
Home-based Activities	100
School-based Activities	70
Change in Involvement over Time	50

Construction of the Parental Role

Since theory suggests that the way in which parents construe their role in their children's education influences whether, and in what ways, parents become involved, parents interviewed were asked to describe how they viewed their role in the education process. What emerged was a strong finding that interviewees appeared to **construe their role as being inextricably linked with the Irish language**. Low proficiency parents tended to respond to the question by mentioning their own lack of Irish ability. For example, when asked how she saw her role in her child's education, one parent responded:

Actually, they had a night course here and I took it, for the Irish. Just to help me to understand it a little bit more. But it was only for about six weeks. And, if I had more time I would definitely do an Irish course so that I could help him a bit more, 'cause especially as it gets a bit harder, you know? (LP2)

This parent appeared to believe that any involvement she could have would be **contingent on her ability to speak Irish**. This was also borne out in other parents' responses to the question. Another parent, while highlighting that she feels an obligation to be involved, describes what she sees as the limits of the role of parents in light of their low Irish proficiency:

I've a role alright. I still haven't learned much of the Irish, but at the same time I do have a role. I will get out there and I will help like, you know what I mean? Any way I can. But there's only so much parents can do at the same time. (LP1)

One parent, again recognising her own lack of ability to speak Irish, construed her role as one of *encouraging* her child's Irish use and modelling positive attitudes towards the language:

I think we should be encouraging Irish, you know that way? And not, you know, no negativity. Like, I did find Irish hard; because I wasn't doing it as me first language, but I'd never let her know that. (LP4)

Another parent explained that he believed the education of children to be the **joint responsibility of parents and teachers**. Again, this parent mentioned his own Irish ability in his response, explaining that he uses involvement in his children's education to improve his own Irish language skills:

I think it's for the parents and the teachers... you see, I'm learning my Irish again. I passed it in Leaving Cert, but because I want to learn it, I've adopted this attitude: I do the Irish homework with them, because I'm learning Irish again with the kids. So that's the way I look at it (HP1).

One parent answered the question about involvement in her child's education by re-focusing the question to be about her children's Irish language development. She admitted that she saw limited involvement for herself in this aspect of her children's learning, stating that she leaves this solely to the school domain: '*Well to be honest with you, when they're in school they speak Irish all the time. When they leave school, it's English with us*' (LP3).

Thus, it was observed that several parents felt that 'involvement' equated to supporting their children's Irish, and/or necessitated Irish proficiency on their part. It was notable that none of these parents discussed involvement with their children's learning in other ways, such as supporting English development or numeracy skills, instead appearing to have a narrow construction of what their role entailed.

One interviewee with higher Irish proficiency felt that 'parental involvement' meant monitoring and advocacy, taking action if a child was experiencing difficulty with some aspect of their learning. She felt that parents have a responsibility to make sure their children are 'on track' and keeping up with their learning, and that a parent's role is to respond to any challenges their children may be facing. She thus described the role of the parent as monitor of progress and standards:

I think it's about keeping an even keel. I think parents need to, like... if your child is not doing well in something, you need to take ownership for it. You need to sit down with your child and find out why they're not doing well. (HP3).

This parent's role construction was active and engaged and she believed that many parents of children in her child's school were **not living up to their obligations** for such involvement. She stated: '*I think teaching them* [other parents] *that the school is not a crèche is another way to go. You know, they need to learn that*' (HP3).

However, like the low proficiency parents, this parent also discussed **the importance of Irish proficiency** if parents are to be successfully involved in their children's education:

I think the hard thing for a lot of parents with an Irish school is, if they have no Irish they can't help the child. So I think there should be... You know, if you're putting your child through an Irish school, learn some Irish. Basic Irish. So you can help out. Because, Maths are in Irish, everything is in Irish. So you know...I genuinely believe that if a child starts in an all-Irish school the parents should be automatically signed up for a beginners' Irish course. Because I think, for most of them, it'd help. 'Cause I mean, it's like sending your child to a Spanish school; if you don't speak Spanish you're not going to

know what they're talking about. Like, the kids are coming home and they're probably excited and they've learned this new song and the parents haven't a clue what they're saying. And it can be like they're living in two different worlds (HP3).

It was noteworthy that from the vantage point of a parent with good Irish proficiency, other parents' limited Irish was seen as blocking their involvement with their children's education across the curriculum. The issue of whether the courses in Irish she recommended would in fact change this situation will be discussed further below.

Home-Based Activities

Throughout the course of the interviews, parents described the ways in which they are currently involved in their children's learning in the home environment. While all parents mentioned **some involvement with homework**, they again frequently adverted to their own limited Irish, and differed in the ways in which they participated in homework, and why they chose to get involved in this way. One parent, who acknowledged that her Irish limited her ability to help with her children's homework, had decided that she would make the effort to be present while it was being done, and to show an interest in it: '*Yeah, when they get home I sit down with them, even though... I struggle a bit with the Irish. But I do, sit down...*' (LP1). Another parent reported that she enjoyed helping her child with his Maths homework, commenting on her use of an English textbook to help him:

The Maths I thought I'd be a little bit down on, because I'm not great at maths. But I'm actually loving doing his homework with him. They have this book 'Mental Maths' and I'm always [saying to him], "Now ask the teacher did we get it right!" And I don't even know whether it is right or not, I'll send him in with the wrong point maybe but I'm actually really loving getting into the homework with him.

This parent's enthusiasm was noticeable, and such use of an English Maths book at home will be discussed in Chapter 7 in relation to the educators' view of this practice, as several parents commented on the difficulty of understanding their children's textbooks (particularly Maths books). Similarly, some barriers to involvement with homework cited by the lower proficiency parents will be discussed in a separate section below under Challenges.

Going from the views of parents who felt they could not get involved because of their limited Irish, another parent interviewed talked about the other end of the continuum, where she found herself not only helping her daughter every day to do the homework, but at times, found herself doing it *for* her: '*I call it "Mammy work"*'. This high Irish proficiency parent said that she had realised it was necessary for her to take a *less* active role in her child's homework, as she became aware of over-supporting her:

Maths, Writing. We'd kind of go through it all. She does it, I check it... Well I used to sit with her, but I found then it was more, that it was me doing the work. So now she does it and then she'll come to me if she has a problem, which is probably for half of the homework (HP3).

This is an interesting perspective, with the Irish-speaker parent feeling the need to intervene to correct her child's Irish as part of supporting homework, perhaps without being aware of the standard of Irish the teacher might expect at this stage of the immersion process.

Parents were also asked about their involvement with their children's reading and about their children's reading habits; both reading in their L1 and their L2. In their reports, it was notable that parents tended to focus on what was *not* happening in relation to reading, rather than what was. Several parents of both low and high Irish proficiency reported that their children did not enjoy reading. For example: '*Not really, no, they're not readers. Now, we do try, but they just are not. They're not readers.*' (LP3) As another parent explained, reading was something her daughter only did for school-related activities: '*She's not a great reader, no. But she's, she'll read when she has to, that kind of way but...*' (HP4). Similarly: '*The younger fella's not a great reader*' (HP1). Another parent said that she sometimes saw her daughter reading but she was not happy with the quality of the material she was reading '*Yeah [she reads], but like, only Hannah Montana*' (HP3).

This parent was probed as to whether she had read to her child when she was younger. She explained that she only read *English* to/with her child (despite her own high proficiency in Irish), but was keen to point out that she felt she was supporting her child's L2 sufficiently because she *spoke* to her child in Irish:

Yeah, [I read to her] in English. But I spoke to her in Irish before she went to school. She spoke Irish before she started school... She has very good Irish. She has a very good concept of the language. She'd... Her reading sometimes needs a little bit... She's one of these kids who needs a lot of encouragement. She needs constant "Keep going, keep going, keep going" but like, she would understand any conversation with you (HP3).

When questioned further about her child's Irish reading and writing progress, she responded:

Both I'd say she has a little bit of an issue with. Well, no, her writing would be good. It's just, she... How could you describe it? She, she doesn't think what she writes. So if something sounds right, she'll write it and it'll spell wrong. And she won't correct it herself she's just "Ah yeah, that'll be grand". She's quite lazy with it that way.

When asked if her child had access to any reading material in Irish, this high proficiency parent responded: '*Well, to be honest, I probably haven't tried to get...books in Irish.*' This interaction is interesting as it highlights that even high Irish proficiency parents, who feel that they are actively or fully supporting their children's Irish development, may be focusing

exclusively on their children's oral skills and may not consider supporting early literacy activities in Irish. Thus, Irish literacy may be in danger of a 'leave it to school' attitude even among parents who try to support Irish. Another parent also reported noticing a difference between her child's oral Irish and Irish reading: *'Well, I find when he's doing the Irish reading he kind of mumbles a bit over a few words that he doesn't know. It's that lack of confidence thing again, you know?'* (HP1).

When asked if she read English to her child, one parent responded: *'English or Irish. She has both [kinds of book]. They had a club here [to provide children access to Irish books] and she was in that'* (LP4). However, this was the exception, with the remainder of parents indicating that Irish reading rarely, if ever, took place in their homes, aside from that required to do with schoolwork. Parents were, on the whole, less likely to support their children's reading in Irish than in English. When asked about her son's reading habits one parent said: *'No. Not in Irish. No. Never.'* (LP2). Another said: *'English only, yeah.'* (HP3).

School-Based Activities

In exploring parents' involvement in school-based activities, three parents said that their experience of such involvement was **limited to attendance at school occasions**, when they were invited guests: *'They have a sports day, and I'd come up and do the sports day. And it's really only for the Communion and the Confirmation that I'd come, to the masses that they do.'* (LP2).

However, it was noted that three parents of younger children (Senior Infant) interviewed said they currently volunteer, or had previously **volunteered, as teachers' helpers** in their children's schools. This consisted of helping children in the class with English or Irish reading. A further Senior Infant parent said she had occasionally volunteered to help children with their maths work in the school:

I volunteered for doing the Maths with the kids in the mornings. I've done that once or twice... They get parents in, and they bring in games, like Snakes & Ladders, and they do it with each class. You might have three or four parents in the one class and they switch around with all the children.

She continued: *'The children think it's great that the mummies come in and play games with them like.'* (LP6). Such volunteering activities were reported exclusively by parents of younger children. It is possible that teachers of older classes do not see as much value in the support parents can offer, or that they think that older children would not feel as enthusiastic about their parents' presence in their classroom. The issue of Irish proficiency may also militate against parent involvement in older classes, when children have become more fluent in Irish. The parent who volunteered was probed as to whether she spoke English or Irish on such

occasions and responded: *‘I try. The little words I have I would use. But like, again, it’s frustrating when you can’t... But the children know what you’re saying.’* (LP6) Thus, it is possible that lower proficiency parents can be more easily involved in such activities when children are younger and the level of Irish spoken in the class more basic.

One higher proficiency parent interviewed was employed in the naíonra (Irish-medium preschool) of her child’s school and so she was often present there, and aware of the efforts made by the school to include parents in school life. However, she was also in a position to see that most parents did not respond to these efforts:

Like they do a few things like. Yeah, there is a lot like. But most parents would just come to the school gate... and go “Ah no, I wouldn’t be involved in that, and I wouldn’t be involved with that”, you know? But like, I think if you’re serious, you will get involved in stuff. (HP4).

However, even she did not seem to feel comfortable with some of the options open to parents with regard to involvement in the school:

Now I’m only involved ‘cause I’m involved with the naíonra. Like, I wouldn’t be going to the Parents’ Room and having cups of tea or anything like that. I never did. I was never into it like. (HP4).

Another parent expressed a similar sentiment, feeling that the **same parents are always involved** while others do not bother: *‘Oh they [parents] are welcome, it’s just that it’s the same parents all the time who come ...’* (HP3). She continued to expound the view that a small group of committed parents were shouldering all the responsibility of supporting the school:

Like, for example, here, and this is only from my personal view, but you see it here every year. She’s [daughter] been here now six years, and the parents who come in for the shows, the parents who come to coffee mornings, the parents who come to anything to do with the school, you probably get about five out of a class. They [the rest] just don’t get involved... We said that here at the AGM. A lot of parents... don’t come in... You need to! Even for fundraising. Everybody needs to give a little, a little bit of your time. I know everybody works, and has stuff to do, and all that. But we all do. Get over yourself. (HP3).

These were the perspectives of two high proficiency parents, one of whom had a relationship to the school and its staff spanning back to her own schooling, and one of whom worked in her children’s school in the pre-school. Other parents, who did not have such connections, did not apparently perceive that their involvement was needed or welcomed in their children’s school, or felt that their low proficiency in Irish excluded them from such an involved role in the school. This will be discussed further in a separate section below concerning barriers.

Change in involvement over time

Four parents of children in Fourth class discussed how the extent of their involvement in their children's homework had changed over time. Interestingly two of these parents reported that their involvement increased while the remaining two reported lower levels of involvement. Those who said they were more involved attributed this increase to their children needing more parental input and support as the content of their work became more difficult. As one parent explained:

Because his homework now... there is a lot of reading. A lot of questions. The maths is getting a little bit harder. And his spellings, he needs help with spellings too. So I need to be around. I'm always there when he's doing his homework. Just checking it over. (LP2)

In contrast, two other parents explained that they took a much less active role in home-based involvement activities, specifically homework, now that their children were older. As one parent put it: *'They get to a stage where they don't need help with their homework, you know what I mean? They need guidance like, but the girl in Fourth Class, she doesn't need help.'* (HP4). This was echoed by another parent with a daughter in Fourth Class: *'I have to say, when they get to a certain age, they really don't need our help, because they have the understanding themselves.'* (LP3).

Research has consistently demonstrated that levels of parental involvement decrease as children grow older (Desforges, 2003) with significantly lower levels of parental involvement found in second level than in primary education. Several reasons for this decline in involvement have been posited. Dauber and Epstein (1993) reported that parents of older children felt less able to be involved when their children reached middle school than they had previously been due to the increased difficulty of the school/homework. Other reasons relate to pupils' desire for increased autonomy and more focus on peer relationships during adolescence (Matza, Kupersmidt & Glenn, 2001). However, the parents who made the above comments about decreased involvement are parents of children in Fourth Class in primary school (age 9-10 years old). It could thus perhaps be the case that in immersion, where the child is likely to surpass the parent in terms of L2 proficiency at an early age, that parents may adopt a less involved role in homework *earlier* than they might if their children were being educated through their own L1.

Indeed, parent 4 who made the comment above that her child did not need her help anymore, later went on to say that she was more involved when her children were younger because she was more able to help then:

Because I had basic Irish, so I was definitely more able for it then...You know, the easier homework and that. But as they have gone on now, I would be stuck, and I'd be looking at the dictionary and that, you know? (LP3).

It is thus difficult to ascertain whether this parent's decrease in involvement is actually due to her child **not needing her involvement** or due to the parent **feeling unable to be involved** in a helpful or positive way.

As would perhaps be expected, the practice of reading to, or with, children also dropped off as the children increased in age. Only one parent of a Fourth Class child reported still reading to her child: *'Ah yeah. Yeah, I still read to her. In English... We read it together'* (HP3). Other parents described their children's unwillingness to continue this practice, and the perceived lack of necessity for it. As one parent responded, when asked whether she reads to her Fourth Class child: *'Conor would laugh at me. He actually reads better than I do'* (LP1) whereas she still monitors the reading of her Senior Infant child even though her child does not want to be read to: *'She comes home with the books, both languages, and she's coming home with them and she's actually reading to me. So then I'm not allowed open my mouth! She's so confident in it at this stage'*. (LP1)

Topic 4: Irish in the Home

A significant theme to emerge with regard to parents' views of how they were involved with their child's education centred on their reports regarding their use (or non-use) of Irish in the home and their child's use of Irish outside of the school setting. Parents spoke about their own use, or lack of use, of the language with their children, and also about their children's use of Irish with their peers.

Table 5.8: Main themes and frequencies relating to Irish in the home

Theme	%Frequency
Frequency of parents' Irish use in the home	100
Child's use of Irish with siblings/peers	60

Frequency of Parents' Irish Use with Child

Most of the participants interviewed (n = 8) stated that they **rarely, if ever, use Irish** in the home. Several different reasons were given in explanation of this. For example, one parent observed that Irish does not feature at all in her children's home life: *'Regards speaking it at home now and that, we don't, you know? We don't speak it to each other at home. We tend to leave it more so... in school.'* (LP3). This parent continued to explain her belief that children who attend all-Irish schools have **sufficient intake of the language at school**, and therefore she feels it unnecessary for parents to introduce Irish in the home: *'I genuinely think*

they have enough of it at school. I don't think they're missing out at all by not having it at home.' (LP3). Another parent even went so far as: *'He had too much intake [of Irish in school]'* (LP2).

Other parents (n=3) said that their **own lack of proficiency in the language prevents them** from speaking it in the home. One parent explained that, while her daughter can converse fluently in the language, she herself does not have the ability to do this and so the nature of Irish in the home extends to *'A few words here and there, but that's all.'* (LP5). She went on to explain:

I wouldn't be at the same level like. Because they're constantly... because they're listening to it all the time they're at a much better level. Because it's more natural for them, where we'd have to kind of think about it before we tried. (LP5)

One parent said she would like Irish to be a regular feature of her family's everyday life, but recognised that making this a reality requires considerable effort, which she does not always have time for:

It was always my intention. I've had good intentions, and I've started... I find that the biggest barrier to it is that you're in such a rush during the day, 'cause I've three of them, and trying to get them ready and out... And it's not that I don't want to, but it's the rushing that's the biggest problem. But I've started to speak it with them, and I'm trying (HP1).

This idea of Irish as 'effortful' was echoed by another parent who reported having given up trying to introduce Irish into the home: *'We did try. I'm slacking off now, but we did try.'* (LP2)

The two parents who said that the Irish language *does* feature, at least somewhat, in their home life also gave different explanations as to why this is the case. One parent reported that, because her child is accustomed to speaking Irish all day at school, it has a tendency to overflow into his interactions at home:

We would do it at home, 'cause David would come up to me and he can't switch off when he comes home. So he'd speak as Gaeilge [In Irish] and I'd answer him because I'd kind of understand what he's saying. And then if I don't understand, I'll ask him what he's saying, so then it makes me understand. (LP1)

Another, high proficiency, parent explained that she had spoken to her child in Irish since she was a baby and that she often speaks Irish with her daughter as it has always been a feature of their relationship. She said that when her daughter was younger it was she, the parent, who started these conversations with her daughter, but now that her daughter is older she has taken to initiating interactions in Irish: *'She'd start conversations with me now.'* (HP3).

Other parents (n=4) said that while they were unable to maintain conversations with their children in Irish, they made attempts to include the language in their home at times, in any way that they could. In this way, parents who lacked the proficiency to communicate meaningfully with their children in Irish felt that they could show their support for it and model to the children that they think the language is important, and that its use was not confined to the school domain: *‘We try to do it at home, ‘cause even if, you know, we’re only saying, “Sit down for your dinner” we’d say “Suigh síos” [Sit down]... so we do use it, yeah, when we can.’* (LP6). Similarly, another parent said: *‘I say a bit of the Irish as well to her, like ‘suas an staghair’ [upstairs] and that.’* (LP4).

The overall impression from the interview data is that Irish is not a prominent feature of the homes of most of the families involved in Phase I of the present study. Some parents lament the fact that their own low proficiency means that using Irish with their children is not a feasible option for them. Other parents perceive that it is simply not important to speak Irish to their children, believing that their children have ‘enough’ or ‘too much’ of the language during school hours. Even higher proficiency parents suggested that they only used Irish ‘sometimes’ or ‘now and again’. The view that using Irish is ‘effortful’ for parents was evident, even when parents expressed a wish to speak more Irish in their homes. Finally, several parents reported that their children were reluctant to speak Irish outside of school and resistant to parents’ attempts to introduce the language into their interaction. This will be discussed in further detail below.

Child’s Use of Irish with Peers

Four of the parents interviewed said that they hear their children speak Irish with other children outside of the school grounds. One parent observed that, while her child is reluctant to speak Irish with *her*, she does, on occasion, speak Irish with her friends:

There’d be days when they’d say, “Oh no, just English” like but then there are days, I mean, like when they’re playing. Like when they’re with friends it’s great to hear them. If they meet in the park... they’ll talk Irish to each other in the park.

Another parent reported: *‘Yeah, ‘cause one of her friends is in her class, and they’d play games at home in Irish. Sometimes now, not all the time. But they do it like.’* (HP3). Another parent also described her children’s use of Irish during play with cousins, but noted that this seemed to be a feature only when the children were playing games which related to school:

But now she has games where her and her sister play, and they’re the múinteoirs [teachers] and they bring in me niece who’s in the school too. So, when they’re playing, they’ve games where they’re in school, you know [they will speak Irish] (HP4).

However, the majority of parents interviewed said that their children rarely speak any Irish outside of school, including with their friends, siblings or cousins who also attend the school. For example, when asked if he observed his children using Irish with their classmates/friends when away from the school environment, one parent responded: *‘I would say, unfortunately, virtually not at all... I’d say it’s that they consider it uncool’* (HP1).

Two parents expressed the hope that, despite the fact that their children do not use Irish when outside of school grounds, that they will make use of Irish later in life:

He wouldn’t speak an awful lot of it at home. But I’d say, as he’s older, it’ll probably come out and it’ll all be in the brain, and eventually it might come out. But right at the moment he’s not doing an awful lot with it, you know? (LP2)

This was echoed by another parent who saw no problem with her children’s failure to use Irish outside of school, but felt that they might do so later in life:

I think maybe later in life, you know what I mean, when they go out working they’ll probably realise, they will benefit from it, you know what I mean? But at the moment now they do tend to keep it as just for school. (LP3).

Topic 5: Home-School Contact

This section deals with parents’ experiences of interacting with their child’s school. Included here are parents’ descriptions of the nature and frequency of contact with their child’s teacher and also the language or mix of languages which they use when present on school premises.

Table 5.9: Main themes and frequencies relating to home-school communication

Theme	%Frequency
Nature and Frequency of Communication	70
Language(s) used in home-school communication	100

Frequency of Communication with the School

For most of the interview parents, their contact with teachers about their children’s progress was **limited to annual parent-teacher meetings** and written end of year reports. For example, one parent said she relies on what her son tells her about his schoolwork, but she recognised that the reality of his progress may differ from that which she is hearing from him:

He’ll come home and he’ll say “I had a Maths test” but I never really see the result. But he is telling me that he got 100% and only two more people got it. And I do be delighted, you know?... Now when I get the results it might be a little bit different.

Another parent mentioned her child's yearly school report, and highlighted difficulty she had understanding it because it was only presented in Irish:

For example, like, I got the school report the day before yesterday and, last year I couldn't... it was all as Gaeilge [in Irish], so I couldn't understand it, I had to get someone to translate it for me. Now this year, it was a bit of both. You know when you have the subjects, or say ,you know, 'Scríobh' is writing, and I'd understand those, but then you have the rest that it's kind of like "I don't know what this means". (LP6)

Exceptions to this type of annual contact were reported in cases where problems arose, and **increased frequency of contact between home and school due to academic/conduct problems** was mentioned by two parents when their children's teachers alerted them to issues which their children were having. One parent indicated that her child's school made contact with her when her son was having some difficulty with his English reading: '*Well, he, which is what I like about the school, they came to me, I think it was last year, and they said that his reading was a little bit behind, in English.*' (LP2). Another parent made reference to being alerted to the fact that her son was not completing his homework:

I didn't know the Irish language as much. He kept telling me that his homework ...was done. I wasn't understanding the Irish, and half of it wasn't [done]. So we were having..., he was being pulled, kept back, ... getting in trouble all the time for it. (LP1).

By contrast, a high proficiency parent stated that she regularly approaches her child's teacher to be updated on her progress, rather than waiting for annual meetings or reports, and feels that all parents should do the same. She saw this as an area where it is the parent's responsibility to be proactive and approach the school and was critical of parents who did not take the initiative as she did:

They just don't get involved. And then, you see, if there's a problem with the child, it's the teacher's fault. You can't blame the teacher. I go to her teacher at least once a month and say "How are things? Is everything alright?" And even when she got her school report, it was amazing, and I went in and said "Thanks", and the teacher said "Well I told you all year how it was. You've never not seen me." Do you know? (HP3).

However, this parent was unusual among the interview parents in her readiness to approach the school outside of formal meetings. Two parents indicated that they were aware of the heavy workloads of teachers as part of their reluctance to initiate contact with them:

The teachers are obviously busy, you know what I mean? I can ring and speak to the principal and that. And, like, you know, if I don't get to speak to the teacher, she can, you know what I mean, have a chat with them [the teacher]. Or they will ring me back. But it is, like, it can be tight sometimes within the school. The teachers are just constantly going. (LP1)

Similarly: '*I think the teachers are busy. They haven't much time for that* [communicating with parents]' (HP1).

Language of Communication

Most of the interview participants (n=8) explained that the majority of their interaction with the staff of their children's school is conducted through English. Several mention that while parents are encouraged to speak Irish as much as possible with the school staff and while on school premises, this is not a policy which is strictly enforced: '*They do encourage you to speak the Irish, you know that way? But they wouldn't be real down on you if you just got a few words out, do you know? I think if you make the effort, like, that's enough.*' (LP4)

Another parent also perceived that **parents were expected to speak Irish as much as they can:**

They do like you to speak Irish, whatever you have. So in the morning like you'd come in and you'd say, you know, "Dia duit" [Hello] or you'd say "Slán" [Goodbye]. So whatever words you pick up you try and use more and more. (LP6)

Some parents mention that while they would like to speak Irish to their children's teachers in deference to the school's ethos, they simply feel that they are unable to do so. All parents interviewed point out that for formal meetings, such as parent-teacher meetings, parents are offered the choice of which language the interaction takes place in, and most choose not to speak in Irish. However, it was noted that, despite the fact that English is permitted at these times, parents can still feel uncomfortable. As one parent explained:

I have to speak in English... They're open to it alright. But I feel, I don't feel, I feel... I don't know! Like, they'd say "Slán" and that in Irish. But at the same time when you're standing there speaking English you do feel... Yeah, you don't like it at all now. (LP1)

Another parent appreciated being **offered the choice of languages** by the school:

They always ask us do we want it [communication] in Irish or English, and I would say English because I genuinely wouldn't be able to understand anything... Like I would [understand] a few words and that, but you know? So if we've parent-teacher meetings now, or anything like that, they would ask. (LP3).

When asked about which language she used in less formal situations when she is present on school premises, this parent replied that she felt that she had to make an effort to speak some Irish at other times:

Well, I would speak a few words in Irish because they really come down on you... they want you to speak it when you're on the school grounds. They want you to speak it as much as you can. (LP3).

On the whole, parents were happy to make this effort where possible: *‘I’d talk as much as I can in Irish, but my Irish isn’t strong. And eh, once someone starts to speak fluently in Irish I get a bit swamped, you know?’* (HP1).

Two parents mentioned their perception that not only do the teachers appreciate parents using Irish when on school premises, but also that the **children are impressed** when this happens: *‘And of course they [the teachers] were delighted that I was speaking a little bit of it... and David would look at me and be: “Ooh, you’re speaking Irish!”’* (LP2).

Another parent explains that while she sometimes speaks in English while in her daughter’s school, she generally makes an effort to use Irish as much as possible because she felt it was what was desired:

To be honest, I could be lazy some days here and I’ll just speak in English... But the teachers appreciate when you speak in Irish and they speak back. And it’s nice, you know? The kids actually see it and they’re kind of looking at you going, “How do you know how to speak Irish?” (HP3).

Another parent, who had also attended Irish-medium education herself explained that while she used Irish in her child’s school, she was aware that other parents found this so difficult that they **avoid talking to the teacher**:

I have no problems talking to them [teachers], but I’ve come across so many parents who wouldn’t dream of trying to speak Irish to a schoolteacher. So they just stay away unless they... unless it’s absolutely necessary (HP10).

Indeed, this may be linked to the reports from several parents of feeling somewhat isolated from their child’s school and nervous about being present in an ‘all-Irish’ environment. This theme will be dealt with further in the next section.

Topic 6: Barriers to Involvement

This section deals with parents’ reports which relate to experiences of challenges, or perceived obstacles, to successful involvement and home-school relationships. The themes uncovered can be broadly categorised into factors relating to a) the parent themselves, b) to other family members, c) to the child, and d) to the school/community. Each of these will now be presented in turn. Data are available here from the survey respondents’ answers to open-ended questions as well as from the interviews.

Table 5.10: Main themes and frequencies relating to barriers to involvement

Theme	% Frequency	
	Phase I (N=10)	Phase II (N=84)
Parent Factors		
Low parental language proficiency	70	22
Practical issues	40	10
Child Factors		
Child's resistance to parental attempts at involvement	50	15
Family Factors		
Low proficiency of other family members	10	14
School/Community Factors		
• Lack of appropriate resources	30	13
• Inappropriate supports offered	20	22
• Lack of invitations/opportunities for involvement from school	10	9

Parent factors

The most frequently reported barrier to involvement that was identified by the parents was their **perceived lack of proficiency in the language of the school**. The interviewees and many survey respondents ascribed their difficulties in participating in a range of involvement activities, from helping with homework to speaking Irish with their children, to their low proficiency in the language. What was most noticeable in their data was their linkage of other, more emotional issues to their low proficiency, such as **embarrassment and feelings of anxiety or discomfort** when on the school premises, worries about being thought stupid, and lack of confidence when communicating with their child's teacher. One parent noted how daunting it is for parents to communicate with their child's school if they do not speak Irish well. She described feelings of **disempowerment** in trying to speak Irish on school grounds, in accordance with the school's encouraged practice: *'I was embarrassed, because you don't know whether you're pronouncing it properly, or you think they're looking at you going "Huh, she's after saying that wrong' or something.'*" (LP6)

Another parent noted the **significance of such anxiety** among low Irish-proficiency parents in the context of such school policies:

I was standing one day waiting for a teacher's meeting and the husbands were coming up going "I'm just afraid someone's going to speak to me in Irish 'cause I don't know how to reply!" I think there is that fear, there is that barrier that, yes, you're sending your child, but we don't know how to speak it, you know?" (LP2)

One parent of a Fourth Class child recounted that it took her several years to feel confident enough to increase her involvement with her child's school, and she ascribed her increase in confidence directly to her increase in proficiency in the Irish language:

To be honest with you, I was one of them parents that just dropped them at the school and things like that. And it's an awful lot to do with confidence, 'cause straight away you're looking at another language and it's like, even though your kids are coming home speaking it and everything, you're looking at this different language, and it freezes you out straight away. You're afraid to go there. Because, I think it's more that parents...don't want other people to think they're stupid, dumb. To be honest, that's the way I felt. (LP1)

A large number of the survey respondents also echoed the concern about speaking Irish in the school, and one commented on feeling **alienated** when interacting with other, more proficient, parents at her child's school: *'I have felt intimidated in the past when surrounded by confident Irish speakers, like I was not part of the group. As a result I sometimes avoid these situations.'*

Such feelings of alienation/intimidation was echoed by another respondent who reported discomfort in relation to interactions with the teachers:

I feel intimidated in front of teaching staff/principal due to my poor knowledge of Irish. I hated Irish at school as we had to 'rote learn' and the teachers were unsupportive. I have tried to attend Irish classes (3 years running) but I didn't seem to improve.

Several survey parents volunteered comments about their lack of confidence with speaking Irish and expressed concerns about using incorrect Irish in front of their children, both from the point of view of teaching them errors, but also in terms of the **undermining of their authority**. For example, one parent wrote: *'[My] family is quite young and I am anxious about using incorrect words/grammar- lack of confidence, especially now that the older child corrects me!'* Another parent spoke about her insecurity regarding her ability to use Irish with her children: *'My lack of confidence and fear of teaching incorrect Irish is a big thing for me.'* A further parent simply wrote: *'I don't have the confidence to speak the language.'*

This **lack of confidence and feeling of invalidation as an educational partner** (arising from low target-language proficiency) was also identified as directly affecting parents' involvement in home learning activities. Interview participants described such feelings, and their **resultant frustration**:

I just wouldn't know enough... I feel I'd just tell them the wrong thing, so I feel like I would just be better off leaving them to get on with it themselves. It gets frustrating always having to say to them, "You'll have to ask your teacher tomorrow". (LP4).

This was corroborated by similar comments by the survey respondents, who chose to elaborate on the effects they perceived as due to their low proficiency in Irish. The impact on parents' ability to **help with homework** appeared to cause significant concern, with parental recognition of its impact on parents' ability to support their child's learning, e.g.: *'As a parent*

who speaks little Irish, I'm nervous about the level of support I can give my child with homework as she gets older. Advice on this is always welcome.' One survey parent volunteered a suggestion for what would have helped her, but was not supplied in her child's school:

As I have very limited Irish and find it very hard to understand, I would have found it very useful to get a copy of their homework in English as I would have been able to help her a lot more instead of going to the Irish-English dictionary for every second word.

In addition to these concerns about the target language, immersion parents share the normal stresses of modern life with parents in mainstream schools, and parents in this study also mentioned **practical, logistical barriers to their involvement**. These included time pressures, childcare issues, rival commitments, etc. Being a single parent, having other children, and working outside the home were all barriers or at least challenges to involvement mentioned by parents interviewed. One parent expressed a wish to be more involved, but felt she did not have the time to do so: *'I should be more active... But I'm a single mum and it's hard, you know?'* (LP2).

This was echoed by comments made by several survey respondents also, e.g. *'I would like to be more involved in my child's school but due to work commitments I currently find it impossible. I would like to be more involved in the future.'* As another parent put it: *'I am time-poor. I've a full time job and 3 children.'* One parent wrote: *'As a working parent I do feel left out of the loop often as I am only at school one day per week.'*

While these are reported as barriers to parental involvement in general, comments on this topic are also interesting because they serve to illuminate parents' perceptions of the types of involvement that they feel they *should* take part in or are required by immersion education, such as trying to speak Irish with the children in the home. One participant noted:

I find that the biggest barrier to it is that you're in such a rush during the day, 'cause I've three of them... And it's not that I don't want to [speak Irish to them at home], but it's the rushing that's the biggest problem. But I've started to speak it with them, and I'm trying. (HP1).

Child factors

An interesting finding to emerge from these data was that, even where parents do feel confident enough to try to speak Irish with their children at home, some interview parents reported that they had made repeated **attempts at involvement which were rebuffed by their children**. Thus, several parents reported that actively supporting their children's developing language skills by speaking it at home, as advocated by many immersion schools, becomes problematic in some cases, particularly with older children. One parent described this

happening in her family: *‘As the years went on, we tried to speak Irish with him at home, and his attitude was “I’ve had it all day at school. I don’t want it here.” So we stopped doing that.’* (LP2)

This was supported by comments from three other interview parents, with similar experiences: *‘The ten-year-old a couple of years ago starting saying “Ah Mam, I’m not in school now. Don’t be starting!”’* (HP2). One parent described a need to be sensitive to the child’s response in terms of efforts to use Irish at home:

At home we’d often say to them, “Let’s speak as Gaeilge [in Irish]” - do you know that way? Just to try and bring it in, but then if after fifteen minutes she’s not interested we’d just leave it. (LP5)

Several questionnaire respondents also chose to comment on their child’s resistance to their attempts at using Irish in the home. These echo closely the comments of parents interviewed in the qualitative phase. For example: *‘If only there was some way of getting my children to help me with my Irish rather than them not wanting to speak Irish outside of school – how to do that I don’t know unfortunately.’* Another parent wrote: *‘When I speak it at home, they go mad – they hate me speaking it and give out. We find it so useful in foreign countries though!’* [As a ‘secret’ language]. Similarly, another parent wrote of her inability to effectively encourage her child’s use of Irish:

I would love to find a way to motivate my children to speak Gaeilge [Irish] at home – I get a withering look if I suggest it. My eldest is going on her first trip to the Gaeltacht [Irish speaking region] but apart from that I can’t think of an external activity trí ghaeilge [through Irish]!

Some of the survey parents also noted their children’s resistance to speaking Irish outside of the school, and apparent disaffection from the language: *‘My children do not have a grá [love] for speaking Irish and often do not wish me to speak to them in Irish.’* Another parent reported a similar experience: *‘My son associates Irish with school but not with home/play.’* One parent explained: *‘My children do not want to speak Irish out of school and I do not wish to force them or have any negative association with the language.’* Another wrote: *‘The children themselves prefer to speak English at home and feel they use enough Irish in school without using it at home also.’* One parent responded that there was no Irish spoken in her school because: *‘It is not enjoyable enough.’*

These reports of children blocking parental attempts to speak Irish at home may be linked to their rejection of something they identify as ‘school-like’, but there may also be an implicit discomfort relating to a perception, among some children at least, that their parents do not ‘do it right’ or do not have anything to offer in terms of help. An interview parent talked about her son rejecting her attempts to help with reading, both in English and Irish. She felt that her son

resisted her attempts at involvement due to his perception that she lacked the ability to help him: *‘Conor would laugh at me. He actually reads better than I do’* (LP1). Survey respondents echoed this subtheme. For example: *‘My child's attitude to Irish is good but he's sometimes reluctant to use it for effective communication with me as my Irish is so limited.’* Another parent explained: *‘My child considers that she should not speak Irish to me as I am not Irish even though I can speak/understand it!’*

While the parents above reported explicit rebuffs to their attempts, others parents interviewed attributed their lack of involvement to a **lack of invitations from their child**. The frequency of invitations for involvement seems to decrease as a function of the child’s age, with parents reporting that the older their child got, the less they expressed a need or a want for their parents’ help or involvement. This in turn resulted in some parents failing to make any overtures for involvement. For example, one mother said that she rarely helps her daughter with learning activities in the home anymore: *‘She gets on with her all her homework and that herself. She doesn’t need my help at all anymore really. If she did I’m sure she’d ask me.’* (HP2).’

Family factors

As noted above, parents reported difficulties with using Irish in the home to support their children’s L2 development, but interestingly, these were not confined to low proficiency parents. Several high proficiency parents interviewed/surveyed commented on **their decision not to use the language if other members of their family were not as proficient as they**. For example, one parent interviewed, who indicated that she was a fluent speaker of Irish, discussed how she attempted to make the language a constant feature of her home environment, but that this was not always possible, due to the presence of others with low proficiency: *‘Her father doesn’t speak Irish. So when he comes over we speak English.’* (HP3).

This theme was found to be more prevalent in survey responses, with several highly proficient parents mentioning their reluctance to use Irish for fear of excluding less proficient family members. For example, one father wrote that: *‘My wife doesn’t speak Irish and I don’t like to ‘exclude’ her from conversations’*. Another parent echoed this sentiment, writing: *‘Her dad is not at same standard so hard to include him if we are all speaking Irish.’*

It was noteworthy that this was not only expressed by parents with low proficiency spouses/partners, but also in relation to other children. For example, one parent wrote about her experience of attempting to introduce the Irish language into the home: *‘My child has an older sibling attending an English medium school and she reacts negatively when she hears my*

child or me speaking Irish (unfortunately!)'. This highlights the need to take the wider family into account in considering home language use.

School/Community factors

So far the results discussed have considered the impact of parental, child and family factors on some kinds of parental involvement. The final set of factors looked at here relate to the other 'player' in the interaction, the school, and the wider community. A significant barrier reported by parents to supporting their children's Irish learning is their perception that there **a lack of suitable materials in Irish**, particularly a lack of appropriate reading material. It is interesting to note in this regard that, while it is true that fewer materials are available in Irish than in English (Hinton 2011), there has been a very significant improvement in the supply of Irish books, DVDs, CDs and games, although parents would have to seek them in special outlets and online. Thus, in citing dissatisfaction with the lack of provision of suitable resources, parents may be signalling a **lack of information** about what is available and how to locate it, and also a lack of confidence that they could choose appropriately from those that are available. For example, when asked if her child ever read books in Irish that were not related to school, one parent explained:

There's nothing there for them in Irish. Everything's in English, you know? And yes, I could go out and buy him a book that's in Irish, but I don't know how I'd... But if it were a newspaper or something maybe I could throw it at him and say 'here, have a read of that'. But there isn't actually anything on a daily basis that you would read, because there's nothing around. (LP2)

Another parent reported a similar experience or not seeing Irish materials available in the usual outlets, but her comments also indicate an assumption that her child has a second language reading proficiency that matches their first language reading proficiency:

There isn't a lot in Irish... And, as I say, back to John again, because he loves to read and if you could go out there and get some of the really interesting books that you can get in English... Like, he loved all the Harry Potter books and different things like that. But if they were more... if there was a lot more Irish displayed, he would be able to get out there and get them. (LP1).

Survey respondents also chose to add comments about the perceived lack of appropriate resources. For example, one parent wrote: *'I find a lot of Irish activities/resources are difficult to access if one's Irish is not up to standard.'* Another parent commented that: *'There seems to be very little on the internet in regard to child-friendly interactive games etc., things which children are naturally interested in.'* These comments point to the benefit of offering parents on-going help and advice in sourcing appropriate books, games and other resources in Irish.

Given the proficiency issues discussed, it is not surprising that parents felt that learning Irish would remove barriers to involvement. Addressing the resources for adults who wish to improve their Irish, several survey respondents also described **frustration at the lack of Irish classes for adults** available in the community which they themselves could avail of. One parent wrote:

I am recently unemployed and have sought out Irish-speaking classes in the locality. Very hard to find. Feel that would help enormously with my Irish speaking. Have a lot of Irish but it's dormant. My desire to become a good Irish speaker is huge.

Such parents might benefit from information on online resources to support Irish learning. Similarly, another survey parent who perceived that their lack of Irish proficiency was holding them back from full involvement expressed their belief that Irish classes would help them support their children's learning:

Would love to do Irish classes and feel it would benefit my child who is currently in school and my next child who will be starting Naíonra [preschool] in September. I know myself a lot of the parents would pay a teacher to teach say two hours one night a week.

Other parents felt that Irish classes for immersion parents should not only be available in the community, but should be provided by the school itself. As one parent wrote: '*I was shocked that my child's Gaelscoil did not have a class for parents to learn Irish. This would have helped me!*' Similarly:

I have looked into many courses, methods of increasing my spoken Irish and all are relatively expensive as a student. It is very important to me to learn the language and have an Irish speaking home. I find it hard to find ways of achieving this both financially but also because there appears to be poor information, support available.

It was not clear whether these parents had taken their wish for Irish classes to their school or Parents' Association, but there does appear to be an information and resource gap here for some parents. Despite some parents describing lack of access to such opportunities to learn Irish, in fact the most common way in which survey parents reported that schools attempted to support parents was to make Irish classes available to them. However, this appears not to guarantee success, and parents may have unrealistic expectations of such classes. Several of the parents interviewed had attended Irish classes at some stage in their child's school career in an effort to enable themselves to be more involved, yet most of the interview participants **found their Irish class experience very unsatisfactory**. One parent, for example, found she did not reap much benefit from the class, as she did not receive any one-on-one interaction with the teacher, and thus felt she was unable to keep up:

I did go to a class, but I had the little one with me and it was a very full class, and it was going over my head like... I mean, I think some people don't grasp it quite as quick. They need a bit more one-on-one time. Or, I'd need one-on-one time I should say, to understand it more, or to ask questions. When there's a big group of people it's hard to put questions across. (LP6)

Another parent explained that she lost interest very quickly in the Irish class she attended, as the dialect of the teacher did not match the one she was familiar with:

Well the one thing that I found when I was doing the night course was that the person who was doing it, he was from Donegal... And that turned me off, because they have a different accent... And I kind of got disinterested. (LP2)

The **dialect gap** was not the only problem however: she also noted a more fundamental gap between the teacher's goals and her own in terms of learning Irish:

You see I just want to learn the basics. I just want to learn how to say "Hello! Goodbye!" and help with the homework a little bit, and that's all I'm interested in. Whereas this was a whole big conversation, and he was giving us poems and everything, and I thought: "Not interested." (LP2).

It is relevant to note here that survey respondents also described **disappointment with their attempts to learn Irish** in order to support their children's learning, e.g. '*Tried Irish classes in my son's school. Did not enjoy or learn anything... Very disappointed.*' Another parent wrote: '*I have done 2 courses in Irish but just can't take it in. She is in 6th class now and I still can't put a sentence together*' [i.e. after child has been over 7 years in the school]. Thus, classes in the immersion language may not be the panacea that some parents (and schools) believe them to be. At the very least, these results point to the need to tailor the classes offered to the actual needs of a particular group of parents.

Finally, it is noteworthy in relation to school factors, that some survey respondents commented on a **sense that their input or involvement in school would not be considered welcome or appropriate in their children's immersion schools**: '*Would love to help out in classroom- but not applicable in our school!*' Another parent described how she felt her involvement in her child's school was not welcomed: '*I would like to help in the classes/at school without the teacher feeling it was a criticism. I also don't know how to tell her that I am willing to help.*' Another parent attributed this to the school's size, with fewer invitations to help in school since it became larger and longer established: '*I find that parents are less welcome at the school now and that parents are not asked to help out in the classroom activities/tours etc. now in comparison to when the school started.*' The issue of schools welcoming parental involvement will be discussed more fully later.

Topic 7: Facilitators of Involvement

While most parents' reports focused heavily on factors which they believed impeded their involvement, some parents also described conditions which had prompted their involvement, or which caused them to adopt a more active role than they had previously had, and this section covers the main themes relating to these reported facilitators of involvement.

Table 5.11 Main themes and frequencies relating to facilitators of involvement

Theme	Frequency
School Factors	30
Parent Factors	10
Child Factors	20

School Factors

Some parents noted the **non-permanent nature of the anxiety** which they had originally perceived surrounding their interaction with school staff. One mother found that her perception of low proficiency as a barrier to her presence in the school changed over time. She reported that this was a result of **positive experiences of staff support**, such as finding the staff in her child's school to be very understanding of her low Irish proficiency and helping her to overcome her reluctance:

Like I wrote something on an envelope in Irish yesterday and I wasn't sure if I wrote the proper thing down, and I just asked and she said 'Yeah, you got that perfect.' So they're very encouraging for the parents. (LP6)

Encouragement from school staff helped her to feel more comfortable at her child's school and thus led her to be more willing to be present there. Another parent explained a similar experience in a different school:

You'd think you don't have much [Irish], but because of the kids, you have. And you get more advanced, 'cause the first year you are kind of thinking, you know, I'd be saying to the teacher "Go raibh maith agat" [thank you] when I'd mean to say "Slán" [goodbye] or, I'd be getting confused and then they'd be saying "You're grand" and you're trying, so then you start to relax, you know that way? (LP5).

Thus parents found significant support in the encouragement they received from teachers and schools.

Parent Factors

One parent reported that as her child went through school she learned enough Irish from him to make it less daunting to visit the school. She spoke about how her confidence in approaching the school staff increased as a result of her increased proficiency in the language of the school: *'It's only now that from my young lad I picked up bits and pieces that I've more confidence to come.'* (LP1)

Child Factors

It was interesting that two interview parents reported that their involvement in their child's education was brought about by **their children's difficulties in school**. One parent spoke about how her son was struggling with Irish and falling behind in his homework. As this problem escalated, it led to increased contact between home and school and led to a jointly agreed solution which moved the child to doing his homework in school:

Now he's in sixth class and he was doing the Irish, but...in the end we've actually had more problems with him, because he kept... like, I didn't know the Irish language as much. He kept telling me that his homework ...was done. I wasn't understanding the Irish, and half of it wasn't. So we were having..., he was being pulled, kept back, ... getting in trouble all the time for it. So, like, we've gotten together and dealt with that problem 'cos now he's doing a homework club. (LP1)

Another parent explained that she increased her involvement with her child's English reading when the school informed her that her son was struggling with it. She reported being grateful to the school for drawing her attention to the issue:

Well, he, which is what I like about the school, they came to me, I think it was last year, and they said that his reading was a little bit behind, in English. So they took him aside, with a few others, and they gave them special English classes. And so, that's when I realised "Okay, I haven't been paying enough attention to the reading" so I got a book and made him read in the car going down to school and when he was going to bed. And now he's out of that class and he's doing very well. It was just that extra kick that he needed really, you know? (LP2)

While the data relating to facilitators of involvement are less rich and detailed than the data relating to barriers to involvement, what is clear from the few reports made in relation to this topic, is that parents' decisions to become involve may be highly dependent on others, specifically staff and their own children. Feeling encouraged by school staff, or being told that their involvement is needed or expected led some parents to become more actively involved in their children's education. It appears that some parents' default mode may be passive rather than proactive, unless circumstances require them to react with more active engagement. This is encapsulated by a comment made by one survey respondent who simply wrote: *'I help out when asked.'*

Topic 8: Overcoming Obstacles to Involvement

This section outlines how parents report negotiating challenges to successful involvement which they experience. It then covers parents' suggestions for how they feel they could be supported to be more successfully involved in their children's education.

Table 5.12 Main themes and frequencies relating to overcoming challenges to involvement

Theme	Phase 1 (n=10)	Phase 2 (n=27)
Current Strategies	50	22
Suggestions for Support	60	89

Current strategies

In light of the difficulties some parents mentioned with regard to helping their children with homework through Irish, it is useful to look at strategies that some parents have developed. One parent reported that she and a friend would **consult each other** when they had difficulty with the language of homework:

Like a friend of mine, she'd say "I can't figure out what that word means" and if there's one word you don't understand then you're stuck on the whole sentence. And if I could I'd tell her but... And I'm the same, like I might ring her up and say "Do you understand what this means?" (LP6).

Survey respondents (n=4) also reported **seeking help from others** when struggling with the Irish content of their children's work, e.g.: *'My ability in Irish is sometimes a factor but I try very hard. My sister is a primary school teacher and always at the other end of the phone.'*

Other parents reported that when children needed help with maths homework, they would ask the child first to **translate the problem into English for the parents**: *'Like the Maths, you could help with that. They would translate the Irish into the English for us, you know?'* (LP3). Another parent, who had reported several barriers to involvement as a result of her inability to speak Irish, mentioned that she relied on her eldest son to help his younger siblings. She noted that, while her son's teacher sent home a written sheet every Monday which outlined the child's homework assignments for the rest of the week, she could not understand this as it was written in Irish only. She explained that her older son helped in this situation:

'I can't actually get down, like you know, and help out with that...and only for David, I... I have to get David to read out what it is. Even basic sheets I have awful problems with. He's just brilliant, and he's very good now, with the others. 'Cause he's in sixth class now, getting ready to go into secondary. He actually helps out with their homework if I have problems.' (LP1)

This is one example of how the roles of parents and children in immersion may diverge from traditional ideas in mainstream education. It points to the conclusion that a rigid view of ‘Parent as Teacher’ in the home may not be an appropriate, or helpful, construction of the parental role for lower proficiency parents in immersion. Other examples of this role reversal can be seen throughout the data. For example: *‘If I don’t understand I’ll ask him what he’s saying, so then it makes me understand.’* (LP2), *‘Mine [my children] were coming home and they were teaching me bits and pieces, you know what I mean?’* (LP1) and: *‘I think we’ll help each other. When they surpass me [in Irish proficiency], then they can help me.’* (HP1).

Finally, a strategy used by some low target language proficiency parents was the **purchase of Irish-English dictionaries** to consult when parents encountered something which they did not understand: *‘The dictionary comes out then. We find that handy then.’* (LP3) Similarly: *‘I bought myself a dictionary and anything I didn’t know I helped him out with the dictionary’* (LP2). This was also reported by several (n=5) survey respondents. It might also be helpful to make parents aware of online dictionary resources, as no parent mentioned use of these.

Suggestions for Supports

Several parents from both Phase 1 (n=7) and Phase 2 (n=24) talked about what they felt would help them to increase their involvement in their children’s education. One interviewee felt that **efforts should be made by schools to create a more welcoming, less intimidating, environment for parents:**

‘If it was just, like, if you know what I mean... if it was more, if it’s made more comfortable for parents, you know what I mean?... So it’s not like you’re, you know, you’re going to the school to stand outside the gate. Do you know what I mean? That’s the way you’d feel... If it’s more of a relaxed environment, definitely.’ (LP1).

A survey respondent appeared to feel that English was not allowed or acceptable from parents on her child’s school premises, and suggested that schools should: *‘Allow parents to speak a mixture of Irish and English until they build up confidence.’*

Other parents had more specific suggestions about the type of classes that would be helpful.

‘All you’d want is the fluency. If I could go to somebody and just get that, that’d be great. But they do take in all that other stuff, you know. But if you could go to a class where you just wanted to... where you could learn the fluency of the Irish language I would.’ (LP3).

Another parent, who had been disappointed with Irish classes previously, made a suggestion as to what classes for parents should actually entail: *‘To get people together. Even to do phrases with them. It doesn’t have to be so intense that it’s a conversation thing... Even just, little phrases’* (LP2). Several (n=9) survey respondents also added comments about how they felt

that Irish classes would help them to be more involved with their children's learning. For example: *'I feel my lack of Irish holds me back and I would love a course in Irish to run through the year – starting at beginners and progressing from there.'* Another parent wrote: *'I would like to be able to speak Irish and for there to be class in my community for adults/parents. If I could speak better Irish I would be able to help my children more.'*

However, another view of Irish classes was offered by one interviewee who reported that classes focusing on conversational or oral Irish were not fully meeting her needs, as they did not address the difficulties she had with her children's reading:

Irish reading. I think, we have the Irish classes, but classes for Irish reading, do you know that way? Even my Irish is different from the way they're using it now. I mean, I would pronounce differently. So, I think Irish reading from the beginning would be a brilliant help... If we knew how to pronounce. I mean there are some words like, there are some words that I mightn't know how to read. (LP5).

One parent explained that as she did not understand any Irish she would find it helpful to have copies of her children's work in English:

If we knew it in English, like I know English is our language, we know it. Where, if we had it in both, kind of, I think I'd be able to, y'know, pick up the words off the sheets and things like that as well. (LP1).

This was also suggested by survey respondents (n=3). For example:

As I have very limited Irish and find it very hard to understand, I would have found it very useful to get a copy of their homework in English as I would have been able to help her a lot more instead of going to the Irish-English dictionary for every second word.

As noted, an interviewee who reported not being able to understand her child's school report given in Irish only suggested that an English language version of it would have been preferable to her. However, another parent interviewed felt that the immersion atmosphere in her child's school was somehow being diluted by practices such as these, with less emphasis placed on learning through Irish than she had experienced when a pupil there herself:

Well, they do an awful lot more English now than we did. We did no English. The only English we learned at school was English, our English lessons. But we did all our Maths, and History and Geography and everything through Irish.

When probed as to whether this was not still the case in her child's school, this parent described how:

No. Well they've done it in a way now where there's help for parents because they get an English Maths books home. So, you know, I was a bit put out by

that. Because my whole concept was that, if you're going to teach them Maths in Irish, give them a maths book in Irish to bring home.

Thus, while some low proficiency parents had earlier commented that using an English Maths book for homework had allowed them to be more involved in helping with their child's homework, a high proficiency parent saw this as diluting the immersion in Irish. These opposing viewpoints emphasise the heterogeneity within this group, and highlight the challenges of supporting low proficiency parents without antagonising those who desire a greater commitment to total immersion from all parents. This would appear to indicate that strategies to help parents in the home need to have some flexibility, so that parents who can use Irish are encouraged to do so, while those who feel blocked from engagement as educational partners by their low Irish proficiency can avail of supports in English.

Other common suggestions for support included parents' wishes to be informed about **Irish language resources** which they could make use of with their children. For example parents' wish lists for supports included: '*Computer programs that can help parent and child learn Irish together.*' Also: '*Web resources for adults e.g. focal.ie or online info on how to assist learning/follow curriculum.*'

Another parent suggested:

A user friendly dictionary English-Irish Irish-English for parents of primary school kids, for help with written homework and understanding of some words... Maybe this could be given to each household of children in Irish speaking school as a home support.

Other suggestions included: '*Any fun activity- Parent and Child- where child helps child with Irish, perhaps in classroom- showing work/learning game- Irish only to be spoken.*' And: '*I feel more online interactive resources would encourage children to use more Irish in their free time.*'

Ten survey parents also commented that they would like **increased communication with their children's schools**, including updates about their children's progress and also being provided with information about what the children are learning at school. For example, typical responses relating to this subtheme included: '*I would like more parent/teacher meetings during the year to discuss my children's progress. I feel that there is not enough contact between teachers and parents*', '*Increased feedback from the school. More one-to-one with teachers. One parent teacher meeting per year is not enough.*', and '*Parent-Teacher meetings are once a year unless there is a problem. Usually in November-December. Not enough- should have end of year meeting also!*'

Other parents reported that they did not have time to actually visit the school for face-to-face meetings and believed that schools should look at alternative ways of communicating regularly with parents. For example:

As I work full-time I have to take time off work to visit teacher just to 'touch base' and see how my child is doing. I would like a brief note written in homework book weekly. Just a brief status report on how he is doing and if more help is needed from me to my child.

Another parent wrote: *'Email updates of my child's progress on a quarterly basis would be very helpful in guiding me where to concentrate my efforts at homework.'* Indeed, several parents expressed that they would like more guidance about which forms their involvement should take. For example: *'Would like some pointers in how best to handle homework.'* Three survey parents felt that increased information about immersion would be beneficial in allaying concerns about children's progress. One parent wrote: *'Worry will child have difficulty learning English as its not taught in Junior Infants- feel this could be explained to parents and the method of teaching being employed- i.e. through play etc./sound.'*

5.9 Response to Research Questions

This section will summarise briefly how the findings presented above may be used to answer the research sub-questions posed for the present study.

1: Why do parents choose to send their children to Irish immersion schools?

This study revealed that parents are choosing immersion education for a variety of reasons. For some parents, issues of national identity, culture, and maintenance of the Irish language were primary motivating factors. As was suggested by Hickey (1997, 1999) Coady (2001) and Ó Laoire (2008), for some parents, perceptions of other benefits of an all-Irish education such as increased employment opportunities, smaller school environments and better grades at second-level were important considerations. In the 1970s, almost half of children enrolled in Gaelscoileanna came from Irish speaking homes and parents wished this to have this Irish atmosphere maintained in their children's schooling. In this study, some parents reported choosing immersion in order to give their children something 'extra', something which they felt that they would otherwise not have. Regardless of the specific motivations, the overarching theme was that parents wished to provide their children with an 'edge' over their English-medium counterparts, and/or, to give them something which they deemed to be valuable and which, in many cases they felt they had lacked themselves. Despite this, parents differed in respect to the amount of knowledge they had about what immersion would entail, how their children would progress, and how they would be able to support their children's learning.

2: What are parents' attitudes towards a) the Irish language? b) Irish-medium education?

As expected, parents choosing IME reported having very favourable attitudes towards Irish. While this is an encouraging finding, it is important to note that positive attitudes towards Irish are not necessarily predictive of a parent's inclination or ability to actively support their child's Irish language learning. In fact, favourable attitudes towards Irish and the teaching of Irish have also been found among parents in English-medium schools, but in practice 'many have a lukewarm, hands-off approach to the *enterprise* of their children learning Irish' (Harris, 2005, p. 969). The present study found that, although all parents described themselves as positively disposed towards their child's learning of Irish, they differed considerably in their actual practices of involvement in their child's education. It is also interesting to note that the majority of parents reported having negative attitudes towards their own learning of Irish while at school, finding it '*tedious*' and '*difficult*'. It is possible that those long-held attitudes may to some extent covertly influence their engagement in their children's L2 development and learning generally. Overall, parents reported feeling positively towards immersion education and expressed satisfaction, on the whole, with their choice of school.

3: How do parents construe their roles in their children's education?

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) argue that it is those parents who believe that parents should be involved in their children's education who are most likely to become involved in different types of school and home-based activities. Parents with a less active role construction will be more likely to think that their child's education should be 'left up to the school'. In the present study, it was notable that most of these immersion parents did appear to construe their role as a parent as including an obligation to be involved in their children's education. However, the *way* in which they construed this role appeared to be problematic for many of these parents. Parents appeared to operate with a general model of involvement that differed little from that of a parent with a child attending an English-medium school, without adapting this construction appropriately to an immersion context. Thus, parents primarily appeared to construe 'parental involvement' as referring to parents taking on the teacher's role at home, 'teaching' their children concepts or language, or helping their children with homework *through the language of the school*, which causes difficulties for the many parents who are unable to do this successfully. What appears to be absent in the parents' reflections on their role is a consideration of the skills that such parents *do* have to contribute to supporting their child's education. Use of the target language is only one mechanism through which parental involvement can positively influence student's achievement. Exploration with parents of the other ways in which they can show encouragement, reinforcement and the modelling of positive attitudes towards the language and learning may result in more effective, and more feasible, ways of parents supporting a child's learning. An area that could fruitfully be

explored with parents would be the home-based opportunities for children (especially younger children) to be exposed to Irish in a more relaxed or non-school-like way. For example, since parents report that children identify the language strongly with school, then an effective 'homework' option might include asking parents to sit and watch a cartoon in Irish on TV with their child. This could be more effective than general instruction telling parents to 'speak Irish' at home to the child. Parents also indicated that they, like the children, see the target language as something that is 'done in school' and need help to identify resources that are appropriate for supporting their child's exposure to it in less school-like activities. Most importantly of all, parents also need to be helped to value – and increase - their contribution in supporting and developing their child's L1 English skills, as it is clear from these data that their role construction revolved heavily around their L2 skills or lack thereof.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) suggested that a parent's role construction is largely learned from modelling and observation of their own parents' involvement and the involvement of their friends and peers etc. Since all of the lower proficiency parents in this study were educated through English, and since such mainstream schools are the norm in Irish society, such parents may focus on the major difference between their child's school and such schools, Irish as the medium of instruction, as short-circuiting their attempts to follow this pattern for involvement. On the other hand, awareness of the types of involvement of higher proficiency parents in their own immersion school may, in some cases at least, raise the bar unrealistically for them, and make them feel deficient or disaffected. This may contribute to one group of parents feeling that they are unable to help either their child or the school, while another group feels that other parents are not 'pulling their weight' in terms of supporting the immersion ideals or the practical needs of the school for support. This will be discussed further in relation to the educators' data.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) argue that parental construction of their role 'is important because it enables the parent to imagine, anticipate and act on a host of educationally related activities with their children.' (p. 313). The fact that parents in the present study appear to accord such a high priority to Irish proficiency in their construction of their own role, even when they do not have such proficiency themselves, may limit the range of activities which they imagine, anticipate, and act on in relation to their children's education. How this construction relates to actual involvement is discussed in the following section.

4: How are parents currently involved?

Parents reported being involved in their children's education in different ways and to different degrees. No parent engaged in all of the activities mentioned, and no parent reported being completely uninvolved. Most of the parents interviewed expressed the view that they were not as involved as they would like to be or as they felt that they should be, and many attributed this to their low levels of Irish. Parents were all involved in some degree with homework, but the nature of this involvement differed greatly between parents. For some, involvement meant making sure that homework was done or 'showing an interest' in homework, while others reported taking a much more 'hands on' approach. Only one parent interviewed reported supporting her child's Irish reading development by reading to her child in Irish at home. The majority reported that their children did not read in Irish

5: Does parental involvement change over time?

In line with existing research on parental involvement, most parents of older children reported engaging less frequently in involvement activities as their child progressed through the school. Previous commentators have attributed parents' decreasing involvement over time to a number of factors, such as their belief that their children need more autonomy as they get older and to decreasing awareness of how to be involved as the difficulty level of the child's work increases (Simon, 2004). The latter was found to be the case in the present study, as several immersion parents reported feeling less able to help with learning in the home as their children's proficiency in Irish surpassed their own and as the difficulty of the material to be covered increased. Invitations for class-based involvement from schools were also reported to decline as children progressed, and increased resistance from children to attempts at involvement was reported by parents.

On the other hand, an exception to this general trend of reduced involvement was found in the reports of some immersion parents that they made more frequent visits to their child's school as they became more comfortable with Irish as their child advanced through school. They reported that positive experiences with school staff assuaged their anxieties about using the language, and that increased familiarity with the school led to their increased confidence in taking part in school-based activities. There is thus an argument to be made that support for parents should adapt to and span the length of their child's career, and perhaps that the type of support offered may be tailored as the child progresses through school. Another exception to the trend of decreasing involvement was reported when parents were alerted to difficulties their children were having with some aspects of their learning. Only when informed of these did parents become aware of the issues and take actions to address them. Thus, encouraging

parents to adopt a proactive rather than a reactive approach to involvement may be important in order to improve students' outcomes.

6: *How does Irish feature in the home lives of immersion pupils and their families?*

The overarching theme in this section of the data was that immersion pupils rarely use Irish when not in school. Parents report that children resist their attempts to use the language with them and identify it solely with school. For others, lack of parental proficiency means it is not practical for the parents to speak Irish to their children. A perception held by at least some parents is that children have either 'enough' or 'too much' intake of the language at school, and therefore that there is no need to offer support to the language outside of school.

7: *How is a parent's sense of efficacy for involvement affected when the language of the school and the language of the home differ?*

The major issue relating to parents' sense of efficacy for involvement in immersion education was their reports that it was their own lack of proficiency in the target-language that presented the most significant barrier to involvement in a range of activities, both in the home and in their child's school. Low proficiency in the language through which their children are learning appears to impact very significantly on parents' general sense of efficacy for involvement, not only in terms of constraining their actual involvement (*I leave it to her really*), but also in causing anxiety that they are a negative factor (*I might teach him wrong*), which in turn undermines such parents' personal efficacy further (*he'd laugh at me*). Several parents expressed this concern that their involvement would actually be detrimental to their child's learning, mentioning fears of somehow 'contaminating' children's learning by using incorrect Irish vocabulary or grammar. These data point to some parents with low proficiency constructing a rationale by which their *non*-involvement with homework and other supportive activities are deemed preferable or beneficial for the child, in the apparent belief that their children would be better off without their participation in this regard.

8: *What are immersion parents' experiences of home-school communication?*

Parents reported that communication with class teachers about their children's progress takes place mainly at annual formal parent-teacher meetings. In addition to that, parents received yearly written reports on their children's progress, not always in bilingual format. Aside from this, parents reported relying on their own observations and their children's reports when assessing how their children were getting on. Exceptions to this infrequent contact were reported by parents who reported increased home-school communication when a problem was identified and they were asked to become more involved with their children's learning. One high proficiency parent reported initiating contact with her child's teacher monthly to check on

progress and she was critical that all parents did not do the same. However, it was not clear that other parents felt that this was an option available to them, with some parents commenting that teachers were too busy to keep them regularly updated on their children's progress.

9: Do immersion parents experience barriers to involvement in their children's education?

The present findings indicate that immersion parents can experience a range of barriers to involvement in their children's immersion education. Low parental proficiency was an overarching theme in the data, and affected parents' sense of efficacy for involvement, as discussed above. Several parents reported feelings of isolation from their child's school, largely due to their lack of proficiency in the target language, and apparently due to a belief that they could not manage their interaction with the school without speaking English. Even where they recognised that the school was understanding of this, and accommodated them, it may be that their sense of failure to live up to the school policy, or 'fit in' in the school atmosphere acts to make them feel that they do not belong. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler argue that parents will be more likely to be involved if they perceive invitations for involvement from their child's school arising from a welcoming and opening school climate and if they perceive specific invitations from their child's teacher or from their child. Feeling uncomfortable or unwelcome in a domain where they do not speak the language of communication, even where they know that the staff will be accommodating of their language limitations, may mean that low proficiency parents are less likely to perceive the school as welcoming and generally inviting their involvement. The lack of specific invitations for involvement from their child's school was also mentioned by parents, particularly in relation to school-based involvement activities.

What was notable, however, was that higher proficiency parents also reported barriers to involvement activities at home, primarily relating to their children's resistance to their involvement. These findings point to the previously overlooked importance of the role that children themselves play in shaping the involvement of their parents in immersion education. It is clear from these findings that children are not passive recipients of parental involvement in their education, but are active participants who can influence and shape the nature and extent of their parents' involvement. While Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model noted that a parent's perception of specific invitations for involvement from their child is an important condition for involvement, relatively little attention has been devoted to the wide variety of ways in which children can not only elicit involvement, but can actively resist or rebuff it, and shape the ways in which it is enacted. Resistance from children was predominantly reported in relation to parents' attempts to speak Irish with them in the home. Several parents reported that their children did not enjoy using the language and identified it only with school. Children may

also perceive that their parents' lack of proficiency in the language means that they are unable to communicate effectively with them, that it may be burdensome for parents to do so, or that it will not help them improve their own language skills. Thus, as well as a parent's personal sense of self-efficacy, *children's* evaluation of the benefits of their parents' involvement may be an important feature in an immersion context.

10: *How could immersion parents be supported to take a more active role in the education of their children?*

While the experience of barriers to involvement was not the preserve of low proficiency parents, low proficiency in Irish was an overarching theme to emerge from analysis of these data. While it is tempting to think that merely teaching the target language to parents would be a panacea (as many parents themselves also appear to believe), other parents who *have* made such attempts to learn the language actually report that this is not a practical or attractive solution. Thus, it is imperative that parallel and alternative ways of including parents be investigated. This could involve some changes in how school policies encouraging use of the target language on school premises is communicated to parents, so that they are also made explicitly aware of acceptable options for managing communication with the school in English. Some parents expressed reluctance to be seen by the children 'breaking the rules' by speaking English, so it would be interesting to consider the provision of options that would make it clear to these parents that their contribution is facilitated rather than effectively silenced. One such option used in New Zealand in some immersion preschools is the provision of an 'English zone' near the entrance, where parents are made explicitly aware that use of English between parents and staff is acceptable at drop off/collect times or for informal meetings, and away from the view of the pupils. Other options that appear to be helpful for some parents include use of the equivalent English-language versions of textbooks in order to help them to help with their children's homework where terminology is a problem for them. Informing parents of suitable and fun resources in Irish (*and* where to buy them) and less school-like activities that they can use to increase the child's positive experience of Irish in the home may also have benefits for both low and high proficiency parents. Finally, and most fundamentally, it appears that schools could engage in more explicit communication with parents to encourage all, and especially low proficiency parents to make use of the skills that they *do* have for successful involvement, such as emphasising the very great value of their support for their children's L1 oral English and literacy development, as well as showing positive attitudes to the L2 by facilitating less school-like activities in the language. This would help to empower parents currently more likely to view their own deficits with regard to Irish, and would help these immersion parents to extend their role construction to recognise the high value of their

involvement in other areas of their children's education than the L2, and thereby offer complementary support to schools.

5.10 Conclusion

The aim of the present phase of the research was to explore how immersion parents feel about how they are involved in the education of their children. While parents were extremely positively disposed towards Irish and Irish-medium education, and while they appeared satisfied with their choice of an immersion school for their children, parents report a range of challenges to successful involvement and to effective relationships with their children's school. The main findings from this phase of the research are considered further alongside findings from the other phases in Chapter 9.

This chapter has presented the findings emerging from parents' qualitative reports on their experiences of involvement in their children's education. The next chapter reports findings from the perspective of a large sample of parents, in the in-depth self-report parental involvement survey.

Chapter 6

Study 1, Phase 2: Parental Involvement Survey

6.0 Overview

This chapter describes the second phase of the mixed methods study of Irish immersion parents' involvement in their children's education. While the first phase of the study utilised qualitative methods to yield rich data on parents' lived experiences of involvement, the second phase aimed to examine parents' involvement through the use of survey methods. The overall aim of this stage of the study was to explore the nature and extent of parents' engagement in a variety of involvement activities, and to identify which background factors and parent characteristics are related to this involvement. The chapter opens with a description of the design and methodology of the present phase. This includes a consideration of ethical issues, the recruitment of participants and other relevant procedural detail. Next, the specific aims which the study was designed to address are outlined, and the results are then presented. Because the study was exploring an area about which relatively little information is known, descriptives on a number of relevant questions are presented. This is followed by inferential statistics examining the relationship between certain parental factors and their scores on the FIQ. Cluster analysis of the parental involvement results is then presented, followed by regression findings. The chapter concludes with an interim discussion of how the reported findings relate to the stated research questions.

6.1 Design

As has been discussed previously, the current phase of the research constitutes the latter stage of a larger mixed methods study of parents' involvement experiences, the overall design of which can be described as sequential exploratory. The present phase of the study involved the administration of a self-report parental involvement survey. It thus employed a cross-sectional correlation design, whereby data are collected from a sample of individuals at one stage in time in order to determine relationships between variables and to provide the possibility of making predictions or inferences from these relationships (Hall, 2008). The development of the survey, and the sections contained therein were described in detail in Chapter 4.

6.2 Ethical Considerations

This phase of the research met the University College Dublin Human Research Ethics Committee's criteria for exemption from full ethical review. Given that the data collection entailed administering anonymous surveys to adults over the age of eighteen and given that the research was not being undertaken with vulnerable groups, it was not necessary that the research proposal and materials be submitted to the full ethical review process. Despite this, the researcher ensured that all relevant ethical guidelines were complied with. An information sheet (see Appendix B) was presented with all surveys, which fully outlined the purposes of the study and what participation would entail. Parents were informed that the survey would be anonymous and that they were not required to give any identifying information. As such, signed written consent was not obtained from participants; rather, parents were informed that by returning a completed survey to the researcher they were consenting to participate in the study and to have their data included in the analysis.

In line with the ethos of Gaelscoileanna, but recognising the differing Irish proficiency levels of Gaelscoil parents, the survey was presented bilingually in order to allow parents to choose whether to respond to the Irish or English version. For validity purposes, the English version of the survey created by the researcher was translated to Irish by professional translators.

6.3 Procedure

6.3.1 Recruitment of Participants

Access to participants was facilitated through school principals. Letters (see Appendix B) were sent to principals in every Irish-medium primary school in Leinster inviting their schools to participate in the research. Sixty three primary schools of varying sizes were thus initially approached. Ten principals agreed to allow parents be recruited through their schools, a figure which may have been somewhat depressed by the co-occurrence of data collection at about the same time for a large-scale study of attainment in IM schools that included a background questionnaire to be completed by parents. Surveys were administered to every family in each of the participating schools.

6.3.2 Data Collection

Surveys were delivered to the school by the researcher and were given by class teachers to their pupils to be brought home for one parent/caregiver to fill in if they agreed to do so. Depending on each individual school's usual method of delivery of correspondence to parents who have multiple children attending the school, surveys were sent home via either the youngest or the eldest child attending the school. Such parents were instructed to

respond to survey questions in relation to their eldest child, rather than the child who had brought home the questionnaire. Parents then sent the completed surveys back to the school in sealed envelope via their children and surveys were collected by the researcher at a pre-specified date. Timescales for return of surveys by parents and their collection by the researcher varied somewhat between schools in line with individual principals' advice, or at their convenience, but parents were given no less than seven days and no more than fourteen days in any school within which to complete and return the questionnaire.

In order to reassure parents that their responses would not be read by their children or by school staff, surveys were sent to parents in unsealed envelopes which they were instructed to seal when returning the questionnaire. Parents were also given an address to which they could post the completed survey if they preferred this to returning the survey via the child-teacher-researcher channel. Parents could also thus return the survey by post if they had missed the specified date for survey collection but still wished to have their data included.

6.4 Response Rates

A total of 563 parents completed the survey, and response rates for each of the ten participating schools are presented in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Response Rates for Each Participating School

School ID	Response Rate (%)
School A	54.54
School B	58.33
School C	48.84
School D	80.00
School E	24.64
School F	75.00
School G	57.14
School H	48.10
School I	50.53
School J	41.38
<i>Unknown school of origin</i>	n/a
Overall response rate	47.63

Response rates ranged from a low of 24.64% in one school to a high of 80%, with an overall response rate for the study of 47.63%. Sample sizes for each individual school are not reported here as, if coupled with percentage response rates, could mean that participating schools would be potentially identifiable. Several parents returned the survey by post, the majority of whom indicated on the survey, or with an accompanying note,

which school their child was attending. However two participants failed to include this information and thus it is unknown from which school they were recruited and their data are excluded from some of the analyses reported later.

It is important to note that response rates reflect the number of returned, completed surveys from the total number of families in the school as indicated by the schools' enrolment figures. Children who may have been absent from school when surveys were delivered and whose parents did not receive the survey have thus been counted as 'unreturned' in these response rates. In addition, given the method of delivery of surveys and the method of return (via pupils rather than via post) it is not possible to ascertain whether all surveys reached their intended destination or whether all completed surveys were returned by children to their teachers in time. In addition, the length of the questionnaire should be considered when reviewing response rates. In accordance with the ethos of the schools, the survey was presented in both Irish and English, which may have led some parents who did not examine it closely to think that it was longer than was the case. Overall, pilot testing showed that it took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Given these factors, response rates for the present study were deemed to be acceptable.

6.5 Participants

Participants consisted of 563 parents of children in Irish-medium primary schools in Leinster. The sample was made up of 88.9% females and 11.1% males. The vast majority (97.7%) of respondents listed their nationality as Irish. Parents were asked to indicate their relationship to the child who brought home the survey and almost all (99.8%) indicated they were the parent of the child about whom they were answering the survey, with 0.2% indicating that they were the child's step-parent. As such, the term 'parent' will be used in the reporting of the findings rather than 'caregiver' or other variant. Of the respondents, 92.4% chose to respond to the English version of the survey, with the remaining 7.6% responding in Irish. Further information on the socio-demographic characteristics of parents in the sample is presented in the Results section below.

6.6 Aims of the Present Study

This phase of the study aimed to provide answers to a number of research sub-questions which relate to the overall research questions posed by the present research project (see Chapter 4). Each of these sub-questions will now be briefly reiterated in turn, prior to outlining the findings of the study. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of how the results obtained provide answers to each of these questions.

- 1: What is the socio-demographic profile of participating Irish immersion parents?
- 2: What is the linguistic profile of Irish-immersion parents?
- 3: What are parents' motivations for sending their children to immersion schools?
- 4: How are parents engaged in school-based involvement activities, home-based involvement activities, and home-school communication?
- 5: How are parents engaged in supporting their children's L2 development?
- 6: What supports would parents find useful in promoting/increasing their involvement in their children's education?
- 7: How are background parent variables related to individual indices of parental involvement?
- 8: How are background parent variables related to overall levels of reported parental involvement?

6.7 Data Analysis

In order to answer the research questions posed a number of different analyses were conducted. Descriptive analyses were undertaken in order to ascertain who the participating parents are, why they have chosen immersion education for their children, and what they are doing in relation to supporting their children's education and L2 development. Classification methods have also been used to identify subgroups in the sample of parents based on their self-reported levels of involvement. Inferential analyses were used to explore relationships between parent/family characteristics and involvement activities. Parametric and nonparametric statistical tests were performed where appropriate. All analyses were undertaken using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 18) software.

6.8 Results

In this section, the results of the analyses conducted on the collected data are reported. For ease of reading findings are presented in subsections, each of which relates to its relevant research sub-question.

6.8.1 Socio-demographic Profile of Parents

Parent characteristics are summarised in Table 6.2 below. Individual elements of the parental profile are then considered in turn.

Table 6.2: Sociodemographic characteristics of participants

Characteristic		n	%
Gender	Female	499	88.9
	Male	62	11.1
Marital Status	Married/living with partner	480	85.4
	Separated/divorced	30	5.3
	Single/widowed	52	9.3
Number of children in the school	Mean	1.56	
	Standard Deviation	.812	
Educational level	Junior Cert or less	42	7.6
	Leaving Cert/Post Leaving Cert non-degree	279	50.3
	Primary degree or higher	234	42.2
Employment status	Working for payment/profit	341	63.1
	Looking after home/family	157	29.1
	Unemployed	27	5.0
	Student	8	1.5
	Retired from employment	0	0
	Other	7	1.3
Occupation Type	ISEI score	$M= 52.31$	$SD= 25.97$
Medical card status	No	451	81.7
	Yes	94	17.0
	Choose not to answer	7	1.3
Books in the home	A few (less than 50)	68	12.2
	Moderate (50-299)	300	53.9
	More than 300	189	33.9

Family Structure

Phase 1 of the study showed that aspects of family structure were reported as being associated with levels of parental involvement, and parents in the survey were thus asked to indicate their family circumstances. The vast majority of parents (85.4%) revealed that they were married or co-habiting with a partner, 9.3% indicated that they were separated or divorced, with 5.3% describing themselves as widowed or single.

The number of school age children which parents have is also associated with levels of involvement, and the age of these children is another influencing factor. Over half of parents (57.1%) indicated that they had one child attending the Gaelscoil, with approximately one third (33.1%) having two children attending, and the remainder (9.8%) having more than two children in the school at the time of completing the survey. Just over half (52.8%) of the respondents answered the survey about a child in the junior half of the

school (Junior Infants to Second Class) and the remainder (47.2%) responded in relation to a child in the senior half (Third Class to Sixth Class). The relative parity in these figures can be seen as a justification for the decision to have parents of multiple children answer in relation to their eldest child in the school.

Employment Status

Previous literature has suggested that employment may present barriers to effective involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011), and the qualitative stage parents reported barriers to involvement relating to work demands and resultant time pressures. These were particularly reported as being barriers to school-based involvement and home-school conferencing, with parents finding it difficult to attend school occasions or meetings due to work commitments. As can be seen from Table 6.2, a majority of parents (63.1%) indicated that they were employed outside of the home. The next most common response was that parents were looking after home/family. Reported unemployment rates were 5% which was lower than the national rate in 2010 (approximately 13%) when data were collected. Later analyses will be presented which examine differences in involvement levels across these employment groups.

Employment Type

Parents who were employed were asked to give their occupation, and to provide this information for their partner where applicable. The responses provided were then coded according to the International Socioeconomic Index (ISEI; Ganzeboom, de Graaf & Treiman, 1992) which is a scale which aims to capture both educational and income differences between occupation categories. Where occupations were provided for two parents, the highest was taken as the score for that family. Participants who listed their occupation as 'self-employed' without indicating the area in which they were employed were excluded (n=6). Scores on the ISEI range from 16 to 90. Low scores are assigned to occupations such as labourers, porters, cleaners etc. and the highest scores are assigned to judges and doctors. Categories of low, medium and high SES were derived from the ISEI scores. Two cut-points were made on the ISEI scale so that approximately one third of parents fell below the first cut point, roughly one third were between the two cut-points and the remainder fell above the higher cut-points (as in Gilleece et al., 2011).

Parent Educational Attainment

Parents were asked to indicate the highest level of education they had completed. As can be seen from Table 6.2 above, there is a high proportion of parents in the current sample (42%) who have attained at least a Bachelor's degree. The most common response given by parents (approximately one third) is that they have completed a Post Leaving Certificate qualification (less than degree level). Sixteen per cent of parents ceased education after

second-level, while 8% did not complete secondary school. How education level of parents relates to levels of involvement will be explored below.

Medical Card Holders

Parents were also asked to indicate whether they were in possession of a medical card. In Ireland, medical card holders are entitled to free general medical services. In the general population (for those under 70 years of age) medical card issue is based on a means testing system (unless the individual has a disability), and medical cards are issued to low-income applicants. Medical card ownership has thus often been used as a surrogate or proxy for disadvantage in studies which assess socioeconomic status (e.g. Harris et al., 2006; Whelton et al., 2007). As SES has been found to be related to parental involvement in previous studies, medical card possession was assessed in the present survey. In the current sample of parents, 17% indicated that they held a medical card. This is in comparison to approximately one-third of the general population in Ireland who are medical card holders (Central Statistics Office, 2011). In Gilleece et al.'s (2011) sample of Irish-medium parents, 12% were found to be medical card holders.

Number of Books in the Home

The number of books in the home has been used many studies as a proxy for educational resources or 'scholarly culture' in the home (e.g. Evans, Kelley, Sikora & Treiman, 2010; GUI, 2012). Schütz et al (2008) argue that a large number of books in the home can be interpreted as indicative of a family background where educational and academic pursuits are valued and, as such, is an important indicator of the social and educational background of a student's family. Since books are also goods which must be purchased, they also argue that the number of books in the home is a useful proxy for the economic status of a family. Previous studies have found that the number of books in the home to be the single greatest predictor of students' academic achievement (superior even to parental education level). Parents in the present study were thus asked to report whether they had a low, moderate, or high number of books in the home. Over half (53.9%) had a moderate number of books in the home, while only 12% reported a number that would be classified as a low number of books.

Summary

The sociodemographic findings show that, in this sample, there are high numbers of parents with background characteristics which have been found to be associated with involvement in other contexts. The majority are in two-parent families, many have

received a third level education, and the proportion of medical card holders is lower than that in the general population. However, the findings do also highlight that there is heterogeneity in terms of family sociodemographic characteristics; that Irish immersion parents are not uniformly socioeconomically advantaged and there is a proportion of parents who appear to come from less advantaged backgrounds. Previous research would suggest that this would mean that these parents could be experiencing challenges to successful involvement. However, it remains to be seen whether the demographic trends in involvement found in other settings are also found in the immersion setting, and this will be explored later in the chapter.

6.8.2 Linguistic Profile of Parents

Given the qualitative findings outlined in Chapter 5, it was hypothesised that, in the immersion context, parents' linguistic background may be associated with levels of involvement. As such, several questions were included in the survey which aimed to explore the linguistic profile of immersion parents in the current sample.

Home Language(s) while Growing Up

Parents were asked to indicate which language (or mix of languages) was used in their family home while they were growing up. Respondents were also asked to give similar information for their partners, where applicable. Results are presented in Tables 6.3.

Table 6.3: Language(s) used in parents' homes while growing up

Language(s) used	Self(n %)	Partner (n %)
English only	446 (79.4)	422 (86.5)
English and Irish but mostly English	97 (17.3)	45 (9.2)
English and Irish, but mostly Irish	7 (1.2)	6 (1.1)
Irish only	4 (0.7)	1 (0.2)
Another language/mix of languages	8 (1.4)	14 (2.9)

Irish featured in the home lives of only a small proportion of parents while they themselves were growing up. The majority of respondents (79.4%) indicated that Irish did not feature at all in their home lives and indicated that Irish was not spoken at all in 86.5% of their partners' homes while they were growing up.

Types of Schools Attended

Parents were also asked whether they and/or their partners had themselves attended an Irish-medium school, either at primary or secondary level. As can be seen from Table 6.4 below, the vast majority of parents had not been educated through Irish themselves.

Table 6.4: Language medium of schools attended by parents

Level	Type	Self (n %)	Partner (n %)
Primary School	Irish-medium	46 (8.3)	41 (8.3)
	English-medium	489 (87.9)	418 (84.8)
	Other	21 (3.8)	34 (6.9)
Secondary School	Irish-medium	31 (5.5)	15 (3.7)
	English-medium	420 (89.7)	358 (88.8)
	Other	17 (3.6)	30 (7.4)

Proficiency in Irish

Given that in Phase 1 of the study, parents repeatedly referred to their own Irish proficiency while discussing their involvement or lack thereof, the survey aimed to explore proficiency levels within the sample. Participants were asked to assess their own ability in Irish across four dimensions of receptive and expressive language: Speaking, Understanding, Reading and Writing. Those with partners were asked to give an assessment of their partners' proficiencies for each of these aspects of language also. The results are summarised in Table 6.5.

For further analyses, responses on the four proficiency dimensions were grouped for the formation of three proficiency groups: low proficiency (LP), medium proficiency (MP) and high proficiency (LP). Participants who indicated that they had 'not a word' or their proficiency extended to 'a few words' or 'short sentences' only were deemed to be low proficiency on that dimension of language. Those who could speak or understand 'bits of conversations' or could read or write a short article, letter or note, were deemed to have medium or moderate proficiency in Irish. Respondents who could understand or speak most or all conversations, and could read a book or write any document were designated as high proficiency for that dimension. Parents were scored 1 for low proficiency, 2 for medium

Table 6.5 Parents' self-assessed receptive and expressive Irish abilities

Understanding	Self n(%)	Partner n(%)	Speaking	Self n(%)	Partner n(%)
Not a word	5 (0.9)	32 (6.6)	Not a word	6 (1.1)	42 (7.5)
A few words	41 (7.3)	142 (29.2)	A few words	68 (12.1)	160 (33.1)
Short sentences	113 (20.1)	107 (22.0)	Short sentences	172 (30.6)	104 (21.5)
Bits of conversations	219 (38.9)	114 (23.5)	Bits of conversations	200 (35.5)	121 (25.1)
Most conversations	139 (24.7)	67 (13.8)	Most conversations	71 (12.6)	34 (7.0)
All conversations	46 (8.2)	24 (4.9)	All conversations	46 (8.2)	22 (4.6)
Reading	Writing				
Not a word	3 (0.5)	58 (12.1)	Not a word	16 (2.8)	91 (16.2)
A few words	50 (8.9)	125 (26.2)	A few words	93 (16.5)	153 (31.8)
Short sentences	190 (33.8)	135 (28.2)	Short sentences	220 (39.1)	127 (26.4)
Short article/letter/note	242 (43.0)	117 (24.5)	Short article/letter/note	185 (32.9)	88 (18.3)
A book	77 (13.7)	43 (9.0)	Any document	39 (6.9)	22 (4.6)

proficiency and 3 for high proficiency based on responses for each domain. Parents' total proficiency score was then calculated by summing their recoded score (i.e. 1-3) on each domain to give a total score (range: 4-12). Those with a score of 4 or less were considered low proficiency (n = 124), those with a score of 5-8 were considered medium proficiency (n = 275) and those with scores of 9-12 were considered high proficiency (n = 153).

The same procedure was used to calculate respondents' partners' Irish proficiency, where applicable. Data for partners' proficiency was provided by 478 respondents. Again, low proficiency (n = 213), medium proficiency (n = 181) and high proficiency groups (n = 84) were formed on the basis of these responses. Partner proficiency was deemed to be an important factor to take into account in the survey analysis. Barriers to parental involvement relating to one parent's low proficiency might be offset to some degree by the presence of a more proficient adult living in the home. Similarly, the qualitative data revealed that high proficiency parents could experience barriers to using Irish in the home if their partner was less proficient in Irish than they and their child(ren). Not wishing to exclude low proficiency family members was a frequently mentioned explanation for low levels of Irish use in the home. As such, rather than simply looking at the survey respondents' Irish proficiency in isolation, the various proficiency combinations of two-parent families (n = 472) were also explored (see Table 6.6).

Table 6.6: Proficiency level combinations in two-parent families

Partner	Self		
	Low Proficiency	Medium Proficiency	High Proficiency
Low Proficiency	69 (14.62%)	107 (22.67%)	68 (14.41%)
Medium Proficiency	20 (4.24%)	93 (19.7%)	44 (9.32%)
High Proficiency	17 (3.60%)	29 (6.14%)	25 (5.3%)

As can be derived from the data contained in Table 6.6, of the two-parent families surveyed in the current sample, 14.62% consist of two low proficiency parents, 26.91% consist of one low proficiency and one medium proficiency parent, 19.7% have two medium proficiency parents, 18.01% have one low proficiency and one high proficiency parent. 15.46% consist of one medium proficiency parent and one high proficiency parent, and just 5.3% of two parent households consist of two highly proficient parents (see Figure 6.1).

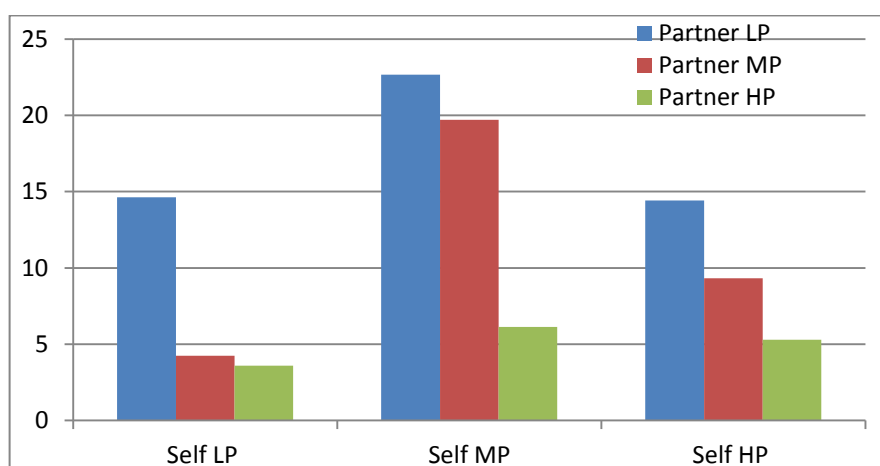


Fig. 6.1 Respondents' and Partners' Irish Proficiency Combinations (%)

Parental Attitudes towards the Irish Language

Modelling of attitudes and behaviours has been posited a primary mechanism by which parental involvement influences achievement. It stands to reason, therefore, that parents' modelling of attitudes towards the target language may influence children's L2 attitude formation. Thus parental attitudes towards Irish, and whether (and if so, *how*) these are conveyed to children were also explored, with participants asked to rate their current attitude towards Irish on a 7-point scale, where 1 indicated a very unfavourable attitude and 7 indicated a very favourable attitude towards the Irish language.

A very large majority (92.8%) of respondents expressed favourable attitudes towards Irish, with over half (56.8%) choosing the highest score of 7 to indicate their attitude, and almost a quarter (24.3%) scoring 6 and 11.8% scoring 5, just above neutral. By contrast, only 3.8% expressed broadly unfavourable attitudes towards Irish, and only 3.2% indicated that they were neutral in relation to the Irish language (see first columns in Table 6.2).

Given that participants in the qualitative phase reported that partner characteristics could also influence aspects of their own involvement (such as use of Irish in the home), those respondents with partners were also asked to give an estimate of their partner's attitude towards the Irish language where possible. Respondents believed that their partners also felt favourably disposed towards the Irish language, with only 6.3% indicating broadly negative attitudes towards Irish held by their partners (see second set of columns in Fig. 6.2). A larger proportion of partners were reported to hold a 'neutral' attitude to Irish than respondents reported for themselves (14.6% compared to 3.2%). However, a considerable majority of 79.2% of respondents indicated that their partner held broadly positive attitudes towards the Irish language (over a third or 37.4% with the highest attitude rating of 7, 22.5% a rating of 6 and 19.3% of 5), although again these attitude scores were overall lower than they reported for themselves.

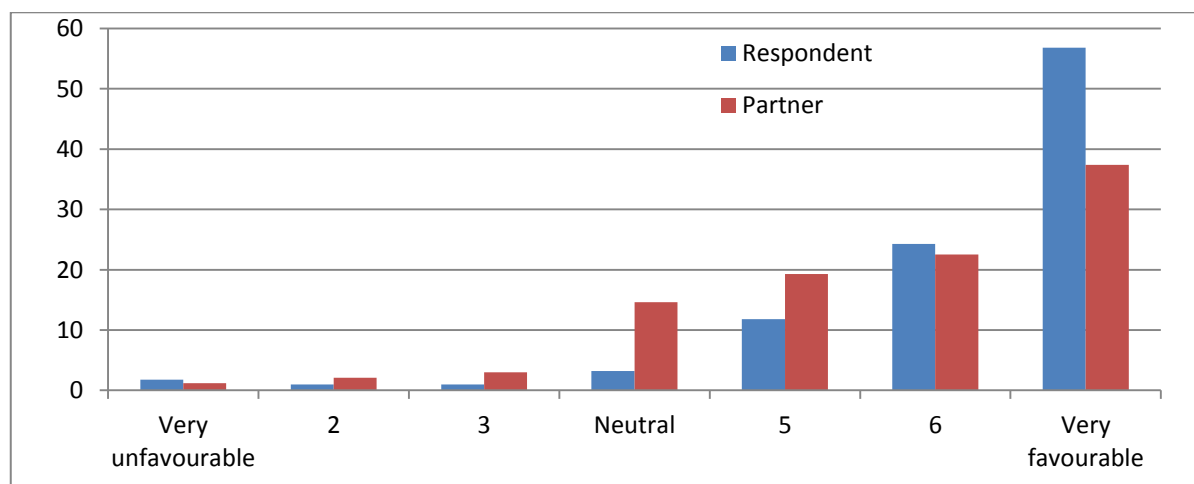


Fig. 6.2 Attitudes to Irish: Respondents' and Respondents' Reports of Partners' attitudes

Despite holding positive attitudes to Irish now, it had been noted that the majority of participants in Phase I of the present study had revealed that they had not enjoyed learning Irish at school and had generally had negative attitudes towards the language while growing up. Because it is possible that those who had negative associations with the language when learning it themselves may be more reluctant to be involved in their children's Irish language learning than those who had always felt positively towards the

language, it was deemed important that these prior attitudes also be explored. Survey respondents were asked to give an assessment of their attitude held towards the Irish language while they were growing up by on a 7-point scale. Percentage frequency responses are presented in figure 6.3.

Just over one third (35.2%) of parents responded that they had previously held broadly negative attitudes towards Irish, while 26.2% indicated they were neutral towards Irish and 38.6% indicated that they felt favourably towards the Irish language while growing up. The relationship between attitudes towards the language and involvement activities will be further considered below.

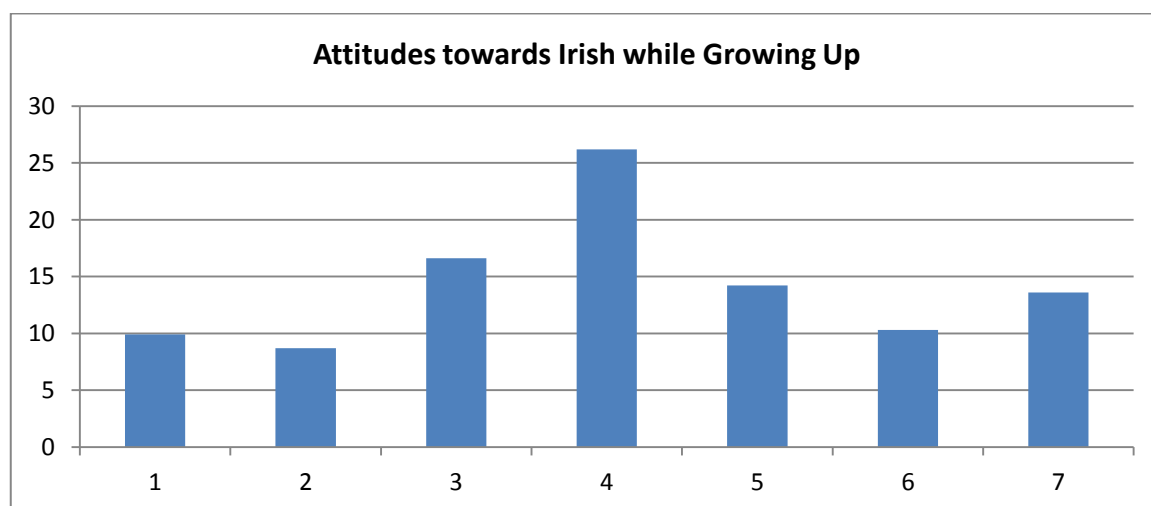


Fig. 6.3: Parents reported attitudes towards Irish while growing up (%)

Respondents' reports of their previous and current attitudes towards the Irish language appear to support the findings from Phase 1, where parents indicated that they had disliked Irish while they were learning it at school for a variety of reasons (e.g. finding it difficult and disliking the manner in which the language was taught). Parents reported developing more favourable attitudes towards the language over time, and felt that immersion in Irish would inculcate such attitudes towards Irish in their children from an early age. They also reported believing that it would be 'easier' for their children to attain the language than it had been for them and this was described as a motivating factor for choosing Irish-medium education in the qualitative phase. Reasons for parents' choice of immersion education reported in the present phase are now explored in greater detail.

6.8.3 Reasons for School Choice

Respondents were asked to a number of closed-class items relating to potential factors involved in their choice of school derived from the literature and from Phase I. Parents were asked to indicate whether each of the factors listed was a factor *in favour* of the school they chose, a factor *against* choosing the school, or was not a factor either way in their decision. Percentage frequencies of responses are presented in Table 6.7 below.

Table 6.7: Percentage Frequencies of Responses to Potential School Choice Factors

Factor	PRO	CON	NOT A FACTOR
Desire to have the language properly taught to child	93.5	0.9	5.6
Desire to give child the Irish atmosphere/culture of a Gaelscoil	91.5	2.0	6.5
Desire to offer my child a good grounding in Irish for secondary school	87.3	0.7	12.0
Commitment of teachers in Gaelscoileanna	81.5	1.1	17.3
Desire to preserve the language for posterity	74.7	2.3	23.1
Educational record (good exam results etc.) of Gaelscoileanna in general	73.0	1.9	25.1
This Gaelscoil's general reputation or status in the community	72.0	1.5	26.5
Accessibility to home	52.4	7.7	39.9
Pupil-teacher ratios in Gaelscoileanna	48.0	9.5	42.5
Desire to have the Nationalist/Republican tradition ensured	28.5	10.3	61.2
Parental ability to assist child with Irish homework etc.	25.9	18.3	55.9
Physical Facilities	14.2	16.1	69.6
Child's level of Irish at the time	10.7	5.8	83.5
Child's wishes to attend this particular school	9.6	4.0	87.1
Child's wishes to attend a Gaelscoil	9.2	3.4	87.4

Responses to this question provide very interesting information on parents' school choice. The most frequent 'Pro' responses concerned factors relating to Irish language and culture. 'Desire to have the language properly taught to child' and 'Desire to give child the Irish atmosphere/culture of a Gaelscoil' were, perhaps unsurprisingly, significant motivators of IM school choice for over 90% of respondents. The least common 'Pro' responses were given to factors relating to children themselves such as the child's wishes to attend the school and child's level of Irish at the time of the decision. The item with the highest proportion of 'Con' responses related to parents' ability to support their children's learning, with 18.3% recognising their own inability to be involved with homework as a disadvantage when choosing Irish-medium education. Just over a quarter of parents (25.9%) reported that they saw their ability to help with Irish homework as an advantage at the time of choosing, while interestingly, for over half of parents (55.9%) in this sample,

their ability to support their children’s learning was reported not to have been a consideration in their decision to choose an immersion school.

Parents were then asked to indicate what they considered to be the *main* factors in their decision by indicating which three factors were the most important for them when choosing a school for their child. The percentage frequencies with which each of the factors appeared in parents’ top three list is presented in Table 6.8 below.

Table 6.8: Frequencies with which each factor appeared in parents’ top three factors

Factor	%
Desire to have the language properly taught to child	53.8
Desire to give my child the Irish atmosphere/culture of a Gaelscoil	49.5
Desire to offer child a good grounding in Irish for secondary school	37.6
Educational record (good exam results etc.) of Gaelscoileanna in general	28.1
Commitment of teachers in Gaelscoileanna	27.6
This Gaelscoil's general reputation or status in the community	27.2
Desire to preserve the language for posterity	24.5
Accessibility to home	18.9
Pupil-teacher ratios in Gaelscoileanna	17.2
Desire to have the Nationalist/Republican tradition ensured	6.6
Child’s level of Irish at the time	1.7
Physical Facilities	1.5
Other	1.3
Child’s wishes to attend a Gaelscoil	1.3
Child’s wishes to attend this particular school	1.1
Parental ability to assist child with Irish homework etc.	0.9

What emerges is an interesting divide: while items relating to Irish culture and Irish language attainment were described as advantages of Irish-medium education by a vast majority of parents (over 90%), these featured as the primary considerations for much smaller numbers of parents. ‘Desire to give child the atmosphere/culture’ of a Gaelscoil and ‘Desire to have the language properly taught to child’ featured in the top three factors of approximately half of the parents surveyed (49.5% and 53.8% respectively). Other factors appeared in the top three for between a quarter and a third of parents, including the IM schools’ general educational record, the commitment of teachers, the particular school’s reputation, and the desire to preserve Irish. Factors included in the top three by a lower percentage included accessibility and the pupil-teacher ratio.

Finally, parents were asked to choose one factor which was the most important or ‘Crunch’ factor in their decision to send their child to the Gaelscoil. Percentage frequencies of responses are outlined in Table 6.9 below.

Table 6.9: ‘Crunch’ factors in parents’ decisions

Factor	%
Desire to have the language properly taught to my child	20.8
Desire to give child the Irish atmosphere/culture of a Gaelscoil	15.6
Desire to offer child a good grounding in Irish for secondary school	12.8
Educational record (good exam results etc.) of Gaelscoileanna in general	11.3
Commitment of teachers in Gaelscoileanna	9.2
Desire to preserve the language for posterity	7.4
This Gaelscoil's general reputation or status in the community	6.7
Pupil-teacher ratios in Gaelscoileanna	5.5
Accessibility to home	4.4
Desire to have the Nationalist/Republican tradition ensured	2.3
Other	1.3
Parental ability to assist child with Irish homework etc.	1.1
Child’s wishes to attend this particular school	0.6
Physical Facilities	0.4
Child’s wishes to attend a Gaelscoil	0.4
Child’s level of Irish at the time	0.2

Responses to this question reveal that the desire to have the language taught properly to their child was the ‘crunch’ factor for about a fifth of respondents (20.8%) and another 7% noting identifying their desire to preserve Irish for posterity, while another sixth (15.6%) identified a desire to have the Irish atmosphere or culture of an IM school as their central motivation. Thus, over two fifths of respondents (43.8%) reported what could be described as integrative motivation, with another 12.8% reporting what could be described as a more instrumental desire for the child to get a good grounding in Irish before secondary school when high stakes testing takes place. Overall, for 56.6% of parents, the crucial factors in their school choice were related to aspects of Irish language and culture which they wanted provided for their children by the school. For the remaining 40.5%, more general educational advantages such as educational record (11.3%), teacher commitment (9.2%) and pupil-teacher ratios in IM schools (5.5%) were the crunch factors for another group, while more local factors such as accessibility (4.4%) and the status/reputation of the particular school (6.7%) were the crunch factors for a small group of respondents. Thus the crunch factors seem to split between specifically language-related factors, and more general educational and local factors. This echoes the findings from the qualitative data, where parents reported choosing the school for a variety of perceived benefits.

The survey also explored whether parents' expectations had been met, i.e. whether or not they were happy with their choice of school. Parents were thus asked to rate their satisfaction with their decision.

Table 6.10: Parents' ratings of satisfaction with their choice of school

	Very dissatisfied	2	3	Neutral	5	6	Very satisfied
%	1.8	0.2	1.4	2.3	5.6	16.9	71.8

Overall, parents appeared to be very satisfied with their decision now, with only 3.4% indicating dissatisfaction, and only 2.3% indicating that they felt neutral about their decision now.

6.8.4 Involvement Activities

The frequency of the responding parents' engagement in a number of involvement activities was assessed. First, parents were asked to indicate how often they participated in a number of home-based involvement activities with/for their child. Frequency responses are presented in Table 6.11, and show that the ways in which the majority of the respondents report daily/frequent involvement relate to enquiring about their child's school day, ensuring that their child has an appropriate area in which to complete homework, offering to help with homework and checking that the child has completed assignments. Looking at more specific activities, it was notable that over four-fifths of respondents report daily/frequent engagement in listening to their child's reading in both Irish and English, and slightly lower proportions report daily/frequent helping with Irish and English homework in general, and with maths homework. Parents were less likely to help with projects or art and craft activities, probably because these are assigned less frequently as homework. However, the activity which most parents report *rarely* engaging in is reading to their child in Irish, with 40.8% of parents indicating that they rarely or never read Irish stories to their child as compared to just 7.7% of respondents who reported that they never/rarely read English stories to their child. Just over three quarters of parents (75.7%) indicated they that regularly read in English to their children, but only about one in five (21.3%) parents reported that they regularly read in Irish to their child.

Table 6.11: Frequencies of responses to items relating to home-based involvement activities

	Daily	Often	Some-times	Never/ Rarely
Ask about child's day at school	95.3	3.4	0.7	0.5
I check that my child has completed all homework	83.2	12.2	3.9	0.7
I make sure that my child has a quiet place to do homework	72.8	21.0	5.3	0.9
Offer to help with homework	66.2	25.3	6.4	2.4
I listen to my child read aloud in Irish	66.1	19.7	10.5	3.7
I listen to my child read aloud in English	64.3	21.2	10.4	4.2
I help my child with Irish homework	60.0	17.7	15.9	6.3
I help my child with English homework	57.1	20.2	15.7	7.1
I help my child with Maths homework	56.9	22.3	15.7	5.0
I test my child's spellings/multiplication tables	50.6	30.7	8.8	3.9
I direct my child towards learning resources	48.4	31.5	14.0	6.1
I help my child with project work	39.5	29.2	19.6	11.7
I help my child with art/craft activities	38.5	30.7	20.7	10.1
I read a story to my child in English	38.0	37.7	16.6	7.7
I read a story to my child in Irish	5.8	15.5	37.9	40.8

Home Use of Irish

Immersion literature has shown that out-of-school use of the target language is associated with higher levels of proficiency (e.g. Murtagh, 2007) and parents were asked in the survey to indicate the frequency with which they speak Irish in the home in a variety of situations. Responses are summarised in Table 6.12. Table 6.12 indicates that only a small proportion of the respondents here came from households using Irish most of the time (3.8%) or all of the time (1.6%). Indeed, one in five respondents (19.5%) indicated that they never/rarely use Irish in their homes. However, over half the respondents (58%) reported that they mostly use Irish at homework time, and another third (36%) reported they sometimes used Irish during homework, indicating that homework activities are the most likely to elicit Irish use on a regular basis at home. Mealtimes and play with the child elicited less regular use of Irish among about half of the respondents. Overall, over three quarter (75%) of these parents reported that they use Irish between some to half of the time in their home interactions, indicating that a sizeable proportion of these respondents try to use Irish sometimes at least with their child outside of the school environment.

Table 6.12: Percentage frequency responses for Home Use of Irish Scale

	Most/ All of the time	Some/ half of the time	Never/ Rarely
At homework time	58.0	36.4	4.7
At mealtimes	9.9	68.1	24.0
Playing with child	3.8	63.0	33.3
Reading stories with child	4.7	55.7	39.7
While doing housework	4.9	51.3	43.9
In the car	5.2	45.6	49.2
While watching TV	5.5	45.1	52.4
While with relatives	4.6	35.4	59.9
At religious services	6.1	30.1	63.8
Overall at home	5.4	75.1	19.5

The above questions asked respondents about their own use of Irish with their child. However, acknowledging that children may make use of Irish in other interactions also, parents were asked to indicate how frequently they observed their children using Irish when not in school.

Table 6.13: Percentage frequency responses regarding child's use of Irish in the home

	Most/ All of the time	Some/ Half of the time	Never/ Rarely
While doing homework	53.1	40.7	6.2
On the way to/from school	9.9	60.2	29.9
While playing with friends	12.8	57.6	29.6
With siblings	9.1	54.1	36.9
While on the phone	1.7	25.6	72.7
While online	1.5	17.6	81.0

Again, homework was the activity that was most associated with Irish use by children, with 53% of respondents saying that children use Irish most of the time while working on homework. Table 6.13 shows that between 50-60% of parents reported some use of Irish by their child when walking to school, when playing with friends and with siblings. However, another 29.6% of respondents indicated that they never/rarely noticed their

children speaking Irish with friends, with 36.9% indicating that their children never/rarely spoke Irish with siblings.

Parents in Phase 1 mentioned a variety of barriers to using Irish with their children, and these were incorporated into the survey. Respondents were asked to indicate how true a number of statements relating to their home Irish use were for them. They responded on a 5-point scale where a response of 1 indicated that the statement was not at all true for them and a response of 5 indicated that the statement was very true for them. Responses to each of the items are summarised in Table 6.14.

Table 6.14: Percentage frequency responses to items relating to home Irish use

	Very True	Somewhat True	Neither True/nor Untrue	Somewhat Untrue	Totally Untrue
I am not good enough at speaking Irish to use it effectively in my home	30.7	17.5	25.5	9.8	16.5
I try every now and then but it is hard to keep going	20.5	23.8	34.3	10.5	10.8
I don't see any obstacles to increasing the use of Irish in my home	13.9	17.0	27.9	16.8	24.4
My child is reluctant to speak Irish outside of school	10.1	15.4	19.7	15.8	38.9
I feel my child has enough exposure to Irish at school	5.9	7.5	16.3	14.6	55.8
I do not think it is important to increase the use of Irish in my home	4.4	4.6	14.6	15.5	61.0
I haven't time to give the effort needed to increase the use of Irish in my home	3.1	12.8	22.7	17.4	44.0

In Phase 1, low parental proficiency was proffered as an explanation for low levels of home Irish use. Over two fifths (44.3%) of respondents agreed that they tried to use Irish every day, but found it difficult, and almost half (48.2%) of respondents in this phase agreed that they felt that their Irish is not good enough to use effectively in their home. However, a majority (76.5%) agreed that it is important to increase Irish use in the home, and disagreed that their child has enough exposure to Irish in school (70.4%). About a quarter (25.5%) of respondents agreed that their children were reluctant to speak Irish outside of school, and about a sixth (13.4%) agreed that they believed that their children had enough exposure to the Irish language during school hours and did not need to speak it at home. A similar minority (15.9%) agreed that they did not have the time required to increase the use of Irish in their home, echoing a theme revealed in Phase 1 of the study.

Contact with School

Parents were asked to indicate the amount of contact which they had with their children's schools and how satisfied they were with the level of contact which they had. The modal category was those who reported 'some contact' (26%), while 19-24% reported their contact at each of the higher levels, or 64% overall. Only 8.7% reported little or no contact. Responses are presented in Figures 6.4 and 6.5.

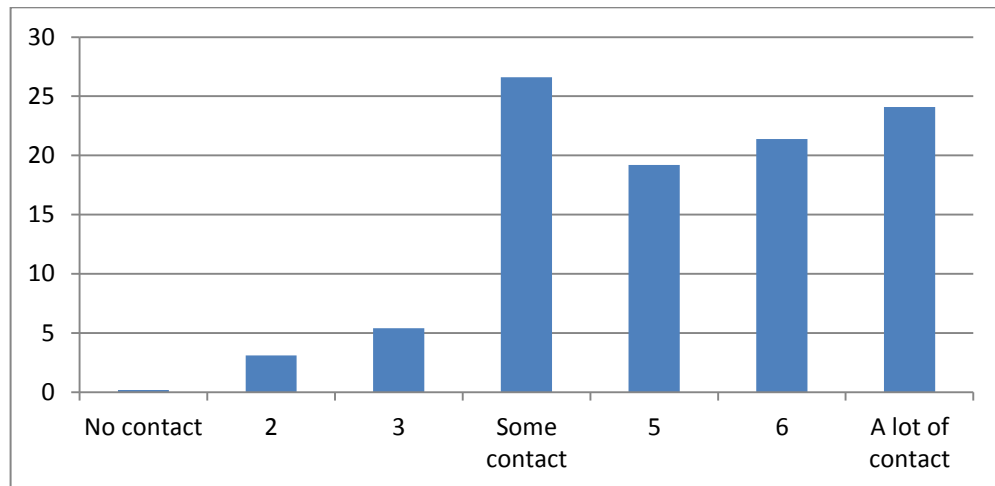


Fig. 6.4: Parents' reports of the frequency of their contact with child's school

Almost two fifths (38.7%) of responding parents were highly satisfied with their contact with their child's school, another third (35.3%) were somewhat satisfied, and over a sixth indicated neutrality on the topic. Ratings of contact and satisfaction with this level of contact were significantly positively correlated ($\rho = 0.71$)

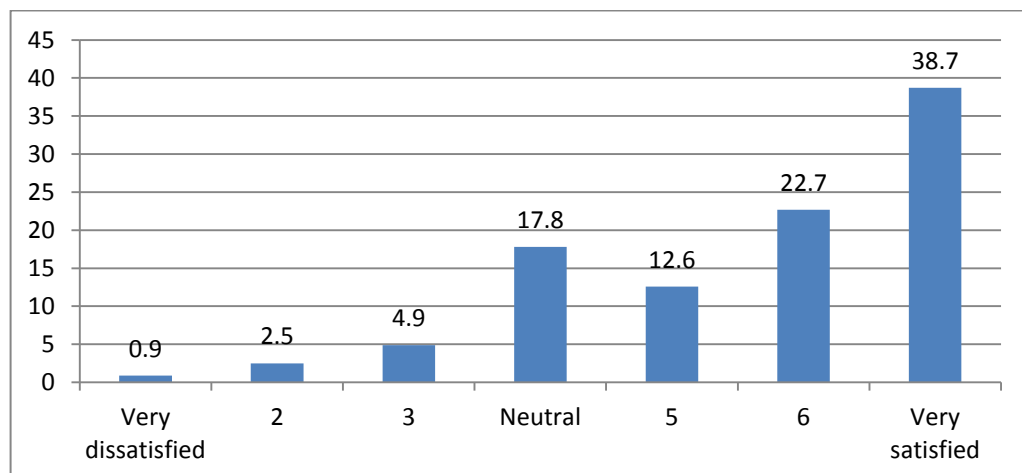


Fig. 6.5: Parents' satisfaction with their level of contact with child's school

Parents were asked to provide further detail on the nature and extent of this contact by indicating the frequency with which they are present in the school for a number of occasions (see Table 6.15). The only daily activity selected by the majority of respondents (71.6%) was dropping or collecting their child from school. About a quarter of respondents (24.7%) attended a school occasion about monthly and a third (30%) reported discussing their child's progress each month with the teacher, but the majority (61.2%) indicated that they went to the school to discuss their child's progress just once a year.

Table 6.15: Parents' reports of contact with their children's schools

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Never/ Yearly
Deposit/Collect child	71.6	15.4	7.1	5.9
To discuss child's progress	2.0	3.9	30.0	64.1
To attend a school occasion	2.0	2.0	24.7	71.1
To help out in classroom	0.2	2.9	4.4	92.5
To attend Irish classes	0.0	7.5	2.6	89.9
For fundraising activities	2.0	2.0	2.6	74.7
To attend other adult classes	0.0	2.4	0.6	97.1

Over three quarters of respondents (75.8%) indicated that they never helped out in the classroom and 16.7% did so just once a year. Only 7.5% of respondents indicated that they attend weekly Irish language classes. Interestingly, the majority 74.7 % reported that they attended fundraising activities only once a year.

Language used on school premises

Parents were asked to indicate which language or mix of languages they use when present in their child's school. Responding parents showed a fairly even spread in terms of their language use in the school: over a third (35.6%) of parents revealed that they mainly use English while in their child's school, 35.4% indicated that they use a 50:50 mix of English and Irish, and 28.9% said that they use mostly Irish while on school premises.

Table 6.16: Language(s) used by parents on school premises

%	English Only	Mostly English	Half English, Half Irish	Mostly Irish	Irish Only
	8.00	27.6	35.4	20.4	8.5

Parents were then asked to indicate whether they agreed with a series of statements regarding their use of English and/or Irish when present in their child's school. Parents were asked to tick as many boxes as they felt were appropriate to their situation. The items were selected based on parents' reports in Phase 1 of the study

Table 6.17: Percentage frequency of agreement with school language use statements

Factor	% agree
I try to speak Irish because it's important to keep an 'all-Irish' atmosphere in the school	62.2
I try to speak Irish because the teachers ask parents to	56.7
I speak mostly/all English because I am uncomfortable using/unable to use Irish	42.6
I try to speak Irish because I see other parents doing so	26.1
I use only/mostly Irish and feel comfortable doing so	15.1

Most respondents agreed that they attempt to use Irish when present in their child's school and agreed that their efforts to use Irish in the school were due to their recognition of its importance to the ethos of the school (62%), or because teachers asked them to do so in their particular school (57%). Only a minority (26%) indicated that their efforts were linked to other parents' language use. However, two fifths (42%) reported that they were not able to speak Irish, or too uncomfortable to do so, compared to just under a sixth (15%) who were comfortable Irish speakers and were able to use Irish in most or all of their interactions with their child's school.

Parents' Ratings of their Involvement Relative to Others

Responding parents were then asked to provide an assessment of their overall involvement in their children's education relative to average levels of involvement of parents of pupils in their child's class. Parents responded on a seven-point rating scale. A response of 1

indicated that the parent felt that they were much less involved than average, a response of 4 was indicative of average levels of involvement while a response of 7 meant that parents believed themselves to be a lot more involved than the average parent. Two-fifths (42.8%) of respondents felt they had average levels of involvement. Approximately one quarter (24.9%) of respondents felt that they were less involved than the average parent while 32.5% of parents felt that they had higher than average levels of involvement.

Change in Involvement over Time

Parental involvement literature has demonstrated that levels of parental involvement decrease as a function of the child's age. The present study aimed to assess whether such trends hold true in the immersion context. Phase 1 revealed conflicting findings in relation to this. Some parents interviewed indicated that, as their child surpassed them in terms of Irish proficiency and as the content of homework became more difficult, they found it more difficult to be involved in home-based activities. Additionally, parents of older children were more likely to mention that their children were reluctant to have them involved. By contrast, other parents indicated that their own Irish proficiency increased as their child progressed through school and this, as well as increased familiarity with school staff, meant that they were more comfortable in, and thus more likely to be present in, their children's schools. Others felt that as the child's work became harder, the child required more parental help and support.

Survey respondents with a child in the senior half of the school (3rd Class-6th Class) were asked to indicate whether their overall levels of involvement had changed over time. Over a fifth (22.2%) of parents indicated that they had become less involved in their child's education over the course of their child's time at school, but 41% indicated that their overall level of involvement had stayed about the same over the years. Interestingly, over a third (36.9%) of parents indicated that they had become *more* involved over the course of their child's school career. This will be discussed further in relation to parents' growing confidence in Irish.

It was also deemed important to explore which parental involvement activities increased decreased, or stayed the same over time. The findings are summarised in Table 6.18.

Table 6.18: Parents' reports of changes in specific involvement activities over time

Activity	More likely	No change	Less likely
Check that child has completed homework	30.2	50.2	19.6
Ask child about his/her day at school	29.9	69.7	0.4
Praise child's school achievements	28.5	70.8	0.7
Speak Irish to child	27.9	54.0	18.1
Help child with homework activities	26.5	44.7	28.7
Volunteer at child's school	20.7	60.5	18.8
Read to child in Irish	13.3	29.5	57.2
Read to child in English	8.8	31.0	60.2

Not surprisingly, most respondents were less likely to read to older children (in Irish and English) than when their children were younger. Similar numbers of parents indicated that they were more involved in homework activities (26.5%) as reported that they were less involved with homework (28.7%). A high proportion of parents indicated that there had been no change in the levels of their involvement over time.

Suggested Supports

Phase 1 indicated that immersion parents experience barriers to involvement. Parents also revealed that they lacked appropriate supports and resources necessary to support their children's education. Survey respondents were asked to rate how useful they would find a series of potential supports. Supports included in the question were derived from the nature of the barriers revealed by interviewed parents, supports suggested by interviewed parents, and by practices undertaken in other immersion contexts. Responses are summarised in Table 6.19.

Table 6.19: Usefulness of potential parental supports (%)

	Very useful	Some Use	No Use
Parents' Irish classes with focus on conversation	59.2	32.0	8.9
Parents' Irish classes with focus on helping with homework/textbooks	57.2	33.1	9.7
Information on web resources in Irish for child	55.6	40.5	3.9
Information on educational games for child	52.2	42.7	5.0
More information about what child is learning at school	51.8	42.2	6.0
A newsletter that would advise parents on using Irish in the home	50.0	43.2	6.8
Information on Irish-language activities in your local area	48.4	49.0	2.6
Instruction on how to support your child's Irish literacy things	47.9	35.8	6.3
Advice on sourcing and selecting Irish reading material for your child	47.1	46.6	6.3
CDs of Irish songs/nursery rhymes/poems etc.	45.8	46.6	7.7
Information on TV programmes/films/DVDs in Irish for your child	45.3	47.6	7.1
Instruction on how to support your child's English literacy skills	39.7	46.0	11.2
An internet forum to discuss issues with other parents	29.3	62.6	18.1

Over half of respondents selected Irish classes for parents as the most useful support, with little difference between those who wanted a focus on conversation versus homework and textbook use. Over half also identified information on web resources and educational games as desirable supports. About half of respondents thought that it would be very useful to have information streams on what their child is learning, on how to use Irish in the home, how to support literacy and selection of appropriate Irish reading materials, CDs and TV programmes. These supports will be discussed further later.

6.8.5 Inferential Analyses: Exploring Relationships

Involvement as Assessed by FIQ

As was outlined in Chapter 4, the Family Involvement Questionnaire (FIQ; Fantuzzo et al., 2000) is a multidimensional assessment of parents' involvement in the education of their children. The measure assesses three main constructs: home-based involvement, school-based involvement, and home-school conferencing. The measure consists of 42 items, to which parents are asked to respond on a 4-point likert-type scale. Parents are asked to indicate whether they partake in the listed activity rarely, sometimes, often, or always.

The internal consistency of each of the three involvement subscales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. All three subscales had good levels of internal reliability. The alpha value for the School-Based Involvement subscale (SBI) was 0.785; the alpha value for the Home-Based Involvement subscale (HBI) was 0.830; the Home-School Conferencing subscale (HSC) was found to have an alpha value of 0.847.

The demographic and linguistic profile of parents in the sample was outlined earlier. Further analyses were conducted to investigate the relationship between these parental background variables and the dimensions of parental involvement assessed by the FIQ. To investigate whether there were differences in the three main dimensions of the FIQ (school-based involvement, home-based involvement and home-school conferencing) as a function of parental background variables and age of child, a series of one way multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were conducted. Descriptive statistics for these variables are presented in Table 6.20 below.

Prior to conducting all multivariate analyses, preliminary assumption testing was conducted in order to check homogeneity of variance/covariance matrices, linearity, multicollinearity, and normality. All conditions were satisfied, apart from that of normality. However, MANOVA has been found to be robust to violations of normality (Bray & Maxwell, 1985). Indeed, when normality assumptions are not met, the parametric MANOVA has been found to outperform the nonparametric alternative in terms of Type 1 error rate and power (Finch, 2005). In light of this robustness, and considering that all other assumptions were met, MANOVA was deemed to be an appropriate test for the purposes of the analysis.

Table 6.20: Descriptive statistics for family involvement factors as a function of demographic data

Variable	SBI		HBI		HSC	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Parental Irish Proficiency						
Low Proficiency	41.68	8.56	41.72	10.24	38.17	10.39
Medium Proficiency	43.26	8.50	40.74	10.42	37.70	10.49
High Proficiency	44.23	7.46	40.99	11.51	37.55	11.83
Marital Status						
Married/Living with Partner	43.53	8.16	40.68	10.63	37.53	10.73
Separated/Divorced	44.73	6.49	44.80	10.64	39.27	11.31
Single/Widowed	39.73	9.87	42.00	10.11	39.50	10.80
Parent Education Level						
Early School Leavers	42.46	5.87	38.76	14.03	37.95	11.55
School Completers	42.86	8.70	40.71	10.12	37.35	10.49
Degree Holders	44.18	7.58	41.95	10.35	38.40	10.80
Employment Status						
Looking after home/family	44.84	8.64	41.82	10.14	39.02	10.00
Working for payment	42.83	7.76	40.69	10.56	36.79	11.14
Unemployed	41.64	8.80	38.52	14.93	39.72	7.89
SES (based on ISEI)						
Low	42.18	8.52	41.30	10.86	37.28	11.70
Medium	43.58	8.68	40.75	11.07	38.57	10.60
High	44.04	7.73	40.93	10.68	37.20	9.79
Stage of Child						
Junior School	42.82	8.99	43.09	10.31	37.98	10.58
Senior School	43.74	7.46	38.81	10.51	37.65	10.98

Proficiency

A one way MANOVA was conducted to investigate whether FIQ scores for the three subscales SBI, HBI and HSC differed as a function of parents' Irish proficiency. No significant effect was found of parental proficiency in Irish on their FIQ subscale scores $F(3,523) = 4739.523, p > 0.05$.

The proficiency categorisation used above was based on parents' self-reported proficiency across four dimensions: speaking, understanding, reading and writing (see Section 6.8.1). However, as the inability to *speak* Irish was reported by participants in Phase 1 as presenting specific barriers to their school-based involvement (e.g. parents reported feeling anxious, uncomfortable or isolated when at the school) it was considered important to conduct separate analysis to explore the effect of *spoken* Irish proficiency on school-based involvement. Here, a one-way between groups ANOVA revealed a significant effect for Irish speaking proficiency on involvement in school based activities (SBI) as assessed by the FIQ, $F(2,532) = 3.535$, $p < 0.05$. Post hoc analysis (Tukey) revealed that high proficiency parents had significantly higher levels of school-based involvement ($M = 44.12$) than low proficiency parents ($M = 40.85$). The medium proficiency group ($M = 43.35$) were not found to differ significantly from either of the other two groups.

Education Level

Parents were split into three groups on the basis of the highest level of education which they had completed. Group 1 consisted of parents who had ceased education at the Junior Certificate level or earlier. Group 2 consisted of parents who had completed secondary school and whose highest level of education was the Leaving Certificate or a Post-Leaving Certificate course (non-degree). Group 3 consisted of parents who had completed at least a Bachelor's degree (i.e. those who held a primary degree and those who also had a postgraduate qualification). No significant effect was found for parent education level on involvement as assessed by the FIQ, $F(3,528) = 1.163$, $p > 0.05$.

Employment Status

A MANOVA analysis revealed a significant effect of employment status on involvement, $F(3,498) = 2.434$, $p < 0.05$, with significant differences between groups on the School-Based Involvement subscale. Parents who indicated that their principal status was looking after home/family had significantly higher school-based involvement scores than those who were employed outside of the home (Tukey HSD). Those who described themselves as unemployed were not found to differ significantly from either of these groups.

Marital Status

A MANOVA analysis also found a significant effect of parental marital/relationship status, on FIQ scores $F(3,533) = 4.000$, $p < 0.05$. Groups were again found to differ significantly in terms of their School-Based Involvement. Parents who were married/co-habiting with

their partner had higher levels of school-based involvement than parents who described themselves as single/widowed. Similarly, parents who were separated/divorced had higher levels of SBI than those who were widowed/single. The co-habiting and separated parent groups were not found to differ significantly.

SES Groups

A one-way MANOVA found no significant effect of SES (as indicated by parent occupation) on FIQ scores, $F(1072) = 1.726$, $p > 0.05$. The three SES groups were not found to differ significantly in their involvement as assessed by the FIQ.

Stage of Child

Parents were split into two groups to investigate the effect of the age of the child on parental involvement levels. Group 1 ($n = 297$) consisted of parents with a child in Junior School (Junior Infants-Second Class) and Group 2 ($n=266$) were parents of a child in Senior School (Third Class-Sixth Class). A significant MANOVA was found for school stage of child, $F(3,535) = 13.635$, $p < 0.05$. When the results were considered separately, it was revealed that the groups differed in terms of Home-Based Involvement scores, and that parents of younger children reported significantly higher levels of home-based involvement than did parents of older children.

Effect of School

Given that the usual involvement trends relating to parent background variables were not found in the present sample of immersion parents, analysis was carried out to investigate whether the particular school attended had an effect on involvement levels. Descriptive statistics for the each of the FIQ scores relating to type of family involvement factors as a function of School ID are presented in Table 6.21 below.

Considerable variation was found in schools' mean FIQ scores for each subscale. For the School-Based Involvement subscale, mean scores ranged from a low of 40.17 (in School F) to a high of 51.19 (School B). Home-Based Involvement scores ranged from a mean of 36.13 (School G) up to 45.00 (School F). Home-School Conferencing scores ranged from 33.81 (School A) to 42.58 (School B). A significant MANOVA was found for School ID, $F(3,526) = 3.61$, $p < 0.001$. Significant differences between schools were found for School-Based Involvement, Home-Based Involvement, and Home-School Conferencing subscales. This will be discussed further below in relation to school policy and practice.

Table 6.21: Descriptive statistics for family involvement factors as a function of School ID

<i>School ID</i>	SBI		HBI		HSC	
	M	<i>SD</i>	M	<i>SD</i>	M	<i>SD</i>
School A	40.36	8.43	38.71	12.73	33.81	13.05
School B	51.19	4.59	42.67	7.94	42.58	7.37
School C	44.39	7.43	38.35	8.04	37.24	8.79
School D	43.21	9.24	44.31	12.28	41.71	10.11
School E	41.66	8.76	40.32	10.22	37.22	8.29
School F	40.17	10.39	45.00	8.17	36.22	12.39
School G	46.25	8.17	36.13	12.93	37.50	8.73
School H	42.98	7.36	42.67	11.94	42.53	11.24
School I	43.43	8.46	42.62	10.08	35.89	11.95
School J	43.55	7.64	42.02	11.63	38.34	10.90
Overall Mean	43.71		41.28		38.3	

While the FIQ is a useful measure for examining aspects of parental involvement, because it was developed for mainstream schooling, it does not assess an exhaustive list of potential involvement activities in an immersion setting. For example, it does not assess parents' involvement with their child's L2 development. The present survey aimed to include additional questions to supplement the information which the FIQ could not provide; information that was deemed important in the Irish context and in the Irish immersion context. The results of the further analyses conducted to this end are presented below.

Decision Making

Involvement in decision making is one of the main categories included in Epstein's Typology of Parent Involvement, but this was not assessed by the FIQ. In Ireland, parents have representation at a decision-making level on the school's board of management and on parent-teacher committees/associations. Here, parents were asked to indicate whether they were currently, or had ever been, involved at either of these levels in their children's schools. The relationships between decision making and a number of parent background variables were then explored. Chi-square analysis revealed a significant relationship between Irish proficiency and membership of the school's Board of Management as a Parent Representative $\chi^2(df) = 17.498, p < 0.001$, Cramer's $V = 0.184$. Lower proficiency

parents and medium proficiency parents were significantly less likely to be involved in the school's Board of Management than were higher proficiency parents

Table 6.22: Cross-tabulation table for BOM membership by proficiency level

Irish proficiency level	(%) No BOM membership	(%) with BOM membership
Low Proficiency (n = 124)	95.76	4.34
Medium Proficiency (n = 275)	95.0	5.0
High Proficiency (n = 153)	84.17	15.83

A chi-square test was also performed to examine the relationship between Irish proficiency and membership of the school's Parent-Teacher Association. The relationship between these variables was significant $\chi^2(df) = 26.451, p < 0.001$, Cramer's $V = 0.222$. Thus, Low Irish proficiency parents were significantly less likely to be involved in the PTA than medium or high proficiency parents.

Table 6.23: Cross-tabulation table for Parents' Association membership by proficiency

Irish proficiency level	(%) No PTA Membership	(%) with PTA Membership
Low Proficiency (n = 124)	88.33	11.67
Medium Proficiency (n = 275)	74.81	25.19
High Proficiency (n = 153)	56.38	42.62

There are multiple potential explanations for these findings. It is possible that schools seek highly proficiency parents to fill these roles because it is deemed preferable that meetings are conducted through the medium of Irish; this is true in particular of Board of Management meetings. It is also possible that school staff (teachers and principals) have more frequent contact with, and thus have more familiar relationships with, higher proficiency parents and may encourage these high proficiency parents to put themselves forward for election. It is also possible that lower proficiency parents are reluctant to put themselves forward for such positions due to feelings of inadequacy and discomfort (resulting from low proficiency) which were described by parents in Phase 1 of the study.

Given the recognition noted earlier among a majority of parents that it is important to speak Irish in the school, it is likely that the parent body would prefer to elect a high proficiency parent to both the PTA and the BOM than a low proficiency parent.

The relationship of BOM and PTA membership with other factors is summarised below:

- No significant relationship was found between employment status and involvement at Board of Management, $\chi^2(2,1) = 0.595$, $p > 0.05$ or Parent-Teacher Association level $\chi^2(2,1) = 4.322$, $p > 0.05$.
- No significant relationship was found between occupation (ISEI scores) and Board of Management involvement, $t(522) = .596$; $p > 0.05$ or occupation and Parents' Association membership, $t(540) = 1.74$; $p > 0.05$
- No significant relationship was found between parent education level and involvement in the Parent-Teacher Association, $\chi^2(2,1) = 3.121$, $p > 0.05$. However, a significant relationship was found between parental education and involvement at Board of Management level, $\chi^2(2,1) = 7.135$, $p < 0.05$, but this association was found to be weak (Cramer's $V = 0.117$).
- Marital status was not found to be related to membership of the Parent-Teacher Association, $\chi^2(2,1) = 1.272$, $p > 0.05$. Marital status was found to be related to involvement at Board of Management level, $\chi^2(2,1) = 11.255$, $p > 0.01$, but again, this was found to be a relatively weak association (Cramer's $V = 0.144$).

Of the significant relationships revealed, the strongest associations were between Irish proficiency and involvement in the Board of Management and the Parent-Teacher Associations.

Parents' Use of Irish in Home

As reported earlier, parents were asked to indicate the frequency with which they speak Irish in a variety of situations in the home. Parents were asked to respond to ten items relating to home use of Irish on a six-point rating scale, where a score of 1 indicated that they never use Irish in that situation and a score of 6 was indicative of always using Irish in this context (see Table 6.12 above). Cronbach's alpha analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of this scale. Analysis revealed that the scale would be more internally consistent if the items relating to use of Irish at homework time and use of Irish at religious services were removed from the scale. These items appear to have reduced the reliability of the scale due to the strong probability of using Irish while a child is doing homework, given that homework would be done through Irish, with the result that this item does not

effectively differentiate between parents in terms of their home Irish use. At the other end of the scale, the item regarding Irish use at religious services is confounded by variable attendance at such service, since non-religious parents would necessarily respond to this question that they never use Irish at this time, which may be inconsistent with their responses to other items. Upon deletion of these items, Cronbach's alpha analysis was conducted again. This revealed that the final scale measuring parents' Irish use in the home had a very high level of internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.911$). Participants' scores for each of the eight remaining items were summed to give a score for overall use of Irish in the home.

Because these Home Use of Irish scores were not normally distributed and because the groups had unequal sample sizes, nonparametric analyses were used in order to explore group differences relating to use of Irish in the home. Kruskal-Wallis analysis revealed a significant effect of proficiency on Irish use $\chi^2(2) = 30.64, p < 0.001$. Post hoc analyses, using Mann Whitney tests with Bonferroni correction, revealed significant differences between low and high proficiency parents, $U = 5476.5, p < 0.001, r = 0.22$, and between medium and high proficiency groups in their home use of Irish, $U = 13985.0, p < 0.001, r = 0.19$. However, low and medium proficiency groups were not found to differ significantly in terms of their Irish use, $U = 13518, p > 0.0167$ (mean ranks for low, medium and high proficiency groups were 220.47, 250.3 and 318.2 respectively).

No significant effect was found for parent education on home use of Irish, $\chi^2(2) = 0.247, p > 0.05$. Similarly, no significant effect on home Irish use was found for parent employment status, $\chi^2(2) = 0.263, p > 0.05$, marital status, $\chi^2(2) = 5.359, p > 0.05$, or occupation/SES level, $\chi^2(2) = 1.292, p > 0.05$.

Parents interviewed in Phase 1 indicated that their children became less willing to speak Irish with them as they progressed through school. Analysis was thus carried out to ascertain whether the age of the child about whom the parent was answering the survey had an effect on their use of Irish with the child. Parents were thus split into two groups once more: parents who were answering in relation to a child in the first half of their primary school career (Junior Infants to Second Class; $n = 297$) and parents who were answering in relation to a child in their second half of primary school (Third Class to Sixth Class, $n = 266$). A Mann Whitney U test revealed a significant effect of stage of child on parents' use of Irish with their child, $U = 22905.5; p < 0.001, z = 0.31$. Thus parents of older children were using significantly less Irish with their children than parents of younger children (mean ranks for parents of younger and older children were 312.06 and 217.06 respectively).

These findings relate to parents' reports of the frequency with which *they* use Irish with their children. However, it is possible that children could be making use of Irish in other out-of-school situations. Parents were thus also asked to rate their *child's* use of Irish in a number of situations (e.g. with friends, with siblings, online etc.). Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the Child Use of Irish Scale, and the scale was found to have satisfactory internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.733$). Responses for the scale items were summed to give an overall score for child's out-of-school Irish use.

As before, a series of nonparametric ANOVAs (Kruskal-Wallis H tests) were run in order to investigate which, if any, parent/home background variables had an effect on children's out-of-school Irish use (separate to their use with parents). Again, the only parent variable under investigation which was found to have an effect on children's home language use was parental proficiency in Irish, $\chi^2(2) = 8.787$ $p < 0.05$. Low proficiency parents reported having children who used Irish at home significantly less than high proficiency parents $U = 6250.5$; $p < 0.01$, $z = 0.18$. Differences between low and medium, and medium and high proficiency parents were not significant at the adjusted alpha level (mean ranks for low, medium and high proficiency parents were 225.96, 246.07 and 278.49 respectively).

In addition to parent variables, the age of the child (whether the child was in the junior or senior half of the primary school) was again investigated as to whether it had an effect on parents' assessments of their children's out-of-school Irish use. Again, a Mann Whitney test revealed a significant effect on Irish use, with parents of children in Senior School reporting significantly lower levels of Irish use by their children, $U = 26015.0$, $p < 0.001$, $z = 0.17$.

Parents' Perceptions of their own involvement

As reported earlier, parents were asked to rate their own involvement relative to other parents on a 7-point scale, where a score of 1 indicated that they felt that they were much less involved than other parents, a score of 4 indicated that they were about as involved as the average parent, and a score of 7 indicated that they believed themselves to be much more involved than the average parent of children in their child's class.

Irish proficiency was found to be significantly related to how much parents believed themselves to be involved, relative to other parents, $\chi^2(2) = 18.174$, $p < 0.001$. Post hoc pairwise comparisons revealed that low proficiency parents perceived themselves to be significantly less involved than both medium proficiency parents, $U = 13287.5$, $p < 0.0167$, $z = 0.01$ and high proficiency parents, $U = 6326.5$, $p < 0.001$, $r = 0.18$. Medium

proficiency parents also rated their involvement as significantly less than high proficiency parents, $U = 17122.5$, $p < 0.01$, $r = 0.11$. (Mean ranks for involvement among low proficiency, medium proficiency and high proficiency groups were 226.64, 265.81 and 304.17 respectively).

No significant effect was found for parent education on how involved parents believed themselves to be $\chi^2(2) = 4.713$ $p > 0.05$.

Marital/relationship status was found to have an effect on how parents rated their involvement, $\chi^2(2) = 8.721$, $p > 0.05$. Mann Whitney post hoc tests revealed that parents who were married or co-habiting rated their involvement as significantly higher than parents who indicated that they were single/widowed, although the effect was small $U = 9058.00$, $p < 0.01$, $z = 0.12$. Parents who described themselves as separated/divorced were not found to differ significantly from either of the other two groups (mean ranks for 'married/living with partner', 'separated/divorced' and 'single/widowed' were 280.05, 241.61 and 218.7 respectively)

Parents with a child in the senior half of the school rated their involvement as significantly higher than those with younger children, $U = 33140$, $p < 0.05$, although the effect size was very small.

Employment status was also found to have an overall effect on how parents rated their involvement, $\chi^2(2) = 6.274$ $p > 0.05$. Post hoc pairwise comparisons did not reveal any significant effects between groups at the adjusted alpha level (mean ranks for 'looking after home/family', 'working for payment/profit' and 'unemployed' were 277.46, 223.67 and 247.12 respectively). Occupation/SES was not found to be related to parents' ratings of their involvement relative to others, $\chi^2(4) = 4.415$, $p > 0.05$

It should be remembered that the earlier results showed that proficiency groups were not found to differ in terms of their scores for the subscales of the FIQ (Home-based involvement, School-based involvement and Home-School Conferencing). Despite this, lower proficiency parents judged their own level of involvement to be lower than that of the average parent. This appears to support the finding in the qualitative stage of the research, that immersion parents construe 'involvement' as relating to L2 support and activities. It also seems to suggest that lower proficiency parents might not be valuing to the same degree the involvement activities which they *do* undertake, such as those assessed by the FIQ.

6.8.6 Identifying Subgroups of Parents based on Overall Involvement Levels

Thus far, analyses have been reported which have explored the relationships between parent characteristics and individual indices of parental involvement. In the case of the FIQ scores, subscale scores were considered together by means of MANOVAs. However, none of the individual variables (or combinations of variables) considered thus far can be said to fully encompass the multifaceted nature of parental involvement in an immersion context. To address the current research aim it was necessary to consider together the ‘bundle’ of parental involvement activities which can be undertaken by Irish immersion parents. It was thus decided to classify parents by their levels of involvement based on their responses/scores on a number of these variables. Cluster analysis was thus selected as the appropriate methods of classifying participants. Cluster analysis is an exploratory tool for organising data (people, objects, events, etc.) into meaningful groups (or clusters) based on combinations of variables. Cluster analysis identifies subgroups in a population with the aim of maximising within-group similarity and between-group difference. A cluster may thus be defined as a group of relatively homogenous cases (or observations).

Method of Cluster Analysis Employed

Two-step cluster analysis was the method selected for clustering the data. Two-step clustering has a number of advantages over traditional methods of cluster analysis. This method can handle both categorical and continuous data which was necessary in the present analysis. Traditional methods of clustering have proven effective with smaller datasets but have failed to scale up to larger datasets. Two-step has the ability to handle large datasets (more than 500 cases) efficiently (Hair et al, 2010) which was an advantage given the sample size in the present study.

Based on the previous results, the following variables were used to form the clusters:

- FIQ scores (summed home-based involvement, school-based involvement and home-school conferencing subscale scores)
- Home Use of Irish scores (summed scores on the home use of Irish scale)
- Rating of overall involvement relative to other parents (recoded into three categories, namely ‘less than average’, ‘average’ and ‘more than average’)

Two-step cluster analysis assumes that continuous variables are normally distributed and that categorical variables have a multinomial distribution. It also assumes the independence of all

variables. Preliminary testing revealed that all the variables selected for inclusion were sufficiently independent of each other to be included in the analysis. The continuous variables were found to deviate from normal distributions (distributional attributes are presented in Table 6.24 below). Examination of skewness and kurtosis values indicates that the scales are not normally distributed. Similarly, Kolmogorov-Smirnoff tests confirm that the data are non-normal. However, Two-Step cluster analysis has been found to be robust to violations of both the distributional and independence assumptions (Norusis, 2004).

Table 6.24: Distribution of the continuous measures included in the cluster analysis

<i>Scale</i>	FIQ	Home Use of Irish
N Valid	540	534
N Missing	23	29
Mean	121.96	21.68
SD	24.41	6.60
Variance	595.73	43.62
Skewness	-0.544	.60
Std. Error	.105	.106
Kurtosis	1.50	1.73
Std. Error	.210	.211
Range	155	40
Minimum	30	8
Maximum	185	48
Sum	65857.00	11579

Clustering Procedure

The first step in the two-step cluster analysis method is that of ‘pre-clustering’ whereby cases are grouped into small subclusters. The second step is the clustering of these subclusters in order to achieve the optimal cluster solution. Log-likelihood distance is the distance employed in two-step cluster analysis, where there is a mixture of categorical and continuous variables. It is a probability distance measure, where the distance between two clusters is related to the decrease in log-likelihood as they are combined into one cluster. The number of clusters was not predetermined and so the Statistical Package for the Social

Sciences (SPSS) identified the optimal number of clusters using the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC).

Cluster Profiles

The two-step clustering revealed a three cluster solution for this dataset on the basis of the variables included. Examination of the profiles of the clusters reveals the presence of three subgroups with differing levels of self-reported involvement across all variables. These shall henceforth be referred to as Low Involvement (n=122), Medium Involvement (n= 217) and High Involvement (n=162) Groups. Cluster profiles are presented in Table 6.25 below.

Table 6.25 Final Cluster Centres

	Cluster		
	1:Low Involvement (n=122)	2:Medium Involvement (n=217)	3:High Involvement (n=162)
Relative Involvement	Less than average	Average (100%)	Higher than average
FIQ score	112.76	123.67	127.98
HUI score	12.62	21.42	23.11

Evidence for the Validity of the Clusters

A popular way of assessing the ‘goodness’ of a given cluster structure is to examine the silhouette measure of cohesion and separation. For each element, the silhouette measure is the difference between the smallest average between cluster distance and the average within cluster distance, divided by the larger of the two distances. In a good solution, the within-cluster distances are small and the between-cluster distances are large, resulting in a silhouette measure close to the maximum value of 1. If the silhouette measure is negative, the average distance of a case to members of its own cluster is larger than the average distance to cases in other clusters, an undesirable feature. The silhouette measure for a cluster is the average of the silhouette measures for the cases within the cluster. The silhouette measure ranges of values from –1 to +1. The silhouette coefficient for the generated cluster structure was found to be 0.6 (Mooi & Starstedt, 2011). Examination of this value in light of rule of thumb guidelines reveals that a reasonable cluster structure has been found.

Rule of Thumb for interpretation of Silhouette Measure:

- < 0.25 - no substantial structure has been found
- $0.26 - 0.5$ - the structure is weak and could be artificial- try additional methods of data analysis
- $0.51 - 0.7$ - a reasonable structure has been found
- $0.71-1.0$ - a strong structure has been found

Stability of the Clusters

As recommended by Clatworthy et al. (2005) in order to explore the stability of the clusters, the dataset was split in half and the cluster analyses run again on both halves of the data. Results of these analyses showed that similar three-cluster solutions were found when the analysis was repeated on each half of the dataset. In each of the halves, low, medium and high involvement subgroups were identified. Both of these cluster solutions had an average silhouette width of 0.6. These results suggest that the cluster solution revealed is stable.

External Validity of the Clusters

Stability of the clusters is a necessary condition for the validity of clusters, but not a sufficient one (Clatworthy et al., 2005). It is also necessary to provide some evidence of their use to the field of study, for example by using inferential statistics to compare the groups on variables that were not included in the analysis. Three variables were thus selected for this purpose. It was aimed to compare the clusters on variables relating to each of the three main dimensions of parental involvement, namely, home-based involvement, school-based involvement and home-school communication.

The variables used for cluster evaluation were:

- Overall contact with school (recoded into three categories, namely, 'low levels of contact', 'average levels of contact' and 'high levels of contact')
- Decision making involvement (recoded into three categories, namely 'never a member of Parents' Association or Board of Management', 'Is/has been a member of either Parents' Association or Board of Management', and 'Is/has been a member of both Parents' Association and Board of Management')
- Helping with homework scores (summed scores across items relating to frequency of providing homework help rated on a four point scale).

The results of these comparisons are presented in Table 6.26 below.

Table 6.26: Relationships between involvement clusters and additional involvement variables

Variable		Total Parent Group (n=501)	Low Involvement (n=122)	Medium Involvement (n=217)	High Involvement (n=162)	Test Statistics	<i>p</i> <	Effect Size
Contact	Low	41	34 (29.8%)	6 (3.5%)	1 (1.1%)	Chi = 112.901	0.001	0.387
	Medium	132	52 (45.6%)	70 (53%)	10 (10.9%)			
	High	203	28 (24.6%)	94 (55.3%)	81 (88.0%)			
Decision Making	Never a member of either PA or BOM	370	115 (95%)	169 (79.3%)	86 (54.1%)	69.747	0.001	0.266
	Is/has been a member of one	95	3 (2.5%)	31 (14.6%)	61 (38.4%)			
	Is/has been member of both	28	3 (2.5%)	13 (6.1%)	12 (7.5%)			
Helping with Homework	Mean	48.76	48.16	48.71	50.12	F=1.672	>0.05	

As can be seen from the Table 6.26, cluster scores for ‘helping with homework’ were in the expected direction, with the lowest mean score found in the low involvement cluster, and the highest in the high involvement cluster, although the difference was not significant at the 0.05 level. Significant associations were found between cluster membership and decision making, and between cluster membership and contact with school. Inspection of the Cramer’s V values (0.387 and 0.266 respectively) reveals very strong associations between the variables. Thus, evidence exists for the validity of the clusters.

Having established explored the quality of the cluster structure, and having identified the clusters as low, medium and high involvement subgroups, it was then necessary to ascertain which variables assessed in the survey were related to cluster membership. A range of sociodemographic, linguistic, and other variables were selected on the basis of previous involvement literature and of earlier findings from the present research. The results of the analyses conducted are presented in Table 6.27. This table highlights that a number of variables were found to be significantly related to cluster membership.

- Of the family structure variables examined, both **marital status** and **number of children** were found to be significantly related to involvement, but the age of the child was not found to be associated with cluster membership.
- Of the sociodemographic variables, **parent education level** and **number of books in the home** were found to be significantly associated with involvement, while employment status, occupation type and medical card possession were not.
- In terms of linguistic variables, **parent proficiency** was found to be related to involvement.
- As was expected, involvement subgroups did not differ in relation to their **current attitudes** towards the Irish language, but parents’ attitudes while growing up were found to be significantly related to involvement.
- **Motivation for choosing immersion** (recoded into Linguistic/cultural factors, Other educational factors and Other factors) was not related to involvement, but feeling that parental involvement is welcomed by the school was strongly associated with levels of involvement.

Table 6.27: Parental profile of the three involvement clusters

		Total Parent Group (n=501)	Low Involvement (n=122)	Medium Involvement (n=217)	High Involvement (n=162)	Test Statistics	p
Gender	Male	52	8	23	21	3.149	>0.05
	Female	447	114	193	140		
Marital Status	Living with Partner	432	99	186	147	9.961	<0.05
	Single/Widowed	25	6	15	4		
	Separated/Divorced	43	17	16	10		
Education Level	Junior Cert or less	38	17	12	9	13.751	<0.01
	Leaving Cert/Third level non-degree	257	57	124	76		
	Degree or higher	202	46	80	76		
Employment Status	Working for Payment/Profit	301	81	128	92	7.034	>0.05
	Looking After Home/Family	142	25	63	54		
	Other	39	13	16	10		
ISEI	Mean		50.08	51.94	54.57		>0.05
Medical Card	No	404	178	94	132	2.44	>0.05
	Yes	83	32	26	25		
	Chose not to answer	6	3	1	2		
	Missing	8					
Books in home	Less than 50	64	28	24	12	37.754	<0.01
	50-300	269	61	137	71		
	300+	165	32	55	78		
Irish Proficiency	Low	110	48	37	25	16.794	<0.01
	Medium	249	115	59	75		
	High	133	49	25	49		
Attitude towards Irish	Unfavourable	18	5	7	6	5.497	>0.05
	Neutral	17	8	6	3		
	Favourable	465	108	204	153		
Attitude growing up	Unfavourable	119	50	27	42	11.151	<0.05
	Neutral	215	77	65	73		
	Favourable	161	5	32	77		
Number of Children	Mean	1.55	1.37	1.59	1.62	F= 4.78	<0.05
Age of Child	Junior School	265	73	115	77	4.231	>0.05
	Senior School	236	49	102	85		
Reason for School Choice	Irish lang/culture	282	61	128	93	1.955	>0.05
	Other educational	127	32	52	43		
	Other	63	18	25	20		
Feel involvement is welcomed by school	Rarely/Sometimes	203	68	81	54	20.682	<0.05
	Often/Always	281	45	132	104		

In order to assess their individual and collective impact on involvement, the variables found to be significantly related to membership of involvement subgroups were then used as explanatory variables in a multinomial logistic regression.

6.8.7 The Multinomial Logistic Regression Model

The multinomial logistic regression model is an extension of logistic regression where the categorical outcome variable has more than two levels. For the present analyses, the outcome variable is cluster membership, i.e. a categorical variable with three levels defined above as Low, Medium and High involvement). As the categories appear to be ordered, an ordinal logistic regression was first conducted. However, the proportional odds assumption of ordinal regression was violated with the current model, and so a multinomial logistic regression (which allows regression coefficients to vary over response categories) was instead used. The multinomial model produced signs and significance similar to those of the ordinal model, and while probabilities differed somewhat in magnitude, the overall all pattern was similar.

The multinomial model was found to be a significant fit to the data ($p < .0001$). The Nagelkerke Pseudo R Square value was found to be 0.188, suggesting that approximately 18.8% of the variance in involvement levels is account for by the current model. As seen from Table 6.28 below, three of the explanatory variables were found to be significant predictors of involvement, namely, Irish proficiency, number of books in the home, and how welcome involvement is perceived by the school.

Table 6.28 Likelihood ratio tests

	-2log likelihood of Reduced Model	Chi Square	df	Sig.
Intercept	826.709	.000	0	
Proficiency score	835.188	8.479	2	.014
Books in the home	847.563	20.854	4	.000
Involvement welcomed	838.605	11.896	2	.003
Marital Status	833.563	6.753	4	.150
Education Level	831.149	6.377	4	.173
Attitude to Irish growing up	831.149	4.440	4	.350
Number of Children	830.298	3.589	2	.166

The relative impact of each of the significant predictors of involvement is summarised in Table 6.29. High involvement is the reference category for the model.

Table 6.29: Multinomial logistic regression model showing the impact of parent characteristics on low, medium and high involvement

High involvement compared to		Beta	Std.Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(b)
Medium Involvement	Intercept	.927	.818	1.283	1	.257	
	Proficiency Score	-.101	.037	7.380	1	.007	
	Junior Cert or less	-.459	.537	1	.392	.632	
	LC/Third Level non-degree	-.062	.251	.061	1	.805	.940
	Degree or higher						
	Books-Low	.779	.434	3.342	1	.068	2.223
	Books-moderate	.894	.258	11.986	1	.001	2.444
	Books-high						
	Married/Living with Partner	.202	.452	.200	1	.655	1.224
	Separated/Divorced	1.368	.731	3.503	1	.061	3.926
	Widowed/Single						
	Feel Involvement welcome	.167	.237	.497	1	.481	1.182
	Feeling Involvement not welcome						
Low Involvement	Intercept	.928	.953	.949	1	.330	
	Proficiency Score	-.094	.045	4.440	1	.035	.711
	Junior Cert or less	.421	.543	.602	1	.438	1.524
	LC/Third Level non-degree	-.269	.312	.741	1	.389	.764
	Degree or higher						
	Low amount of books	1.340	.475	7.972	1	.005	3.821
	Books-moderate	.442	.327	1.824	1	.177	1.555
	Books- high						
	Married/Living with Partner	-.352	.466	.571	1	.450	.703
	Separated/Divorced	.829	.812	1.04	1	.307	2.291
	Widowed/Single						
	Feel Involvement welcome	.899	.277	10.501	1	.001	2.457
	Feeling Involvement not welcome						

Summary of Regression Findings

The multinomial logistic regression results show that three of the variables included in the model are related to the odds of being either a medium or a low involvement parent as opposed to being a highly involved parent. A review of the statistically significant odds ratios in Table 6.29 shows that the odds of being a low or a medium involvement

parent decrease with an increase in Irish proficiency (odds ratio for medium involvement: 1.101; odds ratio for low involvement: 0.094).

Parents who indicated that they had few books in their homes were 3.821 times more likely than those who had many books in their homes to belong to have low rather than high levels of reported involvement. Those with a moderate number of books in the home were over twice as likely (2.444 times more likely) to belong to the medium involvement cluster than to the high involvement cluster. These findings suggest that educational resources in the home, or a home 'scholarly culture' are important in explaining levels of parental involvement in Irish immersion.

Those parents who felt that their involvement is welcomed by their child's school less frequently were 2.457 times more likely to belong to the low involvement cluster than the high involvement cluster than those who feel their involvement is often/always welcome, and 1.182 times more likely to belong to the medium involvement cluster than the high involvement cluster. This highlights that it is not just parent characteristics involved in influencing parents' involvement, but that schools' practices also play an important role.

6.9 Summary of Main Findings

The survey in Study 1 Phase II assessed a number of sociodemographic and socioeconomic characteristics of participating parents. Harris and Ó Laoire (2006) hypothesised that with the rapid growth in popularity of Gaelscoileanna, it was likely that the parental profile of Irish immersion parents would be growing to resemble more closely the profile of mainstream parents in terms of sociodemographic characteristics. The present survey has confirmed that there *are* still high numbers of parents in IM who come from advantaged backgrounds, with high levels of parental education, and relatively low numbers of unemployed parents and parents who are medical card holders in the current sample. However, the findings also show that the IM parents sampled here are not homogenously advantaged, since a considerable portion of parents come from less advantaged backgrounds. For the purposes of the present research, what was most pertinent was whether elements of this parental profile were related to parents' involvement practices. The survey also assessed linguistic variables and found lower numbers of Irish proficiency and use among parents than might have been expected.

Several analyses were conducted in order to explore which features of parents' profile were related to individual indices of involvement and these have been reported above. However, what was of most interest was the overall 'package' or 'bundle' of activities in which parents engaged and what could be found to predict these. Having classified parents based on their reported levels of involvement, the most important factors in predicting their involvement emerged as parents' proficiency in Irish, the number of books in their homes, and the degree to which they felt that their child's school welcomed their involvement. These findings highlight the uniqueness of the immersion context compared to mainstream educational contexts, where factors such as employment status, marital status and educational attainment have been found to be most strongly related to involvement. In this context, having children educated through a language in which the parent is not proficient influences the involvement of parents in particular ways (in conjunction with a number of situational factors). These results support the qualitative findings of Phase 1, particularly with regard to the finding that feeling their involvement is welcomed by the school is an important predictor of parental involvement. This highlights the contribution of school practices and policies in understanding parental involvement, and these will be explored in the following chapter.

6.10 Conclusion

The present chapter has reported findings from the second phase of Study One, a study which has focused on parental involvement from the perspective of parents themselves. However, the findings of this study have suggested that to fully understand home-school partnerships necessitates that all of the stakeholder groups be consulted. The following two chapters will thus report the findings of studies undertaken with Irish immersion educators, and with Irish immersion pupils. The main findings from the present phase of the research will be further discussed in conjunction with the findings from the other studies later in the thesis (see Chapter 9).

Chapter 7

Study 2: A Qualitative Exploration of Irish-Immersion Educators' Experiences of Parental Involvement

7.0 Overview

This chapter describes the second study conducted as part of the present research. This study aimed to explore the attitudes, practices and experiences of teachers and school principals as related to parental involvement in Irish immersion education. The chapter opens with a brief recapitulation of the design of the study, followed by detail on the procedure employed. The research questions which the study aimed to answer are then outlined. Next, a description is given of the analysis employed, including the reporting of inter-rater reliability results. The detailed findings arising from the present study will then be presented. How these findings provide answers to the research questions posed for this stage of the research is then considered. The chapter closes with a brief conclusion.

7.1 Design

Study 2 was qualitative in nature, comprising a series of in-depth, face-to-face interviews with educators working in Irish-medium primary schools. Interviews were semi-structured in nature: the interview schedule was developed on the basis of existing literature and also informed by the findings from Study 1 (see Appendix C for full interview schedule). A rationale for selecting such a design and methodology was described in Chapter 4. Data were analysed using qualitative content analysis.

7.2 Participants

Nine participants were interviewed in the course of this study: three immersion school principals, five classroom teachers (three teaching junior classes and two teaching senior children) and one Home-School Liaison Coordinator, a post that is only funded in designated disadvantaged schools. The participants had teaching experience which ranged from one year post-qualification to over thirty-five years teaching. Seven of the interviewees were female and two were male.

7.3 Ethical Considerations

The present study was exempt from full ethical review by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee, given that it involved consulting professionals about aspects of their work lives. Notwithstanding this exemption, every effort was made to ensure that all ethical

guidelines were complied with, in accordance with UCD's code of ethics in research. Participants were presented with an information sheet (see Appendix C) which outlined the aims of the study and described what participation would entail. Participants were informed of the confidentiality which their data would be treated, and of their right to withdraw from the study at any time if they so wished. Written consent was obtained from all participants prior to interview (see Appendix C for sample consent form).

7.4 Procedure

7.4.1 Recruitment of Participants

Purposive sampling was the method through which participants were recruited. Schools were selected in order to cover a range of school types. In particular, the researcher aimed to recruit participants working in schools with different parent demographic profiles. It was also aimed to include educators from schools of varying size, and from schools which were long-established and those which were newer. It was also decided to include schools under different patron bodies. Having identified three schools which allowed a spread of school types according to these criteria, the researcher wrote to the principals in each of the schools in order to invite their participation. All principals approached agreed to be interviewed. Principals then distributed the invitation and relevant information sheets to teachers in their schools who taught children in the predetermined age groups (5-7 year olds and 10-12 year olds). Everyone who volunteered to participate was interviewed.

Interviewees were recruited from three schools in the Greater Dublin area. One of these schools was a large school (circa 500 pupils), one was a medium-sized school (circa 200) and one was smaller again (circa 130 pupils). Two of the schools were under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop and one was under the patronage of An Foras Patrúnachta. One of the schools was designated DEIS and thus catered for a socially disadvantaged population. One of the schools was located in a city location, while the others were located in towns in counties bordering Dublin. The sociodemographic profile of the schools will be considered further in Topic 1 below.

7.4.2 Data collection

Prior to interview, participants completed a brief questionnaire about their position in the school and their employment history. Participants then took part in an in-depth interview. While some interaction took place in Irish, the interviews were conducted in English in order to obviate the need for a potentially less than fully nuanced translation of participants' remarks into English, which translation was necessary for thesis submission and dissemination. All interviews were audio-recorded to facilitate analysis. Where participants included Irish in their

responses, English translations are offered here. Interview sessions ranged in length from 25 minutes to 80 minutes.

7.5 Research Questions

The overall aim of the present study was to explore IM educators' perspectives on parental involvement and home-school partnerships in Irish immersion schools. In order to address this aim, the following research questions were posed:

Table 7.1: Research sub-questions for Study 2

1.	How do immersion principals and teachers define/construe 'parental involvement'?
2.	What are immersion principals' and teachers' attitudes towards the involvement of parents in the education of their pupils?
3.	What are the policies and practices of Irish-medium schools in relation to the involvement of parents?
4.	What are the experiences of parental involvement of educators in Irish-medium schools?
5.	What do immersion principals and teachers identify as the facilitators of successful home-school partnerships?
6.	What do immersion principals and teachers identify as challenges to effective home-school relations?

7.6 Qualitative Analysis

Content analysis was selected as the method of analysis for all qualitative data collected in the course of the research project. All nine interviews were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were then reviewed in order to identify clear sections (or topics). Interviewees' responses for each of these sections were isolated and then reviewed in order to establish what essential meaning they communicated. Responses were then condensed into mutually exclusive themes under each section and adapted for use as a coding frame. The initial coding frame was applied and then reviewed for themes that overlapped or were ambiguous, the identification of which led to some revision of the coding frame. All interviews were then coded using this revised framework. In Table 7.2 below, a summary of the main sections and themes identified as a result of the content analysis is presented. The final coding frame which was utilised in the present study is presented in Appendix C. An additional step, relational analysis, was also carried out in order to discern overarching or recurrent themes which transcended sections and research questions.

Table 7.2: Summary of main topics and themes in Study 2

Section	Themes
1 Aspects of Parental Profile	Sociodemographic Profile Linguistic Profile Change in Profile Over Time Parents' Attitudes towards Irish-medium education
2 Perceptions of Parents' Reasons for School Choice	Educational Advantages Alternative to Other Local Schools Economic/Employment Benefits School Atmosphere Family History/Prior Connections Cultural Affiliation
3 Definitions of Parental Involvement	School-Based Activities Home-Based Activities Home-School Communication
4 Attitudes towards Parental Involvement	Positive Attitudes towards Parental Involvement Value Placed on School-Based Involvement Value Placed on Home-Based Involvement Value Placed on Home-School Communication Ambivalent Attitudes towards Parental Involvement
5 Experiences of Parental Involvement	School-Based Involvement Home-Based Involvement Change in Involvement over Time Core Involvement Group 'Absent' Parents
6 Use of Irish in the Home	Experiences Expectations Attitudes
7 Policies and Practices	Eliciting Parents' Commitment to Immersion Inviting School-Based Involvement Guiding/Encouraging Home-Based Involvement Communicating with Parents Providing Supports/Resources to Parents Lapsed or Failed Practices
8 Facilitators of Parental Involvement	School Outreach/Invitations Welcoming Atmosphere Parent Characteristics
9 Barriers to Parental Involvement	Practical Issues Low Parental Proficiency/Confidence Low Teacher Confidence Parents' Construction of their Role

7.7 Inter-Rater Reliability

Following the development of the coding frame, a second individual with experience of conducting qualitative research and analysis of interview transcripts reviewed a sample of the data (three interviews). The overall percentage agreement between coders was 94%. The percentage agreement by topic is outlined in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3 Inter-rater reliability: Percentage agreement for Study 2 interview data

Topic	Percentage Agreement
1: Aspects of Parental Profile	100
2: Perceptions of Parents' Reasons for School Choice	87
3: Definitions of Parental Involvement	97
4: Attitudes towards Parental Involvement	96
5: Experiences of Parental Involvement	95
7: Practices and Policies	100
8: Facilitators of Parental Involvement	89
9: Barriers to Involvement	100
Overall	94

7.8 Qualitative Findings

This section outlines in detail the findings which emerged as a result of the content analysis conducted. Nine main sections were identified, and the topics and the themes relating to each of them will be presented in turn. The themes are accompanied by frequency counts and quotes are presented to illustrate themes and subthemes. As before, participants have been assigned codes in order to protect their identities but to give some indication of their role and school background. Those codes which feature 'P' refer to principals while those which include a 'T' refer to teachers. Codes begin with either A, B or C depending on the school from which they were recruited (more information on these schools is given below in relation to the Parent Profile). The home-school liaison coordinator is referred to as 'HSLC' throughout. Although the sample featured male participants, in order to protect the anonymity of individual interviewees, the pronoun 'she' is used in reference to all participants.

Topic 1: Aspects of Parent Profile

Although it did not constitute a section in the designed interview protocol, in answering questions from other sections, participants made reference (both directly and indirectly) to various aspects of the profile that was typical of their parent bodies. Interviewees offered their impressions of demographic, attitudinal and linguistic characteristics of parents of children in their schools. The themes relating to these parent characteristics are presented here, prior to the main findings, as it is believed that they will provide important context within which the findings presented later can be considered.

Table 7.4: Main themes and frequencies relating to aspects of parental profile

Theme	Frequency
Sociodemographic Profile	9
Linguistic Profile	9
Change in Parent Profile Over Time	4
Parents' Attitudes towards IME	6

Sociodemographic Profile

All participants made reference to sociodemographic/socioeconomic characteristics of parents in their schools. In one of the schools (henceforth **School B**) the comments of the educators working there indicated that parents there typically conform to the commonly held perception of Gaelscoileanna families as being from **higher sociodemographic backgrounds** (Borooah et al., 2009): *'It's a very middle class area with a very well-educated population, we're [located near to a university] for God's sake!'* (BP). However, this was not the case in each of the schools through which participants were recruited, given the aim to explore the experiences of educators working in different school types. As would be expected, the interviewees who worked in the DEIS school included in this study (henceforth **School A**), made reference to the **socially disadvantaged nature of families** in the school's catchment area. In the following quote, the principal of this school argues that, contrary to popular opinion, Irish-medium education is no longer the preserve of children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds:

Well take this school that was established [over 25 years ago], it would've been [an early example of an] all-Irish primary school set up in a, what was then called, a working class area. Because most Gaelscoileanna up until then, say in Dublin especially, they were there for the children of Gaeilgeoirí [Irish speakers], from Irish speaking homes - children coming from families, their parents would have come from Gaeltacht areas in the country, they might be children of civil service workers, Gaeilgeoirí, blah blah blah. But here now, and there are many such examples since- not alone in Dublin, but throughout the country, where there are these Gaelscoileanna being set up all over the place, and it's not exclusive anymore. (AP).

This principal later added, in response to a question about the involvement of parents in her school that: *'families have... they might have issues. Social issues, home issues, family issues, unemployment, single parents. But there's a place for them all. They're all welcome.'* (AP).

Staff in the third school (henceforth **School C**) indicated that their school was very **diverse in terms of the sociodemographic characteristics** of its families: *'I know they say, some people say that it's [the Gaelscoileanna movement] elitist, you know, but... No, not really. You know, I suppose, there is parts of that, but I mean, I think this school's very mixed.'* (CT3). The perception that this school catered for children from a diverse range of socioeconomic

backgrounds was echoed by all of the interviewees from School C. Respondents from this school indicated that this mix had developed over time, and that they had **observed a change in the profile of their families** over a period of years. They reported that the school had initially catered mainly for families from disadvantaged backgrounds: ‘*The first couple of years, we were getting people mainly, maybe, from [name of predominantly disadvantaged area]*’ (AP). However, when the school moved to a different location, the profile of the parents enrolling their children began to change somewhat:

Since...maybe when this present Sixth Class started, kind of, a change started to come then.... so, we went to the old [name of other local primary school] premises then in 200X. So from 200Y, there was a sea-change really, and a different, maybe, type of parental background, people who had a different type of parental background started to come. And maybe, people who would have originally thought of going to [local convent school] started coming here, so we started to get more of parents like that. And so, since then, that has been the pattern...Now, we still get some from [name of disadvantaged area] and from, you know, social housing areas around. We have a significant mix now. (CP)

The changes in parental involvement attributed by participants in this school to this change in parent profile will be considered in a separate section below.

Linguistic Profile

Interviewees also referred to their perceptions and experiences of the **proficiency and use of Irish** on the part of parents of their pupils. All of the interviewees, regardless of the school from which they were recruited, indicated that there were low proportions of parents in their schools who could be classed as proficient in the Irish language, and even fewer who would use the language on a regular basis. One principal, who indicated that parents of children in her school tended to be very well-educated, described it thus:

I'd say we would probably have a very small handful of parents who are bringing up their children through Irish. Maybe only one or two. We would have, maybe, up as far as a dozen families then, out of about 300 families, where both parents would be proficient but they wouldn't have made the decision to raise their children through Irish... And then we would have a wider little pool again where you might have one parent who's proficient and while they would be, there would be a little bit of Gaeilge spoken at home, it wouldn't be much... (BP)

Similarly, the principal who indicated that she had seen increasing numbers of higher SES parents in her school reported that she had not seen an associated change in the number of proficient *Irish speakers* in her parent body:

The vast majority of parents in our place wouldn't have a vast amount [of Irish]. Even though there's been a shift in the, we'll say, maybe in the parent population. But at the same time... some of those even wouldn't have a lot of Irish. Some of them would have done it up to Leaving Cert but they would be

still a bit wary or a bit shy about using it. And then, some of them would have, maybe, okay they would have gone to maybe some ... private schools, we have a few like that now, but they would have very little of the language. It's amazing actually. (CP)

Participants' reports reflect the findings from Study 1 that low proportions of parents of children in Gaelscoileanna are proficient Irish speakers. It was notable that this was reported across schools and regardless of the sociodemographic composition of the school.

Parent Attitudes towards Irish and IME

Participants reported their perceptions that parents had **generally positive attitudes towards the Irish language and towards immersion education**. For example, one principal said of parents in her school:

You can ask them to have a positive attitude, which in the vast majority of cases, most of them do. I mean, it would be one parent every now and again that would question the tumoideachas [immersion] policy of the school, if the child for some reason was... was having difficulty. But most parents come in and say: "Look, we realise that we've sent him to a Gaelscoil, he has to speak Irish, what can we do to support you on this? We need to be talking". And that would be mostly the experience we would have. (CP)

Similarly, one teacher described her experience of parents' positive reactions to their children's learning of Irish, and how this positive attitude was important for children to see:

And, like, every day I've people saying: "They've taught me this word", you know? "I'm learning from my child and they're helping me". So, it's good for the child, and the parents are delighted, so I think it's a positive attitude among parents to Irish that helps their children. You can see it in this class, the level of Irish is higher than it had been. (BT2)

Summary of School Profiles

The information on the schools from which the respondents in this Study were drawn is summarised below, but with some information not made explicit in order to avoid identification.

School A: Described by educator participants as catering for families of lower socioeconomic status. Designated DEIS by the Department of Education of Skills, the school is located in an urban area. Low levels of parental proficiency in Irish are reported by respondents.

School B: Described by participants as being located in a middle class area and catering for children of well-educated, middle class parents. School B is located in a town outside of Dublin. Mainly low levels of parental proficiency in Irish are reported by interviewees.

School C: Described by respondents as catering for pupils from a range of sociodemographic backgrounds. This diversity developed over time. School C is located in a suburban area bordering Dublin. Low levels of parental proficiency in Irish are reported by interviewees.

Participants from all schools reported believing that parents of their pupils were generally positively disposed towards Irish and towards IME. A related, but separate, topic concerning parents' motivations for choosing to have their children educated in a Gaelscoil, is presented in the next section.

Topic 2: Educators' Perceptions of Parents' Reasons for School Choice

Interviewees mentioned a broad range of motivating factors which they believed influence parents' decision to send their children to an Irish-medium school rather than to other educational options in their locality. The themes uncovered here broadly confirm parents' own reports of their reasons for school choice, but it was notable that there were some divergences in terms of the frequencies with which certain motivations were mentioned and the emphasis placed on some factors differed somewhat from parents' own reports.

Table 7.5: Main themes and frequencies relating to reasons for school choice

Theme	Frequency
Educational Advantages	7
Alternative to Other Local Schools	4
Economic/Employment Benefits	2
School Atmosphere	2
Family History/Prior Connections	2
Cultural Affiliation	1

Educational Advantages

The majority of interviewees (n=7) gave most weight to discussing the impact of general educational advantages on parents' motivation, rather than singling out Irish or bilingualism per se. They indicated that they perceive parents as being attracted to Gaelscoileanna due to their beliefs that attending such schools can lead to general **educational advantages not available in other settings**. For example, one teacher said:

I think they know it's going to help them a lot in later years. I think Gaelscoils tend to have a really nice atmosphere and academically, in later years, it's going to be, just, helpful. Some parents have older children who have gone through an English primary school and think that they would have done better in the Gaelscoil. (CT1)

Another teacher from this school expressed a similar opinion:

I mean, maybe there is, to just to try to give them a chance, to, you know, that you know, you're making life easier for them in secondary school, that they have, you know, that they have that knowledge. I suppose a lot of schools do have a good reputation for as well. (CT3)

The principal from School C reported her belief that parents in her school wanted to give their children both **Irish and educational advantages/opportunities they had not had themselves**:

Still a lot of the parents from that [disadvantaged] area came, and some of those, I suppose, would have wanted Irish for their children because they wouldn't have it themselves. A lot of them, maybe, wouldn't have had a lot of education themselves, and a lot of opportunities, so they kind of wanted something for the kids. Something a little bit more. (CP)

In light of the parents' data citing educational advantages, it was interesting that the educators recognised that many parents have a somewhat vague perception that children who attend Irish-medium schools perform better in education than their mainstream counterparts. However, respondents also reported some **misunderstanding by parents regarding specific benefits of Gaelscoileanna**:

I think that people think the classes are smaller, even though it isn't necessarily true. But there is a story out there that we have an extra teacher, or that our classes would be smaller. And maybe, and I think, I've heard this in my own school, that people feel teachers are more committed, that they're interested in Irish, that they're actually more committed to teaching. (CT2)

Similarly, one principal stated:

They still think we have smaller classes, even though we don't, and, you know, people would be quite surprised at the size of our classes. And actually, there's research now... that says that Gaelscoileanna classes are bigger. (AP)

One teacher explained how she felt that with the sociodemographic change in the parent population she had seen **a change in the main motivations** for parents choosing her school: *'I think there may have been... a political element to it from the other area, but I think there's more of an interest in education...[now].'* (CT3).

Alternative to Other Local Schools

One principal believed that the initial demand for a Gaelscoil in her area was due, primarily, to parents' desires for an **alternative to the local single-sex schools**, and that this was still the main reason why local parents chose to send their children to her school. Her perception was that commitment to immersion and/or commitment to the Irish language were secondary to parents' wish for an alternative to the local Catholic single-sex national schools which predominate in most Irish communities:

A lot of them as well, I think, were looking for something different. In [name of town] here there was a boys' school, a girls' school, (a convent girls' school and a boys' school) which are still here. And I would always have felt that while people were very committed to there being a Gaelscoil in the area... they wanted an alternative. And I would stand with my hand on my heart and say for a lot of people, the fact that we were co-educational was probably the reason they sent them. And the Gaeilge was a bonus, rather than what motivated them in the first place. Now, in the core group on the Coiste Bunaithe [founding committee], who did start off, there would have been some very strong Gaeilgeoirí. But the other people were here because they wanted something different. And I would sometimes feel that if somebody had set up a committee to start an Educate Together at the same time, it would have been just as successful. (BP)

Thus, it is noteworthy that, while this principal perceives parents as being generally positively disposed towards Irish, she sees other factors as equal drivers - or even stronger drivers - of some parents' decision, with Irish for them being a 'bonus' of a Gaelscoil education rather than their central motivation for choosing IME. Thus she cautions against assuming a commitment to Irish (or the immersion model) on the part of all parents choosing an immersion school, since she recognises that some may have alternative motivations for selecting the school. Thus, this principal indicates that some parents may not be opting into the immersion model so much as opting *out* of another available school model, and this will be discussed later.

Economic/Employment Benefits

Two participants reported their belief that a factor in parents' choice to send their children to a Gaelscoil is the hope that it will lead to **enhanced employment opportunities** for their children:

It [Irish] even has a certain cachet sometimes, I think. You know, I would notice a change in the culture myself in the last couple of years. I think that those who speak Irish fluently, or have gone through a Gaelscoil, almost have a little... edge. (HSLC)

This was echoed by another participant; although she argued that while it might be the *parents'* reason for choosing an Irish-medium school, this was not in line with the school's philosophy on immersion education:

And maybe there are some of them [parents] that are of the opinion that it might turn their children into better citizens, or a better chance of getting a job, or moving on in education, or in society. That's not necessarily what we're about. To us, language is for everybody, it's not all about jobs. (AP)

This participant thus indicates that in some cases parents' motivations, agenda or priorities might diverge from the aims of the school.

Cultural Affiliation

The principal of School A noted that the demand for a Gaelscoil in the disadvantaged area in which her school is located initially came from factors relating to Irish identity and culture, and that this is still the case for some parents there:

I suppose there are lots of reasons. When the school started off in 19XX, and you're talking about parental involvement, the demand for this all-Irish primary school came from the bottom up. It wasn't the State, or the Catholic Church, that came up with the idea. There was a lady that was living in the community, and she brought it up at a tenants' association meeting, would it be possible to provide education through the medium of Irish for children of parents who wished that they would be educated through the medium of Irish? Because at that stage, late 1960s, early 1970s, people were thinking about their background, their Irish... identity. They were now able to access foreign television stations, foreign culture, they were going abroad on holidays. And when they went abroad, maybe, they became embarrassed: "Here I am going to France and they're speaking their own language, and here am I using English". There was a bit of that. And then, I suppose, there are parents now, obviously, hopefully, and it's great to hear, that are interested in the language and the culture of the country, and they want to give their children every opportunity to be part of that. (AP)

It is noteworthy that, while many of the parents who participated in Study 1 reported that factors relating to Irish language and culture were the main motivating factors in their choice of school, only this one educator reported believing that this was genuinely the case. The following quote sums up the beliefs of the remainder of the interviewees, who reported believing that commitment to Irish is confined to a small number of parents in their schools: 'There are an element that would be very interested [in Irish]... I think, I'd say, it's probably a majority that would think it's secondary.' (CT2)

Topic 3: Educators' Definitions of Parental Involvement

Having thus far considered educators' perceptions of various features of their parent bodies, including their background characteristics, attitudes, and their motivations for choosing an immersion education for their children, it is now necessary to address how this sample of educators actually construes the role of parents in the education of their children in Irish immersion. To this end, participants were asked to describe what 'parental involvement' meant to them, and they defined the construct in their own terms. As Table 7.6 shows, most of them discussed this in relation to School-based activities, a minority with regard to home-based activities, and one in relation to communication.

Table 7.6: Main themes and frequencies relating to definitions of parental involvement

Theme	Frequency
School-based Activities	9
Home-based Activities	3
Home-School Communication	1

School-based Activities

Interviewees were asked to describe what the term ‘parental involvement’ meant in the context of the educational lives of the pupils in their schools. School-based involvement activities dominated teachers’ and principals’ definitions of the concept, and the majority (n = 7) focused exclusively on such aspects of parental participation, even when they claimed to have a multifaceted view. One principal reported that she had such a multidimensional definition of parental involvement and was aware that parental involvement could take many forms at different stages from the setting up of a school to becoming well-established, but while she listed a variety of different activities, all actually related to parents helping in the school:

Well, I suppose it would have a lot of definitions for me, because, working in a Gaelscoil you have different levels of parental involvement at different stages in your life cycle. So parents would have established our school and would have been on planning and development committees. They would have fundraised; they would have come in and worked in the school in all sorts of capacities, and would still, even though we’re a bigger school, be highly involved at the Parents’ Association end, in fundraising and other activities, in a lot of cultural activities in the school, and would be very willing to share expertise. So it’s kind of a very broad spectrum. (CP)

Similarly, another principal offered the following definition which focused on school-based involvement:

Eh, well, at least to this school, it’s the obvious things, you know? It’s parents’ wish to come to this school, that the children be enrolled here, that they be educated through the medium of Irish. Then when their children are in the school, we encourage them to be involved in the school in lots of ways, not just bringing the children to school and collecting them in the afternoon. We meet them formally on occasions during the school year; we have parent-teacher meetings. We have a parents’ committee, and we encourage parents to become involved in that committee, and we have several other sub-committees to help the school in lots of ways. It might be to do with fundraising; it might be to do with the upkeep of the school, all that type of thing. It might be to do with some of the children’s extracurricular activities that we could make do with the support of parents. (AP)

This definition includes the issue of communicating with parents, mainly in the context of formal meetings with teachers, but also places a clear emphasis on parents’ involvement in

school-based activities. Activities such as **involvement on committees, fundraising, helping with practical upkeep** and **volunteering** to provide or to support extracurricular activities are all included. Later in her interview, this principal reiterated her conceptualisation of parental involvement as consisting of parents providing help and support for the day-to-day running of the school:

And they all [parents] have talents, and different degrees of them, and we try and avail of all of those talents. It might be an artist, it might be bookkeeping, it might be an electrician. There's a role for them all. (AP)

These definitions, while they point to a view of parents as important resources, seem to focus on their potential to **support the effective functioning of the school** and school life, and do not explicitly include a role for parents as *educators* or contributing to children's learning at home. This can also be seen in the following quote where a principal described the involvement of one of the parents in her school:

For example, there's one person and she works in [name of shop]... And they gave us bulbs and bits and pieces and whatever. And then you kind of, eh, you know, you accept what you get, and things like that, with great gratitude, and you know, it's, it was really lovely, it was a fabulous thing to get. But you know, sort of, you suppose, being open to kids, or sort what people CAN give and what they CAN do. (CP)

This principal appears to be highlighting a necessity to accept the kinds of help offered by parents, and tacitly advert to there being other help that they are unable to offer either in material or other ways. However, the things that parents cannot do were not clarified.

Teachers, as well as principals, also referred to school-based activities when asked to define parental involvement in education. However, parental support for homework was more likely to be included by the teachers than the principals, as discussed further below. One teacher indicated that she had quite a narrow definition of what parental involvement constitutes: 'I think mostly of homework, school tours, Sports Day, general helping out. That's pretty much it.' (CT1)

The principals' and to a lesser extent the teachers' emphasis on school-based involvement is at odds with how parents' definition of involvement in Chapter 5, where parents' role construction as educational partners included supporting learning in the home and actively supporting their children's L2 development. The following quote, taken from an interview with a principal who is also a mother, highlights the conflicting priorities of parents and school staff:

Well, with the child's learning, I mean, as a mother myself, I can see that [involvement] with the child's learning, that is a huge thing. But I suppose wearing the principal's hat, every so often you actually genuinely need parties

to help, a parent body to help, as regards, say, we've a lot of bills that have to be paid...and there's very little fundraising done...So I am counting on parents' involvement and their assistance with that at the minute. (AP)

Home-Based Involvement

As noted, participants mentioned home-based activities less frequently in their initial definitions than they mentioned school-based involvement. Three teachers stated their belief that a parents' role involved helping with, or monitoring, their children's homework. One participant indicated that her thinking on parents' role had evolved, so that she had **changed her definition of parental involvement over the years** to include now more emphasis on parental involvement in the learning of the child:

And I suppose nowadays now, it's slightly changing in that, parental involvement now, I suppose, I think more of how they can help with the children and help with their learning. When it was more, in my mind anyway, parental involvement would have been more... getting involved in fundraising. And getting involved in activities in the school. But, em, the way the new reports are [official template for end-of-year school reports to parents], or whatever now, there's a section, you know, that sort of...how the parents can help and all and get involved, so I suppose it's kind of, you know, the, my idea of what it means is changing. (AP)

What was significant was that none of the participants mentioned parents speaking Irish with their children, or supporting their children's Irish development in their definitions. Since supporting home learning and L2 development were the primary ways in which parents believed they should be involved in their children's education (as reported in Study 1) this points to some interesting divergences in how educators and parents are construing parental involvement in IM.

Home-School Communication

Only one educator participant mentioned the issue of schools communicating to parents about children in defining what parent involvement means in her school (see AP quote above), and even there it was in the context of the yearly written report. This seems to support the findings from Study 1 (and findings in Study 3 as reported in Chapter 8 below) which indicated that many parents have infrequent contact or communication with school staff about their children's progress (if the child is not experiencing difficulties) and links in with the expressed wish of some parents in that study to receive more regular information and guidance from schools on how to support their children's learning at home. The near total absence of mention of school-home communication in participants' definitions is thus in line with the findings of the other studies here and indicates that for some families, the home and the Gaelscoil can be separate and distinct domains, with little communication between the two.

Topic 4: Attitudes towards Parental Involvement

This section deals with interviewees' attitudes towards the involvement of parents in the education of their pupils. A majority spoke positively in general terms about the value which they placed on parental participation, and variously described what they perceived to be the benefits of successful home-school relations for schools, children and parents themselves. They also outlined which types of involvement activities they valued most as educators. Some less favourable (ambivalent and neutral) attitudes were also expressed towards parental involvement and to particular parental involvement activities. The main themes relating to this topic are summarised in Table 7.7.

Table 7.7: Main themes and frequencies for attitudes towards parental involvement

Theme	Frequency
Positive Attitudes towards Parental Involvement	7
Importance of School-Based Involvement	8
Benefits of Home-School Communication	3
Importance of Home-Based Involvement	1
Ambivalent Attitudes towards Parental Involvement	2

Positive Attitudes towards Parental Involvement

The majority of participants expressed favourable attitudes towards parental involvement. The strongest endorsement of parental involvement, perhaps unsurprisingly, came from the home-school liaison coordinator from School A. She described her job thus:

The purpose of this job is to create a partnership between home and school community; and particularly to strengthen the link between home and school. So I suppose, at the core of it is the children's education. And the aim of the job is to bring parents closer to their children's education. So that's a very noble aim, I think. (HSLC)

She acknowledged the important role she felt that parents should have in the educational lives of their children: '*Parents are the prime educators of their children.*' (HSLC). This participant reported high levels of (school-based) parental involvement in her school, and believed that this had a range of benefits for children's outcomes. She was keen to highlight that while some of these outcomes may not be easily measured or assessed, they were nonetheless very important.

I think there's benefits [of parental involvement] for both the school and for the children... I think for the parents to feel part of their children's education, they feel that they're respected and valued and that their knowledge and expertise and skills are valued, really, and respected... The children will feel more secure. It will deepen their appreciation of education, without them even knowing it... I think all the research shows that the higher parental involvement, the greater the parental involvement, the greater the outcomes for children. In all kinds of ways. There's a lot of outcomes though... I think at the moment we're very focused on quantitative outcomes in everything we do. And I'm not such a person. I'm sure there's statistics that back up everything, but I think the qualitative outcomes are more important. And they're less obvious sometimes. And there are qualitative outcomes here. You know, you see that the children are more secure. You see that they, they seem to flourish I suppose. Education becomes bigger than school. It becomes more than what lessons you have or what you're learning. It's kind of like a lifelong journey really, that's the way I see it anyway. It's a life journey. So you're preparing for that engagement with learning and knowledge throughout their lives. (HSCL)

Thus, the HSLC presents what appears to be an empowerment view of parental involvement, highlighting her experience that it provides subtle but significant benefits for child, parent and school. Other participants had less detailed responses, but also reported being favourably disposed towards parental involvement. For example: *'I think it's very important.'* (CT1) and *'Well, mostly I'd say...it's very positive, involvement.'* (CT2). However, such general evaluations may point to a need for teachers to consider this question more deeply in the future, particularly in light of the experience of Home-School Liaison Coordinators. It should be noted that, in reporting generally favourable attitudes towards 'parental involvement', the definitions outlined in the preceding section show that it appears to mean different things to different teachers, and to teachers and parents, and respondents here did not place equal value on all parental participation practices. The importance, or lack thereof, placed by educators on different aspects of parental involvement is now considered.

Importance of School-Based Involvement

Principals interviewed indicated that it was school-based involvement that they valued most from parents. They specified activities such as planning, fundraising, organising, committee membership and volunteering as the most helpful ways in which parents could participate in school life (as distinct from involvement in school-based *learning* activities such as helping in the classroom). Principals reported relying on parental support in these ways, and in their roles as 'school managers' (in addition to their roles as educators), these types of parent participation were those which they valued most. Among the teachers interviewed, those who taught older children also strongly valued these types of 'helping out' activities on the parts of parents: *'The volunteering I think would be the most important [way for parents to be involved]'* (CT1).

Benefits of Home-School Communication

Only one respondent, a principal, discussed the value of strong communication links between home and school, but it was notable that she chose to emphasise the positive influence this has on the discipline of children in her school and its contribution to a positive school atmosphere:

I think it's also very important for the children to know that there's communication going on with home. I think this has a huge impact on discipline, if children know that Mum and Dad are in the loop. And that that's important to know, well, it's only a phone call. You know, and I would say to them "I have to talk to your mum and dad about that" or... and I would always say to parents as well: "Look, it's very important your child knows that you and I are communicating. That you and the teacher are communicating." That would have a very positive impact on discipline. And we would have very... a calm school. Very few discipline problems. There's a very good buzz, a very good atmosphere through the place and, you know, teachers who come from other schools comment on the fact that things work very well. And I think it's because that understanding is there that, we're talking to Mam and Dad, Mam and Dad are talking to us. (BP)

The communication being referred to in this account seems to relate mainly to discipline issues, although it is possible that such regular communication also embraces learning issues, even if not stated. However, it is significant that neither this participant, or any other, explicitly considered communication on issues such as how to support the child's learning or progress in different ways or curricular areas (where communication might be of benefit to parents' role construction and sense of efficacy, and thus to children's learning outcomes). Instead, it appeared that the primary value placed on effective home-school communication related to the smooth running of the school.

Importance of Home-Based Involvement

There was an interesting divergence within the sample in terms of valuing home-based parental involvement. Teachers of younger children indicated that they place the most value on parental **support for the literacy development** of their pupils: *'I think, for the level that I'm teaching, reading and talking to your child about books is the most important thing.'* (CT2). Similarly, another teacher described the advantages she perceived for children in her class who had parents who were actively involved in literacy activities at home with them:

Well a lot their reading does need to be...you know, they do need to have that support at home. I mean you notice some children have it before they even come to school and they have a head start on children that don't, so the gap has already been there, it's not even their own... I know that their own intelligence matters, but it's mostly, you know the basic words or the basic signs before they even come in. So it's very difficult then for children who don't have that to catch up. (CT3)

This teacher also commented on the value of **parents' providing support for learning in informal ways** and listed several things she would like to see parents doing. For example:

Even using, like, Maths and like giving them, sort of, the responsibility like. Even setting the table, like, how many knives do you need, how many forks do you need? That they're doing things like that at home. That really helps... Even just to do things, even if it's not formal, you know, sitting down and doing homework and doing written work, that even, you know, even reading signs on the road, like, just in passing, that they're helping, you know, trying to, you know, to decode words... Even reading the menu if they go to a restaurant or something, you know, just trying to help them in that way. (CT3)

However, it was not clear that this teacher or her school were communicating to parents the value of such activities. Aside from these instances, overall, the educator participants did not seem to be greatly engaged with the issue of parental involvement in the home. In fact they seemed to accept that it would not happen, and several interviewees talked about not expecting parents to be involved in home-based learning activities, such as homework, while others reported believing such involvement not to be necessary. This will be considered further below.

Ambivalent Attitudes towards Parental Involvement

One reason for the limited definitions and lack of detail in some of the responses regarding parental involvement may point to some tacit ambivalence about this issue. A principal expressed the view that, contrary to the intuitive appeal of the idea that parental involvement is entirely positive, it can actually be somewhat problematic: *'Em... well I think it's a mixed blessing. That's how I think of it. I suppose so much depends on the parents that want to become involved.'* (CP). This principal went on to describe negative experiences she had had of parental involvement in her school and referred to parental participation in education as a *'double-edged sword'* This will be covered in greater detail in the following section which deals with participants' experiences of the participation of parents in the education of their pupils.

Additionally, one teacher in School C, who had previously been employed in another Gaelscoil catering for a more homogenously high-SES parent body compared her experiences of parental involvement in the two schools in the following way:

I think the children here just, a lot of them are from... lower socioeconomic backgrounds than Scoil Y... Scoil Y parents would be a lot more involved, and a lot more, I think, on top of what the child is learning. But not necessarily in a good way. I think some of them, you know, would kind of be on your back a lot more than here. There's a huge difference really. (CT1)

This teacher appeared to perceive high levels of parental involvement in their children's learning as potentially problematic in terms of pressuring teachers, and she appeared to prefer the lower levels of contact she had in the current school with low SES parents. These accounts serve to indicate that, while there may be general agreement regarding the value of parental involvement, some teachers may have reservations about how it is structured or implemented, and may perceive it as diluting their autonomy, or adding to their workload. Thus it is imperative to recognise that teachers are not necessarily unanimous about the benefits of parental involvement as a positive force in a school. This points to the value of giving more consideration to teachers' actual experiences of parental involvement detailed below.

Topic 5: Experiences of Parental Involvement

Interviewees were asked to describe some actual experiences of parental involvement in education, and they reported involvement in a range of different activities, as well as their awareness of changes in the nature and extent of parental involvement over time. Participants also discussed their experiences of 'hard to reach' parents i.e. parents with very low levels of contact with the school who are resistant to invitations for involvement. This contrasts with their experience of a 'core group' of parents who can be relied on for support.

Table 7.8: Main themes and frequencies for experiences of parental involvement

Theme	Frequency
School-Based Involvement	9
Change in Involvement over Time	7
Core Involvement Group	6
'Absent' Parents	5

School-Based Involvement

Three participants discussed their experiences of parents' school-based involvement in **learning activities** with younger children in the school. The home-school liaison coordinator from School A indicated that there were high levels of such involvement from parents in her school, specifying as an example an (English-medium) programme she had organised for parents and children in the most junior classes which incorporates art/craft and literacy activities, which she entitled the 'Story Sack Project' and was aimed at encouraging reading and positive attitudes towards books and reading. She also indicated that the school was involved in the 'Maths for Fun' programme, which is a paired Maths programme for parents and children in the classroom implemented in DEIS schools. She believed that this was a very positive way for parents to be involved:

I think when their parents... They love to see their parents in the school. They get a kick out of that themselves and you can see them kind of light up. They might say to you: "My mammy's coming in today". And you know, if mammy doesn't turn up, for the class or whatever - Maths for Fun is another thing we're doing - they feel disappointed, you know. They like it. I think it creates good continuity between home and school. (HSLC)

However, in both cases these programmes appeared to be delivered to the (disadvantaged) parents in this school mainly through English, which is highly relevant here. Another participant, a teacher of Senior Infants in School C, indicated that parents were involved in several activities in her classroom:

Like, a lot of people come in to do different things like art, crafts, whatever. There's a lot of that at the moment. Sometimes music. But also volunteering to help with reading, or you know, paired reading with children. We'd have groups coming in all the time. (CT3)

She too described why she believed this to be important as a way of developing the children's L1 language skills in preparation for literacy:

Reading with them, reading to them. You know, discussing the stories with them, the characters, because to develop language at this stage is hugely important before they start to read, so, it helps comprehension... You know, that it's hugely important what you do with your child and that they see you reading. Not even just reading to them but that they actually see that you're interested in something. (CT3)

Participants also discussed their experiences of parents' involvement at **committee or decision-making levels**. The Principal of School C explained that only proficient Irish speakers could represent parents on the school's Board of Management:

Well you see actually, there's different managerial groups, there's the Educate Together..., the CB [Catholic Bishop] and there's the Foras [Patrúnachta, Patron Board]. Now we're under the Foras, so actually the Board in Management meetings are all as Gaeilge, so the people on our Board of Management, the parent Reps, have to have Gaeilge... (CP)

A similar situation was described by the principal of School B:

Now, proficient parents do tend to find their way onto the Board especially, because the records of the Board and that are typed in Irish and you would need a certain amount. (BP)

This supports the findings of the parent study that only a very small number of parents reported experience on the Board of Management, and some expressed a sense of being excluded. It was notable that the principal of School A, the disadvantaged school, described a more open and what she referred to as 'democratic' system:

And, em, you're probably familiar with the Board of Management system that every school has? But we also have a Board of Management, but it's within a Parents' committee. It's part of a parents' committee, a democratic committee,

made up entirely of parents, apart from the principal of the school and another member of staff. Take this year, the other member of staff is also a parent in the school. So, on this Parents' Committee, you have a representative from each of the classes, and then you have, there are eight parents on the Board of Management... So it's a very democratic organisation. We follow the rules of the State- the Department of Education and so forth. But, it being democratic and central to parents means also, it gets it into their heads, into their minds: "You know, there's a place here for us. We've a role to play." (AP)

While this certainly draws in a wider group of parents, and the principal did not report that parents had to have proficient Irish to be involved, it was not entirely clear whether this was in fact a committee within the Parents' Association, rather than the official Board of Management with executive powers.

Where parents did participate in formal structures, educators' experiences of parental involvement at a decision-making level reported were not universally positive. For example, one principal described negative experiences of the involvement of parents on committees:

And then, yes, initially, and they would have been wanting to go on the management board or whatever, and sort of sitting there as if it were on a throne. But then, I suppose, even as the school progressed, I found, maybe a few, well... it was a really power thing for them, and they thought they were well-intentioned, I presume, but it was causing more... Yeah, it caused a lot of harm. What seemed to happen, sort of, a core group of people, and I suppose it's like that in maybe a lot of schools- it seemed, I don't know, maybe because it's a Gaelscoil... but a group of people sort of seemed more interested in power and the dynamics of power than in actual help (CP).

This principal indicates that parental representation on school committees can be difficult to handle. Of course such difficulties on this issue can occur in any type of school and may be due to a number of factors such as personality differences, vested interests, and Boards and parent bodies taking opposing views on particular matters such as information or resource allocation. However, this principal's particular reference to the Gaelscoil may imply that when Boards of Management are restricted to small sub-samples of parents, those with high levels of Irish proficiency, there is a risk of the formation of a powerful core group which may not always be fully representative of the parents of a particular school.

Core Involvement Group

This core group of involved parents also figured with regard to other types of involvement. Interviewees reported satisfactory experiences of parents' involvement in their school when they felt that they had received the support or practical help they required. However, they commented that this support is often provided by a particular group of parents in schools, who are relied upon to be involved when needs arise: *'We would have a good core group of parents who we could count on to come in and, you know, contribute.'* (CP). Two of the principals

referred to there being certain parents who they perceived as being willing to provide what is needed in the school and that these parents would thus be targeted to do so: *‘so they would get the tap on the shoulder for that.’* (CP) In these comments, the main objective in eliciting parental involvement appeared to be, not the formation of long-term partnerships between the school and its families, but rather the resolution of short-term specific problems or needs met by whichever parent is willing to do so, even if, as one teacher put it, this means that: *‘It always seems to be the same parents that do all the work.’* (CT3). While this may be an efficient way of getting school needs met for teachers, it may also contribute to the feeling expressed by some parents in Study 1 that their contribution is neither invited nor worthwhile, and the formation of in- and out-groups among the parent body.

‘Absent’ Parents

Although not typical, educator participants did indicate that there were parents who had no involvement or contact with the school at all.

I’d be very aware of absent parents that you never see. But you don’t have a way of reaching out to those. Like, every few years you do the note of: “Is there anything you would like to do? Is there any expertise you have?” If we’re looking for someone to paint walls or whatever. You know, you send it out... (BP)

Again, this welcome appeared to be framed in terms of what the parent might have to contribute to the school, rather than in terms of the questions or wishes expressed by some parents in Study 1 for more communication about their child’s learning and how they could support it better at home.

Another teacher indicated her perception that some parents are ‘lost causes’ who are so wary of the school that they do not want to be involved in school life in any way:

It is a pity, there are people, even when you ask them to come in, perhaps don’t really want to. And I think part of that goes back to, people had bad experiences of school themselves. They see school as something negative or bad. And it’s not that they’ve passed it on to their children, the children, the Infants coming in are still positive, but they themselves are slow to come in. (CT2)

Again, it would be interesting to consider if other forms of outreach or invitation that involve home-based involvement could be effective in supporting these parents. It would be worthwhile attempting to reach these parents because, as reported here, they tend to be parents of the children whom educators feel could benefit from their support: *‘Actually a lot of parents you would really want to meet wouldn’t turn up at all. And you’d be ringing them and following them up and whatever.’* (CP)

Change in Involvement over Time

Participants discussed how the level and types of **parental involvement in their schools had changed over the life cycle of their schools**. Participants from School A and School B outlined a decline from the high involvement of the committed founding group of parents who first sent their children to the school and who had enthusiasm for, and commitment to Irish and to the developing school. However, they indicated that this had waned to some degree over time. One participant described it thus:

In a way, small was beautiful, because when we started off we were in pre-fabs and conditions were bad, but the enthusiasm was fantastic. The school has grown, we're still able to manage it. We now have a staff of 14, we're now in a modern, permanent building. But maybe we're cosy... (AP)

This sentiment was echoed by the principal of School B who offered the following account of the change of parents' commitment which she had observed over her time in the school:

I suppose, the people you have, maybe, the first, even, twelve years, who would have been involved at the very start, and who might still have, say, younger siblings coming through, that would have remembered what it was like at the start- they would be a very committed group and would have huge ownership of the school... Parents who come when the school is more established and when you haven't had the same adversity to fight, accept the school as there. And they're just sending their child to another school. And they have missed all that battling and that fighting at the start. And there is nothing like adversity to unite people. And I would feel now, since we moved into a new building parents who now come and see this beautiful, modern facility don't remember when we were in prefabs, don't remember that every year we added a unit onto the pre-fabs in the corner of the field, and the work that took, and the commitment that took. And it doesn't take the same commitment from those parents to send their children into a beautiful, state-of-the-art building that it took for those first parents to send their children to a school that literally didn't exist. So that level of commitment you don't get as the life cycle of the school goes on. (BP)

These principals saw the effect of parents working together to establish the school in terms of their commitment and unity, while current parents 'have it easy' in not needing to fight the system. The principal of School C, whose school had also undergone a change in parent profile, and now included more families from higher SES backgrounds, also noticed a change in parental involvement and expectation. She saw this as helping in terms of attendance at parent-teacher meetings, and higher parental expectations regarding their child's education, but lower general commitment to involvement in the activities of the school:

*I think actually, in many ways, for the vast majority of them [the low SES parents who sent their children in the school's early period], you could actually have been teaching Swahili and they really wouldn't have known. You know, as long as the children were happy and whatever, they were, you know, it was grand. Whereas, yes, now, we notice actually, particularly in the parent-teaching meetings, **both** parents will come to the parent-teacher meetings, whereas before this, actually, a lot of parents you would really want to meet wouldn't turn up ...But, yeah, as regards the children's education, I do see, yes, more of an expectation. As regards being involved in the activities or whatever,*

no, I don't. I think maybe, a lot of them maybe are sort of busy, you know, and late hours and whatever. (CP)

It was interesting that while the principal appeared to regret this lack of engagement of the early parent group in school-based activities and events, a teacher from the school noted that these 'busy' current parents are now more involved in giving home-based parental support to their children's learning than was the case with previously:

Very much at the moment. Yes. A lot more than when I started working. You know, an awful lot more involvement... They're doing a lot more reading with them, reading to them, so there's a lot more going on. (CT2)

When asked to explain why she thought this change had occurred this teacher responded:

Well I'd say, one thing maybe it's the background of the children that I'm teaching at the moment. That perhaps their parents are more educated and are more interested in their education. (CT2)

In addition to changes of parental involvement over the life span of the *school*, a further subtheme (n=2) relates to **changes in parental involvement over the school career of children**. One Fourth Class teacher reported low levels of involvement from the parents of her pupils and explained why she believed this to be the case:

I do think there's more involvement at the younger age, especially wanting to volunteer for things. They're much more eager to volunteer, and the homework is always pristine at the younger age, but then they kind of let the children become more independent as they get older. (CT1)

She was pessimistic that this situation regarding classroom volunteering could be changed as:

I think children would be a bit embarrassed as well if their parents were volunteering, especially the older ages. I don't know if it's the parents not wanting to, I think it's probably more the kids not wanting them to, you know? (CT1)

Again, this raises the issue of the need to review and adapt the model of involvement offered by schools more explicitly in order to deal with changes as children mature, but also with changes in the parent body over time. There is a danger that schools and educators might unconsciously resign themselves to low levels of parental involvement in the activities they want, while meanwhile the current parents have different needs and capacities and are feeling uninvited or unsupported in the areas in which they want to be involved.

Topic 6: Use of Irish in the Home

Given the importance placed by parents on their beliefs that they should be supporting their children's Irish development by creating out-of-school opportunities for their children to speak the language, educators were also asked about this topic. Interviewees discussed the value they

placed on home use of the target language, how they expect parents to support their children's Irish development, and the extent to which they perceive Irish to be used in the home sphere. Each of these main themes will now be discussed.

Table 7.9 Main themes and frequencies relating to home Irish use

Theme	Frequency
Experiences	9
Expectations	8
Attitudes	8

Experiences

Interviewees were unanimous (n=9) in their beliefs that **very few children used Irish in the course of their family lives**:

When they leave school in the afternoon, I suppose it's back, when they're amongst each other, I assume that it's Béarla [English], but sure that's- you have to accept that... That's the reality...Irish is not the number one language at home. (AP)

Similarly, another educator responded thus: *'I can only think of one or two that would ever... [use Irish]'* (CT4)

A subtheme in this section related to educators' perceptions that **home use of Irish may decrease over time**. One interviewee described children's early enthusiasm to use their new Irish words at home which declines as they get older and more self-conscious, making them reluctant to seem 'different':

It's amazing in the Infants they go home and they're delighted to be able to share the language, and the parents, it's like when the children are learning to speak at the beginning, even in English, and there's such excitement in the house with that, with the mála [bag], the focal 'mála' and the múinteoir, and all the things they're coming out with, and they're really, you know, there's a great buzz about the whole thing. And yeah, it comes, later on then, you know, some children, it's amazing though, I don't know what the variables at work are, but I mean... it does come to a stage then that...if they have friends that aren't going to a Gaelscoil, and then they don't want to appear to be that bit different, and it can, kind of, maybe, do you know, put them into a certain category. (CP)

Another participant also highlighted the influence of a child's age on their willingness to speak Irish outside of the school setting. She believed that the habit needed to be formed early if children were not to see the language as just the language of school:

I think a lot of, some of it is about habit, you know. It's like, you know, if there's a habit, like with some parents who have a lot of Gaeilge, and there's a habit that people speak Gaeilge in the house, then, well that's what happens. So I think it's to do with whether it's routine, or habit and you know, you get used to it from that perspective. And there's probably a vulnerable point, you know, say, after the Infants stage, if people persist that it, you know, maybe there is more of a possibility that it will continue. (CP)

Attitudes

Given that educators held this perception about low use of Irish in the home, they were also probed as to whether they believed such out-of-school use is important, and whether they expected parents to be supporting their children's L2 development at home. It was significant that the majority of interviewees reported believing that it was **not necessary for children to speak Irish outside of school**:

No, I don't - I don't actually [think parents' use of Irish with child important]. I mean, I look over the years at the people who went to Scoil Y and, you know, a lot of them didn't speak Irish. And the kids are, were fluent, and I mean, I see, because our place isn't as long-established, you kind of just, there aren't as many to check obviously. But I know of a few who are in college, and that, do you know, they're still having, they still have pretty good Irish. And a few of them are studying Irish as well, so there's stuff in college. And their parents would hardly have had a word... It certainly helps, as regards, getting that little bit of extra vocabulary, and, you know, writing the better stories. But I suppose if you do an okay job of it at school it does help, because, actually the Inspector was in recently now doing a Dip in [a fairly junior] class, and she actually said to me afterwards that they had a very high standard of Irish. And maybe about, I'm just trying to think offhand, maybe about, you know, [only] two or three parents there would ever really speak Irish... So, the immersion is doing its job. (CP)

This principal is indicating a belief that since immersion alone, with little home support, achieves very good results in general, that it is not necessary to attempt to encourage parents to support the language outside of school. Another agreed that it was not necessary that parents created out-of-school opportunities to speak Irish, but felt that it was important that parents conveyed positive attitudes towards the language to their children:

But I don't think it's completely necessary. I think it would be nice if they showed some interest in the language, but it wouldn't be learning it completely. But if they showed some interest in it, that would be helpful. (CT1)

There was not unanimity on this subject however, as three participants did see value in children using Irish in the home. However, they focused on parents with high levels of

fluency, and did not seem to think that parents with low or even moderate levels of Irish proficiency would have anything to contribute:

Yeah. You can't compare between the child coming from the home, coming from the family, where Mammy and Daddy are fluent, are well able to use the language and those that have little or no Gaeilge. There is a difference, there's no doubt about it. (AP)

Expectations

What was most salient here was that, whether they felt that out of school use of Irish was important or not, the educators interviewed reported resignation with regard to this issue. Thus, they explained that, because they recognised that the vast majority of parents cannot speak the language, they **did not expect parents to be involved in this way**: *'The ideal would be that there would be more fluent [parents], but sure, we have to live with reality.'* (AP). Similarly, another interviewee reported that she had never really considered the issue as she did not expect parents to use Irish with their children: *'How to get it going between parents and children?... it's not something I've thought here actually about I must say, you know? (CP).* This is particularly striking in light of the parents' data indicating that they feel that teachers and schools expect them to support Irish, as will be discussed in Chapter 9.

Topic 7: Policies and Practices

Participants were asked to describe any explicit or implicit policies in the school which relate to parents. They were also asked about their individual practices relating to informing parents about immersion and their general dealings with parents. The main themes relating to this topic are now discussed.

Table 7.10: Main themes and frequencies relating to policies and practices regarding parents

Theme	Frequency
Eliciting Parents' Commitment to Immersion	3
Inviting School-Based Involvement	4
Guiding/Encouraging HBI	2
Communicating with Parents	9
Providing Supports/Resources to Parents	6
Lapsed or Failed Practices	3

Eliciting Parents' Commitment to Immersion

Principals discussed their early interaction with parents prior to their children starting school. They all placed significant weight on their policy of asking parents at that stage to commit

explicitly to supporting the immersion policy of the school. One principal described how parents were asked to sign a contract to this effect:

We don't assess the parents' level of Gaeilge, all that we would ask is that they have a positive attitude to it. We do ask them to sign, when they enrol the child, that they understand that the school has an immersion education policy. That Gaeilge is the language of communication of the school, and that they accept this. (AP)

The principal from School A indicated that parents were actually interviewed in order to assess their commitment to Irish and the Irish immersion ethos of the school:

Well there is an interview, but it is a chat, say, between the Chairperson of the Board of Management, who is also a parent, and myself; we meet at the school, and the parents who wish that their child be enrolled in this school, and we talk to them about their reasons for choosing this school, and what their own interest and history is in relation to the language, their use of the language, culture and so forth. And, we would hope that they're enrolling their child for the proper reasons- it's not just because of convenience or the school being next door, or... That's not what we're about. (BP)

It is very likely that such initial interactions significantly impact on parents with regard to the perception that they are expected to speak only Irish in the school, and feed into their understanding of the school's priorities and what is required of them.

Inviting School-Based Involvement

The principal in the DEIS School A was able to delegate inviting parental involvement, which was primarily facilitated through the home-school liaison coordinator:

And another great thing that we have here is this home-school liaison scheme. We're sharing a teacher, Siobhán, with a neighbouring school. And her role is to work with parents, meet with parents, talk to parents, listen to parents, advise them, organise some activities for them. Annette has been doing that for several years and that's of great benefit to the parents, to the school. I think children, they like to see Mammy and Daddy around the place. The reality is Mammies more than Daddies. We have a few exceptions. (AP)

Other principals have fewer supports in this regard. One explained that she often got very few responses to calls for parental involvement when letters were sent out to all parents asking for help. She also noted that a period of strained relations between the school and a section of the parent body had depressed overall levels of parental involvement in school activities.

They [parents who she had had conflict with] had a lot to say and a lot of contact with other parents. Actually, it wasn't that wonderful. So, then for a few years there wasn't that much activities or whatever, and actually that was okay, because you could, in ways, because, em, you know, the grants were okay from the Department and we sort of managed to do a few little bits, and then when the Communion, Confirmation, the kind of times that you would need a particular extra bit of involvement, when they came 'round you could actually just choose people to pick... What I do, what I try to do is I ask, do you know,

face-to-face you know, personally. Rather than expect people to just come to committees. (CP)

What is interesting here is that the definition of involvement in the two schools seems so different: in the DEIS school it embraces empowerment of parents to support their children's education, seeming to prioritise their role in supporting education over the target language, whereas in the non-DEIS school it seem to hinge on eliciting help needed for the school's management and functioning, with some concern that parents may take too much power.

Communicating with Parents

Although participants did not volunteer comments on communication with parents in their definitions of parental involvement, respondents were probed as to the ways in which they communicated with parents, and in what circumstances they would do so. One participant responded in the following way:

We would encourage, especially at the special needs end, we would meet with parents a lot, and they would be very involved in, with the children's IEPs [Individual Education Plans], and what's in them, and knowing what they have to do at home. And we would also, you know, encourage other parents to come in and share expertise with us. You know, things like Science Week and Maths Week and Book Week and all that, to those kinds of events. (BP)

Thus it appears that there is most frequent contact between the school and family in cases where the child in question had special needs and was therefore on a differentiated curriculum. However, no comments were made about communicating to parents of typical children what their children are learning or 'what they have to do at home' if they have no identified special educational needs. In such cases, the main ways in which all interviewees reported communicating with parents about their children's learning were the annual parent-teacher meetings and the end of year reports sent home to parents. Aside from this, it appeared that communication tends to take place when there is a problem. One teacher said issues she would discuss with parents would be: 'Maybe, being late, homework not being done properly.' (CT1).

Some of the teachers interviewed indicated that they made efforts to let parents know that they are welcome to discuss something with them:

I've always said to people: 'Come in at any stage after school, because I'm here, you can talk to me.' I'd rather people came with a problem, you know... and not let it, you know, fester, or you know, maybe a child be upset about something. (CT2)

While it is very positive that this teacher explicitly tells parents that she welcomes communication with them, it appears that communication outside of the formal parent-teacher

meeting is likely to need to be initiated by the parents and to be relating to a problem, difficulty or issue.

Thus, while teachers might have ideas as to how they would like parents to be supporting their children's learning (e.g. the informal literacy and numeracy activities mentioned by a teacher above), it is not clear that they are communicating these to parents in meaningful ways, and the yearly parent-teacher meeting may be the only time that they do offer any guidance or suggestions to parents (and these may not always be accessible if they are offered mainly in Irish). This is in line with parents' reports that they would like to be more involved in their child's learning but are unsure as to how best to do so.

Participants were also asked to indicate what language was used in communication with parents, and whether the school had a policy relating to this. Despite the reports discussed above that the educators have low expectations of most parents' ability to support their child's Irish, all of the interviewees indicated that **parents were requested to attempt to use Irish wherever possible** while on school premises, and to make use of any Irish vocabulary they have:

And we would ask them then informally and formally to use whatever Gaeilge they have. If it's only "Dia duit Sinéad" [Hello Sinéad] and that if they are speaking to a teacher in English to do so discreetly. That we try to keep an atmosphere lán-Ghaeilge [all-Irish]. (BP)

This appeared to link with the requirement that parents show support and encouragement for their child's learning of Irish, but the parent data show that it may be perceived differently by parents themselves. However, participants also all indicated that if parents were not able to speak Irish then they were very open to conducting communication with parents through English when necessary. No participant felt that the policy of maintaining an 'all-Irish' atmosphere was strictly enforced in their school, nor felt that any pressure was put on parents to speak Irish if they were not comfortable doing so:

Gaeilge is the first language of the school. So as much as possible, that everybody would do that, would try to use the words that they have. But if it's the case that you don't have a great facility in Irish, I don't think you would feel unwelcome here. (HSLC)

This seemed to represent a struggle between realism and idealism: although the ideal would be that Irish would be the sole language of communication of the school, educators are aware that this is not feasible and take a more flexible attitude towards this when the goal is to impart or receive information from parents:

Encouraged, it's encouraged, but we don't demand Gaeilge only, we have to be realistic. You might turn a person off. I might have as much time for that parent

that, say, you know “I don’t have a lot of Gaeilge, but I want my child to. I didn’t have the opportunity to pick it up”. (AP)

All participants indicated that any written correspondence from the school to parents was presented bilingually: *‘Obviously, it has to be in both. We would have children who have, who are not of Irish parents as well. So you have to cater for everybody.’ (AP)*. Similarly, at committee meetings: *‘But it’s, a bit of Gaeilge and a bit of Béarla so that everybody’s in tune. Yeah, they are basically. The idea would be that they would be as Gaeilge but in this case, you know, we mix it.’* However, as already noted, Board of Management meetings and some committees may be more exclusively Irish in other schools that can draw on a core or in-group of at least some proficient parents.

Providing Resources/Supports for Parents

Participants also discussed the specific ways in which they supported parents to be actively involved in their children’s education. School A appeared to be most proactive in doing several things to this end:

When we have come up with a list of 28 children for the Junior Infants class, eh, and we inform the parents, or call them, we also ask that them, nearly demand of them, that if they’re not fluent Gaeilgeoirí [Irish speakers], that they should attend what we call a ‘crash course’. And we provide that crash course during the last term, or before the September when the child is due to start. And the attendance at that is 90+%. And ciorcail comhrá [conversation circles], and there’s one of those going around the place. And there are also, not lessons, but these classes, whatever, they take place every Thursday morning. And people come along and I don’t know, it’s just conversational I suppose. It’s giving parents the phrases, the sentences, the words, that could be as Gaeilge used in the home. Sort of, “Cá bhfuil an bainne?” [Where is the milk?] “Dún an doras” [Close the door], “Téigh go dtí do leaba [Go to bed]”, “Cá bhfuil [where is...] the whatever?” That sort of thing. (AP)

This range of classes appear to be in line with the wishes expressed by some of the parents in Study 1. The HSLC also made reference to the Irish classes for parents and how successful she believed them to be:

An example of that would be that we run a parents’ class, a Rang Gaeilge. We’ve a fabulous teacher, and that’s been running as long as I’ve been here, it pre-dates my arrival . Very well attended. Lovely atmosphere, buzzy atmosphere. (HSLC)

However, this school was the only school out of the three which offered Irish classes for parents. The principal of School B indicated that if parents wished to improve their Irish that they could do so locally: *‘[name of university in the area] do have a Diploma course in the evening that parents can do. And some parents have done it.’ (BP)*. The principal of School C stated: *‘I suppose there are organisations who do a pretty good job of it [providing classes], if people want conversation in Irish, but of course, I think some of those are in Dublin.’ (CP)*

An interesting issue arose with regard to the value of parents purchasing English versions of their children's textbooks as a useful resource/support for parents.

On a very practical level, English language versions of all the textbooks we use exist. And a lot of parents, for their own peace of mind, if the child, if there's an issue with Maths, they will buy the English version of the Maths book and have it at home. We don't have an issue with it. Because sometimes it just gives peace of mind to a parent. We don't teach the English terminology here. (BP)

This strategy might be of wider interest to the parent body with regard to Maths homework particularly, as several parents did not seem to realise that this was an option for them. However, another teacher was not in favour of parents buying English versions of textbooks, believing that it could negatively affect the child's attitude towards the Irish language and the importance of it:

Possibly, it might be creating some sort of, I don't know, negative vibe with the children that Irish isn't necessary. You know, that there's always the English option. They wouldn't bother with the Irish then, I think. (CT1)

It was interesting that this was from a relatively newly-qualified teacher, whereas educators who have more experience in Gaelscoileanna appeared to be more flexible about practices such as these. For example, the principal from School C reported:

I think to me, I feel that the education is the important thing. And if buying English versions of books helps the parent and they can then help the child, that is the important thing. And as well as that, I mean, with the learning I think, a bond is very, very important between the two. I mean if the parent is there struggling, or if they are fighting with the child because they don't understand how to help them and the child's saying "Aw it's like this" or whatever, I think anything that helps that relationship between the two of them, and that enables the learning, in my opinion, it's not... but, you know, we would have had parents like that, and we would have had people on the Board of Management and actually, under the Foras that we are, they would have a very strong line on a lot of those things [against it]. But at the end of the day, that's within the school day, whereas at home, it's a person's own prerogative. And to me, the learning, I think is the big thing, and the good relationship, and the interest in the learning. That's not going to happen if there's a lot of breakdown in the communication or a lack of understanding. (CP)

Thus, these principals had reached the conclusion that if parents found it helpful to have English versions of the textbooks at home in order to assist them in helping with homework, that that was acceptable to them, although there were indications that this was not an official policy. This might account for the fact that relatively few parents seemed to be aware of this strategy.

Lapsed/Failed Practices

Interviewees also made references to activities that they had tried to introduce but for one reason or another had not been successful. One such was the experience of School C of running Irish classes for parents:

Now we did try, we tried a few times ourselves to have them [Irish classes for parents]. And they worked for a little while, but we had the old prefabs and then in the night it was so cold that it would start off... It's typical of these, these classes like you'd have in [name of local community/education centre], like adult education classes, for the first few weeks there's loads of people and then after that it really waned, you know? (CP)

This school had a similar experience of holding evening meetings with parents to discuss the class curriculum, but these too had ceased mainly because they were unpopular with teachers:

And curriculum evenings, we used to have those over the years, but what we found was that the teachers didn't really like doing them... And second of all though was, you know, those parents who you would really want to talk to wouldn't come. (CP)

Attempts to bring parents together to speak Irish in the school had also failed:

We have like little bits, you know, we tried a couple of coffee mornings this year, and we had a few parents that had a little bit more [Irish] than others, and they, kind of, they made the cake, and had the cup of tea and, you know. And there was a good few at the first one, but I noticed though that when I went up that they were all talking in English. So it didn't, kind of, work. So the next time we got a guy, thought it might be an idea to get somebody who wasn't in the school to maybe facilitate it a little bit. Only two showed up. (CP)

These experiences of strategies that schools have not found successful are important, but it is also worth considering, in light of earlier findings regarding change over time and change as children get older, that it might be worth reviewing even previously unsuccessful strategies in light of changing profiles of parents.

Topic 8: Facilitators of Parental Involvement

Having reflected on their experience of what did not work, participants also discussed the conditions which they believed were conducive to successful home-school partnerships. The themes relating to such facilitators of involvement are presented in this section.

Table 7.11: Main themes and frequencies relating to facilitators of parental involvement

Themes	Frequency
School Outreach/Invitations	5
Welcoming Atmosphere	4
Parent Characteristics	4

School Outreach/Invitations/Appeals

Respondents indicated that when they offered specific **invitations or appeals for help** that parents would respond positively to these. The idea of parents 'filling a gap' in the needs of the school was mentioned by several and participants had the impression that if they made an appeal for help with something specific, that there would be parents who would oblige. One principal described it thus:

I must say, in our experience, we have never looked for something that we haven't got. You know, if I was looking for a lorry to move furniture, somebody will come up with it. You know, six Daddies to move the pianos will happen. If you send out the message that you're looking for specific help, people who have that specific set of skills will come back to you. (BP)

This idea that parents are willing to **respond to school invitations**, was also offered by a teacher in School C who described the following belief:

And, you know, I think, most people are only waiting to be asked to do something, you know, that they're very, very glad to come in.' (CT3)

Participants have the perception that if they send out specific requests for involvement or help then parents will respond. It does appear, again, that these requests for parental support relate to practical help with aspects of school life, rather than reaching out to parents to be *educational partners* or providing any guidance to parents on how to be involved with their children's learning.

Welcoming School Atmosphere

When asked to explain why they believed that parents were highly involved in their school, the interviewees from School A attributed this to their cultivation of an atmosphere that is welcoming and accepting of parents. The principal of the school described deliberate attempts to make parents feel welcome and outlined the informal interactions and familiar relationships she had with parents which she believed were related to high levels of parent participation in her school:

We, I think, make them feel very at home in the school, sort of an open door policy. We're on first name terms with each other. If I meet a parent she's 'Síle' or 'Seán' or whatever, you know...I think that makes them comfortable. When we meet for the first time, we have a good transparent enrolment policy, in my opinion. Anybody can wish to have their child enrolled... They're all welcome. (AP)

This was echoed by the HSCL from this school who also referred to this atmosphere as an important facilitator of parents' school-based involvement. She indicated that this largely came from the top-down and referenced her principal's managerial style as being integral to this:

We're flexible, I think, and supportive. Because true support is flexible, it's not rigid. And if- I've never, ever, heard [name of Principal] give any kind of rigid directive around "You can't do this. Don't do that." It's rather more: "How can we resolve this? Let's look at this, let's look at this from another perspective." (HSCL)

It appears that this school has a philosophy of empowering parents and treating them as partners in ways that facilitate parental involvement in school-based activities: *'And it's by... I think when they feel comfortable, at ease, more and more can come along.'* (AP)

Similarly, the principal in School C also tried to ensure that all parents felt welcome in her school and part of the community:

I suppose what I personally do is, when I meet them I try and sort of, you know, engage them in conversation. I try and, sort of, make them feel welcome, and sort of give them the impression that, look it, the school is for everybody, not just for the parents who are pretty well educated and have college degrees and stuff. (CP)

Parent Characteristics

Participants were very aware that parent characteristics played a role in whether or not parents became involved. Teachers in School C attributed increasing levels of parental involvement to increasing numbers of well-educated parents among the parent body. However, for the most part, interviewees framed this issue in terms of how parent characteristics presented *barriers* to parental participation and this will be considered further in the next section.

Topic 9: Perceptions of Barriers to Parental Involvement

Table 7.12: Main themes and frequencies relating to barriers to parental involvement

Theme	Frequency
Practical Issues	5
Low Parental Proficiency/Confidence	4
Low Teacher Confidence	2
Parents' Construction of their Role	2

Low Parental Proficiency/Confidence

Three participants showed awareness of some of the difficulties that parents in Study 1 expressed in acknowledging that it may be **daunting for parents** to take an active role in the school or to communicate with school staff if they were not confident Irish speakers:

And I mean some people are more, feel more nervous about it, you know they feel embarrassed that their Irish isn't good enough and that the kids... But what I would say here is that most of the kids wouldn't notice if you make a mistake, you know, they're not going to notice. But, up the school, I suppose, people become more reticent about it, you know? (CT2)

It was interesting that this teacher believed that parents would be **embarrassed to make errors** when speaking Irish in front of the *pupils* in the school, whereas parents themselves actually reported feeling anxious about their interactions with the adults (teaching staff, principal, school secretary etc.)

Since parents in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of Study 1 indicated that they experienced barriers to involvement with their children's home learning, e.g. homework, which they attributed to their lack of proficiency in the Irish language, the educator participants in this study were asked whether they perceived, or had experience with, barriers to such involvement on the part of parents. It was particularly noteworthy that interviewees did not feel that such barriers arose, or should arise, because they had a different view of homework itself, in which **children should not need parental assistance**. For example, as one principal stated:

And children, I mean, really a child should not be doing homework that he/she is not able for. It's just a rehash of what has been learned, taught at school. (AP)

One teacher believed that the homework given to the children in her class was of a sufficiently basic level that parents would have no difficulty supporting their children with it. She also

believed that as the work increased in difficulty in higher grades, children should be capable of managing it themselves, and should not need parental input:

But you hope that, by that stage, that they have, you know, the skills themselves to do it. (CT3)

Another participant acknowledged that while parents worry about their ability to support their children's education if they lack proficiency in the target language, she herself saw this as largely a baseless concern, as it is **not something that educators are anxious about**:

It's definitely a worry for parents. We, on this side of the fence as I suppose, don't see it as an obstacle. But I always say to parents, there are... there are three questions when they come [to the school first]. First of all: "Do you have a place for my child?" Second: "How can I help them with their homework?", and the third is "Where are they going to go to secondary school?" You know, those three questions always come up in my first meetings with parents. And the homework really isn't an issue. Because the children understand what they have to do. (BP)

This principal indicates that the worry parents have about this issue before the child starts in school tends to evaporate in practice. However, it may be that it is allayed in the early years, when children do not have any/much homework, and returns later, since some parents in Study 1 continued to express concern about this issue, which may remain more salient for parents than teachers. In this regard it is interesting to note that, when asked whether she believed low parental proficiency in Irish could result in barriers to the home-based involvement of parents, another participant admitted that it had **never occurred to her** that this could be the case:

No, now I've never heard that mentioned... It's an interesting question... An obstacle? No, I don't think so. (HSLC)

However, this was in the school that made most outreach efforts to parents to take part in school-based activities, many of which were mainly through English, as their proficiency levels were so low. Another teacher recognised that parental proficiency in Irish would be a bonus, but not something that was expected:

The ideal would be that there would be more fluent [parents], but sure, we have to live with reality. (AP)

One teacher was of the opinion that if children were more proficient than their parents in the target language that this could be a positive thing for children's self-esteem:

No, I think it probably gives them a better... more confidence in the Irish, if they kind of show off at home, especially at a younger age, that they can speak it, you know, to their aunts and uncles and they can understand stuff on the radio- I think it gives them a bit of a boost and makes them want to learn more. (CT1)

However, others reflected that it might be low parental confidence in their Irish skills that deters the 'hard to reach' parents from wanting to get involved in school life:

I don't know why - Maybe they feel their Irish isn't good enough, maybe they feel, you know, "I don't know enough to get involved". But there is an element of people, a group of people, that it is very difficult to, to motivate them to come in, you know, even, maybe even to a parent-teacher meeting even. They're kind of intimidated or something, I don't know. (CT2)

Similarly:

But still there are certain sections of people that, I suppose maybe it's lack of confidence or whatever, and they think that it's only for the select few, the, you know, getting involved. (CP)

Low Teacher Confidence

In addition to parent confidence, it was significant that one interviewee made reference to **low staff confidence in inviting parental involvement**. She recognised the importance of the teacher's role in promoting involvement, but having had previous negative experiences of parental involvement she believed her own confidence had been shaken:

And I think some of it depends heavily too on the teacher, and the teacher's confidence in inviting them in. And I suppose, even as regards, my own confidence... We've gone through so many different types and scenarios, that sometimes you're... you know the ones [parents] that you know are fine, and the ones that you've had the trial of. But then, the new ones, you kind of need to just wait and see how it's working out. So it's a double-edged sword from that perspective, you know? (CP)

Practical Issues

Five respondents cited a number of practical issues that acted as barriers in their view. One principal explained how moving location had led to a change in parents' involvement in her school. She indicated how the **physical characteristics of their new school building** had led to parents' perception that the school atmosphere had altered:

I know since we've moved into this new building, parents would feel that they're not as welcome in. And when we were in the pre-fabs, when you pulled up outside, you were literally at the steps of the school. And you walked in the door, and the place was smaller and it was much easier to police or control, for want of a better word, and I knew who was there. We're now in a much bigger building. We have four doors to come in, and I would send notes to people saying "Please do not come in through the fire doors if you see them open. Please come and report at reception." And people feel that the atmosphere has changed. Now we here feel that it hasn't. And I had a very long conversation with a parent the other day who was saying "I don't feel welcome anymore" and I said "have you actually come in?" and she said "No". And even if you pull into the car park like you did, it's quite a walk. You're quite physically distant from the school. (BP)

This is an interesting perspective on how the built environment impacts on school functioning. An added concern for teachers is the need to be concerned with the security of the school building, and a result of this was that this principal believed it was no longer possible for parents to be present in the school in the same ways that they were used to. She believed that parents found this difficult to accept:

We've a big school population, we've over X children, we do have children here where there are barring orders in a family and one parent can't collect. So we have to police who comes in. But that's not something I can tell the general population of parents because it would be easy to identify those parents, and it's a privacy issue. So, I suppose I'm legislating for the minority, I'm legislating for Dunblane, and people find that very hard to take. So, as a school we have to organise more structured ways of bringing the parents in to see, and to mingle. (BP)

Thus the size of the school population impacts on the possible ways in which parents can be involved in school-based activities. One result may be to raise the consideration of home-based activities more in the future. .

Parents' Construction of their Role

Two interviewees mentioned their view that the way parents construe their role may mean they do not become actively involved. One believed that parents saw children's Irish development as something that was solely associated with school and saw this as the explanation for why they would not support it in the home:

You can up skill parents to a degree... But I think, realistically, unfortunately, parents will say: 'That's something they do in school and it's not something we have to do at home.' That compartmentalisation would be there. (BP)

She later expanded on this, linking the choice not to be involvement in school-based activities on the part of some parents to a range of factors that appeared to hinge on a lack of understanding of the value of parental involvement:

It can be for all sorts of reasons. It can be work commitments, it can be, there can be a perception out there that 'Oh, it's only people with issues that go on committees, and they're cranks and I don't want to be involved with that'. There are people who genuinely see no reason why they should be involved. (BP)

Another interviewee saw this less of choosing not to be involved, but rather due to feeling deficient or incapable, perceiving parental involvement as being something for the 'select few' *'just for the parents who are pretty well educated and have college degrees and stuff'* (CP); a perception that she struggled to disabuse them of.

7.9 Relational Analysis

Primarily, the educator participants here viewed parents' roles in the education of their children as providing help and support for their children's schools. Throughout the interviews, it was school-based activities which featured most prominently in respondents' definitions and discussion of parental involvement and also were those most frequently mentioned as being the most valued by educators. School A seemed to be the school most successful at eliciting such school-based involvement, with interviewees listing several successful programmes and activities for parents in the school, and creating a picture of a welcoming, open and 'buzzy' atmosphere, offering classes, volunteer activities, support activities and an open door. However, respondents from this school did not report expecting parents to be involved in home-learning activities with their children and did not feel that this was a function of parental involvement as they understood the concept. They talked about needing to be 'realistic' in relation to this, given the educational and linguistic profile of their parent body, and they fundamentally saw the education of the children and the pupils' Irish language development as being the sole responsibility of the school. Their outreach activities appeared to be designed to address its parents' social disadvantage issues more than issues relating to immersion specifically, and the school appears to have managed very well in creating what Epstein referred to as a 'family-like school'. It is less clear that they have been successful in supporting parents to cultivate 'school-like families', or indeed whether the school has sought to do this.'

Participants from School C reported much lower levels of parental involvement than School A. However, they reported that at different stages they had tried to implement many of the practices which were reported as being so successful in School A (parent classes, conversation circles, curriculum evenings). While thriving in School A, all of these had reportedly failed and had thus ceased in School C, where levels of school-based involvement were reported as being 'very poor'. Given that staff in School C were trying unsuccessfully to adopt strategies that were almost identical to those working in School A, this raises the question of why they were so successful at involving parents in one school and so ineffective in other. It is possible that this was at least in part attributable to resources: while there was a significant number of parents from socially disadvantaged backgrounds in School C, as in like School A, they were not designated as a DEIS school and thus did not receive the myriad supports which School A received. They did not have a home-school liaison coordinator whose sole purpose was to strengthen home-school links and to organise and facilitate parental involvement. Having somebody who understands the importance of involving parents in the school and has the time to devote to accomplishing this may in part explain this difference. Indeed, respondents from School A reported being anxious that the current supports they received would be cut. When

asked if she could think of any ways in which the school could improve home-school partnerships, one interviewee responded:

We'd love to be able to continue with all the resources and supports that we already have. They're a little bit, they're actually quite under threat at the moment because of the proposed cuts, the budget cuts or whatever. So we're hoping we'll be able to retain everybody, and maybe even increase our resources in some way. If there's any philanthropists out there.... (HSCL)

Thus there is a recognition in this school that what they perceive as high levels of parental involvement are, at least in part, attributable to this extra support which they receive.

Another factor in its favour was that School A had been established in the community for over two decades and had a parent body that included many former pupils. Parents were familiar with the school and its staff, and the sense of community was palpable from the reports of those working there. By contrast, School C was a newer school and had moved locations several times in its relatively short history. This movement meant that the school has children enrolled from different areas in the region and as a result has a diverse mix of families in terms of their sociodemographic backgrounds. It is possible that these factors of diversity and geographical spread have detracted from the school's ability to create a sense of community among its families which would be facilitative of involving parents.

It is also possible that the leadership styles of the principals may explain some of the difference in parental involvement levels across these schools. The principal of School A reported having an 'open-door policy' in relation to parents. She described her familiarity with the parents and the welcoming, flexible and supportive atmosphere which she actively tried to cultivate. This endeavour was acknowledged by other staff interviewed in the school, who praised the principal for her philosophy and actions in relation to parents, which they reporting as in turn trickling down to all staff. By contrast, the principal in School C admitted honestly that she was wary and cautious about inviting parents to be involved in her school. She admitted that she had had some negative experiences with parents in the past and that this had led her to be ambivalent about the value of parental involvement. It had also affected her confidence in forging relationships with parents. In the parental involvement literature, there is much reference to 'school characteristics' and 'school outreach' as being important in influencing parental involvement. Such terms are perhaps unhelpful to some degree, as they may lead us to forget that in this context 'school' refers to principals and teachers, to actual people, who have their own motivations and attitudes, shaped by their own experiences. The characteristics of the personnel involved may thus be as important in eliciting parental involvement as the actual practices aimed at doing so.

7.10 Conclusion

The present chapter has outlined the qualitative findings arising from a series of in-depth interviews conducted with educators working in Irish immersion primary schools. The findings suggest that educators construe the parental role in education differently than parents do, having low/no expectations of parental contribution to Irish learning or homework support. They indicate that the parental involvement practices they value are school-based and are different to the ones which parents place most importance on. They are aware that some parents have high levels of involvement, on whom they often lean for practical and organisational help (the 'core group' or 'select few'), while conversely another group is hard to reach, resisting all invitations to the school. These data suggest that principals and teachers are pivotal figures in terms of conveying to parents the value of their contribution, but may not be fully aware of challenges to successful partnerships perceived by parents.

Chapter 8

Study 3: Irish Immersion Pupils' Experiences of Parental Involvement: A Qualitative Exploration

8.0 Overview

This chapter describes the third study of the research project. This study consisted of a qualitative exploration of children's experiences of parental involvement while attending Irish-medium primary schools. This study signals a departure from the majority of parental involvement literature, which has, on the whole, neglected to consult children about their experiences of home-school relations and has failed to explore how children may mediate the home-school link. As with previous chapters, the design and methodology of the present study are first outlined. Next, the ethical issues involved in the study are considered. A detailed description of the findings is then provided. Overarching themes in the data revealed as a result of the relational analysis undertaken are highlighted. Specific responses to each of the research sub-questions are then presented before a brief conclusion is made.

8.1 Design

The present study utilised a qualitative methodology. A series of individual face-to-face interviews were conducted with pupils attending immersion primary schools. The interviews were semi-structured in nature (see Chapter 4 for a description of the rationale for the selection of such a research design). The data were analysed using content analysis.

8.2 Participants

Participants consisted of 33 pupils attending an Irish immersion primary school. Pupils were recruited from two schools. One school (henceforth Gaelscoil A) was located in a large urban area and had DEIS disadvantaged status. This school was a long-established school (founded over forty years ago) and had an enrolment of over 350 pupils. By contrast, the second school (Gaelscoil B) was located in a small town, established in the last ten years and had an enrolment of less than 60 pupils. Twenty one participants were recruited for interview from Gaelscoil A and 12 pupils from Gaelscoil B were interviewed.

As was the case with parent interviews, it was one of the aims of the study to explore whether the nature of parental involvement changes as children progress through school. Consequently, two different age groups (5-7 year olds and 9-11 year olds) were targeted for recruitment. In Gaelscoil A, 14 younger children and 7 older children were interviewed. In Gaelscoil B, eight younger children and four older children were interviewed. Overall then, 22 interviewees were

recruited from classes in the junior half of the school and 11 were recruited from the senior half of the school.

Of the 21 children interviewed in Gaelscoil A, 16 were female and five were male. In Gaelscoil B, participants were balanced with respect to gender. Overall then, 22 of the children were female and 11 were male, giving a gender ratio for the sample of 2:1. Of the 33 children interviewed, 27 were living in two-parent families and six were living with one parent. None of the children interviewed were reported to have special educational needs.

8.3 Ethical Considerations

This study underwent full ethical review by the Human Research Ethics Committee of University College Dublin and was granted approval. Given that the study involved conducting research with children, there were a number of ethical issues which needed careful consideration prior to conducting the research. These are now outlined in turn.

8.3.1 Informed Consent/Assent

When recruiting participants it was necessary that the study be described fully to parents, and in an age-appropriate manner to children. Bilingual information sheets for parents and for children (different versions for each age group) were designed to this end (see Appendix D for samples of information sheets, consent and assent forms). Participants and their parents were informed of the nature of the research and of the purpose and expected duration of the interviews. Parents were urged to read the information sheets with their children and to explain the relevant information to them. The researcher also reiterated this information to participants before interviews commenced. Parents' informed written consent was a prerequisite for inclusion in the study. Written assent was also obtained from Fourth and Fifth Class children. Verbal assent was obtained from Senior Infant and First Class children prior to interview. Participants were informed several times in a positive manner about their right to withdraw from the study at any stage. Children were also given opportunities to ask any questions which they had regarding the research prior to being interviewed.

8.3.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

The concepts of confidentiality and anonymity were defined for participants in a manner appropriate for their developmental stages. To this end, it was explained to all children that their names would not be used in the reporting of the study, and that their parents or teachers would not be informed of what they had said (apart from the normal consideration of disclosure of potential danger: see below). For reporting purposes, participants have thus been assigned identifier codes which allow the reader to identify the type of school and the class level of the child while still protecting participants' individual identities. Codes are

alphanumeric with the letter portion of the code referring to the school from which the participant was recruited (Gaelscoil A or B) and the number allowing the reader to identify the stage of the child. In Gaelscoil A, numbers 1-14 refer to children in the younger age group with the remainder (15-21) referring to older children. In Gaelscoil B, participants B1-B8 are from the younger age group and B9-B12 are older children. In addition, all names presented in the quotes that follow are pseudonyms selected by the researcher.

8.3.3 Planning for Participant Distress/Disclosure

While explaining confidentiality and anonymity, participants were also informed that an exception to these conditions would occur if the children made a disclosure of something which led the researcher to have concerns about the safety or welfare of the child. This was made clear to pupils and parents alike. While such a situation did not arise during the course of the interviews, it was an important ethical consideration in designing the study. A detailed protocol was designed for the researcher to follow in the event of such a disclosure, and this is outlined in Appendix D. Similarly, it was not envisaged (given the topic of the research) that the interviews would be particularly distressing for participants. Indeed, every effort was made to ensure that the interviews would be a positive and non-stressful experience for participants. While no child became distressed during interviews, a protocol was devised in advance for the researcher to follow if such a circumstance did arise (see Appendix D).

8.4 Procedure

8.4.1 Recruitment of Participants

As previously mentioned, participants were recruited from two Irish-medium primary schools. These schools were selected for participation due to their differing profiles (with respect to size, SES, location, length of time established, etc.). Contact was initially made with principals in these schools, who were briefed as to the nature and purposes of the study, and who both agreed to allow recruitment through their schools. Research packs containing invitation letters, information sheets, parental consent and participant assent forms (older children only) were sent to the parents of every pupil in the classes of interest in both of these schools. In consideration of the all-Irish ethos of the schools involved, all research materials were presented bilingually, having been translated to Irish from English by a professional translator. All children who had signed parental consent and assent forms (where applicable) with them at the time of the researcher visits were interviewed.

8.4.2 Data Collection

Each school had particular stipulations for the data collection process. Following the process of gaining parental consent and assent, Gaelscoil B imposed a stipulation (following principal's

consultation with the school's Board of Management) that interviews would be conducted through Irish. Interviews were conducted in the school, during school time. Only the interviewer and the interviewee were present in the assigned interview room, and the door was left open in line with the school's child protection policies. It was agreed with Gaelscoil A that the individual interviews with the children would be carried out in English, but that, in deference to the ethos of the school, the researcher would speak Irish at all other times when present on the premises. In Gaelscoil B, children were taken to the interview room in groups of three as per the principal's request. While one child was interviewed, the remaining two were seated at the opposite end of the room where they were instructed that they could talk quietly to each other. They were also provided with books to peruse and art materials to occupy them prior to, and after, their own interviews. Interviews with older children lasted between fifteen and twenty five minutes. Interviews with younger children were conducted with a shorter interview schedule and thus lasted no more than ten minutes. All interviews were audio recorded to facilitate analysis.

8.5 Qualitative Research Questions

The overall aim of the present study was to qualitatively explore children's experiences of their parents' involvement in their education. To this end, a number of research sub-questions were formulated, as summarised in Table 8.1 below. Full interview protocols for each of the age groups can be found in Appendix D. The interview questions were devised on the basis of involvement literature and informed by the findings from the previous phases of the research.

Table 8.1: Research Sub-Questions for Study 3

1.	How does Irish feature in the home lives of immersion pupils?
2.	What are children's experiences of their parents' involvement in their home-based learning?
3.	What are children's experiences of their parents' involvement with their schools?
4.	How do children feel about reading (Irish and English) and what role do their parents play in supporting literacy?
5.	Are there differences between younger children's and older children's experiences?

8.6 Data Analysis

As in the previous qualitative study, audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts in Irish from Gaelscoil B were transcribed in Irish and translated to English by the researcher to facilitate analysis. The data were then submitted to a content analysis, following closely the guidelines set out in Mayring (2000). Transcripts were read until distinct sections could be identified. This process revealed the presence of four main sections, which largely (although not fully) corresponded with topics of questions in the interview protocols. Next, participants' responses for each of these sections were isolated and reviewed in order to establish what they communicated. Responses were then condensed into themes under each section and adapted for use as a coding frame. The initial coding frame was applied and then reviewed for themes that overlapped or were ambiguous, leading to some revision, as recommended by Braun and Clark (2006). All 33 interviews were then coded using this revised framework. An additional step, relational analysis, was also carried out in order to discern overarching or recurrent themes which transcended sections and research questions.

8.7 Inter-rater Reliability

As with the findings of parent interviews and survey comments, inter-rater reliability was conducted on 20% of the data by a researcher experienced in qualitative analysis. Percentage agreement by topic is presented in Table 8.2 below. Overall Reliability was calculated as 93% deemed to be a very satisfactory reliability outcome.

Table 8.2: Percentage agreement for Study 3 interview Data

Topic	Percentage Agreement
1: Out-of-School Use of Irish	100
2: Literacy and Reading	92
3: School-Based Involvement	94
4: Home-Based Involvement	87
Overall	93

8.8 Qualitative Findings

Four main sections were identified during the content analysis. Each of these sections contained a number of themes which are summarised in Table 8.4 below (for full coding frame which includes all themes and subthemes, see Appendix D). Each of the topics, and the themes contained therein will now be discussed in turn. Salient subthemes will also be considered. As in Chapters 5 and 7, each section will begin with a table outlining the themes relating to that

section as well as the frequencies with which they occurred in the data. The findings are accompanied by quotes to illustrate each theme.

Table 8.3: Summary of main topics and themes in Study Three

Section	Themes
1 Out-of-School Use of Irish	Frequency of Home Irish Use Facilitators of Irish Use Barriers to Irish Use
2 Reading	English reading habits Irish reading habits
3 School-Based Involvement	Frequency of Parents' Presence in School Types of School-Based Involvement Language(s) Used by Parents on School Premises
4 Home-Based Involvement	Homework Discussing School Challenges to Involvement Overcoming Challenges

Topic 1: Out-of-School Use of Irish

This section deals with children's reports about their use of the target language outside of the school environment. Children reported on their Irish use with their parents and with their peers (specifically with their friends and siblings). The typical circumstances or situations where Irish is used outside of school were described by participants. Children who reported that they rarely, if ever, spoke Irish when not in school, also explained their reasons for this.

Table 8.4: Main themes and frequencies for Out-of-School Irish Use

Themes	Frequency
Frequency of Irish Use	33
Barriers to Irish Use	26
Facilitators of Irish Use	15

Frequency of Use

Just three of the children interviewed indicated that they **regularly used Irish at home**. For example, one child revealed that she spoke Irish: *'When I'm doing my homework, and at dinner, and in the evenings, and all that... Most of the time Irish.'* (A9). However, the vast majority (n= 30) of children indicated that Irish was **not a regular or prominent feature of their home lives**. When asked if they ever spoke Irish when not in school responses included: *'I never speak Irish at home.'* (A13) and: *'English at home and Irish at school.'* (A4). More typical responses included: *'Not really,' 'Sometimes,' 'Just cúpla uair.'* [Just sometimes] (B8) and *'Píosa beag* [A little bit] (B4).

Since out-of-school use of Irish has been linked to pupils' L2 proficiency, it is important to understand the factors which facilitate or impede such usage. The reasons for these differing out-of-school L2 habits were thus explored with participants.

Barriers to Irish Use

Children who indicated that they rarely spoke Irish when not in school were probed as to the reasons for this infrequent use, and a variety of explanations were given by interviewees. **Low Irish proficiency of parents** and of other family members was a common subtheme in children's responses. For example:

Níl a fhios ag mo mhamái Gaeilge. [My mammy doesn't know Irish]' (B9)

'Not that much... 'cause my Dad's half, eh, Italy [Italian].' (A1)

Níl a fhios ag mo mhamái ach cúpla focail Gaeilge. [My mammy only knows a couple of Irish words]' (B6) and

Béarla amháin, mar níl a fhios ag mo mhamái gach rud a rá as Gaeilge. [English only, because my mammy doesn't know how to say all things in Irish]' (B5).

It's easier to talk English because my mam doesn't really understand Irish that much. (A14)

One boy reported on his perception of his family's low proficiency in Irish and his mother's resulting attitude towards his out-of-school use of Irish:

She's happy enough because she knows I know a lot of Irish and I say it at school, but not at home, because if I did they'd all be like "What?" (A18).

Another participant included his sibling's limited Irish in his explanation: *'Níl a fhios ag mo dhaidí nó mo dheirfiúr Gaeilge.* [My daddy and my sister don't know Irish]' (B4). Another child also attributed his lack of Irish use to his brother (who attended an English-medium school) having low proficiency in, and a strongly negative attitude towards, the Irish language:

Tá mo dhearthair a dó dhéag ach níl sé ró-mhaith ag Gaeilge. Agus is fuath leis an Ghaeilge. [My brother is twelve and he isn't too good at Irish. And he hates Irish] (B9).

This sentiment is similar to that expressed in parents' survey comments where, for example, one mother wrote that she had a child attending an English-medium school in addition to one attending a Gaelscoil. She reported that the child attending the English-medium 'reacts negatively' to her attempts to introduce Irish in the home and to his/her sibling's use of it. While it may be relatively rare for children within the same family to be attending different

schools, this can clearly cause problems, and thus the issue of excluding other siblings, or negative reactions to Irish among other siblings, is relevant to parental involvement.

Even where parents appeared to make an effort to speak Irish to them, several children reported that their knowledge of Irish generally extended only to greetings and short phrases. For example, when asked if she ever spoke Irish when not in school, three pupils commented on their mothers' limited Irish, with some indications that at times the children were, in fact, tolerating/supporting the parents' efforts to learn Irish rather than vice versa:

Em, not really. But my mam would, like, when she's dropping me off at school she'd say like 'Slán' [Goodbye] and all to me. We'd talk a little bit to each other but we wouldn't say, like, the whole conversation.' (A14).

No, she [mother] can't speak really Irish at all... she can speak like the normal 'Dia duit' [Hello] and all like.' (A15).

B'fhéidir deireann siad 'Dia duit' agus rudaí mar sin... Ní thuigeann siad na focail móra.' [Maybe they say 'Dia duit' [hello] and things like that... They don't understand the big words] (B10).

Most children (n = 28) also indicated that **Irish was not a feature of their peer relationships**. Similar reasons to those given for not using Irish with parents were also given in this context. Children explained that it was not practical for them to speak Irish with their friends, as they believed that their friends would not be able to converse in Irish.

Well, my one friend who goes to this school, she doesn't really know that much Irish, and the others, like, they don't know Irish.' (A11)

Thus, even when socialising with school friends after school, the child's language choice is based on the individual's competence.

As noted in earlier chapters, parents opt to send their children to an Irish-medium school for a variety of perceived benefits, and many indicated that proximity and accessibility to the school were not factors in their school choice. As a result, the school chosen may not be the closest to their home and the catchment area of Irish-medium schools may be wider than for local English-medium schools, with its pupils thus more dispersed. Consequently, several children reported that few, or none, of their classmates live near them and that the children they are interacting with when playing or socialising at home are monolingual, so that it is not feasible for Irish to be used in such situations:

'No, because they all don't go to an Irish school. Only my friend Seánie.' (A6)

‘Ceapaim go bhfuil sé níos éasca labhairt as Béarla mar ní bhíonn a fhios ag gach cairde ar an nGaeilge’ [I think that it’s easier to speak in English because not all of my friends know Irish] (B10).

When asked about use of Irish with friends who attend English-medium schools and whether they would be able to converse with him in Irish, one child expressed himself strongly, revealing some alienation from children with limited Irish:

No, not one bit. They might understand something like ‘ispíní’ [sausages] or ‘bainne’ [milk]. Fools! That’s what I learned in playschool. (A18)

In addition to parent and family factors which limited children’s out-of-school use of Irish, several children expressed personal reasons for not wishing to use the language at home, mainly alluding to the **extra effort involved for them in speaking Irish**:

‘Eh, it’s hard...Well, easy words are kind of alright, I can speak them. But, like, hard words, you say “Aw, I don’t want to speak these!” (A13).

These echo parents’ reports in Study 1 which related to their experiences of their children’s resistance to their attempts at introducing Irish into home life. This idea that speaking Irish requires particular effort was also expressed by children who reported they felt they were tired of speaking the language after the school day and did not wish to speak it at home. When asked if they ever spoke Irish at home, some participants responded:

No, not really...I don’t feel like it...I speak it for five hours a day! (A11).

[It’s] enough speaking it at school every day. (A20).

It’s just, you get enough of it in school. (A13).

Yeah, like, I don’t really, like, want to speak any Irish, ‘cause, like I’ve just finished speaking Irish...(A11).

One First Class child reported that she only wished to speak English at home because she disliked the Irish language:

I like to speak English...Because I don’t really like Irish.’ (A7).

The perception that English requires less effort and Irish requires more effort on their part, as well as the awareness of the obligation in school to speak Irish alluded to in the last quote, appears to lead some children to a fairly clear understanding of which is their more and less preferred language, indicating that we should exercise caution in assuming that these fairly proficient bilinguals perceive themselves as ‘balanced bilinguals’.

Children’s reluctance to use Irish when not in school may be due, in part, to their associating the language with something which they *have* to do. One child commented on the freedom from the obligation to speak Irish and the ease associated with speaking her first language:

Well, I use English mostly at home [with friends] because when we're in school we have to talk Irish and it's a bit nice to just- to talk English because you've been brought up with English. (A16)

This association between Irish and school obligation was notable also in relation to homework. Several interviewees indicated that the only time they heard their parents speaking Irish was when it was homework time. For example: *'She talks it when I'm doing my homework, but only sometimes.'* (A2) When asked if she ever spoke Irish when not in school, one child responded:

Níl. Ach, nuair a bí me ag déanamh mo obair bhaile bí mé ag caint píosa Gaeilge, agus nuair a bí mé ag déanamh obair Gaeilge. [No. But when I'm doing my homework I talk a bit of Irish, and when I'm doing Irish work]' (B9).

Another child reported that she only spoke Irish at home:

'Nuair a bíonn me ag déanamh obair [When I'm doing work]'

Thus, the contexts in which parents attempt to introduce Irish into their interaction with their children may be reinforcing the children's **association of Irish with work, or duty, or effort**. It is also worth noting that parents interviewed in Study 1 explained that when they used their limited Irish in the home, this tended to be in 'little phrases' and the examples they gave included: *'Dún an doras'* [Close the door], *'Téigh go dtí an leaba'* [Go to bed] and *'Suigh síos'* [Sit down]. In fact, these phrases were mentioned frequently by parents when asked about their Irish use with their children, probably because they are simple phrases that parents would have heard regularly from teachers while they themselves were at school. When asked if he spoke Irish at home, one boy responded that he did not, but that his mother sometimes tried to speak Irish to him. When probed as to why he did not want to engage with her through Irish, he responded: *'Because she just says "Dún an doras" [Close the door] and I say "No"'. (A18)*

By using Irish in this way, parents may in fact be perpetuating the idea that Irish is 'work-like' and this may link in with children's perceptions that they have had 'enough' of the language during the school day.

Thus, some consideration should be given to the possibility that, while low proficiency parents may feel that using such phrases is helpful by introducing Irish in the home, the fact that these utterances tend to be (teacher-like) *commands* may further reinforce the children's perception of the link between Irish and school/work, and could actually be counterproductive with regard to promoting use of Irish at home. This may also tie in with survey comments made by parents, one of whom lamented the fact that she did not know any 'pet phrases' in Irish and that she felt her Irish was very 'formal' and that she thus 'sounded harsh' when speaking Irish. If children only hear Irish from their parents when they are being told to do something, when it is homework time, or if the tone they hear is harsh and formal, it is perhaps not surprising that

children are resistant to the using the language when they do not have to (i.e. outside of school).

Facilitators of Irish Use

Notwithstanding the above findings, for some children, the lines between home (L1) and school (L2) language use were less rigid, and several children, who indicated that they occasionally spoke Irish at home, reported that they sometimes found **Irish overflowing into their interactions at home**. For example:

'I keep on getting- I can't get it out of my head that much sometimes...I keep on speaking a little bit of Gaeilge.' (A1).

Well, I keep getting mixed up when I'm talking to my Mam.' (A6).

One child reported that once she was in 'Irish-mode' she found herself forgetting English: '

Sea, agus gach uair nuair a tá mé ag déanamh Gaeilge, déanann mé dearmad ar Béarla. [Yeah, and every time when I'm doing Irish, I forget English]' (B7).

This experience either of mixing up languages or feeling confused about which language to use was only reported by children in younger classes. Dexterity in handling Irish and English as domain specific appeared to develop with age.

While several children described family members' lower proficiency in Irish as limiting opportunities for out-of-school use of Irish, this was not a universal experience. Some children (n = 9) reported that in the face of the low proficiency of their family members that they were **adopting a role as language teacher** and spoke Irish with their parents in order to improve their parents' language skills. For example, when asked about home use of Irish one child reported:

Well we, my mom and dad, I'm teaching them a bit more Irish. So I do that with them, and if they get stuck on anything when we're in a conversation I just give them a hand with it... She [mother] doesn't have as much Irish as my dad does, so I'm teaching her a bit more than my dad so. (A16).

She recounted that when she was younger, her father had attended Irish language classes provided by her school as he felt he needed to improve his proficiency in order to understand her schoolwork. However, as his daughter progressed through school and improved her Irish he felt that he no longer needed to do so, as she could now help him:

No they didn't [speak Irish]. So when I went into a class- my dad started taking classes here but then he stopped because I'm in Fifth Class now, so I can help him instead. (A16).

Another child responded to the question about home Irish use in the following way: *'At home? Well, I teach my mom a bit of Irish...'* (A18). Even younger children reported using Irish in the home in order to give their parents an opportunity to practice their oral Irish skills. As one girl responded when probed as to whom she spoke Irish with outside of school: *'With my mummy, 'cause she needs to learn Irish.'* (A8) and another stated: *'Cabhraíonn mé le mo mhamai. [I help my mammy]'* (B2). While low proficiency parents cannot provide the kind of language input that interaction with highly proficient or native speakers would provide for immersion pupils, by asking their children to help them improve their own Irish skills, parents can still support their children's L2 development. First, they are giving children an opportunity to reinforce what they have been learning in school. Second, parents are also modelling to children that they are committed to Irish and that they value it enough to try to learn it themselves, rather than expressing a *'Do as I say, not as I do'* attitude towards the learning of Irish.

Children (n = 8) also reported **'teaching' Irish to siblings and to friends**. For example, when discussing her best friend who attended an English-medium school, one participant said: *'Cad é an Gaeilge ar 'I'm teaching her'?* [What is the Irish for 'I'm teaching her'?]...*I'm just teaching her Gaeilge...Tá mé ag múineadh [I am teaching]'* (B7). Similarly: *'I teach her [sister] a lot of times. 'Fiacla' [teeth] and all. 'Súile' [eyes] and 'Béal' [mouth].'* (A9) The importance of this role is highlighted by the fact that several (n = 5) indicated that they *only* used Irish with brothers and sisters in a helping or teaching capacity. For example: *'I would kind of teach her Irish words and that'* (A11). Another responded: *'[My brother] sometimes asks me for help for little words and that.'* (A14). Similarly: *'Yeah, I would. If he was stuck on a couple of words I'd just give him a hand.'* (A16)

Interestingly, some children also reported making use of **Irish as a 'Secret Language'** on occasion in order to keep secrets or even to exclude other children who were less proficient than they in Irish. In these cases the accompanying affect showed that the children found this empowering. For example:

Eh, sometimes, if my friends are over from school in my house, and if there's people that I don't like, I'd say it in Irish so they wouldn't hear... And sometimes when we're in school... yeah, we try and say Irish. Like, when we're at a football match in school, as well, like the school was playing and the other school was cheering and we were saying stuff in Irish and they looked all puzzled because they had no idea what we were saying! [laughs] (A17)

As another boy stated:

Sometimes, when I like, when I'm afraid of... when my friends annoy me I'd be like "blah blah blah" in Irish, and they'd be like "What?" and I'd be like "Yeah!" (A18).

This secret use of the language certainly appeared to be a strong motivator, and even counteracted the effort/obligation effect already noted. As one child explained:

I think it's fun, because you're not in school and you don't have to learn anything, you're just talking... Yeah, because some other people wouldn't know what you're talking about. It would kind of be like gibberish to them. (A16)

Finally, on the topic of home use of Irish, several children mentioned **watching television** when they got home from school. However, this appeared not to be associated with recreation, as they reported finding it difficult to keep up with the dialogue:

No. I don't understand them 'cause they talk too fast. (A13).

Another child reported watching the Irish language television station as a last resort:

'TG4. I watch it sometimes if there's nothing else on.' (A18).

Topic 2: Literacy and Reading

This section deals with children's reports about their reading habits and joint reading activities with their parents. Children were asked a number of questions about reading such as whether they liked to read, what sort of material they read, and whether they ever read Irish material other than that which they had to read for school. The questions aimed to establish children's reading activities in the home, and their parents' involvement in these activities.

Table 8.5 Main themes and frequencies relating to Literacy and Reading

Themes	Frequency
English Reading	33
Irish Reading	33

English Reading Habits

Children generally reported enjoying reading and liking stories. Younger children were much more likely to take part in joint reading activities such as being read to or having a parent listen to them read aloud, with only one older child indicating that this still happened. Several younger children (n = 6) indicated that they were unable to read themselves. When asked if she liked stories, one child responded: *'No. I can't read.'* (A7). Another stated: *'I'm not that good. I can only know how to read one book and it's called 'Rapunzel''* (A1). Others indicated that while they could read to themselves, their parents also read to them: *'My daddy once readed a*

book when I was going to bed' (A3) And: 'Sometimes my mam does and sometimes I just read them to myself.' (A6). Others indicated that they could read to themselves and that their parents did not do so: 'No. I can read them to myself.' And: 'No, I do it by myself...I read stories to my brother.' (A10). When asked if his parents ever read to him, one child responded: 'No, Well, every time when my mammy goes out when it's bedtime I just go down, get a book, and read it to myself.' (A4). Overall, 33% of children said that their parents did not, and had never, read to them: 'No, they never do.' (A7).

Irish Reading Habits

Only six of the thirty three participants indicated that they read in both English and in Irish at home: 'Bhfuil, cúpla uair scéalta Gaeilge agus cúpla uair scéalta Béarla. [Well, sometimes Irish stories and sometimes English stories]' (B9), 'Cúpla cinn as Gaeilge agus cúpla cinn as Béarla. [A couple in Irish and a couple in English]' (B1), 'Gaeilge agus Béarla. [Irish and English]' (B3). One child explained: 'Sometimes I do. I'd find a book that's, you know, it's in Irish and I'd start reading it, because when I was little my mam used to have these Irish books and we would read them together.' (A17) Children who revealed that they do read Irish tended to indicate that they did this only occasionally: 'Anois agus arís, leabhair Gaeilge.' 'Tá cúpla leabhair Gaeilge agam sa bhaile, agus tá cúpla leabhair Gaeilge sa leabharlann. Bíom ag léamh níos mó leabhair Béarla ná Gaeilge.' [Now and again, Irish books. I have a couple of Irish books at home, and there are a couple of Irish books in the library. I read more English books than Irish ones.]' (B11). Another child reported that while she had read some Irish books in the past, she had found it difficult: 'Well, I've read a couple of [Irish] books. I'd find it just a little bit hard. Because there's some words I wouldn't recognise. When you're talking it's easier than reading it, so...' (A16)

The remainder (n= 27) rarely, if ever, read in Irish when they were not in school. Of these, twenty of the children indicated that they owned no Irish books. A further seven indicated that they possessed a small number of Irish books. While children generally reported owning several English books, they had much less access to Irish language reading material. For example: 'I just have one and... em, I don't really read it.' (A5) And: 'Em, I have one. It's kind of a comic thing to help you learn Irish... For my mam and dad like.' (A12). 'In Irish... I probably have an Irish book somewhere.' (A18) Also: 'Em, níl aon... tá ceann amháin leabhar Gaeilge agam, agus tá a lán Béarla, agus tá ceathair cinn i French. [I have no... I have one Irish book, and a lot of English, and four of them are in French]' (B7). 'Tá cúpla scéalta Gaeilge agam agus tá a lán scéalta Béarla agam. [I have a couple of Irish books and I have a lot of English books]' (B4). Similar reports were given repeatedly by children: 'Ceapaim go bhfuil ceann amháin agam... [I think I have one]' (B8). Also: 'Well, the only Irish books I'd

have would be the books that our teacher gives us in our bags.’ (A19), ‘Em, I think I have one or two, that I sometimes read a few pages.’ (A14). As another child explained about her experience with Irish language books: ‘I only see them in class, school.’ (A3).

Topic 3: School-based Involvement

This section deals with children’s reports of their parents’ participation in school-based involvement activities. Included in this section are reports relating to parents’ communication with teachers and other school staff. Children were asked if, and if so for what reasons, their parents were present in their school. They were also asked if they were aware of which language, or mix of languages, was used by their parents when present on school premises.

Table 8.6 Main themes and frequencies relating to parents’ involvement in the school

Theme	Frequency
Frequency of Parents’ Presence in the School	30
Types of Parental Involvement Activities	17
Language used by parent on school premises	18

Frequency of Parents’ Presence in the School

As noted previously, school-based parental involvement is believed to be important as it models to the child that school and education is valued by the parent and should be important to the family. Epstein’s model states that the goal in home-school relations should be the development of ‘school-like families’, but also ‘family-like schools.’ In other words, successful home-school relations are those in which the zone of interaction between home and school is maximised in order that these overlapping spheres of influence are brought close together rather than pushed apart.

In the current sample, several children (n = 19) reported that they **rarely, or never, saw their parents at school**. When children were asked about whether and when their parents came to school responses included: ‘Well I don’t think so ‘cause she has to go to work and all.’ (A13), ‘Just uair amháin...[Just once]’ (B5), and ‘Ceapaim just uair amháin. Uair amháin. [I think, just once. Once]’ (B8). Even parents who deposited their children at school did not necessarily come onto school premises: ‘They drop us, they drop me off over there [points out window] and then I walk. They don’t ever come in.’ (A3).

Types of Parental Involvement

Several children (n = 10) reported that the only time their parents came to school was when they were **invited to be an audience for a performance**. For example, when asked if their

parents ever came into the school, typical responses included: *'Only when we do shows or plays.'* (A5) Similarly: *'She did see my shows but nothing else though, so, no.'* (A18), *'Well, only when we do shows like- Christmas songs and, well, just the shows.'* (A4) And: *'For plays and all and stuff, but my dad can't come because he's in work every single day.'* (A9). Similarly: *'Em, no, not really. Only when things are usually on and the parents are allowed come... Yeah, like just the Halloween thing and everything.'* (A8).

Three children reported that their parents came to school when they had **specific information to impart to, or elicit from, teachers**. For example, one children described: *'Yeah, she's come in, like, if I'm going on my holidays and it was in school, she'd come in and tell them like, can I get extra homework and all so I'm not falling down when all the others are knowing what to do. So I can keep up.'* (A14). Another child said that her parents would come into the school to find out information. They would come in: *'Chun beidh a fhios acu rudaí. [So that they will know things]'* (B4)

One Fifth Class pupil reported that her parent **volunteered to help younger children in the school with their reading**. She explained: *'Well, on Tuesdays, my mam comes to read with Junior and Senior Infants. Like, and First Class I think, because every Tuesday they go out to read... Well, like, she found out about it and she asked if she could, like, volunteer for it. And then every Tuesday people just go out to any mam or my mam and they read.'* (A11). This was followed up with a question about whether she would like it if her mother was involved in *her* class. The response was: *'If I was little, yeah. If I was big, not so sure.'* (A11).

Just two children revealed that their **parents had attended Irish classes for parents** offered by the school in the past. One of these talked about his mother's wish that she could speak Irish so that she could better support his learning: *'Bíodh sí sásta má raibh si ábalta- Nuair a bhi me i Rang 2 bhí sí ag déanamh na cleachtaí anseo le haghaidh Gaeilge, ach ní raibh sí ró-mhaith mar tá si ón Albain agus tá sé an-dheacair.'* [She would be happy if she was able to (speak Irish). When I was in Second Class she was doing the classes here for Irish, but she wasn't too good because she's from Scotland and it's very hard] (B9).

One child reported that his mother was **involved at a decision-making level** in the school and was present in the school as a function of this role: *'Bhfueil, tá sí ar committee an scoile [Well, she's on the school committee]'* (B9) He was probed as to whether he knew whether committee meetings were conducted through English or Irish. He responded: *'Bhfueil, bíonn siad trí Bhéarla do mo mhamáí mar níl a fhios aici ar an Gaeilge. [Well, they are through English for my mother, because she doesn't know Irish]'* (B9).

Language(s) Used by Parents at School

Other children also commented on the language used by their parents when communicating with their teachers and other school staff. The majority of children indicated that their parents spoke **mostly, or only, English in their interactions** with school staff. For example: *'They just speak English... Because they don't know that much, like, Irish.'* (A1). Similarly, *'Béarla... Níl a fhios ag sí Gaeilge [English... She doesn't know Irish]'* (B7), and *'English... 'cause they don't know that much Irish.'* (A20). Some indicated that their parents would **make an effort to use any Irish they did have, and would revert to English if they had to**: *'Sometimes she would talk Irish, and if there was anything she didn't understand, she'd talk English.'* (A19). Similarly: *'She'd say like 'Slán' and 'Dia duit' but if they were having a conversation like, she'd talk in English.'* (A14) and *'She would speak English. She'd say like 'Dia duit' and that'd be it.'* (A15).

Less typical were reports that parents used Irish sometimes (n=3) or often (n=2) when they were present in the school: *'Cúpla uair as Gaeilge agus cúpla uair as Béarla. [Sometimes in Irish and sometimes in English]'* (B3) and: *'Usáideann mo mhamá a lán Gaeilge lena múinteoirí [My mammy uses a lot of Irish with the teachers]'* (B2).

Although parents in Study 1 reported feeling a pressure to speak Irish at the school, or described feelings of embarrassment or discomfort when they were unable to do so, children did not appear to feel that there was any onus on their parents to use Irish, even though they themselves were required to do so: *'Like, do you know when you're getting a note home and it says your parents can come in for a cup of tea in the hall?... You don't have to [speak Irish] when you're having a cup of tea in case you don't know any.'* (A6). Similarly, another child reported feeling as though Irish was not expected from parents in the school: *'English, because the teachers will speak in English back to them...but if the teachers were talking to her [in Irish] she'd have to put in enough effort for it, so.'* (A16).

Topic 4: Home-based Involvement

Children were asked about their parents' involvement in learning activities in the home. Children reported on whether, and if so *how*, their parents were involved with their homework. Children were also asked if they discussed school and their progress with their parents and whether they talked at home about what they were learning at school. The main themes relating to children's reports on their parents' involvement in the home are now presented, with illustrative quotes presented for themes and subthemes.

Table 8.7 Main themes and frequencies relating to parents' involvement in home-based activities

Themes	Frequency
Parental Involvement in Homework	33
Challenges to HBI	18
Overcoming Barriers	13

Parental Involvement in Homework

Some pupils interviewed (n = 11) reported that their parents were **not at all involved with their homework**. This was explained as being due to the fact that children felt that they **did not need their parents to be involved**, and that they felt that they could manage on their own. For example: *'I don't really need help.'* (A9) and *'I can do it on my own.'* (A19). Others (n = 18) reported that they **sometimes, or often, required help** from their parents: *'My mam helps me... She has to help because I don't really know what to do.'* (A3).

Overcoming Challenges to Parental Involvement in Homework

Children who reported that they needed help were probed as to what happened if such a circumstance arose and several (n=18) reported challenges to their parents' successful involvement. Many children acknowledged that their parents had some **difficulties helping due to their limited Irish proficiency**, yet also reported strategies used in order to overcome these. For example, several children discussed how it was necessary for them to **translate the content of their homework assignments into English** before their parents were able to help them. One pupil discussed how this worked in relation to his Maths work: *'Well, most of the time, if I'm stuck on something, my mam would break it down. Like, if it was something in Irish, I'd tell her what it meant because she wouldn't know and she'd say 'You have to divide this, you have to multiply this and you'll get the answer' (A17).* Similar reports were made by other children. For example: *'Well, he [father] works for [name of company]. He'd be working late some nights, but em, whenever he comes home and I'm stuck on like, two or three maths questions I'd leave it out on the table. I'd do my homework in the kitchen and leave it out on the table and then... I'd translate it into English, and then he'd tell me how to do it.'* (A18) Similarly: *'If I'm stuck on a question, I'll tell my mam, like, I'd speak it in Irish, then I'd tell her it in English.'* When one child was asked whether her mother could understand her homework she replied: *'Nil. Ach bí mise ag rá le mo mhamai cad a chiallaíonn siad.'* [No, but I say to her [tell her] what they mean] (B9).

While some children reported translating for their parents themselves, others reported making use of free **online translation services** in order to help their parents understand their

homework: *'Well, most of the time I do go onto Google Translate and translate the stuff and she looks at that and then she helps me, because it makes sense then.'* (A15). Several children (n = 5) mentioned that their **parents referred them to dictionaries** or online translation services if they were having difficulty: *'Yeah, or sometimes she says 'Look up the words in the dictionary' (A11). Similarly: 'She'd tell me to go on to Google and there's this translating thing so I'd just write in the words...'* (A13).

Several children (n = 6) described how their parents' had purchased Irish-English dictionaries so that they could help their children: *'Agus tá leabhar Gaeilge ag mo mhamai mar níl a fhios ag mo mhamai Gaeilge agus...Agus tá sin ag Muinteoir Pól freisin [And my mammy has an Irish book because she doesn't know Irish...And my teacher has that too] [Laughs]'* (B7). Similarly: *'Yeah, she knows loads of Irish, but she doesn't know some so they got an Irish and English book so that they can learn some Irish. It's an Irish and English book...It's a dictionary.'*(A4). One child reported asking her parents for help with homework, but not trusting that they were actually accurate in the help which they gave: *'Yeah, I'd ask my dad first, and then my mam, and then I'd just have to get out the dictionary because I wouldn't be sure of what they tell me.'* (A16).

The present findings also indicate that, in the context where parents have low proficiency in the target language, siblings may play a more active role in involvement than in other contexts. Children interviewed reported **seeking help from older siblings** who attend/have attended the Irish-medium school. *'Sometimes, for my Maths I don't understand a few of the words so I ask my sister. She can speak fluent Irish.'* (B13) When asked if her parents helped her when she needed homework help, one interviewee explained: *'No, my mam would get me to ring my sister, because my sister would be in work and then I'd ring her...Yeah, she's fluent, and sometimes she helps me.'* (B14)

As well as parents referring children to older siblings when they needed homework help, other children reported that their parents looked to them to **help with the work of younger siblings**: *'And sometimes my mam doesn't know what something... If my mam was doing the homework with my sister and she didn't know what number this was, I'd have to translate it for her, and my mam, you know, we would do that.'* (A17). As another child explained: *'Me ma would call me over like every day when I'm finished my homework and say 'Paul, what's this on Mark's homework?' Or I've a little sister so I'll help her with her homework, and I'd be like, translating and counting triangles or something like that.'* (A18). Similarly: *'Bíonn sí ag léamh le Ailbhe, mo dheirfiúr mar níl sí ábalta léamh. Ach bíonn sí ag déanamh a iarracht chun an Gaeilge a léamh agus cúpla uair caithfidh mise cabhair a thabhairt di leis an Gaeilge.'* [She reads with Ailbhe, my sister, because she [Ailbhe] isn't able to read. But she

tries to read the Irish and sometimes I have to help her with the Irish] (B9) For some, having to help with the work of others was described as being a burden: *'I just don't know, 'cause people, my cousins go to an English school, and they ring me up and say 'Aw, can you help me with my Irish homework' ...Yeah, and I don't like it.'* [A13].

8.8.5 Relational Analysis

Data underwent further scrutiny and categorisation in order to identify recurrent or overarching themes, using relational analysis. The first overarching theme in the data was children's perceptions of the **low proficiency of others**. As in Study 1, low parental proficiency was mentioned by children in responses to various questions asked. Children as young as 5-6 years of age already showed awareness of their parents' ability or inability to speak Irish and many expressed that they felt that they had better Irish skills than their parents. Children were also aware of their superior proficiency in Irish when compared to their English-medium educated peers. Ability to speak Irish was seen as something which was particular to those in the school environment and so use of Irish was thus seen as limited to this context also.

Another overarching theme evident relates to **barriers to parental involvement**. Unlike parent interviewees, children were not explicitly asked about challenges to their parents' involvement or to their participation in home learning activities. Questions asked were general and worded positively, rather than attempting to pinpoint challenges or obstacles to parental involvement. Nonetheless, reports of such barriers permeated the data. Barriers to helping with homework, to out-of-school use of Irish and Irish reading were all reported by children. Over three-quarters of children reported barriers to involvement in at least one of these areas.

Another overarching theme in the data related to **role construction**. Children repeatedly expressed that they and their parents adopted roles which differ from the expected or traditional construction of roles in the parent-child-learning relationship. In the literature, parents are often cast in the roles of 'helper' or 'teacher'. This was also how parents in Study 1 generally appeared to construe how they should be involved in their children's education. However, in the immersion context, where children often surpass their parents in terms of L2 proficiency, children reported that these roles were often inverted, and interviewees felt that *they* were helping their parents and were teaching them Irish. The findings also indicated that siblings may play a particularly important role in the immersion context. Children reported being referred to older siblings when they needed help with homework. Others reported being called on to help younger siblings with homework, or to assist parents to help with this. They also reported teaching younger children Irish and reading to younger siblings. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model suggests that parents will be involved if they have the skills and knowledge to do so, or have the ability to access this skill or knowledge from alternative

sources. In the case of low proficiency parents, it seems that several are utilising the knowledge of older children in order to support the learning of younger ones.

An additional overarching theme in the data relates to children's perceptions that there is **little overlap between school and home domains**. Irish is reported as being something which separates children from their parents and from their monolingual peers. For most, the Irish language is something which is school-specific and is thus left at the school gate once school finishes. This extends to both speaking and reading the language. This is likely to have implications both for the children's Irish development during their school careers, but also for the revitalisation of the language. If children's use of the language is limited to the school environment, it may be unlikely that they will continue to regularly use the language once they leave the education system. It is also pertinent to note that the separation between school and home is not only reported in one direction. Children also reported that their parents were very rarely present in their school, with some reporting that they had never seen their parents there. Findings from Study 1 would suggest that this may be, at least in part, attributable to parents also observing a strict divide between home and school and feeling uncomfortable, embarrassed or even unwelcome in the school due to their low Irish proficiency. Taken together, these findings suggest that, in an immersion setting, the differing languages used in home and school may be resulting in challenges to successful home-school partnerships.

This perception of strict separation of school and home domains may link to another overarching theme in the data, relating to **children's associations with Irish**. Throughout several sections of the data, children appear to be associating Irish with school, with work, and with being told to do things by their parents. Participants in the present study talk about the considerable effort they feel that speaking and reading Irish takes. Associations of 'Irish as work' may be reinforced by the fact that as well as focusing on a their own language development and homework, many have the additional responsibility of helping with siblings' homework, with having to constantly translate for their parents, and with 'helping/teaching' parents, siblings and friends to speak Irish. For example, one child reported disliking being called on as a source of Irish help by his English-medium educated peers. Another reported that her non-Irish relatives would often try to get her to speak Irish as a novelty, and she did not like feeling as though she had to oblige by performing.

8.9 Responding to Research Sub-questions

Sub-Question 1: How does Irish feature in the home lives of children?

On the whole, children reported that they rarely spoke Irish outside of the school environment. Low proficiency of others (family members and friends) was given as an explanation for this

by many. For other children, speaking Irish was described as something difficult and effortful, and children reported not wanting to have to speak Irish when they were not in school. Many children appeared to associate Irish with the school and when they left school they also left their L2 there also. Exceptions to this were the situations where children reported teaching Irish to parents and family members. Using Irish to conceal information from people who do not speak Irish was also reported by some children.

Sub-Question 2: What are children's experiences of their parents' involvement in their home-based learning?

Children differed in the extent to which their parents were involved in their home-based learning. Several were keen to stress that they completed their homework by themselves and did not need help. Others expressed that they do need help and thus enlisted their parents' involvement. Children described that their parents had some difficulty understanding their homework, and outlined strategies their parents used to combat this. Referring children to alternative sources of help, such as more proficient siblings, dictionaries and online translation resources were reported. Children also talked about translating their homework into English to facilitate their parents' understanding of it before they could provide help.

Sub-Question 3: What are children's experiences of their parents' involvement with their schools?

Most children revealed that they very rarely, or never, saw their parents at school. Only two children indicated that their parents volunteered in their school. Children talked about their parents having to work and being too busy to be involved. The most common reason for parents to be present on school premises was when they were invited to attend school occasions or performances as audience members. Children seemed unaware of any further interaction between their teacher and their parents. Children described varying practices in terms of their parents' language use in the school, with some indicating that their parents spoke Irish, others attempted to speak Irish but then switched to English, or that their parents spoke English only. While parents in Study 1 spoke of feeling intimidated or anxious about being present in the school, children did not seem to pick up on this and such experiences were not reported by children interviewed.

Sub-Question 4: How do children feel about reading (Irish and English) and what role do their parents play in supporting literacy?

Children generally reported enjoying reading and being read to. However, reports of reading activities referred almost universally to English reading. The vast majority of interviewees indicated that they owned no Irish language reading material and that they only read Irish when

in school. Children reported being disinclined to read in Irish and to finding it difficult, while many reported not having the opportunity to do so due to a lack of available reading material.

Sub-Question 5: Are there differences between younger children's and older children's experiences?

Younger children tended to provide shorter responses to questions while older children provided more lengthy responses. However, all the data provided clear insight into children's experiences. A higher proportion of younger children reported parental involvement in reading and in homework. Older children spoke more about their negative associations with Irish than did younger children. These findings are in line with parent reports.

8.10 Conclusion

The main aim of the present study was to explore Irish immersion pupils' experiences of parental involvement in their education. The findings of the present study echo in several respects the qualitative findings from Study 1 (e.g. parents' perceptions that their children are resistant to speaking Irish when not in school appear to be accurate). Such triangulation is encouraging and adds to the legitimacy of these findings. However, new issues came to light throughout the course of the study, which had not been uncovered beforehand, (e.g. the seemingly important roles played by children in supporting their less proficient parents and siblings). This additional insight highlights the value of integrating children's perspectives into studies of parental involvement. The main findings from this study will be discussed in greater detail, and in conjunction with the key findings from the other studies, in Chapter 9 below.

Chapter 9

Integration and Discussion of Findings

9.0 Overview

The present chapter discusses the main findings from the studies conducted and considers them together. First, the main aims of the research are recapitulated, with a brief summary of the principal elements of design and methodology. The key findings from the individual studies are then summarised and considered in relation to previous empirical literature. Following this, the findings are interpreted collectively in light of the theoretical framework. Also included is a critical appraisal of the research, where the strengths and weaknesses of the research are reflected upon. In light of this critique, a number of suggestions for future research are outlined. An overview of how the findings may relate to future planning and practice in Irish-medium schools is then presented. An overall conclusion made on the basis of the findings is presented in the final section of the chapter.

9.1 Aims of the Present Research

The overall aim of the present research was to provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the experiences of parental involvement and home-school relations in the Irish immersion educational context. Given that this topic is relatively under-researched, a mixed methods approach was deemed most appropriate in order to integrate the perspectives of parents, educators and children. In order to address this primary objective, the following aims were formulated:

- 1: To qualitatively explore the lived experiences of parental involvement in Irish immersion education of a) parents, b) educators (teachers and principals) and c) schoolchildren.
- 2: To investigate the profile of Irish-immersion parents (in terms of socio-demographic and linguistic variables), and to analyse how elements of this profile are related to levels and types of involvement activities undertaken.
- 3: To identify barriers to, and facilitators of, parental involvement in immersion education.
- 4: To integrate findings from each phase of the research project so as to build on existing parental involvement theory in order to develop a conceptual model of home-school relations in an Irish immersion context.

These aims were addressed by conducting three separate studies, the key findings of which will now be summarised in turn. Consideration of how these findings relate to previous research is included in each section.

9.2 Summary of Study 1 Findings

Study 1 consisted of a mixed methods investigation of experiences of parental involvement from the perspective of parents themselves. The study had a sequential exploratory design. The first phase involved an in-depth qualitative exploration of parents' experiences, undertaken with a semi-structured interview approach. The second phase employed survey methods in order to investigate the nature and extent of parental involvement with a larger sample of Irish immersion parents. Phase 2 also provided data for qualitative analysis through parents' provision of written responses to open-ended questions included on the survey.

Both phases of this study yielded significant findings with regard to parents' motivations for selecting an immersion school. The overarching theme which emerged was that parents believed that attending an Irish-medium school would be advantageous for their children, that it would offer benefits greater than they themselves had experienced in school, or greater than they perceived to be available in an English-medium school. It was clear, however, that in these parents' views, such perceived advantages were not necessarily or exclusively *linguistic* in nature. Other factors also were seen as potential benefits of choosing immersion, such as an expectation of smaller class sizes, more committed teachers, superior exam performance in later years, a lower likelihood of children with special needs or ESL children attending the school, and greater choice in the patronage arrangements compared to other local mainstream schools. This wide variety in motivating factors reported in the interviews with parents in Phase 1 was also borne out in the survey responses in Phase 2, with the 'crunch' factor in parents' choice of an immersion school relating to language or culture in only about half of cases. Thus, while a considerable proportion of parents (56%) appear to be committed to promoting their children's bilingualism and the Irish language and Irish culture in general, the IM parent group cannot be seen as homogenous in this regard. The identification of a range of parental motivations is supported by McVeigh's (2012) exploratory study of a sample (n=60) of parents in Northern Ireland IME. She also noted that a wide variety of factors played a role in parents' choice of an IM school, but since she did not collect evidence regarding the relative importance of these different factors, it is not possible to make direct comparison with her findings and the current data. Similarly, sixth class parents in Gilleece et al.'s (2011) study

listed a wide range of reasons for selecting an IM school; again, no ranking of these reasons in order of importance was elicited from parents.

While the current study points to a more complex set of factors influencing parents' choice of Irish immersion than language alone, this needs to be set against the backdrop of the favourable attitudes among most parents to the Irish language found in Study 1 (across both the qualitative and quantitative phases). For some parents, these were long-held positive attitudes, while others reported having felt negatively towards the language in their youth and developing a favourable attitude towards the language more recently. The attitudinal findings from the current survey are broadly in line with those found in Harris et al. (2006), who noted that 92.4% of IME parents expressed favourable attitudes towards Irish, compared with 93.3% in the current sample. Harris et al. found that 6.6% of parents indicated that they were neutral in relation to Irish, whereas only 3.2% in the current sample selected this option. In the present research, 3.8% of parents expressed broadly unfavourable attitudes towards the Irish language, in comparison to 0.7% in the Harris et al. (2006) study.

While this appears to be an encouraging finding, it is, of course, not surprising that parents who have opted to send their children to an Irish-medium school tend to express positive attitudes towards the target language. However, the current study explored further how parents' attitudes to Irish are expressed to children, and found (in both phases of the study) that parents' commitment to the language and towards their children's Irish language development varied considerably. Thus, it is relevant to note that, while only 2.2% of respondents reported that they *discouraged* their children from taking Irish seriously, over half (57.2%) reported that they left it up to their child to develop his/her own attitude towards the language (compared with 44.3% in Harris et al., 2006). More pertinently still, it was found that attitudes towards Irish did not predict overall involvement levels in this sample.

This points to the value of looking beyond parents' attitudes to Irish to include a more comprehensive examination of parents' linguistic profile, examining their proficiency and use of Irish and their practices in relation to the language. Only a tiny minority of surveyed parents grew up in homes where Irish was the main language spoken (Respondents: 1.9%; Partners: 1.3%). The vast majority did not themselves attend an Irish-medium primary (Respondents: 91.7%; Partners: 93.1%) or secondary school (Respondents: 93.1%; Partners: 96.3%). This is in line with Gilleece et al. (2011) who also reported that most of the parents in their sample from IM schools had not attended IM themselves. On the basis of parents' self-reported proficiencies across four dimensions of language (speaking, understanding,

reading and writing) parents were grouped into low, medium and high proficiency subgroups. It was found that 22.46% of parents reported low proficiency (LP), almost half (49.82%) indicated that they had moderate proficiency (MP) in the language and over a quarter (27.72%) reported that they had high proficiency (HP) in the Irish language. The findings for partners were largely in line with those of respondents, although fewer partners had attended IME and fewer were classified as MP or HP (suggesting that, in most cases, the higher proficiency parent had completed the survey). Gilleece et al. (2011) surveyed parents of children attending Second Class and Sixth Class in IME and found that 21% of Second Class and 39% of Sixth Class parents who responded to their survey indicated that they could speak Irish. However, as the question offered only a binary response to 'Can you speak Irish?' this did not allow assessment of the distribution of different levels of proficiency among the parent body.

Consideration of parents' self-assessed proficiency in the 'speaking' dimension of Irish ability allows direct comparison with the Harris et al. (2006) findings from a sample of sixth class IME parents (n=609). When grouped into low proficiency (not a word/few words/short simple sentences), medium proficiency (parts of conversations) and high proficiency (most/all conversations), Harris et al. found that 36.6% of parents fell into the lowest category, compared to 43.8% in the present sample. Harris et al. found that 38.3% fell in the medium proficiency group, compared with 35.5% in the present study. In terms of high proficiency parents, Harris et al. (2006) found that just less than one quarter of parents (24.5%) had high levels of Irish speaking ability, compared to 20.8% in the present sample. These findings are reasonably similar, with the parents in the present study reporting slightly lower Irish speaking ability. This may be tentative evidence in support of Ó Laoire and Harris's (2006) assertion that numbers of proficient Irish parents in the IME sector may be continuing to fall over time. While Harris et al.'s study was published relatively recently (in 2006), their data were collected in 2002 and the study focused on children in sixth class (their eighth year of school). Therefore, the children discussed in their study had commenced school in the mid-1990s. The data for the present research were collected in 2009/2010 and included parents of children in their first year of school (as well as those with older children) thus drawing data from a group of parents whose interaction with school some 15 years after those included in Harris et al.'s sample.

What can be asserted with confidence is that the proficiency levels of parents can be seen to have undergone a considerable shift from the early days of the Gaelscoileanna movement, when in 1979 Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin reported that the fathers of 51% of children attending IM were employed in jobs which required competence in Irish. This trajectory of decline can also be seen in the figures relating to home use of Irish of families. In 1974

Cummins reported that nearly half of children from Irish-medium schools came from Irish speaking homes. However, Gilleece et al. (2011) found that Irish was the main language spoken at home in only 4% of Second Class pupils and just 2% of Sixth Class pupils in Gaelscoileanna included in that study. This is in line with the finding of Harris et al. (2006) that only 6.3% of parents surveyed in 2002 reported using Irish ‘always’ or ‘very often’ in the home. Similarly, in the present research, only 5.4% of respondents indicated that Irish was the language used most or all of the time in their homes. Out-of-school use of the target language has been found to be linked to pupil proficiency, both in international contexts and in the Irish context (Murtagh, 2007; Harris et al., 2006). Therefore, the substantial change in the linguistic profile of parents choosing immersion education between the 1970s and now as the sector has expanded is likely to have impacted on children’s language outcomes.

Irish-medium parents have often been characterised loosely as an elite (e.g. Carey, 2008; Flynn, 2012; McWilliams, 2005) in relation to sociodemographic variables which have been found to be related to parental involvement and student achievement in other settings. However, the findings reported here have suggested that IM parents are not homogeneously advantaged in terms of SES indicators. While 42.1% of respondents indicated that they had completed a degree course, 7.6% had not finished secondary school. These findings resemble closely those of Strickland and Hickey (in preparation) who examined the subsample of over 500 children attending Irish-medium schools in the Growing Up in Ireland database of over 8000 children, finding that 42.55% of those mothers had at least a primary degree but that 9.33% had not progressed beyond a lower secondary education. Additionally, over one in six parents in the present sample indicated that they were medical card holders (indicative of low income in the majority of cases).

Table 9.1 presents a summary comparison of the profile of parents in the current research with elements of the profile of IM parents in other studies. It shows that the demographic and linguistic profile of parents in the present research is broadly similar to that which has been found in other studies, supporting the claim that the parents in the present study are a fair representation of the population of Irish immersion parents. However, it should be noted that the parents in the present study sample were slightly more advantaged in terms of sociodemographic variables, and slightly less advantaged in terms of linguistic characteristics than those in the other studies referred to.

Table 9.1: Comparison of Present Sample to Samples from Other Studies

Characteristic		The Present Research (n=563)	Strickland & Hickey (n=569)	Gilleece et al. (2011) (n=3030)		Harris et al. (2006) (n=609)
Classes Covered		All Classes	2 nd - 4 th Class	2 nd Class (n=1640)	6 th Class (n=1390)	Sixth Class
Irish Proficiency	Low	43.8				36.6
	Medium	35.5				38.3
	High	20.8				24.5
Attitudes towards Irish	Unfavourable	3.8				0.7
	Neutral	3.2				6.6
	Favourable	93.3				92.4
Attended IM school	Primary	8.3		12	13	
	Secondary	6.9		>10%	>10%	
Medical Card Holders		17				12.8
Parent Education	Lower Secondary	7.6	9.33			12.2
	Degree or Higher	42.1	42.55			29.1
Family Structure	One-Parent	14.6		17	21	
	Two-Parent	85.4		83	79	
Employment Status	At least one parent employed	96.2		91	91	

The present study aimed to go further than previous studies which have included consideration of IM parental profile, in order to ascertain which characteristics are related to overall levels of parental involvement, and to specific involvement activities. ‘Overall involvement’ was assessed by classifying parents on a number of involvement variables. The Family Involvement Questionnaire (FIQ) assessed frequency of parents’ participation in a range of practices based on Epstein’s typology of involvement activities, and was thus a multidimensional assessment of parental involvement. However, this measure was not designed for either an immersion or an Irish context, and thus could not comprehensively assess all of the ways in which Irish immersion parents can be, and are, involved. The inclusion of several additional involvement questions in the survey (which addressed the limitations of the FIQ) allowed the identification of subgroups of parents based on a number of variables. Cluster analysis revealed the presence of three distinct involvement clusters, taken to represent low involvement, moderate involvement and high involvement parents. Following a series of univariate tests, the linguistic, demographic and other factors which were found to be significantly associated with involvement cluster membership were included as predictor variables in a multinomial logistic regression. The results of the analysis revealed that three variables significantly predicted involvement, namely **parental proficiency in Irish**, number of **books in the home**, and the degree to which parents felt that their involvement was **welcomed by their child's school**.

It is critical to note here that the profile for parental involvement in immersion diverges from the majority of involvement studies in mainstream schools which have consistently indicated that it is sociodemographic factors such as parental educational attainment, employment status, socioeconomic status, marital status etc. which are the main determinants of parental involvement (Grolnick et al., 1997; Fantuzzo et al., 2000; Pena, 2000; Hill & Taylor, 2004). The findings thus appear to confirm that the immersion context is distinct from monolingual educational settings with respect to parental involvement and home-school relations.

It must of course be acknowledged that the identification of ‘number of books in the home’ as a predictor of parental involvement in Irish immersion does indicate that sociodemographic characteristics are related to involvement in this setting. Schütz et al. (2008) note that books are commodities which need to be purchased; as such, the variable is linked to income. Also, international literacy comparisons such as PISA show that the number of books in the home is a reliable indicator of ‘literacy supportive homes’, which have been more likely to be found among the socially advantaged with parents who have higher levels of education. Thus this finding could be interpreted as giving some support to previous research showing that parents’ education and SES levels are important contributors

to parental involvement in their children's education. Indeed, this variable was found to be significantly related to both ISEI scores and to parent education in the present research. However, the emergence of this variable rather than parental educational attainment or SES (as assessed by occupation type) *per se* may indicate that in an immersion context the relationship between parent profile and involvement is less straightforward than in mainstream schools. Parents from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds reported that they valued education and selected immersion for a range of perceived educational benefits (as opposed to issues such as proximity or accessibility of the school). Opting into a less common educational model for educational reasons may suggest an interest in, and commitment to, education which transcends formal educational levels and may be more important in terms of predicting whether a parent will be involved. In the current setting 'books in the home' appears to be a more sensitive measure of parents' educational orientation than the qualifications which they have obtained.

It is noteworthy that the finding of a significant statistical relationship between parental involvement and parents' perception that the school welcomes their involvement is in line with the models of Epstein and of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, and supports the qualitative findings of Study 1 that parents attributed *low* levels of involvement to feeling unwelcome, intimidated, or out-of-place in their children's school. It is also in line with the finding that some parents reported *increased* involvement following encouraging and welcoming interactions with school staff.

Finally, the finding that parental proficiency in Irish predicted involvement supports the findings from Phase 1 of the study. Low parental proficiency was an overarching theme in the qualitative data and was reported as resulting in a range of barriers to effective involvement in home-based learning activities and school-based activities, as well as being barriers to home-school communication and to supporting children's Irish language development. While the survey data do not provide evidence of a clear causal link between parental language proficiency and involvement, the qualitative data clearly indicated that some parents at least perceive one. Feelings of uncertainty, isolation and frustration resulting from an inability to speak the language through which their children are learning were reported by a number of parents, whose construction of the role of supportive parents seemed to require that they try to act as 'mini-teacher' through the language of the school. The issue of how that role might valuably be extended to include parental involvement activities through English is discussed later.

Finally, it should be noted that barriers to parental involvement were not the preserve of low Irish proficiency parents only. Higher proficiency parents also discussed obstacles and

difficulties such as practical issues like time constraints, but some also identified their children's resistance to, or rebuffing of, parental attempts at involvement. Parents of different proficiency levels also reported feeling that they lacked guidance and support as to how they could take a more active role as educational partners with their child's school. Thus, addressing the issue of parental involvement extends beyond the lower proficiency parents, and requires a broader assessment of ways of increasing the contribution of different categories of parents to an educational partnership with Irish-medium schools.

9.3 Summary of Study 2 Findings

Study 2 involved an exploration of parental involvement and home-school relations from the perspective of educators. A qualitative methodology was adopted for Study 2, whereby in-depth interviews were conducted with educators from Irish-medium primary schools, including principals, class teachers and one home-school liaison coordinator. The findings indicated that the educators interviewed largely defined parental involvement as relating to school-based activities which support the management and running of the school (such as committee-membership, fundraising, sports days, upkeep, etc.). Commentary on communication with parents centred on the role of enrolment interviews and annual parent-teacher meetings in imparting the mission of the school, with relatively less weight given to schools' regular communications with parents about children's progress (apart from cases of academic or behavioural need) or on informing parents as to how they could be supporting their children's learning. The educators interviewed were of the belief that the vast majority of parents of children in their schools lacked proficiency in Irish. As a result, they reported that they did not believe many children made use of Irish outside of the school environment, and crucially, that they did not expect parents to play a role in the L2 development of their children. Perhaps as an extension of this view, they did not appear to expect much active involvement from parents in supporting children's learning in the home. No participant mentioned discussing such involvement, and while some noted that they could see a difference in performance between children with actively involved parents and those without, they did not report seeking to increase this type of involvement or provide guidance on what forms it should take. This appeared to be based on the perception that many parents lack the language proficiency they deemed necessary for successfully supporting children's learning in immersion. Some of the educators signalled that their pessimism on this topic was based on experience, noting that efforts in the past to increase parental involvement tended to reach only the parents least in need of it, rather than the 'hard to reach' parents who they thought needed it most.

The picture that emerged was that many of the educator participants did not perceive low parental Irish proficiency as a barrier to *school*-based involvement, but they also tended not to see an urgent need to try actively to increase *home*-based educational involvement (although teachers of younger children acknowledged the importance of parents' support for reading in the home). The participants in Study 2 were largely satisfied to have some parents ('a core group') involved in supporting the running of the school, and in helping with events such as sports days, Communion and fundraising and maintenance activities, but appeared to be resigned to the majority of parents showing low levels of active involvement according to their definition of it. Most interesting of all was the finding that many of these educators tended to attribute the children's educational progress as due entirely to the school's efforts, since they perceived the school as the only/main source of the target language. This appeared to be linked to their low expectations regarding parental involvement in general, and also to their apparently low estimation of the value of the potential contribution of low proficiency parents in particular (outside of activities such as reading). Overall, it was noteworthy that the educator participants tended to focus on language issues in their discussion of policies and practices in relation to parents, for example in highlighting the importance of the language at the initial interview, and reporting their request that parents speak Irish in the school insofar as possible, or else use English 'discreetly' if unable to communicate effectively through Irish. While they viewed such an approach as 'encouraging parents to use what Irish they have', and safeguarding the Irish ethos of the school, the educators were also pragmatic in accepting that many parents have to use English in interacting with the school. In commenting on communication with parents, the educators interviewed indicated that meetings with parents were largely confined to one annual parent-teacher meeting, with additional communication being more likely only if the child were encountering some difficulty in school, or the school was concerned about conduct or other issues. The barriers to parental involvement which the educators interviewed here reported related to practical issues such as school environment, lack of uptake by parents in specific involvement activities promoted by schools such as Irish classes, parent coffee mornings, etc. However, another issue that emerged indicated that some of these educators had low confidence or efficacy with regard to how to involve parents optimally.

Some of the educators were ambivalent about promoting parental involvement as their experiences of this were not uniformly positive, with not all participants being fully convinced of the benefits of a very active parent body. While the educators interviewed were aware of the benefits of having parents who were supportive of language and literacy in the home, they appeared to be resigned to the fact that, while some parents provide that

support to their children, others cannot or do not. Levels of parental involvement differed across the schools in Study 2, with the highest levels of school-based involvement reported by educators in a DEIS immersion school. As discussed in Chapter 3, DEIS schools receive considerable supports which are targeted at increasing parental involvement and maximising home-school relations as a way of counteracting social disadvantage. DEIS programmes have been submitted to regular evaluation, in a way that system-wide policies relating to parental involvement have not. In this context, these supports appear to have been successful, and could thus form a template for extension to other immersion schools.

The picture which emerged from Study 2 was that educators had a somewhat resigned 'make do with what we can get' attitude towards parental involvement based on their experience of low involvement by parents and their low expectations regarding parental contributions. Rather than actively attempting to build more active partnerships with all families, the educators interviewed appeared to accept that they would have to rely on the support of a small number of high involvement parents in school-based activities where they needed support, while lamenting that there were other parents who were never seen at the school. Most significantly of all, there were indications that, because they see the immersion model as being very successful as it currently operates, many of the educator participants did not see a need to try to increase parents' active engagement as educational partners in their children's learning, largely viewing the children's education as primarily the responsibility of the immersion school. Some interviewees indicated that they would see more parental engagement as a 'bonus' which would be beneficial for children, but they did not appear to expect such involvement from the broad parent-base, and consequently did not actively seek to extend it beyond their current pattern. Thus, the picture that emerged from the qualitative study of the educators' views on parental involvement was that their construction of the parental role in immersion schools was somewhat limited by their focus on the target language, perhaps even more limited than that reported by parents in this study.

9.4 Summary of Study 3 Findings

Study 3 was also undertaken with a qualitative methodology. A series of individual, face-to-face interviews were undertaken with pupils attending Irish-medium primary schools. A major finding which emerged from the analysis of children's interviews was the complete separation they appeared to see between the school and home domains. Children rarely reported observing their parents at school, and at home, they reported barriers to their parents' involvement in their home learning (particularly with homework and out-of-school

Irish use). This perception appears to be, to a large extent, attributable to the different languages used in each setting.

The vast majority of children interviewed reported very low levels of use of the target language outside of the school. Many of them indicated that they found attempting to interact with their parents through Irish was generally not an attractive option, given that parents and other family members have low levels of Irish proficiency. Seeing Irish as something that was 'difficult' or 'effortful' or 'school-like' were also reported as reasons for children to avoid using Irish at home. Perhaps an extension of the identification of Irish with school was children's reports of being cast as 'mini-teacher' of Irish to their own parents, friends or siblings, so that when children do experience Irish use in the home, they are often in the role of teacher. As a result, for the majority of children interviewed, Irish was strongly identified with the language of learning or education only, and they did not welcome parental efforts to have them speak Irish at home.

An important finding of this study was the new light the children shed on the role which siblings play in home-school relations in immersion school contexts. When parents lack, or believe that they lack, the ability to support their children's home learning, they may resort to delegating an older sibling of the child's to act as a parental substitute, and thus older siblings in immersion may be 'taking up the slack' and offering support as 'mini-teachers'. Several children reported having to help their younger siblings with homework (apparently not always willingly) while other children recounted experience of being referred to their older siblings when their parents were unable to help them with their homework in Irish.

When parents did try to help with homework, children were aware of their difficulties, and reported having to translate words and problems in their homework so that parents could understand how to help them. While this practice could be seen as onerous in adding more time and effort to the homework process which would not exist where the language of the home is also the language of school, parents could be helped to see such 'translanguaging' exercises as beneficial to children's learning since they have been found to be highly effective in promoting older bilingual children's deeper learning of material (Cummins, 2010, Williams, 1994). Cummins (2007, p. 223) has discussed the artificiality of the 'two solitudes assumption' of keeping a child's L1 and L2 separate in immersion as failing to recognise the value of crosslanguage transfer. There could be scope for further exploration of this as a way of encouraging more active parental involvement in homework activities, for example, in encouraging older pupils to discuss history or science topics in English with their parents in order to deepen pupils' understanding and to motivate them to seek to learn more about a subject of interest.

As has been discussed in previous chapters, researchers have generally neglected to include the perspectives of children in studies of parental involvement. However, recent years have seen an increase in interest in child-centred research, and in 'hearing' the voices of children. Children are beginning to be seen as social actors in their own right and their views are now more often recognised as valuable and worth seeking out (Chapman & Wood, 2009; Edwards & Alldred, 2000). The findings of the present study indicate that children can indeed report on their own experiences of home, school and parental involvement. The fact that the reports from the children in the two schools in Study 3 were so similar, despite the fact that the schools were selected due to their differing sociodemographic profiles, is further support for the Study 1 finding that it is parental proficiency rather than other demographic characteristics that has the greatest influence on home-school relations in this context.

As far as can be ascertained, Study 3 represents the first qualitative study exploring pupils' experiences of parental involvement and home-school relations in Irish-medium primary schools. As such, there is little previous empirical research which the results can be compared to. However, the findings do suggest support for Gilleece et al.'s (2011) finding that while 80% of second class and 51% of sixth class children included in that study reported enjoying using/learning Irish at school, these numbers fall to 40% and 21% respectively with regard to using Irish at home. They may also explain, in part, the finding reported by Strickland and Hickey (in preparation) that Gaelscoil pupils in the Growing Up in Ireland database were significantly less likely to look forward to going to school than either their English-medium or Gaeltacht counterparts. Given the overarching theme that emerged from Study 3 that these pupils perceived school and home as distinct domains which overlap very little, it is possible that they find the transition from home to school more difficult than others. Thus, if increasing parental involvement in IM schools helps to close the gap that the children appear to be very aware of, there could be benefits for all stakeholders.

Following on from this summary of the results, these findings are discussed and interpreted in the next section in light of the theoretical framework.

9.5 Considering the findings in light of the Theoretical Framework

9.5.1 Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence

As outlined in Chapter 1, Epstein's model of parental involvement posits that the child learns and develops in three main contexts: the home, the school and the community. In

Epstein's model these three settings are conceptualised as spheres which overlap, with the child at the centre of these overlapping spheres. In the present study, the spheres of home and school were under focus. The model posits that there are some practices that home and school conduct separately and some which they conduct jointly. The area of overlap between the spheres is the zone of interaction between home and school- when this zone is maximised (by schools eliciting involvement and parents choosing to be involved), the spheres are pushed together and lead to the creation of 'school-like families' and 'family-like schools' which produces the most positive outcomes for children's learning. Epstein posits that there are three major forces which push the spheres together or pull them apart: The characteristics, experiences, practices of families, the characteristics and practices of schools, and time (i.e. the age/class level of the child). The findings from the present research clearly indicate that, in the context where the language of the home and the language of the school differ, this can serve as a force which pushes the spheres of home and school apart for some families. Throughout the studies conducted here, a lack of continuity or overlap was noted between the immersion school and the home, and at least some of the stakeholders appeared to attribute this to the differing linguistic contexts of the domains. As one parent interviewed in Study 1 described it *'It's like they're in different worlds.'* According to Epstein's model, parents can/should be involved in school-based involvement activities and in home-based learning activities, and they should also engage in open, reciprocal communication with the school. The present research has found that having a child educated through a second language presents challenges to each of these dimensions of involvement for a proportion of IM parents. This supports findings observed in submersion education contexts (Tinkler, 2001; Bermudez & Marquez, 1996) and the findings of Hill (2010) in the Maori immersion context that parents who are not L1 speakers of the target language can become isolated from the school system. The present findings have commonalities with, and divergences from, the findings in these other bilingual education settings, which can best be described in light of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model of Parent Involvement.

9.5.2 Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model

Construction of the parental role

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995-2007) argue that it is those parents who believe that parents should be involved in their children's education who are most likely to become involved. Parents with a less active role construction will be more likely to think their child's education should be 'left up to the school'. In the present study, most of the immersion parents did appear to construe their role as a parent as including an obligation to

be involved in their children's education, but were unsure of how to enact that involvement. It was indeed noteworthy that many parents in the present research believed that they should be active educational partners, and this differentiates this context from other bilingual education settings mentioned above. As Faltis (1995) noted, immigrant or minority parents may not necessarily value education any less than do mainstream majority-language parents, but they may either construe a different role for themselves in their children's education, or else fail to construe a role at all in this aspect of their children's lives, because of the language gap. Faltis (1995) described significant cultural differences between migrant groups in their role construction: he noted that Asian immigrant parents in the U.S. are often highly engaged, seeing themselves as having the main responsibility for their child's learning and success, with the school in a support role, providing the place where children practice basic skills. At the other end of the scale, he reports research on migrant Mexican parents in the US in the 1980s showing that they believed their children's education to be the sole responsibility of the school, and while they taught their children things such as respect for elders, to be accountable for their own actions, and to take care of family members, they did not often involve themselves in school-related learning activities (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987). Faltis concludes that we need to consider more carefully the vision parents have of their role in their children's education, in order to understand better how to reach them effectively to support their involvement with a view to optimising outcomes for children.

The finding that parents in the present study did believe that they had a role as partners is encouraging if the aim is to improve the quality of home-school relations in the Irish immersion context. However, the way in which they construed this role appeared to be problematic in some cases. Parents appeared to operate with a general model of involvement that differed little from that of a parent with a child attending an English-medium school, without any real adaptation for the immersion context. Thus, for some parents, 'parental involvement' seemed to be understood as referring to parents 'teaching' their children concepts or language *in the same way that the school presents them*, or helping their children with homework *through the language of the school*, and many parents felt unable to do this successfully because of their low proficiency in the language of the school. What appears to be absent from the role they have constructed is a consideration of the skills that they *do* have as parents to contribute to supporting their child's education. The focus of many of the low proficiency parents in this study on learning Irish in order to support their children's learning seems idealistic, and the data indicate that many are disappointed that their efforts do not reap more rewards, or at best, are slow to show benefits. An alternative approach would be to encourage immersion parents, while they are

trying to improve their L2 skills, to recognise also the value of their active engagement in enriching their children's mother-tongue (L1) development, particularly their vocabulary, supporting their early literacy and encouraging them to be frequent readers across a variety of genres. This would constitute a significant shift, not only to empowering low proficiency parents and increasing their sense of efficacy as educational partners, but also to forging more effective home-school partnerships in immersion.

Such efforts would not rule out encouraging parents to develop their target language skills, but would help to empower them by offering them other ways in which to engage while those L2 skills are improving. Learning the target language is only one mechanism through which parental involvement can positively influence students' achievement. Other mechanisms worthy of exploration that offer potentially more effective, and more feasible, ways for parents to support a child's learning in immersion include consideration of ways in which they can show encouragement, reinforcement and the modelling of positive attitudes towards the language of instruction. For example, if children strongly identify the target language with school, as reported here, then it might be more effective for schools to emphasise to parents the value of simple leisure activities such as watching a cartoon in Irish on TV with their child rather than giving them general recommendations such as advice to 'try to speak Irish' with the child. It was apparent from the data that parents, as well as children, tend to see the target language as something that is 'done in school' and there appeared to be a tendency to extrapolate this to 'school-like activities'. Thus, they would benefit from identifying ways of supporting their child's exposure to the language through less school-like activities. These data show that parents need help to widen their role definition with regard to supporting the target language to include *non-school* like activities, and more fundamentally, they need to adapt their construction of their role of parental involvement for the immersion context in ways that help them to value – and know that the school values – their contribution to supporting and developing their child's *L1 skills*, as well as their L2 skills. The current construction of their role as '*Parent as Teacher*' appears to lead parents to overlook the areas they can valuably contribute to and focus on their limitations in terms of language proficiency. This has the effect of limiting some parents' involvement in immersion schools, and therefore needs to be reconsidered.

What the findings also clearly highlight is the importance of educators' constructions and perceptions of parental involvement. When schools have a narrow construction of the parental role, this limits the ways in which they promote and seek to elicit involvement. Where educators see the education of children as being their sole responsibility, they are less likely to ensure that they create collaborative educational partnership with them, and a construction of '*Parents as Supporters*' seems to result more often, based on the findings

here, than *'Parents as Partners'*. This will be considered further below. An interesting observation by Epstein (1992) was that when schools view children as *students/pupils* they are likely to see educating them as being the responsibility of the school. Conversely, when schools view children as *children*, they are more likely to construe a role for parents as equal partners in the education process. What is at issue here is whether this is, in fact, entirely the case in immersion. Even where immersion educators do take such a holistic view, they may, inevitably, see their pupils as 'children from non-target language speaking families', which may militate against the development of family-like schools where there is frequent and meaningful overlap between the home and school settings.

The findings here emphasise the importance of taking into account the beliefs and practices of all of the stakeholders, including children. When the constructions of parents and educators differ, it is likely that this makes it more difficult for *children* to understand the role which their parents are to play in their education. Children then become the bridge-head between the school and the home, as carriers of the target language. When their parents have low proficiency in the language, they may adopt empowering roles as translators and mini-teachers, but they may also be uncomfortable with their experience of seeing their parents disempowered and unable to help them when they seek assistance. Such emotional conflict, as well as an identification of the language with work may contribute to some extent to the tendency seen in these data for children to seek to maintain boundaries between school and home. Overall, the present findings suggest that when the understanding of 'parental involvement' varies among members of the stakeholder groups, it is less likely that effective, cooperative home-school relations will develop. Each of the factors which emerged in the data and were supported in the literature as facilitative of parental involvement are discussed briefly below, and summarised in Fig. 9.2.

Personal sense of efficacy for involvement

The issue of how immersion parents construe their role clearly has enormous implications for their sense of efficacy for that role. The most salient issue in these data relating to parents' sense of efficacy for involvement in supporting their children in immersion education was the recurring report that their own lack of proficiency in the target-language posed problems for involvement in a range of activities, both in the home and in their child's school. Low proficiency in the language through which their children are learning appears to impact very significantly on parents' general sense of efficacy as educational partners, not only in terms of constraining their actual involvement (*I leave it to her really*), but also in causing anxiety that they are a negative factor (*I might teach him wrong*), which in turn, undermines such parents' personal efficacy further (*he'd laugh at me*). Several

parents expressed this concern that their involvement would actually be detrimental to their child's learning, mentioning fears of somehow 'contaminating' children's learning by using incorrect Irish vocabulary or grammar. These data point to some parents with low proficiency constructing a rationale by which their *non*-involvement with homework and other supportive activities are deemed preferable, in the apparent belief that their children would be better off without their participation in this regard. This presents as a missed opportunity to help parents to find ways of supporting their child's learning in ways that are not target language dependent. Furthermore, the findings clearly suggest that teacher and child perceptions of parental efficacy are also important factors in reinforcing parents' low personal sense of efficacy. If teachers and children do not believe that parents' involvement will be helpful, then they are less likely to seek it out. In turn, lack of invitations for parental involvement may negatively influence parents' own efficacy.

Invitations for involvement from child's school

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler assert that parents are more likely to be involved if they perceive general invitations for involvement from their child's school (arising from a welcoming and opening school climate) and if they perceive specific invitations from their child's teacher or from their child. Several parents reported feelings of isolation from their child's school, or feeling incapable of helping either in the class or at home, and they attributed this largely to their lack of proficiency in the target language. Feeling uncomfortable or unwelcome in a domain where they do not speak the language of communication is unlikely to lead to such parents perceiving the school as a place where their involvement is welcomed. Epstein emphasises the importance of parents feeling invited, and the lack of specific invitations for involvement from their child's school was mentioned by parents, particularly in relation to school-based involvement activities. As Study 2 shows, invitations or requests for involvement may in fact be targeted at a core group of parents with the requisite language skills who have helped successfully before, rather than being offered to all parents. Educators may believe that this is the most effective way to have their immediate needs for parental help met, but limiting invitations to a small number of parents because it is easier, more expedient, etc., is less likely to forge successful partnerships between schools and *all* families, and may contribute to the perception of an 'in-group' from which many parents are excluded.

Similarly, offering a limited model of parental involvement will exclude those parents who feel they lack the requisite skills. Educators interviewed reported feeling that there was 'nothing they could do' about 'absent' parents and were resigned to the fact that there were would always be some families with whom they had no contact. IM schools may need to

reflect on the ways in which they currently attempt to elicit involvement and consider whether these need to be adapted to include a more diverse range of school *and* home-based options and opportunities that are within the compass of ‘hard to reach’ parents. As educators noted, it was often the parents of children who they felt could most benefit from parental involvement who were the most difficult to involve. Thus it is vital to explore all of the available strategies to improve the involvement of these parents, and research on involvement points to the benefits of emphasising the value *to their child* of their engagement, giving them more options for different types of educationally supportive activities, and issuing more explicit invitations from teacher and school.

Invitations for involvement from child

An important finding from the present study relates to the previously overlooked role that children themselves play in shaping the involvement of their parents in immersion education. It is clear from these findings that children are not passive recipients of parental support for, and involvement in, their education, but are active participants who can influence and shape the nature and extent of their parents’ involvement. While Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s model noted that a parent’s perception of specific invitations for involvement from their child is an important condition for involvement, relatively little attention has previously been devoted to the wide variety of ways in which children can not only elicit involvement, but can actively resist or rebuff it, and shape the ways in which it is enacted. Resistance from children was predominantly reported in relation to parents’ attempts to speak Irish with them in the home. Several parents and pupils reported that children did not enjoy using the language and identified it only with school. Children also perceive that their parents’ lack of proficiency in the language means that they are unable to communicate effectively with them, that it may be burdensome for parents to do so, or that it will not help them improve their own language skills. Thus, as well as a parent’s personal sense of self-efficacy, *children’s* evaluation of the benefits of their parents’ involvement is an important feature in an immersion context.

Life context

This level of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s model refers to parents’ perceptions regarding whether they have a) the skills and knowledge to be successfully involved and b) the time and energy for involvement. In common with many parents the world over, immersion parents interviewed and surveyed in the present study reported challenges relating to each of these conditions. Low proficiency parents in particular described feeling that they lacked the necessary skills to participate in various aspects of their child’s learning, from helping with homework, to communicating with school staff, to supporting their child’s L2

development, and the concentration of these parents on this theme may point to a sense of the greater effort such involvement would cost them, and the greater scarcity of resources of time, energy and money available to parents of lower SES and educational levels. However, even for higher proficiency parents, it was notable that many appeared to believe that supporting a child who is learning through their L2 demands *more* time and resources than it would if their children were attending English-medium schools. This is worth further exploration and discussion with parents.

The present findings also show that there are life context variables in an immersion context which are not included in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's conceptualisation. Several parents in the present study who felt that they *did* have the language skills to support their children's Irish language learning reported failure to do so due to their wishes not to exclude or isolate non-Irish-speaking partners or family members, some of whom were reported to react in a hostile manner to the use of the language in the home. Thus, when investigating parental involvement in immersion context, the proficiency levels of the whole family may be relevant to the strategies open to parents, and future research needs to consider a broadening of scope to include the whole family context.

9.5.3 Empowerment Approach to Parental Involvement

A salient finding to emerge from this study is that having children who are educated through a language which is not the parents' L1, and which the vast majority of parents are not proficient in, presents significant challenges to involving some parents as educational partners. Looking at the qualitative findings from parents in Study 1, language such as 'lacking confidence', 'feeling uncomfortable', 'being unsure', 'feeling unwelcome' permeates many parents' reports. While such parents may feel empowered by their choice of an immersion school which will effectively address for their children a deficiency they felt in their own education, they may find that their day-to-day experience confronts them more often with their deficiency than the sense of empowerment their original decision gave them. Contemporary parental involvement literature has moved away from conceptualising parental involvement in a deficit framework, where parents are seen as lacking the necessary skills and knowledge to support their children's education, to one where parents are valued as the primary educators of their children, and seen as valuable resources for supporting children's learning. The findings from Study 2 indicate that, in practice, a deficit approach to parents' target language appears to exist in the immersion context. While the educators do value parental involvement, in many cases they seem to believe that it is short-circuited because parents are not proficient in the target language. This appears to lead to a rescaling of the options for involvement offered to parents, with the option often limited to

practical, school-based involvement, where what appears to be valued most from parents is practical help such as fundraising, or painting walls, or helping with school tours. There was relatively little explicit evidence in the principals and teachers' interviews of a view that all parents were capable of making a valuable contribution to engaging with and supporting their children's actual learning. Instead, educators talked about not expecting such involvement, and referred to their experience of difficulty in eliciting it. As a result they seemed to have accommodated to an attenuated model of parental involvement, based on their belief that relatively few parents are in a position to engage as partners in supporting the children's Irish development. A further consequence of this appeared to be a tendency to revert to seeing the children's education in immersion as being the sole responsibility of the school.

It is also important to consider the wider social and historical context here. It should be acknowledged that, while the differing languages of school and home *appear* to be responsible for the focus on parent deficits rather than on the empowerment of parents through partnership, it is also possible that such an approach is not limited to IME schools, but is rather a feature of the Irish educational landscape more generally. As outlined in Chapter 3, the role of parents in education in Ireland has historically been a marginal one, with State and Church control of the education system closely guarded until recently. Parents develop their construction of their role in education largely based on how their own parents were involved, and it is likely that many of the respondents' parents were themselves disempowered in relation to involvement with the school. This may also have influenced the way in which teachers have come to construe the role of parents in education. It may be the case that on-going developments within the Irish-medium sector with regard to school patronage and the adoption of inter- and multid denominational ethos in some cases, as well as changes initiated by the Minister for Education and Science in 2012 with regard to moving some denominational schools towards a multid denominational ethos, will be of some relevance in contributing to a review of the role of parents as educational partners in Irish education more generally.

The previous sections have discussed the findings and considered them collectively in light of the theoretical framework. It is now necessary to explore how the findings can be used to build upon existing conceptualisations of home-school relations in order that they may be extended to the immersion setting. The present research identified clear factors which facilitate and obstruct parental involvement in Irish immersion education and these are summarised overleaf in Figures 9.1 and 9.2. As these models show, the facilitators of, and barriers to, successful home-school relationships can be broadly categorised as relating to

parent/family characteristics and practices, school/teacher characteristics and practices and child factors.

Family Factors

A number of individual parent characteristics appear to play a role in facilitating and obstructing parental involvement in Irish-medium education. In line with Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of parental involvement, a parent's **construction of their role** appears to be related to the nature and extent of their involvement. However, as discussed at length above, in an immersion context it may not be merely construing an active involvement role that is important, but in fact the *way* in which this role is constructed which can facilitate or impede a range of involvement practices. Parents who have a construction of an involvement role which is not adapted to the immersion context are limited in the opportunities for involvement activities which they perceive. This can thus be seen as an *extension* of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model, as they discussed parents' constructions of their roles in terms of being either 'present/absent' or 'active/inactive'; the present findings highlight that even when a parent's construction of an involvement role is present or active, it may be the 'narrowness/breadth' of the construction which determines their involvement. If parents have a narrow construction of involvement that is predicated solely on use of the L2, and they have low proficiency in that language, their involvement in their children's educational lives is severely limited.

Another parent factor which appears to be greatly affected by low L2 proficiency is a parent's **sense of efficacy** for involvement. Parents who do not feel efficacious, who do not feel that their involvement will be helpful to their children, are less likely to be successfully involved in a range of potentially influential parental involvement practices. Not speaking the language of the school, or not speaking it well, was reported by parents as directly impacting on their efficacy for involvement, and thus limiting their engagement. Conversely, high parental proficiency was found to be predictive of higher levels of involvement in the present research. Low efficacy was reported as constraining levels of involvement, but also leading to feelings of anxiety, frustration and helplessness in parents. Increasing parental efficacy is thus likely to be facilitative of increased parental involvement, and ways of achieving this are considered in section 9.7.2 below.

In line with Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model, the degree to which parents perceive that their involvement is welcomed by their child, and by their child's school, is related to involvement levels. Feeling that their participation was encouraged by teachers and that

their presence in the school was appropriate was facilitative of higher involvement levels in this study. Conversely, parents who felt isolated from the school, uncomfortable communicating with school staff, and who believed that involvement was ‘for other people’ (higher proficiency parents) were less likely to be involved in school-based and communication activities. Additionally, parents who felt that their children no longer needed or wanted their participation, and who had made overtures to involvement which were repeatedly rebuffed or resisted by their children reported experiencing considerable challenges to effectively supporting their children’s education.

In addition to these individual, psychological factors, life context plays a role in the nature and extent of parents’ involvement in their children’s education. As mentioned above, lacking the skills, knowledge, time or energy for involvement limits the degree to which parents are partners. Particular to the Irish immersion setting is that parents reported feeling that they lacked access to appropriate resources and supports which would facilitate their involvement, particularly for increasing L2 use in the home. Where supports *are* offered to parents, if these are not appropriate to a parent’s individual needs, they are not facilitative of increased involvement. Thus the careful planning and tailoring of any potential supports is crucial; this is discussed further in section 9.7.2 below. The findings also highlight that the characteristics and practices of other family members can influence parental involvement. Not wishing to exclude other family members who lack proficiency in Irish was a frequently reported barrier to supporting the L2 in the home. Additionally, delegating involvement activities to a more proficient family member (spouse, other children in the family) was posited as an explanation for lower levels of self-reported involvement. It is argued here that factors relating to family members who are not directly related to the individual parent-child dyad have not featured prominently enough in previous conceptualisations of the home-school relationship.

Child Factors

As has been discussed in previous sections, the present findings indicate that child factors have not received sufficient consideration in the theoretical literature on home-school relations. Previous models, such as that of Epstein, have focused solely on the age of the child as the child characteristic which impacts on parental involvement. The present findings indicate some support for the role of a child’s age in influencing parental involvement. Although child’s age was not found to predict overall frequency of parental involvement, it was found that it affected the *ways* in which parents are involved, with certain activities (e.g. reading to/with children) decreasing over time, and others (e.g. being present in the school environment) increasing with the child’s progression through school.

However, as can be seen from Figures 9.1 and 9.2, there are additional child characteristics and practices which mediate the home-school link. The ways in which children construe the parental role, their perceptions of their parents' efficacy, skills and knowledge for involvement (largely associated with parents' L2 ability by children) were reported by children as influencing their receptiveness to parental attempts at involvement and also their own likelihood of actively eliciting such involvement. Children's attitudes towards their L2, and associations (positive or negative) which they have the language can also facilitate parental engagement (e.g. child 'teaching' Irish to parents) or obstruct it (child refusing to respond to parent speaking Irish at home). Finally, a child's experience of difficulties or challenges in school was found to result in increased parental involvement and home-school collaboration. The need to move beyond reactive parental involvement to a more proactive/preventative approach is discussed further below.

School Factors

The findings also highlighted that a range of school characteristics and teacher practices were related to how successful home-school partnerships are in this context. The length of time since the establishment of the school was reported as being related to levels of parental involvement, with school staff reporting lower levels of engagement and enthusiasm on the part of the parent body as the school became more established in the community. Physical attributes of the school such as its size and security measures in place there were also reported as presenting barriers to parental presence on school premises. Lacking the space or resources to involve parents in school life was also reported by teachers and parents alike as presenting barriers to home-school collaboration.

Teacher attitudes, motivations and efficacy also appeared to facilitate and obstruct effective parental involvement. When 'involvement' was narrowly defined by educators, parents' participation was limited to support roles (e.g. fundraising, school maintenance) rather than educational partnership roles. Where teachers reported having had previous negative experiences of parental involvement (e.g. overpowering/critical parents, or apathetic 'absent' parents) educators reported low confidence in effectively involving parents and a wariness of inviting parental participation.

At a school-wide level, schools with clear policies and targeted strategies for involving parents appear to be successful in forging and maintaining meaningful relationships with parents. In particular, having a staff member such as a home-school liaison coordinator who is aware of the value of a range of parent practices and whose role is to actively encourage

and facilitate these practices appear to be particularly effective. Similarly, schools that are committed to fostering a welcoming atmosphere, to conveying an open-door policy to parents and who have a pragmatic approach to parental use of Irish on school premises appears to be related to higher levels of parent school-based involvement and home-school communication in the Irish-medium context.

These facilitating and obstructing factors are considered further in section 9.7.2 below, where a series of recommendations are made as to how home-school partnerships can be maximised in Irish-medium primary schools.

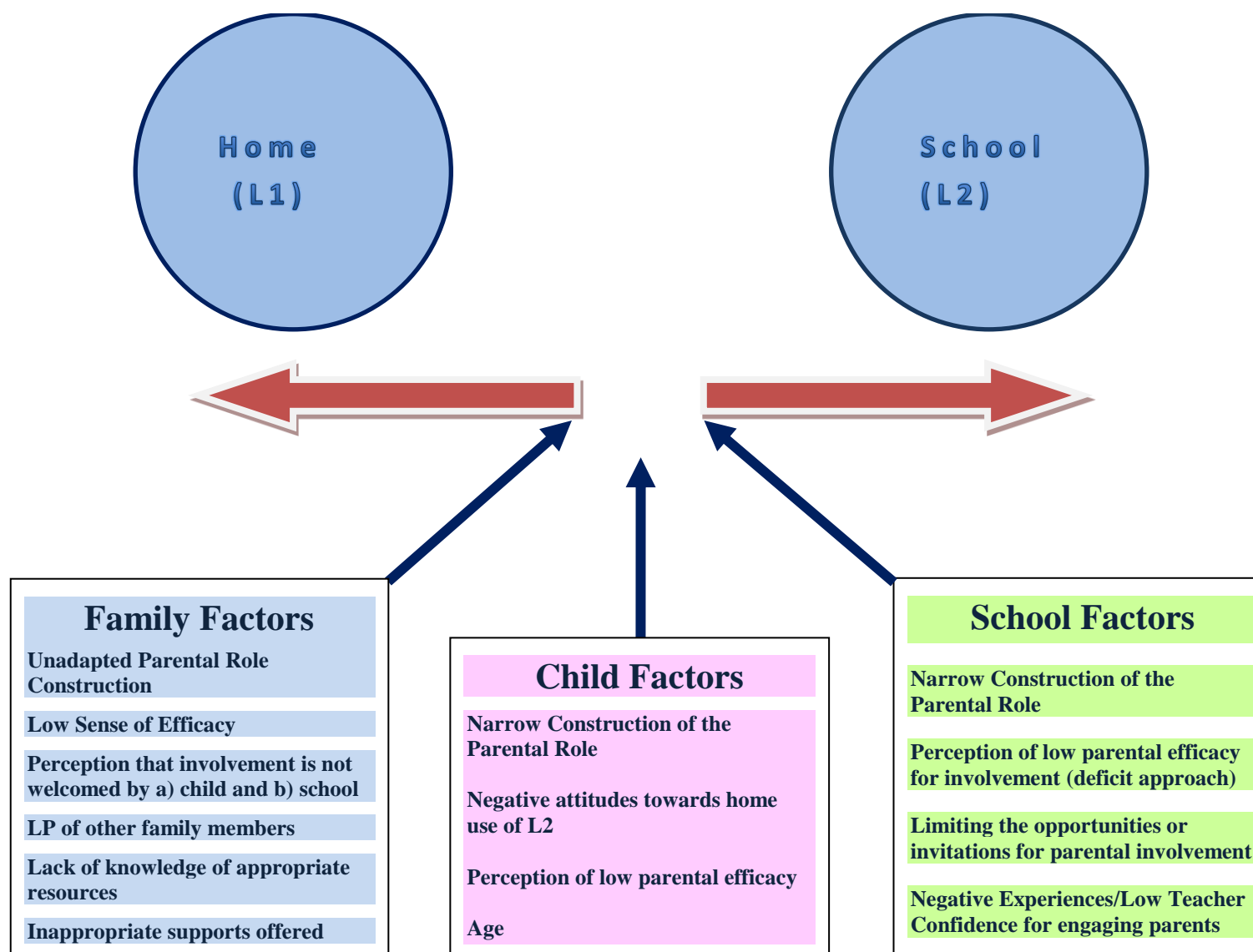


Fig. 9.1 Model depicting the factors which obstruct successful home-school relations in Irish-medium primary schools

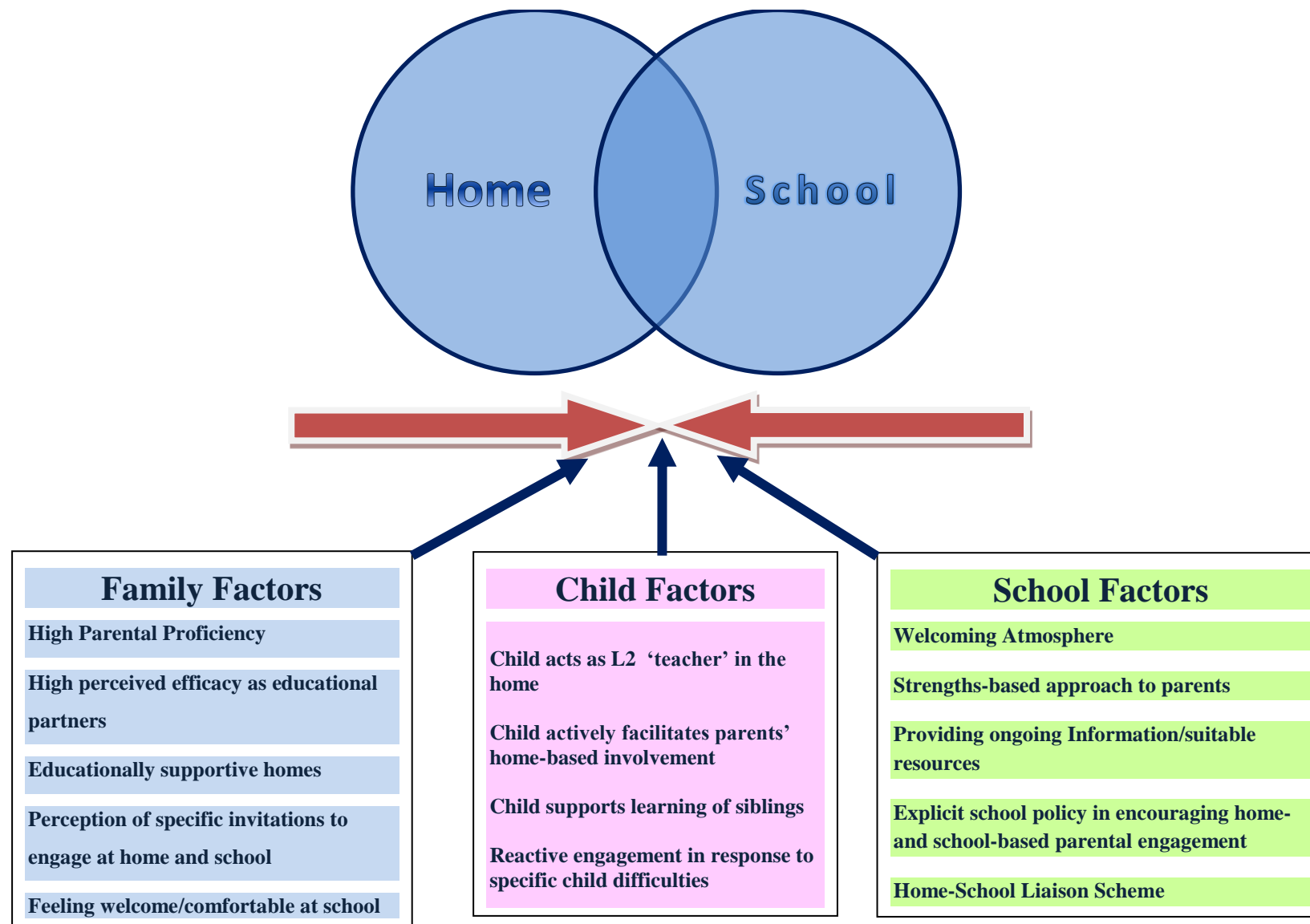


Fig 9.2 Model depicting factors which facilitate home-school partnerships in Irish-medium primary schools

9.6 Appraising the Present Research

In order to determine the usefulness of this research, it is necessary to appraise the research project from a design and methodological standpoint. The present research has a number of strengths and limitations which warrant attention and each of these will now be considered.

9.6.1 Overall Research Design and Informants

A major strength of the research is that it utilised a mixed methods design. Qualitative components of the research allowed for in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of participants. The inclusion of a quantitative phase expanded the usefulness of qualitative findings by allowing the exploration of trends in a larger population. As Creswell (2003) has noted, neither qualitative nor quantitative methods in isolation can lead to a full understanding of a phenomenon. The use of both types of methods in the present research can thus be seen as a major strength of the project. How this manifested itself in the present research is considered further below.

Another major strength of the research is that it integrates multiple perspectives. Hill and Taylor (2004) identified as one of the key issues in contemporary parental involvement research the question of who should be consulted when investigating parental involvement and home-school relations. They argue, as it is argued here, that if one is to adopt an ecological approach to parental involvement, then it is inappropriate to consider parents' perspectives in isolation, as has been the norm in this field of research. Few studies have integrated the perspectives of parents and educators, and fewer still have also consulted children as to their experiences. The present research aimed to ensure that the voices of each of the stakeholder groups were heard, so that a comprehensive understanding of the topic could be achieved.

It must be acknowledged that the data for the present research were collected from each of the participant groups at one point in time, providing a snapshot of home-school relations. Given the existing evidence that parental involvement is dynamic and changes over time, a longitudinal design might have been better suited to exploring this aspect of involvement. However, it should also be noted that this limitation was offset to some degree in the present research by a number of design/methodological decisions. Parents and teachers of pupils at different stages of their school careers, as well as children from different age groups were consulted. Parents who responded to the survey had children ranging from their first year to their final year in primary school, allowing for comparison of the nature and extent of involvement activities between parents of children in different age groups. Additionally, the use of direct, qualitative interviews with members of each of the

stakeholder groups allowed for participants to reflect on changes in involvement and home-school relations over time as they had experienced them. While this cannot be taken as a true substitute for longitudinal research, it does recognise the evolving, dynamic and complex path of parental involvement, in a way which the vast majority of research in this domain has not, given what has been described as the over-reliance on cross-sectional survey data in the extant literature on parental involvement (Baker & Soden, 1997).

9.6.2 Methods of Analyses Employed

All of the qualitative data which were collected in the different phases of the research (interview data from Study 1: Phase 1, Studies 2 and 3, and written responses to open-ended questions on the survey in Study 1: Phase 2) were analysed using Content Analysis, the approach to data analysis advocated by Mayring (2000), Elo and Kyngas (2008) and others. As discussed in Chapter 4, this method of analysis has a number of strengths, specifically its clear method and systematic approach, elements which are not common to all qualitative analysis methods. While recognising that the development and naming of codes and themes in qualitative research is necessarily a subjective process, the high levels of inter-rater reliability achieved over all of the qualitative phases suggests that the coding frames could be utilised effectively by an independent researcher.

For the quantitative phase of the research, a series of descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted. The data derived from the survey provided descriptive information on the profile of a large sample of Irish-medium parents and the frequency with which they engage in a range of involvement activities. A major aim of this phase of the research was to ascertain which background factors predict higher levels of parental involvement. Given that no one measure could be identified which could fully encompass parental involvement in an immersion setting, it was necessary to use classification methods to identify subgroups in the sample according to reported levels of involvement on a number of variables, prior to investigating which factors could then predict this.

Two-Step cluster analysis was selected as the appropriate method to classify parents. Cluster analysis is a widely-used, well-established classification method used for the formation and identification of subgroups in a given sample based on a series of variables (Hannan et al., 2003). Despite this, Clatworthy, Buick, Hankins, Weinman and Horne (2005) note there are not clear guidelines for researchers, making it likely that methods of reporting in previously published studies are adopted. They argue that while clear reporting is important with any method of analysis, it is particularly important with cluster analysis in order for the reader to have confidence in the findings. Clatworthy et al. conducted a review of the reporting of cluster analysis in 278 studies in the area of health psychology on the

basis of five main criteria. They found that just 27% of the studies they reviewed met all of these criteria, and they thus concluded that the reporting of cluster analysis was not satisfactory. In order to follow best practice, each of these criteria was covered in the reporting of the cluster analysis here, namely, the computer programme used, the distance/similarity measure employed, the method of clustering adopted, the procedure used to determine the number of clusters, and evidence for the validity of the clusters. Using these guidelines increases confidence in the results reported here which identified a valid, stable cluster structure based on the involvement variables selected for inclusion.

Multinomial logistic regression was then conducted in order to identify which, if any, of the background characteristics/factors assessed by the survey could be found to significantly predict membership of identified involvement subgroups. While the sample size for this phase of the research was large ($n=563$), it must be acknowledged that these participants were recruited from a limited number of schools ($n=10$). Multinomial logistic regression involves analysis of data at the level of the individual parent, and ignores the fact that there may be higher order clustering in the sample. Given that parents in the present sample were clustered within schools, multilevel modelling would have been preferable in this context. However, multilevel modelling was not advisable here given the number of schools from which participants were recruited and so caution must be exercised when interpreting these results, which may have been influenced by bias.

Methodological and design considerations pertaining to each of the individual studies will now be outlined in turn.

9.6.3 Methodological Considerations for Study 1

It is acknowledged that, in line with qualitative norms, the sample size for Study 1 was small. While the aim of qualitative research is not to be representative of the entire population under study, a guiding principle in qualitative research is that of saturation. Given the considerable corroboration between themes identified in the interview data and those revealed in the analysis of the open-ended survey responses substantially increases our confidence in these findings. However, in addition to this triangulation, survey comments also led to new information being obtained. Given the nature of the themes which were found only in the survey qualitative data, it is possible that the anonymity afforded by the survey format allowed parents to say things which they may not have felt comfortable saying in a face-to-face interview which was conducted in their children's school. Examples of such themes include reports regarding motivation for choosing immersion that may be seen as not socially desirable (such as the perceived absence of foreign national children and children with special educational needs in IME). In addition,

parents may have felt uncomfortable criticising teacher behaviours or school practices in an interview setting, whereas such issues did arise in the anonymous survey comments. Thus the qualitative responses elicited in the survey data served two purposes- corroborating interviewees' reports and also providing new information. This can be seen as strength of Study 1. Not only did the qualitative data from the survey echo interview reports, but the quantitative analyses also confirmed the qualitative interview findings. For example, interviewees reported barriers to involvement relating to low Irish proficiency, and in Phase 2, low proficiency parents were significantly more likely to fall in the low involvement cluster than the high involvement cluster.

While the sample in the survey in Study 1 was not national, given that the research concentrated on schools in Leinster, it did target the area of densest distribution of Irish-medium schools. The findings offer scope for furthering research in this area with larger, nationally representative samples. In particular, caution must be exercised when considering the regression findings presented in Chapter 6, given that respondents were clustered within schools and there were not sufficient schools to analyse relationships at the school-level rather than the level of the individual.

While survey response rates ranged from acceptable to very good, it is important to consider the profile of parents who completed the survey versus those who chose not to. As Anderson and Minke (2007) have noted, completing a survey may be viewed as an act of parental involvement in itself. It is possible that parents who have little involvement do not complete surveys about parental involvement. As such, it is possible that the profile and behaviours of parents who did not respond is different to those from whom data were obtained, and these differences remain unknown. It should be noted, however, that considerable variation in levels of parental involvement *was* found in the present research, with a quarter of parents falling in the low involvement cluster, 43% in the medium involvement cluster and a third falling in the high involvement subgroup.

9.6.4 Methodological Considerations for Study 2

As with Study 1, Phase 1 a small number of participants was recruited in order to explore home-school relations qualitatively from the perspectives of school staff. While such a method allowed for in-depth exploration of educators' experience, given the limited sample size, we must exercise extreme caution in interpreting the findings in relation to the larger population. However, the method of sampling employed was purposive, rather than merely convenient. As such, a strength of the study was that schools were selected in order to cover a range of school types/environments based on criteria which have been found to be related to home-school relations and levels of parental involvement in other settings. Schools thus

ranged in size, in terms of location, and also included a designated disadvantaged school. In addition, schools under different patron bodies were included in the study. Additionally, the study sought to explore the experiences and practices of principals and of mainstream class teachers (teaching both junior and senior classes). The inclusion of a DEIS school allowed a home-school coordinator, whose role is to promote and facilitate home-school relations, to be interviewed.

In the literature, there is recognition that school factors influence parental involvement. However, utilising qualitative methods for this phase of the research recognised that the 'school' player in home-school relations refers, essentially, to its staff. Qualitative methods allowed for exploration of stated policies in schools, and the practices of school staff. However, it also allowed the exploration of individual, psychological attributes of school staff which may influence parental involvement, such as attitudes, motivations, teacher confidence, experience and efficacy.

9.6.5 Methodological Considerations for Study 3

Given the relative novelty of consulting children as to their experiences of home-school relations and, indeed, including children's voices in *any* research is a relatively recent development, methodological considerations for this study in the research project warrant particular attention. James (2007) argued that there are several challenges to conducting research with children, which need to be considered in the new research agenda which seeks to include the voices of children. First, James (2007) raises the issue of the *authenticity* of children's voices in research. He warns of the danger that those who are collecting data will decide and define what is important and that this may limit the authenticity of children's reports. Indeed, Wood and Chapman (2009) used questionnaire methods to explore parental involvement from children's perspectives. They highlighted as a limitation of their study that the quantitative methodology which they employed meant that the areas to be considered were fully predetermined by the researchers. They argued that a more qualitative approach would have been preferable if time constraints had not determined that they use more expedient and convenient methods of data collection. The present Study 3 had the merit of employing such a qualitative design. While it was necessary to compose questions to generally define the main areas of the interviews, the semi-structured approach allowed children scope to talk about those issues which were pertinent to their experiences, and to direct the course of the research in a way that quantitative survey methods would not. Allowing participants to describe their experiences in their own words contributes to the authenticity of the children's voices in the research.

A second warning issued by James (2007) relates to the possibility of researchers assuming that there is a single children's world view, and that the diversity of children's voices (in terms of age, class and culture) can be largely ignored in research purporting to be child-centred. The present study recognised that while immersion pupils are a distinct subset of primary school children, there is also diversity within this group. Rather than assuming that children of different age groups would have the same experiences of parental involvement, data were collected from children at two different stages of their primary school life. Instead of collecting data from just one school, two schools with different profiles in terms of size, location and sociodemographic profiles were selected from which to recruit participants.

Finally, James (2007) questions how best to include children's voices in research. In highlighting the influence of power differentials in child research, she has questioned whether using children themselves as researchers would be the most appropriate way of collecting data from children. The present study did not make use of child researchers and it is acknowledged that there is always an inherent power differential when an adult interviews a child. The fact that the research was undertaken in the school, a domain where adults make and enforce rules, may have reinforced this. However, attempts were made to reduce the potential influences of this where possible. For example, unlike other studies which have consulted children on parental involvement (e.g. Chapman & Wood, 2009), interviews were not conducted in the classroom, and teachers were not present while the data were collected. Every attempt was made to put children at ease and to ensure that the experience was relaxed and positive for participants. Children were repeatedly informed that there were no right or wrong answers to questions and that they were free to say what they wished. In addition, interviews in Gaelscoil B were conducted in English, which emphasised to children that the sessions were separate from school (where they would normally be speaking Irish). The fact that interviewees from Gaelscoil A were code switching throughout interviews also suggests that they did not view the researcher as an authority figure.

While acknowledging that there are limitations to the research, the strengths of the research, such as the depth of the data, the use of mixed methods, and the integration of multiple perspectives suggest that the research has meaningful implications for practice and for future research. These will now be considered.

9.7 Implications of the Research.

9.7.1 Recommendations for Future Research

The present research has served as a significant first investigation into an under-researched area. It has highlighted previously unknown issues that merit further research attention. Parental involvement has been largely absent from research on immersion education and, where it has been investigated, it has been in relation to Teacher-Parent differences in objectives of immersion (e.g. Walker & Tedick. 2006), to issues such as motivation for choosing immersion (e.g. Whiting & Feinauer, 2011) and to parental satisfaction with school choice (Parkes & Tenley. 2011). Some evidence does point to low levels of involvement among one-way immersion parents internationally (Hill, 2010), although these findings were based on teacher reports only. The vast majority of research which has included consideration of the role of parents in immersion has been conducted in a two-way immersion context (Baig, 2011), pointing to the need for a distinct corpus of research pertaining to parents in one-way immersion.

The findings of this study of Irish immersion may have implications for other heritage language contexts. While the present research was limited to a geographical area in the Republic of Ireland and should be considered in light of this particular context, there are likely to be parallels between this context and settings such as Scotland, Wales, and New Zealand where the minority status of the immersion language makes it likely that the language of the school and the language of the home may differ in many cases. This study highlights the need to build research on parental involvement into the immersion agenda for the future.

Future research should also be conducted to ascertain which strategies are most effective for increasing levels of parental participation in Irish-medium primary schools. If data could be collected from a much larger number of schools, multilevel modelling would be the preferable way to conduct this analysis. A series of recommendations are made below, based on the findings of the present research and on practices which have been found to be effective in other settings; their effectiveness and feasibility would need to be empirically explored in the Irish immersion context.

9.7.2 Recommendations for Practice

The findings of the present research clearly indicate that there are particular challenges to fostering and maintaining effective partnerships between home and school in Irish immersion education. However, given the willingness of many parents to take a more active

role, as indicated in the parent data, there appears to be considerable scope to increase and improve parental involvement in the education of their children.

While difficulties relating to involvement were not found only among low proficiency parents, the impact of low proficiency in Irish was an overarching theme in all of the studies conducted. It is therefore tempting to think that teaching the target language to parents would be a panacea (and many parents themselves also appear to believe that this is the case), however parents who *have* made such attempts to learn the target language report that this is neither a practical nor attractive solution. Hickey (1997) discussed the difficulties for parents of attending classes in Irish at a period in their lives when they have multiple demands on their time. In recent years some alternatives in the form of online courses and materials have sought to address these difficulties (although it should also be noted that many parents in this study did not seem to be aware of them). One such approach is seen in *Gaschaint* (Lawlor, 2005), which provides phrases (in book and CD format) that are chosen as being of relevance to parents talking with children, and this offers an appropriate and flexible way of helping parents to improve their Irish which schools could support. For those parents who are willing to attend Irish classes, it would be helpful if such classes could be more tailored to their needs in talking to their children and in helping with homework, rather than generic language classes that can seem remote from parents' actual language needs.

Overall, however, there is a need to recognise that, even if some parents are willing to try to improve their Irish proficiency, such improvement is likely to be slow for at least some of them during the years their child is in the school, and to be vastly outpaced by their children's language learning, so that even improving parents feel they lag too far behind to be able to help their child with Irish. The conclusions of this study point to the value of exploring parallel and additional ways of helping parents to be active partners in their children's education and to recognise the value of what they can contribute through their L1 as educational partners, rather than focusing on their deficiencies with regard to supporting children's L2 development. Looking at parental perceptions with regard to school-based interaction, this might point to the benefit in some cases of reviewing how school language policies are communicated to parents, such as those requiring use of the target language on school premises, if this has the unintended consequence of alienating a proportion of parents. In this regard it is worth noting that some immersion settings in New Zealand have found it helpful to provide a small formal 'English zone' area near school entrances where parents are reassured that it is acceptable for them to speak English in order to interact with school personnel without feeling that they are diluting the ethos of the school. Overall, it might be beneficial for schools to be aware that some parents at least may perceive schools'

language policies as a signal that they are not welcome on the premises, since awareness of this would be beneficial in exploring the options for both stakeholders.

Looking at other school-based involvement activity, school policies which stipulate Irish speaking ability as a prerequisite to parental involvement at Board of Management level means that parent representation on such bodies tend not to be representative of the parent body as a whole in terms of proficiency at least. Proficient Irish speakers in the present study were also significantly more likely to become involved at the Parents' Association level, suggesting that lower proficiency parents may not be adequately represented even at this level of school involvement and decision-making either. It is suggested that efforts to create more inclusive forms of parental involvement at committee/management level could be explored, particularly at the level of Parents' Associations, with transparent bilingual communication of committee decisions and the aim of developing clear networks linking *all* families with parent representatives, as a more equitable and empowering way of organising decision-making structures within immersion schools for all parents.

An empowerment approach to promoting home-based parental engagement in educational partnership in immersion schools would seek to make conscious efforts to harness parents' strengths rather than focusing on their weakness in terms of language proficiency. To this end, a shift towards discussing with parents the importance of activities to develop their children's L1 oral skills and literacy, and the value of talking with their children *in English* about what they are learning at homework time would be valuable in helping parents to modify their template for parental involvement and see such support as worthwhile for their child. Parents in this study rarely reported such activities, and while it is possible that some participating parents were in fact already supporting their children's L1 literacy and learning in such informal ways, and simply did not report doing so, in itself this would be significant in indicating that parents tend not to *value* these activities or see them as valid or significant contributions to their children's education. Rather than commenting on ways in which they could be educationally supportive through English, many of the parent participants in this study focused instead on what they are *not* doing as a result of their lack of target language proficiency. Thus, informing parents of the important role they can play in developing their children's L1 language and literacy skills from the outset, as an active educational partner, with practical advice from schools on how to build a literacy supportive home, would be beneficial in helping them to construct an adapted role. It was also noted by some parents and schools in this study that providing information about the English-language versions of textbooks used in school could be helpful for some parents who are prepared to buy some extra texts in order to help them to support their children's homework, particularly for subjects where children might have particular needs such as

mathematics and where parents feel excluded by specialised vocabulary. There appears to be some reluctance among educators about informing parents of this option, although several parents commented that they would welcome it, and the issue might benefit from discussion. Another recommendation is that, given the findings here showing that some parents turn to older children to answer homework questions, but not all parents have such a resource available to them, it would be worth exploring the benefits of schools promoting 'homework helper networks' in each class, giving parents contact numbers of other parents who could answer their questions, and, in the case of older classes, making some information about homework (such as projects or essays) available to parents in English on a school website area for parents.

Finally, with regard to helping parents to support the target language at home, it might be more effective for schools to inform low and moderate proficiency parents about suitable and accessible resources for *less* school-like activities in Irish that they can use to increase the exposure to Irish in the home, rather than giving general advice to speak Irish. A homework assignment that asked for child and parent to watch a particular Irish cartoon or TV programme together, and discuss it, even if mainly in English, or play a particular Irish computer game or story DVD together would go some way to validating an alternative role for parents than the formal teacher model that seems to dominate their own role construction. The findings of this study show that a 'translated' model of parental involvement for immersion parents is needed, a model which seeks to encourage a more active interpretation of parental engagement in partnership in their children's education among all parents of a school, and in particular helps lower proficiency parents to make use of the skills that they *do* have for successful involvement, in parallel with developing the L2 skills they wish to have.

Models of successful parental involvement emphasise the importance of effective communication between home and school, and efforts could be made to increase communication with parents about such issues as children's progress at school, the skills required for children to develop at particular stages of their school careers, and about aspects of the curricular content which they are covering at any given time. Currently, communication on such issues appears to be largely confined to annual parent-teacher meetings, but parents reported dissatisfaction with this. It is possible that such dissatisfaction is also common to parents of children in mainstream schools, but more frequent communication may be even more important in the immersion setting. As Walker and Tedick (2009) noted, given that immersion is a relatively niche sector of education, and given the findings of the current study that very low proportions of parents have had previous experience of immersion education, such parents often have a "*heightened desire*

for information about curricular content, student progress and, above all, a need for reassurance about achievement” (p.22). Given the finding that immersion parents may feel uncomfortable being present in their child’s school and may lack confidence about speaking to teachers, informal discussions about children’s progress, which may take place more frequently and naturally in English-medium schools, may not be happening at the same level in this context. Where there may be less parent-initiated and less informal home-school communications, immersion schools and teachers may need to explore increasing the frequency of this communication in more structured ways. Using password-protected school websites to present images of children’s work, sending home examples of their work for parent review and comment, providing monthly or termly updates on the curricular content which is being covered in class (and linking this to suggested activities that parents do with their child at home) and on students’ progress would be welcomed by parents and could lead to higher levels of parental engagement. Currently, it appears that enhanced communication is most likely where the child is experiencing difficulties or is having discipline issues. This is likely to be due in part to the pressure on teachers’ time and limited resources, but investment by schools in home-school liaison in establishing open and regular communication with all parents could pay dividends in terms of active educational engagement and might even help to pre-empt some difficulties before they occur.

It is acknowledged that many of these recommendations require some resourcing, effort and commitment on the part of teachers and schools. Persuading teachers that parents can make a valuable contribution as educational partners and can offer valuable support in promoting children’s achievement thus a necessary first step. It is suggested that more time be devoted in pre-service teacher training regarding the potential benefits of promoting parental involvement in educational partnerships with all schools, including the provision of training in developing and maintaining successful home-school relations. Some of this training would need to be focused on particular challenges to parental involvement and home-school collaboration in the immersion context, given the findings which indicate that many of the challenges are attributed by parents to the differing languages of home and school. Pre-service training alone will not be sufficient and should be accompanied by regular in-service training. One educator interviewed (who had qualified over twenty years ago) indicated that she had only recently begun to consider how parents could be involved in learning, when she saw the new standardised annual report cards which include a section for teachers to make suggestions to parents as to how they could support their children’s learning. Providing regular training on parental involvement would raise educators’

awareness of these issues and increase their motivation to nurture home-school partnerships.

Epstein (1997) argues that while individual teachers or principals may be well-disposed towards improving parental involvement in the education of their pupils, one person alone cannot create effective home-school partnerships. She advocates the formation of an Action Group within schools (which could be an offshoot of a Parents' Association) which is tasked with planning and implementing parental involvement activities. The development of school-wide policies, activities and resources over time is more beneficial than leaving each teacher to improve parental involvement individually, and leads to a school culture in which parents' input is more likely to be valued. The findings from the present research have indicated the effectiveness of the Home-School Liaison Scheme in DEIS schools at increasing parental involvement and cultivating a positive home-school community. The presence in the school of a teacher who has been trained in promoting parental involvement, and who has the time and the resources to devote to organising and implementing parental involvement practices can make a significant impact. While resources are limited in a time of recession, schools could benefit even more from harnessing parent power if it could be done effectively, and a useful first step would be the establishment of a working group to allow immersion schools who have experience of running the Home school scheme to share their experience of what works, or does not work, with other Irish-medium schools, with the aim of adapting it to fit the needs and resources of other such schools.

An important aspect of empowering people is the provision of information to them. Parents' qualitative reports revealed that parents knew relatively little about immersion before sending their children to an Irish-medium school, and several parents appeared to have concerns still about issues such as children's L1 development (*'worried about the lack of time spent on English'*) or misguided perceptions about bilingualism (worries about cognitive overload and 'too much intake' of L2). As has been highlighted throughout, some parents also often lack knowledge of ways in which they can support their children's learning. The non-profit body *Canadian Parents for French* (CPF) is an organisation dedicated to the promotion of French learning opportunities, in Canada and in particular to French as a second language schools (CPF, 2012). This organisation (2002) developed a comprehensive handbook for immersion parents entitled, *'Yes, you can help! Information and Inspiration for French Immersion Parents'*. The guide recognises that there are challenges to involvement in an immersion context and aims to provide parents with 'clear and complete information about French immersion' (p.2). The book contains chapters covering: definitions of terms relating to immersion and bilingualism; benefits of bilingualism; history and current context of FME in Canada; the importance of out-of-

school use of the target language; a consideration of post-primary immersion education; addressing potential concerns about children's learning and adjustment; and a section dedicated to French language opportunities and resources. Crucially, it devoted a chapter to outlining ways in which parents could be involved in home-based and school-based learning, and advice on communicating with the school. The handbook was initially developed for parents in Alberta in Canada, but proved such a popular resource with parents and educators that a national edition was produced and made available to parents. It is not merely an information guide or brochure for potential immersion parents; rather, it states that it is designed to be *"of assistance not only during the first few years of your child's immersion education but right through to graduation. It's designed as a reference, to be taken down from the shelf whenever new stages are approached or new questions arise. We hope it will help you put the "French" part of your child's education into perspective.* (p.1)" It is argued here that a similar resource would be of significant benefit for the Irish immersion context. Using the CPF guide as a template and adapting it to the Irish immersion setting based on the findings of the present research and on other Irish immersion literature could be of huge benefit to parents who say they would be more involved if they just knew how. Given parents' preoccupation with the target language and their (lack of) proficiency in it, helping parents to put the 'Irish' part of their children's education into perspective would be very useful. It is important to provide parents with information and guidance so that they feel empowered to take a proactive role in relation to involvement. Home-school relations are reciprocal and schools cannot simply *create* involved parents. Some of the responsibility must also fall on parents themselves.

It is acknowledged, however, that several of the recommendations here relate to things which parents *can* do. As parents are aware, teachers are busy professionals who are working harder and with fewer resources in the current climate where cuts in government spending continue to squeeze schools. Therefore, it is understandable that schools are focusing on ways in which parents can help redress these cuts through fundraising, donating materials, etc. It is also understandable that teachers may not feel that they have the energy or enthusiasm to implement the recommendations listed above. However, it is argued here that, when resources are being cut and pupil-teacher ratios growing, this may be a particularly important time for all schools to create partnerships with families and by doing so to share the responsibility for children's learning and development with their parents, as well as offering parents valuable opportunities for personal growth in a life-long learning context. The findings from the present research suggest that many parents in Irish-medium schools are willing and eager to be partners, but are unsure about how or whether that is even desirable, being focused on their deficiencies rather than their potential strengths. As a

result, in the case of a proportion of immersion families, they have constituted a valuable resource that has remained untapped up to now.

9.8 Conclusion

The present research has examined home-school relations in the less usual educational model of immersion. While the findings indicate that there are some parents who are involved in the education of their children, there is considerable variation in the nature and extent of this involvement, with some parents, children, and schools reporting very little interaction between home and school. The findings also clearly indicate that those involved in the IME sector perceive and experience a range of particular challenges to successful home-school relationships, and that many of these are attributed to the different languages of the school and home. While 'family like schools' and 'school like families' may not seem feasible in every context, there does seem to be considerable scope for increasing active parental engagement in educational partnership with schools among the wider parent base in immersion schools in realistic and effective ways. It is imperative that this issue continue to be explored so that the potential resources of parents as educational partners are utilised to best effect for the benefit of schools, parents, and children themselves.

References

- Anderson, K.J. & Minke, K.M. (2007). Parent involvement in education: Toward an understanding of parents' decision making. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 100(5), 311-323.
- Arias, M. & Morillo-Campbell, M. (2008). Promoting ELL parental involvement: Challenges in contested times. Educational Policy Research Unit, Arizona State University & University of Colorado. Retrieved from <http://epicpolicy.org/publication/promoting-ell-parental-involvement-challenges-contested-times>
- Astone, N.M. & McLanahan, S.S. (1991). Family structure, parental practices and high school completion. *American Sociological Review*, 56(3), 309-320.
- Baig, F. (2011). Investigating the motivations of parents choosing language immersion education for their child. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Iowa. Retrieved from <http://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2306&context=etd>
- Baker, A.J.L. (1997). Improving parent involvement programs and practice: A qualitative study of parents' perceptions. *School Community Journal*, 7(1), 127-153.
- Baker, A.J.L. & Soden, L.M. (1998). Parent involvement in children's education: A critical assessment of the knowledge base. New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. Retrieved from <http://teach.valdosta.edu/whuitt/files/parentinv.html>
- Baker, C. (2003). Education as a site of language contact. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 23, 95-112.
- Baker, C. (2006). *Foundations of bilingualism and bilingual education* (4th ed.). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Bandura, A. (1989). Regulation of cognitive processes through perceived self-efficacy. *Developmental Psychology*, 25, 729-735.
- Barnard, W.M. (2004). Parent involvement in elementary school and educational attainment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 26(1), 39-62.
- Bastiani, J. (Ed.) (1988). *Parents and teachers: From policy to practice*. Windsor: NFER-Nelson.
- Bauch, J.P. (1994). Categories of parent involvement. *The School Community Journal*, 4, 53-60.
- Bauer, M.W. (2000). Classical content analysis: A review. In M.W. Bauer & G.Gaskell (Eds.), *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound* (pp. 131-151). London: Sage.
- Berger, E.H. (1991). *Parents as partners in education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Bermudez, A.B. & Marquez, J.A. (1996). An examination of a four-way collaborative to increase parental involvement in the schools. *The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*, 16(3), 1-16.
- Bishop, R., Berryman, M & Richardson, C. (2001). *Te Toi Huarewa: Effective teaching and learning strategies, and effective teaching materials for improving the reading and writing in te reo Maori of students aged five to nine in Maori-medium education*.

Report to the Ministry of Education. Retrieved from http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/data/assets/file/0008/9269/_721_Te-Toi-Huarewa.pdf

- Bobbett, G.C. (1995). *An analysis of Nevada's report cards on high schools*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, Biloxi, Mississippi, November 8-10. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 397 084).
- Borooah, V.K., Dineen, D.A. & Lynch, N. (2009). Language and occupational status: Linguistic elitism in the Irish labour market. *The Economic and Social Review*, 40(4), 435-460.
- Bostwick, R.M. (2004). What is Immersion? Numazu, Shizuoka, Japan: Katoh Gakuen. Retrieved from <http://bi-lingual.com/school/INFO/WhatIsImmersion.html>
- Bournot-Trites, M. & Tellowitz, U. (2002). *Report of current research on the effect of second language learning on first language literacy skills*. Halifax: Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation.
- Branaman, L. & Rennie, J. (1988). Many ways to learn: Elementary school foreign language program models. *ERIC Review*, 6(1), 14-21.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of family as context for human development: Research perspectives. *Development Psychology*, 22, 723-742.
- Brooks, N., Bruno, E. & Burns, T. (1997). Reinforcing students' motivation through parent Interaction. (Report No. PS-025753). Master's thesis, Saint Xavier University IRI/Skylight, 1997. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED411074).
- Bunreacht na hÉireann (Constitution of Ireland). (1937). Dublin: Government Publications Office.
- Canadian Parents for French (2002). Yes you can help! Information and inspiration for French immersion parents. Retrieved at <http://education.alberta.ca/media/3091402/yesyoucanhelp.pdf>
- Carey, S. (2008). Gaelscoil parents want to have their cake and eat it too. *The Irish Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2008/1224/1229728523284.html>
- Caspe, M. (2003). How teachers come to understand families. *School Community Journal*, 13(1), 115-131.
- Catsambis, S. (1998). Expanding the knowledge of parental involvement in secondary education: Effects on high school success. Report No. 27
- Central Statistics Office. (2011). Census 2011. This is Ireland (Part 1). Retrieved from <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011pdr/Pdf%208%20Tables.pdf>

- Chapman, L. & Wood, J. (2009). Children as partners: Children's perspectives on parental involvement. Retrieved from <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/2801/>
- Chavkin, N.F. (1989). A multicultural perspective on parent involvement: Implications for policy and practice. *Educational Horizons*, 109(3), 276-285.
- Clark, R.M. (1983). *Family life and school achievement*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Clatworthy, J., Buick, D., Hankins, M., Weinman, J., & Horne, R. (2005). The use and reporting of cluster analysis in health psychology. *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 10, 329-358.
- Coady, M. R. (2001). *Policy and practice in bilingual education: Gaelscoileanna in the Republic of Ireland*. Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Colorado.
- Coady, M. and O'Laoire M. (2002). Mismatches in language policy and practice in education: The case of gaelscoileanna in the Republic of Ireland. *Language Policy*, 1(2), 143-158.
- Cohen, L., Mannion, M. & Morrison, K.R.B. (2011). *Research methods in education*. (7th ed.). London: Routledge.
- Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research. (1975). *Report*. Dublin: Stationery Office
- Cooper, H., Lindsay, J.J. & Nye, B. (2000). Homework in the home: How student, family and parenting-style differences relate to the homework process. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(4), 464-487.
- Cotton, K. & Wikelund, K.R. (2001). *School improvement research series: Parental involvement in education*. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.
- Comer, J. & Haynes, N. (1991). Parent involvement in schools: An ecological approach. *Elementary School Journal*, 91, 271-277.
- Conaty, C. (2002). *Including all: Home, school and community united in education*. Dublin: Veritas.
- Creswell, J.W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J.W. & Plano-Clark, V.L. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cummins, J. (1977). *Immersion education in Ireland: A critical review of Macnamara's findings*. Edmonton, Alberta: Centre for the Study of Mental Retardation, University of Alberta.
- Cummins, J. (1978). Immersion programs: The Irish experience. *International Review of Education*, 24(3), 273-282.
- Cummins, J. (1979). Cognitive/academic language proficiency, linguistic interdependence, the optimum age question and some other matters. *Working Papers on Bilingualism*, 19, 121-129.
- Cummins, J. (1998). Immersion education for the millennium: What have we learned from 30 years of research on second language immersion? In M. R. Childs & R. M. Bostwick (Eds.) *Learning through two languages: Research and practice*. Second Katoh Gakuen

- International Symposium on Immersion and Bilingual Education*. (pp. 34-47). Katoh Gakuen, Japan.
- Darling, S. & Westberg, L. (2004). Parental involvement in children's acquisition of reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 57, 774-776.
- Dauber, S.L. & Epstein, J.L. (1993). Parents' attitudes and practices of involvement of inner-city elementary and middle schools. In N.F. Chavkin (Ed.), *Families and schools in a pluralistic society* (pp. 53-72). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Department of Education and Skills (1997). *Home-school-community-liason*. Dublin: Author.
- Deslandes, R. (2001). A vision of home-school partnership: Three complementary conceptual frameworks. In F. Smit, K. van der Wolf & P. Slegers (Eds.), *A Bridge to the Future, Collaboration between Parents, Schools and Communities: Parent Participation* (pp. 11-24) Stichting Katholieke Universiteit te Nijmegen: ITS
- Davis-Kean, P.E. (2005). The influence of parent education and family income on child achievement: The indirect role of parental expectations and the home environment. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 19(2), 294-304.
- De Courcy, M. (2002). *Learners' experiences of immersion education: Case studies of French and Chinese*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1990). *Literacy for empowerment: The role of parents in children's education*. Oxford: Routledge Falmer.
- Department of Education (1991). *Parents as partners in education. Circular 24/91*. Dublin: Department of Education.
- Desforges, C. & Abouchaar, A. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A literature review*. Research Report RR443. London: Department for Education and Skills.
- Desimone, L., Finn-Stevenson, M. & Henrich, C. (2000). Whole school reform in a low-income African-American community: The effects of the CoZi model on teachers, parents and students. *Urban Education*, 35(3), 269-323.
- Deutscher, R. & Ibe, M. (2002) Relationships between parent involvement and children's motivation. Lewis Center for Educational Research. Retrieved from <http://www.lewiscenter.org/research/relationships.pdf>.
- Dietz, M.J. (Ed.). (1997). *School, family, and community: Techniques and models for successful collaboration*. Gaithersberg, Maryland: Aspen.
- Domina, T. (2005). Levelling the home advantage: Assessing the effectiveness of parental involvement in elementary school. *Sociology of Education*, 78(July), 233-249.
- Eccles, J.S. & Harold, R.D. (1993). Parent-school involvement during the early adolescent years. *Teachers College Record*, 94(3), 568-587.
- Eccles, J.S. & Harold, R.D. (1996). Family involvement in children's and adolescents' schooling. In J.D.A. Booth (Ed.), *Family-school links: How do they affect educational outcomes?* (pp.) Hillside, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum
- Education Act. (1998). Dublin: Government Publications. Retrieved from: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/pdf/1998/en.act.1998.0051.pdf>

- Edwards, R. & Alldred, P. (2000). A typology of parental involvement in education centring on children and young people. Negotiating familialisation, institutionalisation and individualisation. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 21(3), 435-455.
- Edwards, R. & David, M. (1997). Where are the children in home-school relations? Notes towards a research agenda. *Children and Society*, 11, 194-200.
- Elo, S. & Kyngas, H. (2007). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(1), 107-115.
- Englund, M.M., Luckner, A.E., Whaley, G.J.L., & Egeland, B. (2004). Children's achievement in early elementary school: Longitudinal effects of parental involvement, expectations, and quality of assistance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 96(4), 723-730.
- Epstein, J.L. (1986). Parents' reactions to teacher practices of parent involvement. *The Elementary School Journal*, 86(3), 227-294.
- Epstein, J.L. (1987). Toward a theory of family-school connections: Teacher practices and parental involvement. In K. Hurrelmann, F. Kaufman & F. Loel (Eds.), *Social intervention: Potential and constraints* (pp.121-136). New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Epstein, J.L. (1992). School and community partnerships. In M. Aiken (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of educational research* (pp.1139-1151)
- Epstein, J.L. (2001). *School, family and community partnerships. Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Macmillan
- Epstein, J.L., Coates, L., Salinas, K.C., Sanders, M.G., & Simon, B.S. (1997). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Epstein, J.S. & Dauber, S. (1991). School programs and teacher practices of parent involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools. *The Elementary School Journal*, 91, 279-289.
- Epstein, J. & Sheldon, S.B. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving school attendance through family and community involvement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 95(5), 308-318.
- Evans, M.A., Shaw, D. & Bell, M. (2000). Home literacy activities and their influence on early literacy skills. *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 54, 65-75.
- Faltis, C.J. (1995). Building bridges between parents and the school. In O. Garcia & C. Baker (Eds.), *Policy and practice in bilingual education* (pp. 245-258). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters
- Fan, X. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A growth modelling analysis. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 7(1), 27-62.
- Fan, X. & Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13(1), 1-22.
- Fantuzzo, J., Tighe, E. & Childs, S. (2000). Family involvement questionnaire: A multivariate assessment of family participation in early childhood education. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92(2), 367-376.
- Feuerstein, A. (2000). School characteristics and parent involvement: Influences on participation in children's schools. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 94(1), 29-39.

- Finders, M. & Lewis, C. (1994). Why some parents don't come to school. *Educational Leadership*, 51(8), 50-54.
- Flynn, S. (2012). To see real educational apartheid, look no farther than your local gaelscoil. *The Irish Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/education/2012/10/23/1224325573683.html>
- Ford, D.L. (1989). *Parental participation and academic achievement*. Chicago, IL: (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 344 659).
- Fox, R.A. & Buchanan, N.K. (2008). *School choice in the Republic of Ireland: An unqualified commitment to parental choice*. Retrieved from http://www.ncspe.org/publications_files/OP157.pdf
- Gaelscoileanna (2012). Statistics. Retrieved from <http://gaelscoileanna.ie/about/statistics>
- Gage, N.L. (1989). The paradigm wars and their aftermath: A "historical" sketch of research on teaching since 1989. *Educational Researcher*, 18(7), 4-10.
- Ganzeboom, H.B., De Graaf, P. & Treiman, D.J. (1992). A standard socio-economic index of occupational status. *Social Science Research*, 21, 1-56.
- Garcia, D.C. (2004). Exploring connections between the construct of teacher efficacy and family involvement practices: Implications for urban teacher preparation. *Urban Education*, 39(3), 290-315.
- Genesee, F. (1987). *Learning through two languages: Studies of immersion and bilingual education*. Cambridge, MA: Newbury House Publishers.
- Genesee, F. (2008). Dual language in the global village. In T.W. Fortune & D.J. Tedick (Eds.), *Pathways to multilingualism: Evolving perspectives on immersion education*. (pp. 221-241). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Genesee, F., Holobow, N.E., Lambert, W.E. & Chartrand, L. (1989). Three elementary school alternatives for learning through a second language. *The Modern Language Journal*, 73(3), 250-263.
- Georgiou, S.N. (2007). Parental involvement: Beyond demographics. *International Journal about Parents in Education*, 1, 59-62.
- Giacchino-Baker, R. & Piller, B. (2006). Parental motivation, attitudes, support, and commitment in a Southern Californian two-way immersion programme. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 5(1), 5-28
- Gilleece, L., Shiel, G., Clerkin, A. & Millar, D. (2011). The 2010 National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics in Irish-Medium Schools. Dublin: Educational Research Centre. Retrieved from: <http://www.gaelscoileanna.ie/assets/National-Assessments-of-English-Reading-Maths.pdf>
- Gonzalez-deHaas, A.R., Willems, P.P. & Doan Holbein, M.F. (2005). Examining the relationship between parental involvement and student motivation. *Educational Psychology Review*, 17(2), 99-123.
- Gordon, I.J. (1970). *Parent involvement in compensatory education*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Government of Ireland (1990). *Report of the Primary Education Review Body*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

- Government of Ireland (2008). *20-year strategy for the Irish language 2010-2030*. Retrieved from <http://www.ahg.gov.ie/en/20YearStrategyfortheIrishLanguage/Publications/20-Year%20Strategy%20-%20English%20version.pdf>
- Griffith, J. (1998). The relation of school structure and social environment to parent involvement in elementary schools. *The Elementary School Journal*, 99(1), 53-80.
- Grolnick, W.S., Benjet, C., Kurowski, C.O. & Apostoleris, N.H. (1997). Predictors of parent involvement in children's schooling. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89(3), 538-548.
- Grolnick, W.S. & Slowiaczek, M.I. (1994). Parents' involvement in children's education: A multidimensional conceptualization and motivation model. *Child Development*, 65, 237-252.
- Hall, J. (2008). Cross-sectional survey design. In P.J. Lavrakas (Ed). *Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hammerly, H. (1991). *Fluency and accuracy: Toward balance in language teaching and learning*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Harley, B. (1993). Instructional strategies and second language acquisition in early French immersion. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 15, 245-259.
- Harris, J. (1984). *Spoken Irish in Primary Schools*. Dublin: Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann.
- Harris, J. & Murtagh, L. (1999). *Teaching and learning Irish in primary school: A review of research and development*. Dublin: Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Eirinn.
- Harris, J. & Ó Laoire. (2006). *Language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools: A review of the literature*. NCCA.
- Harris, J., Forde, P., Archer, P., Nic Fhearaile, S. & O Gorman, M. (2006). *Irish in primary schools: Long-term trends in national achievement*. Dublin: Department of Education and Science.
- Harwell, M.R. (2011). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. In C. Conrad & R.S. Serlin (Eds.), *The Sage handbook for research in education: Pursuing ideas as the keystone of exemplary inquiry* (2nd ed.) (pp. X-Y). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Henderson, A.T. & Mapp, K.L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Annual Synthesis. Austin, TX: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Henderson, A.T. & Berla, N. (1994). *A new generation of evidence: The family is crucial to student achievement*. Washington, DC: The Centre for Law and Education. RETRIEVED
- Hickey, T. (1998). Early immersion in Ireland: The Naíonra experience. In V. Regan (Ed.), *Contemporary approaches to second language acquisition in social context*. (pp. 46-61). Dublin: University College Dublin.
- Hickey, T. (2007). Children's language networks in minority language immersion: What goes in may not come out. *Language and Education*, 21(1), 46-65.

- Hill, N.E., Domini, R., Castellino, J.E., Nowlin, P., Dodge, K.A., Bates, J.E., Pettit, G.S. (2004). Parent academic involvement as related to school behaviour, achievement, and aspirations: Demographic variations across adolescence, *Child Development*, 75(5), 1492-1509.
- Hill, N.E. & Taylor, L.C. (2004). Parental involvement and children's academic achievement: Pragmatics and issues. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 13(4), 161-164.
- Hill, N.E. & Tyson, D.F. (2009). Parental involvement in middle school: A meta-analytic assessment of the strategies that promote achievement. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(3), 740-763.
- Hill, R.K. (2000). *What is the role of English transition in Maori-medium education?* Doctoral dissertation. The University of Waikato.
- Hinton, L. (2001). Teaching methods. In L. Hinton & K.L. Hale (Eds.) *The green book of language revitalization in practice*, (pp. 179-189). London: Academic Press.
- Hinton, L. (2011). Language revitalization and language pedagogy: New teaching and learning strategies. *Language and Education*, 25(4), 307-318.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K.V., Bassler, O.C. & Brissie, J.S. (1987). Parent involvement: Contribution to teacher efficacy, school socioeconomic status and other school characteristics. *American Educational Research Journal*, 24(3), 417-435.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K.V., Bassler, O.C. & Brissie, J.S. (1992). Explorations in parent-school relations. *Journal of Educational Research*, 85(5), 287-294.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K.V. & Sandler, H.M. (1995). Parental involvement in children's education: Why does it make a difference? *Teachers College Record*, 97(2), 311-331.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K.V. & Sandler, H.M. (1997). Why do parents become involved in their children's education? *Review of Educational Research*, 67(1), 3-42.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K.V., Walker, J.M.T & Sandler, H.M. (2005). In E.N. Patrikakou, R.P. Weissberg, S. Redding & H.J. Wahlberg (Eds.), *School-family partnerships for children's success*, (pp. 40-56). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hornby, G. & Lafaele, R. (2011). Barriers to parental involvement in education: An explanatory model. *Educational Review*, 63(1), 37-52.
- Howard, E.R., Sugarman, J. & Christian, D. (2003). *Trends in two-way immersion: A review of the research*. Report 63: Baltimore, MD: CRESPAR/Johns Hopkins University.
- Howe, K.R. (1988). Against the quantitative-qualitative incompatibility thesis, or, Dogma's die hard. *Educational Researcher*, 17, 10-16.
- Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S.E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15, 1277-1288.
- Hyland, A. (1989). The multi-denominational experience in the national school system in Ireland. *Irish Educational Studies*, 8(1), 89-114.
- Irish National Teachers' Organisation (1997). *Parental involvement: Possibilities for partnership*. Dublin: INTO.
- Ingram, M., Wolfe, R.B. & Lieberman, J.M. (2007). The role of parents in high-achieving schools serving low-income, at-risk populations. *Education on Urban Society*, 39(4), 479-497.

- Izzo, C.V., Weissberg, R.P., Krasnow, W.J. & Fendrich, M. (1999). A longitudinal assessment of teacher perceptions of parent involvement in children's education and school performance. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 27(6), 817-839.
- Jacques, K. (1991). *Community contexts of English-Maori bilingual education: A study of six South Island primary school programmes*. Christchurch: University of Canterbury.
- James, A. (2007). Giving voice to children's voices: Practices and problems, pitfalls and potentials. *American Anthropologist*, 109(2), 261-272.
- Jeynes, W.B. (2005). Parental involvement and student achievement: A meta-analysis. Family Involvement Research Digests. Retrieved from <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/parental-involvement-and-student-achievement-a-meta-analysis>
- Jeynes, W.B. (2005b). A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement to urban elementary school student academic achievement. *Urban Education*, 40(3), 237-269.
- Joffe, H. & Yardley, L. (2004). Content and thematic analysis. In D.F. Marks & L. Yardley (Eds.), *Research methods for clinical and health psychology*. (pp. 56-65). London: Sage.
- Johnson, R.B. & Onwuegbuzie, A.J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), 14-26.
- Johnson, R., Onwuegbuzie, A. & Turner, L. (2007). Toward a definition of mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(2), 112-133.
- Johnson, R.K. & Swain, M. (Eds.), *Immersion education: International perspectives* (pp 1-16). New York: Cambridge University Press
- Johnstone, R.A. (2002). Immersion in a second or additional language at school: a review of the international research. Retrieved from <http://www.scilt.stir.ac.uk>.
- Jordan, C., Orozco, E. & Averett, A. (2001). *Emerging issues in school, family and community communications*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Jordan, G.E., Snow, C.E. & Porche, M.V. (2000). Project EASE: The effect of a family literacy program on students' early literacy skills. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 35(4), 524-526.
- Keep, L. (1993). *French immersion attrition: Implications for model building*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Alberta.
- Kellaghan, T. (1993). *The home environment and school learning: Promoting parental involvement in the education of children*. New York: Maxwell Macmillan.
- Krashen, S.D. (1984). Immersion: Why it works and what it has taught us. *Language and Society*, 12, 61-68.
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Lambert, W.E. (1964). Culture and language as factors in learning and instruction. In F. Aloud & J. Meade (Eds.), *Cultural factors in learning and education* (pp. 99-122). Bellingham, WA: Fifth Western Washington Symposium on Learning.

- Lambert, W.E. (1992). Challenging established views on social issues: The power and limitations of research. *American Psychologist*, 47, 533-542.
- Lareau, A. (1989). *Social class and parental intervention in elementary education*. New York: Falmer Press.
- Lareau, A. (1996). Assessing parent involvement in schooling: A critical analysis. In A. Booth & J. Dunn (Eds.), *Family-school links: How do they affect educational outcome?* (pp. 57-64). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Lawlor, U. *Gaschaint*. Baile Átha Cliath: An Gúm.
- Lawson, M.A. (2003). School-family relations in context: Parent and teacher perceptions of parent involvement. *Urban Education*, 38, 77-133.
- Lee, J.-S., & Bowen, N.K. (2006). Parent involvement, cultural capital and the achievement gap among elementary school children. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43, 193-218.
- Lezotte, L.W. (1992). "Principal" insights from effective schools. *Education Digest*, 58(3), 14-17.
- Lyster, R. (1987). Speaking immersion. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 43(4), 124-132.
- Mac Giolla Phádraig, B. (2003). A study of parents perceptions of their involvement in gaelscoileanna. *Irish Journal of Education*, 34, 70-79.
- Mac Giolla Phádraig, B. (2010). Towards partnership: The development of parental involvement in Irish primary education since 1970. *The Irish Journal of Education*, 38, 73-93.
- Macnamara, J. (1966). *Bilingualism and education: study of the Irish experience*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press.
- Mattingly, D.J., Prislín, R., Mc Kenzie, T. L., Rodriguez, J.L. & Kayzar, B. (2002). Evaluating evaluations: The case of parent involvement programs. *Review of Educational Research*, 72(4), 549-576.
- May, S. & Hill, R. (2005). Maori-medium education: Current issues and challenges. *The International Journal of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education*, 8(5), 377-403.
- Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative content analysis. Forum: Qualitative Social Research (online journal), 1(2). Retrieved from <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1089>.
- McKendry, E. (2006). *An tumaideachas/Immersion education*. An Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG).
- McKinley, S. (2000). *Maori parents and education*. Wellington: NZCER.
- McNeal, R.B. (1999). Parental involvement as social capital: Differential effectiveness on science achievement, truancy and dropping out. *Social Forces*, 78(1), 117-144.
- McVeigh, C. (2012). *Language and cognition in developing bilinguals: Examining working memory and executive control*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Queen's University Belfast.
- McWilliams, D. (2005). *The Pope's children. Ireland's new elite*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan

- Miedel, W.T. & Reynolds, A.J. (1999). Parent involvement in early intervention for disadvantaged children: Does it matter? *Journal of School Psychology*, 37(4), 379-402.
- Mooi, E. & Sarstedt, M. (2011). *A concise guide to market research*. Berlin: Springer
- Moore, S., and Lasky, S. (2001). Parent Involvement in Education. EQAO Research Series No.6. Retrieved from <http://www.eqao.com>
- Muller, C. (1995). Maternal employment, parental involvement, and mathematics achievement among adolescents. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57, 85-100.
- Murtagh, L. (2007). Out-of-school use of Irish, motivation and proficiency in immersion and subject-only post-primary programmes. *International Journal of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education*, 10(4), 428-453.
- Natriello, G. & McDill, E. (1986). Performance standards, student effort on homework, and academic achievement. *Sociology of Education*, 59, 18-31.
- Nye, C., Turner, H. & Schwartz, J. (2006). Approaches to parent involvement for improving the academic performance of elementary school age children. Philadelphia, PA: The Campbell Collaboration.
- Ó Duibhir (2009). The spoken Irish of sixth class pupils in immersion schools. Doctoral dissertation. Trinity College Dublin.
- Ó Duibhir (2010). "It's only a language": The attitudes and motivations of Irish-medium education students to the Irish language. In W. Hutchinson & C. Ní Ríordáin (Eds.) *Language issues: Ireland, France, Spain* (pp. 121-138). Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang.
- Ó Duibhir (2011). 'I thought that we had good Irish': Irish immersion students' insights into their target language use. In D.J. Tedick, D.Christian & T.W. Forture (Eds.), *Immersion education: Practices, policies, possibilities* (pp. 121-138). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Ó Laoire, M. (2005). The language situation in Ireland: An update. In R.B. Kaplan & R.B. Baldauf Jr. (Eds.), *Language planning and policy. Europe volume 3: The Baltic States, Ireland and Italy*. (pp. 164-184). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Ó Laoire, M. (2007). Language use and language attitudes in Ireland. In D. Lasagabaster & A. Huguet (Eds.) *Multilingualism in European bilingual contexts: Language use and attitudes* (pp.164-183). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Onwuegbuzie, A.J. & Leech, N.L. (2006). Linking research questions to mixed methods data analysis procedures. *The Qualitative Report*, 11(3), 474-498.
- Organisation for Economic Co-ordination and Development. (1997). *Parents as partners in schooling*. Paris: OECD.
- Ó Riagáin, P. (1997). *Language policy and social reproduction in Ireland 1893-1993*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ó Riagáin, P. (2007). Relationships between attitudes to Irish, social class, religion and national identity in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. *The International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 10(4), 369-393.
- Ó Riagáin, P. & Ó Glasáin, M. (1979). *All-Irish schools in the Dublin area*. Dublin: ITE.
- Palmquist, M. (n.d.) Content analysis. Retrieved from <http://www.gslis.utexas.edu/~palmquis/courses/content.html>

- Palmquist, M., Carley, K. & Dale, T. (1997). Applications of computer-aided text analysis analysing literary and non-literary texts. In C.W. Roberts (Ed.), *Text analysis for the social sciences: Methods for drawing statistical inferences from texts and transcripts*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Parkes, J. (2008). Who chooses dual language education for their children and why? *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 11, 635-660.
- Parkes, J. & Tenley, R. (2011). How satisfied are parents of children in dual language education programs? *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 14(6), 701-718.
- Patrikakou, E.N., & Weissberg, R.P. (1998). *Parents perceptions of teacher outreach and parent involvement in children's education*. (Publication series 14). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, Center for Research in Human Development and Education, Mid-Atlantic Lab for Student Success.
- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pena, D. C. (2000). Parent Involvement: Influencing factors and implications. *Journal of Educational Research*, 94(1) 42-54.
- Pushor, D. (2007). Parent Engagement: Creating a Shared World. Paper presented at the Ontario Education Research Symposium. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/research/pushor.pdf>
- Rasinski, T.V. & Fredericks, A.D. (1989). Working with parents: Dimensions of parent involvement. *The Reader Teacher*, 43 (2), 180-182.
- Reja, U., Manfreda, K.L., Hlebec, V. & Vehovar, V. (2003). Open-ended vs. closed-ended questions in web questionnaires. *Advances in Methodology and Statistics*, 19, 159-177.
- Richards, M. & Burnaby, B. (2008). Restoring aboriginal languages: Immersion and intensive language programme models in Canada. In T.W. Fortune & D.J. Tedick (Eds.), *Pathways to multilingualism: Evolving perspectives on immersion education*. (pp. 221-241). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Robinson, O.C. (2011). Relational analysis: An add-on technique for aiding data integration in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 8, 197-209.
- Rumberger, R. (1995). Dropping out of middle school: A multilevel analysis of students and schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 583-625.
- Schütz, G., Usrprug, H. & Wossman, L. (2008). Education policy and equality of opportunity. *Kyklos*, 61(2), 279-308.
- Sénéchal, M. (2006). Testing the home literacy model: Parent involvement in kindergarten is differentially related to Grade 4 reading comprehension, fluency, spelling and reading for pleasure. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Reading*, 10, 59-87.
- Sénéchal, M., LeFevre, J., Thomas, E.M. & Daley, K.E. (1998). Differential effects of home literacy experiences on the development of oral and written language. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 33, 96-116.
- Sénéchal, M. & LeFevre, J. (2002). Parental involvement in the development of children's reading skill: A five-year longitudinal study. *Child Development*, 73, 445-260.

- Shaver, A.V. & Walls, R.T. (1998). Effect of Title 1 involvement on students reading and mathematics achievement. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 31(2), 90-97.
- Shepard, R. & Rose, H. (1995). The power of parents: An empowerment model for increasing parental involvement. *Education*, 115(3), 373-377.
- Shouse, R. (1997). Academic press, sense of community, and student achievement. In J. Coleman, B. Schneider, S. Plank, K. Schiller, R. Shouse, H. Wang, & S. Lee (Eds.), *Redesigning American education* (pp. 60-86). Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Shumow, L. & Miller, J.D. (2001). Parents' at-home and at-school involvement academic involvement with young adolescents. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 21, 68-91.
- Shumow, L., Lyutykh, E. & Schmidt, J.A. (2011). Predictors and outcomes of parental involvement with students involved in science classes during high school. *School Community Journal*, 21(2), 81-98.
- Simon, B.S. 2004. High school outreach and family involvement. *Social Psychology of Education*, 7(2), 185-209.
- Sink, D.W.R., Parkhill, M.A., Marshall, R. & Norwood, S. (2005). Learning together: A family centred literacy program. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 29, 583-590.
- Smith, J., Wohlstetter, P., Kuzin, C.A., & De Pedro, K. (2011). Parent involvement in urban charter schools: New strategies for increasing participation. *The School Community Journal*, 21(1), 71-94.
- Starkey, P. & Klein, A. (2000). Fostering parental support for children's mathematical development: An intervention with Head Start Families. *Early Education and Development*, 11(5), 659-680.
- Strickland, K. & Hickey, T. (in preparation). *Using national longitudinal datasets to explore the lives of children in bilingual education: Growing up in Ireland*
- Stritikus, T.T. & Garcia, E. (2005). Revisiting the bilingual debate from the perspectives of parents: Policy, practice and matches or mismatches. *Educational Policy*, 19(5), 729-744.
- Sui-Chu, E. H. & Willms, J.D. (1996). Effects of parental involvement on eighth grade achievement. *Sociology of Education*, 69(2), 126-141.
- Swain, M. & Johnson, R.K. (1997). Immersion education: A category within bilingual education. In R.K. Johnson & M. Swain (Eds.), *Immersion education: International perspectives* (pp 1-16). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Swain, M. & Lapkin, S. (1982). *Evaluation bilingual education: A Canadian case study*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Swain, M. & Lapkin, S. (2005). The evolving socio-political context of immersion in Canada: Some implications for program development. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 15(2), 170-186.
- Swick, K. & Graves, S. (1993). *Empowering at-risk families during the early childhood years*. Washington, DC: National Educational Association.

- Tashakkori, A. & Teddlie, C. (2003). *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Teddlie, C. & Tashakkori, A. (2003). Major issues and controversies in the use of mixed methods in the social and behavioural sciences. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research* (pp. 3-51). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tinkler, B. (2002). *A review of literature on Hispanic/Latino involvement in K-12*. Denver, CO: ERIC Clearing House on Urban Education.
- Van Voorhis, F.L. (2003). Interactive homework in middle school: Effect on family involvement and students' science achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 96, 323-339.
- Walker, C.L. & Tedick, D.J. (2000). The complexity of immersion education: Teachers address the issues. *The Modern Language Journal*, 84(1), 5-27.
- Walker, J.L.T, Wilkins, A.S., Dallaire, J.R., Sandler, H.M., & Hoover-Dempsey, K.V. (2005). Parental involvement: Model revision through scale development. *The Elementary School Journal*, 106(2), 85-104.
- Watson, I. & Nic Ghiolla Phádraig, M. (2009). Is there an educational advantage to speaking Irish? An investigation of the relationship between education and speaking Irish. *International Journal for the Sociology of Language*, 199, 143-156.
- Watson, I. & Nic Ghiolla Phádraig, M. (2011). Linguistic elitism: The advantage of speaking Irish rather than the Irish speaker advantage. *The Economic and Social Review*, 42(4), 437-454.
- Weber, R.P. (1990). *Basic content analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Whiting, E.F. & Feinauer, E. (2011). Reasons for enrolment at a Spanish-English two-way immersion charter school among highly motivated parents from a diverse community. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 14(6), 631-651.
- Whelton, H., Harrington, J., Crowley, E., Kelleher, V., Cronin, M. & Perry, I.J. (2007). Prevalence of overweight and obesity on the island of Ireland: Results from the North South Survey of Children's Height, Weight and Body Mass Index, 2002. *BMC Public Health*, 7, 187-195
- Wolfendale, S. (1985). Planning parental involvement in reading. In K.J. Topping & Wolfendale, S. (Eds.) *Parental involvement in children's reading*. (pp. X-Y). New York: Nichols.
- Zhang, Y. & Wildemuth, B.M. (2009). In B. Wildemuth (Ed.), *Applications of social science research methods to questions in information and library science* (pp. 308-319). Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

Appendix A: Research Materials for Study 1, Phase 1

A1: Recruitment Notice

A2: Information Sheet

A3: Pre-Interview Questionnaire

A4: Consent Form

A5: Interview Schedule

A6: Coding Frame

A1: Recruitment Notice for Study 1, Phase 1

Tuismitheoirí Ag Teastáil! Calling All Parents In Senior Infants & 4th Class!

Cuireadh do Thuismitheoirí le páistí sna Naíonáin Mhóra nó Rang 4

You are invited to take part in a research study which aims to identify ways of supporting parents of children in Irish-medium schools. This study will use interviews to explore parents' experiences of involvement in their children's all-Irish education.

Who can participate? Cé atá á lorg?

Parents of children in either Senior Infants or Fourth class in an Irish-medium primary school are invited to participate. You do not have to speak Irish to take part in this study.

Why should I participate? Cad chuige an staidéar seo?

We need to explore the views and needs of parents of children in Gaelscoileanna in order to develop ways of helping further.

What do I have to do? Cad atá i gceist?

Participation will consist of a one-to-one interview (in English) with the researcher. You will be asked to reflect on your experience so far as an educational partner and what might help others like you. You might consider issues such as helping with homework, concern from relatives for example. You do not have to speak Irish to take part in this study.

How do I take part?

Conas a chuirfidh mé in iúl go bhfuil suim agam ann?

If you think you might like to find out more about volunteering to take part in the study, please contact Lauren Kavanagh at 0862191430 and leave a number where we can contact you, or email at lauren.kavanagh@ucdconnect.ie and we will send you more information and set up an interview.

How long will it take? An dtógfaidh sé i bhfad?

Interviews should take approximately 20-30 minutes, and will be arranged in a convenient location for you. *This research is funded by An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta and is part of my doctoral studies in the School of Psychology UCD, supervised by Dr. Tina Hickey.*



A2: Information Sheet for Parent Interviews



UCD School of Psychology

Newman Building
University College Dublin
Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland

T: +353 1 7168369/8363
F: +353 1 7161181

Scoil na Sícolaíochta UCD

Áras Newman
An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath
Belfield, Baile Átha Cliath 4, Éire

www.ucd.ie/psychology

Parents' Experiences of Involvement in Irish Immersion Education

Information Sheet for Participants

You have been invited to participate in a research study on the above topic - thank you for taking the time to read this leaflet. I am a PhD candidate with the School of Psychology, UCD, and I am undertaking research which aims to explore the experiences of parents of children attending Irish-medium schools.¹

What is the study about? It aims to investigate parents' experiences of involvement, any challenges they may have encountered in being involved in their child's schooling, and to explore ways in which parents could be supported to be more effective partners in the education process.

Why have I been invited to participate? You fit the criteria for inclusion in the study as your child is attending either senior infants or fourth class in an all-Irish school.

What is involved? If you agree to participate, a short interview will be scheduled with you at your convenience. This will take approximately 30-40 minutes and will be conducted in your child's school, or another public location convenient to you. Please be aware that the interview will be audio recorded in order to facilitate analysis. The interview will be conducted in English

¹ The research is funded by an Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscoiliachta.

Confidentiality All of the information collected will remain confidential to the research team. While quotes may be used in the reporting of the study, no participant will be identified or identifiable from the quotes used. The findings may be presented at conferences and for publication, but no individual will be identified. Audiofiles of interviews will be kept until the research study has been completed in accordance with examiners' requirements and will then be destroyed.

What will happen if I agree to participate? Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part you can subsequently change your mind and withdraw from the study without difficulty. If you decide to withdraw from the study at any point you can request to have your data removed from the study. It is not anticipated that interview topics should be distressing for any parent. However, if you do not feel comfortable answering a question during the interview you may state that you do not wish to answer, and you do not have to give an explanation.

Contact Details: If you have any further queries about the research please contact: Lauren Kavanagh at lauren.kavanagh@ucdconnect.ie or my Research Supervisor Tina Hickey at XXXXXXXX

A3: Consent Form for Parent Interviews



UCD School of Psychology

Newman Building
University College Dublin
Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland

T: +353 1 7168369/8363
F: +353 1 7161181

Scoil na Sícolaiochta UCD

Áras Newman
An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath
Belfield, Baile Átha Cliath 4, Éire

www.ucd.ie/psychology

Parents' Experiences of Involvement in Irish Immersion Education

Consent Form

Participant name: _____

Contact number: _____

- This study aims to investigate parents' experiences of involvement in their child's education.
- Participation involves taking part in an interview (30-45 minutes), which will be recorded to facilitate analysis.
- De-identified direct quotes will be used in the reporting of the study. It is also possible that research findings may be presented in public, and submitted for publication.

I have read and understood the information sheet and have been given an opportunity to ask questions.

I agree to take part in the study:

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Please return this completed form to the researcher.

A4: Pre-Interview Questions for Participants

Interview Participants: Background Information

Please answer the following questions.

Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐

What is your nationality? _____

What is the highest level of education which you have completed to date?

Primary education	<input type="checkbox"/>
Junior Certificate (or equivalent)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leaving Certificate (or equivalent)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Third level non-degree (diploma, national certificate etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Primary degree (third level Bachelor degree)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Postgraduate certificate or diploma	<input type="checkbox"/>
Postgraduate degree (Masters)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doctorate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify):	_____

How would you assess your own ability in Irish: (Tick ONE from each section only)

Understanding

Not a word	<input type="checkbox"/>
A few words	<input type="checkbox"/>
Short sentences	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bits of conversations	<input type="checkbox"/>
Most conversations	<input type="checkbox"/>
All conversations	<input type="checkbox"/>

Reading

Not a word	<input type="checkbox"/>
A few words	<input type="checkbox"/>
Short sentences	<input type="checkbox"/>
A short article/letter	<input type="checkbox"/>
A book	<input type="checkbox"/>

Speaking

Not a word	<input type="checkbox"/>
A few words	<input type="checkbox"/>
Short sentences	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bits of conversations	<input type="checkbox"/>
Most conversations	<input type="checkbox"/>
All conversations	<input type="checkbox"/>

Writing

Not a word	<input type="checkbox"/>
A few words	<input type="checkbox"/>
Short sentences	<input type="checkbox"/>
Short article/letter/note	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any document	<input type="checkbox"/>

A5: Interview Schedule for Phase 1, Study 1

1. Decision re school choice

- 1.1 What were the main factors influencing your decision to send your child to an all-Irish school?
- 1.2. How much did you know about immersion education before you sent your child to an all-Irish school?
- 1.3 Have your expectations of all-Irish education changed since your child has been in the school?

2. Attitudes to Irish

- 2.1 What is your attitude towards the Irish language?
- 2.2 What is your attitudes towards Irish-medium education?

3. Parental Involvement

- 3.1 How do you see your role, as a parent, in the education process? (examples?)
- 3.2 How active would you say you are in your involvement with your child's school?
- 3.3 Has this involvement changed in form since your child's earlier school days?

4. Contact with school

- 4.1 What language do you use normally when you communicate with your child's school?
- 4.2 When do you talk with your child's teachers?
- 4.3 For what sorts of occasions would you be present in your child's school?

5. Progress

- 5.1 How do you feel about your child's progress in school overall?
- 5.2 And in learning Irish now? (in English?)
- 5.3 What is your child's attitude to reading in English (and in Irish)?

6. Home language activities

- 6.1 Do you ever speak Irish to your child? Has this changed since the child began in school?
- 6.2 How often would you read now to your child in English (..in Irish)? Has this changed as your child has gotten older?

7. General

- 7.1 Do you think it is important to support your child's education?
- 7.2 What do you think are the main barriers to you doing so effectively?
- 7.3 Do you think that there are different challenges facing all-Irish parents than are experienced by parents of children in mainstream schools?
- 7.4 What steps do you feel could be taken to support you to participate more successfully in your child's education?

A6: Coding Frame for Parent Qualitative Data	
Topic	Codes for Themes and Subthemes
1: Reasons for School Choice	1a Cultural Affiliation
	(i) Language maintenance/revitalisation
	(ii) Language as integral to Irish identity
	(iii) Irish culture (e.g. music, dance, folklore)
	(iv) Important to retain Irish language/culture/identity in light of increasing cultural diversity
	1b Desire for Child to be Bilingual/Multilingual
	(i) Desire for English-Irish bilingualism specifically
	(ii) Desire for bilingualism generally (any languages)
	(iii) Economic/Employment benefits of bilingualism
	(iv) Facilitate acquisition of additional languages in the future
	(v) Early immersion as the most effective way to achieve bilingualism
	(vi) Desire for Irish to be taught to children in a better manner than parents had been taught it ('drip feed' method')
	(vii) Desire for parents to achieve fluency in Irish which parents regretted not having themselves
	(viii) Child already bilingual/multilingual
	1b: Other Educational Advantages
	(i) Belief that Irish-medium students outperform their English-medium counterparts academically
	(ii) Smaller school/smaller class sizes
	(iii) Educational record/reputation of the school
	(iv) Educational challenge for child
	(v) Avoidance of perceived negative influence in local non-immersion schools
	1c Existing Links to the School
	(i) Parent had attended the school
	(ii) Child's friends/neighbours/relations already attending the school
	1d School Atmosphere/Staff
	(i) Overall atmosphere/culture of school
	(ii) Welcoming school staff
	(iii) Commitment of Staff
	1e Ethos
	(i) Catholic ethos of the school
	(ii) Alternative to Catholic school
	(iii) Wish for co-educational education
	(iv) Uniform policy of school
2: Attitudes towards Irish and IME	2a Current Attitudes towards Irish
	(i) General positive attitudes
	(ii) Strong positive attitudes and commitment to the language (e.g. want to learn language further)
	(iii) Weaker positive attitudes (less commitment/'hands off' attitude)
	2b Change in Attitude over Time
	(i) Disliked how Irish was taught to them when at school
	(ii) Found Irish boring at school
	(iii) Found Irish difficult at school
	(iv) Neutral attitude towards Irish when growing up

	2c Attitudes towards Irish-Medium Education
	i) General positive attitude
	ii) IM as a more 'fun' environment
	iii) IM as easiest way to acquire Irish
	iv) IM schools should be more available/availed of/promoted
	v) IM schools would lose community atmosphere if they became more mainstream
	vi) Positive attitudes towards, but little prior knowledge of, immersion model
	vii) Positive attitudes to IM developed as a result of positive experiences of others (e.g. friends' children, neighbours, relatives, etc.)
	viii) Prior concerns about children's progress in immersion
	ix) Current concerns about children's progress in immersion
	x) Satisfaction with child's progress in IM
3:Parents' Involvement Activities	3a Construction of the Parental Role
	(i) Parental involvement requires Irish proficiency
	(ii) Parents as 'monitors' of children's learning
	(iii) Parents as 'advocates' for children
	(iv) Parents as 'supporters' of Irish development
	(v) Questioning other parents role constructions
	3b Home-Based Activities
	(i) Monitoring Homework
	(ii) Helping with Homework
	(iii) Supporting English Literacy
	(iv) Supporting Irish Literacy
	(v) Little or no English literacy activities happening at home
	(v) Little or no Irish literacy activities happening at home
	3c School-Based Activities
	(i) Limited to attendance of school occasions
	(ii) Volunteering in school-based learning activities
	(iii) Low levels of school based involvement perceived
	3d Change in Involvement Over Time
	i) Increased involvement as child needs more parental support
	ii) Decreased involvement as learning content becomes more difficult
	iii) Decreased involvement as children become more autonomous
4: Irish in the Home	4a Frequency of Child's Use of Irish with Child
	(i) Infrequent use- Low parental proficiency
	(ii) Infrequent use- Child has enough Irish at school
	(iii) Infrequent use- Intentions to increase Irish use
	(iv) Infrequent use- Irish takes much effort
	(v) Some use of Irish- overflows from school to home via child
	(vi) Some use of Irish- limited to 'little phrases'/commands
	(vii) Regular home use of Irish
	4b Child's Use of Irish with Peers
	(i) Some home use with classmates
	(ii) Some home use when 'playing school'
	(iii) Little/no use of Irish with peers
	(iv) Hope that peer use of Irish will increase over time
5: Home-School Contact	5a Nature and Frequency of Contact
	(i) Communication limited to annual parent-teacher meeting
	(ii) Increased frequency of contact if child experiences difficulties
	(iii) Regular parent-initiated contact about child's progress

	(iv) Perception that teachers are too busy for regular communication with parents
	5b Language of Communication
	(i) Most interaction takes place through English
	(ii) Parents are expected/encouraged to attempt to speak Irish
	(iii) Parents given the option to speak Irish or English in formal communications (e.g. parent-teacher meeting)
	(iv) Teachers appreciate parents attempts to speak Irish
	(v) Children appreciate parents attempts to speak Irish
	(vi) Parents can avoid interactions due to low Irish proficiency
Topic 6: Barriers to Involvement	6a Low Parental Proficiency in Irish
	(i) embarrassment/anxiety/disempowerment surrounding contact with school
	(ii) Alienation from high proficiency parents
	(iii) Fear of 'contaminating' child's Irish development by using incorrect grammar/vocabulary
	(iv) Low proficiency undermining parental authority with child
	(v) Difficulty helping with homework
	(vi) Feeling unable to be an educational partner
	6b Practical Barriers
	(i) Time- work commitments
	(ii) Time- childcare issues
	(iii) Time- single parent status
	(iv) Time- involvement through Irish requires extra time/effort
	6c Child's Resistance to Parental Involvement
	(i) Child reluctant to speak Irish out of school (associates Irish with school/work effort)
	(ii) Child questions parent's efficacy for involvement.
	(iii) Child does not invite parental involvement
	6d Low Proficiency of Other Family Members
	6e Lack of Appropriate Resources
	(i) Lack of (or lack of awareness of) Irish reading material for children
	(ii) Lack of (or lack of awareness of) Irish classes for parents
	6f Inappropriate Supports Offered
	6g Lack of Invitations/Opportunities for Involvement from School
7: Facilitators of Involvement	7a School Factors
	(i) Positive experiences of staff support
	7b Parent Factors
	(i) Increased parental confidence
	7c Child Factors
	(i) Child experiences difficulties
8: Overcoming Obstacles to Involvement	8a Current Strategies
	(i) Consulting others for help
	(ii) Child translates content for parent
	(iii) Purchase Irish-English Dictionary
	8b Suggestions for Support
	(i) Schools to be more welcoming
	(ii) Suitable Irish classes
	(iii) Irish language resources
	(iv) Increased home-school communication
	(v) More guidance from school about how to be involved
	(vi) More information on immersion education

Appendix B: Research Materials for Study 2

B1: Letter to Principals

B2: Information Sheet for Survey Respondents

B3: Parent Survey

B1: Letter to Principals



UCD School of Psychology

Newman Building
University College Dublin
Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland

T: +353 1 7168369/8363
F: +353 1 7161181

Scoil na Sícolaíochta UCD

Áras Newman
An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath
Belfield, Baile Átha Cliath 4, Éire

www.ucd.ie/psychology

Dear [insert principal's name],

I am a PhD student with the School of Psychology, UCD who is undertaking research aimed at identifying ways of supporting parents of children attending Irish-medium schools. Having already conducted a series of interviews with parents, teachers and principals, I am now conducting a study that involves surveying parents on their experiences of involvement in their children's education. For the purpose of this study, I need parents to fill out a brief questionnaire, a version of which I have attached. I am writing to request your permission to recruit such parents through your school.

For more details relating to the study please see the information sheet overleaf. If you are willing for your school to participate then I would ask that you fill in the attached form and return it in the stamped addressed envelope included with this letter. I will then send out questionnaires to your school which I would like you to distribute to parents.

As I am sure you are aware, the involvement of parents in their children's schooling is one of the greatest contributors to a child's academic and social success at school. The significant numbers of parents with low proficiency in Irish who are sending their children to gaeilscoileanna is increasing, and this may present significant barriers to these parents becoming active partners in the education process. Identifying these barriers is the first step on the road to devising strategies to overcome them, which is a primary aim of the current research project. Your help in this matter would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Lauren Kavanagh

B2: Information Sheet for Survey Respondents



UCD School of Psychology

Newman Building

University College Dublin

Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland

T: +353 1 7168369/8363

F: +353 1 7161181

Scoil na Sícolaíochta UCD

Áras Newman

An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath

Belfield, Baile Átha Cliath 4, Éire

www.ucd.ie/psychology

Investigating Parental Involvement in Irish-medium Education Information Sheet for Parents

Thank you for taking the time to read this leaflet

You are invited to participate in a research study. I am a PhD candidate with the School of Psychology, UCD, undertaking research which aims to identify ways of supporting parents of children attending Irish-medium schools. The present study entails surveying parents on a number of issues relating to their involvement in their children's education. *Your opinions and responses would make a valuable contribution to this study, and we hope that you will share your views with us.* The study aims to explore:

- your experience as a parent in an Irish-medium school with regard to supporting your child's learning, and
- your views on challenges you may have encountered or ways Gaelscoil parents could be helped to be active and successful partners in the education process.

Why have I been chosen to participate? You are the parent of one/more children now attending an Irish-medium primary school and we would like to learn from your experience and views.

What is involved? If you choose to participate, you are asked to fill in the questionnaire brought home by your child. The questionnaire should take approximately twenty minutes to complete. You are asked to try to answer all questions and to do so honestly. The questionnaire explores a number of issues such as your attitudes towards Irish, your interaction with your child's school and your participation in learning activities with your child. The questionnaire is anonymous and does not ask for your school's name either, but it does ask you to fill in some basic personal information, such as your own ability in Irish, to help us interpret the data. The questionnaire is presented in both English and Irish, and you may choose which language to answer it in. Please note that the views of every parent are of interest to us, and you do not have to have any particular level of Irish or education in order to complete it. We hope that you will find answering the questionnaire an interesting exercise.

Confidentiality: The questionnaire is anonymous, so you are not required to put your name or the name of your school anywhere on it, and your data will be treated in strictest confidence. The results of the study may be published or presented at conferences; however any reporting of results will refer to group data only. Individual results will not be described.

What will happen if I agree to participate? Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part please fill out all sections of the questionnaire and then insert it into the envelope provided and return to the teacher or to the box in your child's school, where I will collect it on a certain date. By completing the questionnaire and returning it, you are agreeing to have your data included in the study. As all questionnaires are anonymous, it will not be possible to have your data removed from the study later.

Contact Details: If you have any further queries about the research please contact: Lauren Kavanagh 716 8147 (leave your number and I will return your call) or email lauren.kavanagh@ucdconnect.ie

<p><i>Thank you for reading this sheet – we hope that you will consider taking part.</i></p>
--

B3: Survey Questions

1. Are you Male ☐₁ Female ☐₂ 2. What year were you born?

3. What is your nationality?

4. With regard to the child who brought home this questionnaire, are you his/her:

Parent ☐₁ Step-parent ☐₂ Aunt/Uncle ☐₃ Other (Please specify)

5. Are you now: Married/Living with partner ☐₁ Separated/Divorced ☐₂ Widowed/single ☐₃

6. How many children do you have in this Gaelscoil right now?children.

Which class (Rang) is each child in? If a child is in the naionra, write 'N'

Child 1: Rang Child 2: Rang Child 3: Rang Child 4: Rang

Child 5: Rang Child 6: Rang Other:

How would you assess your ability in Irish when it comes to listening, speaking, reading and writing? Please tick ✓ ONE from each section only for yourself, and try to estimate for your partner for each section, where applicable.

7. Understanding

You

Partner

Not a word

☐₁
☐₁

A few words

☐₂
☐₂

Short sentences

☐₃
☐₃

Bits of conversations

☐₄
☐₄

Most conversations

☐₅
☐₅

All conversations

☐₆
☐₆

8. Speaking

You

Partner

Not a word

☐₁
☐₁

A few words

☐₂
☐₂

Short sentences

☐₃
☐₃

Bits of conversations

☐₄
☐₄

Most conversations

☐₅
☐₅

All conversations

☐₆
☐₆

9. Reading

You

Partner

Not a word

☐₁
☐₁

A few words

☐₂
☐₂

Short sentences

☐₃
☐₃

A short article/letter

☐₄
☐₄

A book

☐₅
☐₅

10. Writing

You

Partner

Not a word

☐₁
☐₁

A few words

☐₂
☐₂

Short sentences

☐₃
☐₃

Short article/letter/note

☐₄
☐₄

Any document

☐₅
☐₅

11. When you were growing up, what language(s) were spoken in your home, and in your partner's home, where applicable?

English only

Self
☐₁

Partner
☐₁

English and Irish, but mostly English

☐₂
☐₂

English and Irish, but mostly Irish

☐₃
☐₃

Irish only

☐₄
☐₄

Another language

☐₅
☐₅

12. What kind of school did you attend? Please tick ✓as many boxes as necessary for yourself and your partner where applicable

	You	Partner
All-Irish primary school	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
English-medium primary school	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Primary school in another state	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
All-Irish secondary school	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
English-medium secondary school	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Secondary school in another state	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 6

13. How would you describe your attitude towards Irish while you were growing up? Please circle one number on the scale below.

Very Unfavourable		Neutral		Very Favourable
1	2	3	4	5
				6
				7

14. What is your general attitude to Irish now?

Very Unfavourable		Neutral		Very Favourable
1	2	3	4	5
				6
				7

15. If living with a partner, how would you estimate your partner's attitude to Irish now?

Very Unfavourable		Neutral		Very Favourable
1	2	3	4	5
				6
				7

16. What general attitude towards learning Irish in school do you try to encourage in your child?

	Yes	No	Office Use Only
Please put ONE tick ✓per line.			
I let my child know that Irish is very important	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	16_1
I discourage my child from taking Irish seriously	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	16_2
I leave it up to my child to develop his/her own attitude to Irish	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	16_3

If you ticked agreement with the first item in Question 16, please answer Question 17.
If not please go to Question 18 overleaf

17. In what ways would you say that you encourage a positive attitude towards learning Irish?

Please rank the top three answers most relevant to you, where 1 is the most relevant, 2 is the second most relevant etc.

		Office Use Only
I praise my child's achievements in Irish	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	17_1
I tell my child stories about my own positive experiences of learning Irish	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	17_2
I create opportunities for my child to use Irish outside of school	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	17_3
I let my child see me speaking Irish regularly	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	17_4
I explain to my child why I feel Irish is important	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	17_5
I try to make learning Irish fun for my child	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	17_6

18. What were the things that influenced you in choosing an all-Irish school for your child?

Please tick ✓ one box on each line.

	PRO	CON	NOT A FACTOR
1. Accessibility to home	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
2. Physical Facilities	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
3. Pupil-teacher ratios in Gaelscoileanna	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
4. Commitment of teachers in Gaelscoileanna	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
5. Educational record (good exam results etc.) of Gaelscoileanna in general	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
6. This Gaelscoil's general reputation or status in the community	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
7. Desire to give my child the Irish atmosphere/culture of a Gaelscoil	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
8. Desire to have the Nationalist/Republican tradition ensured	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
9. Desire to have the language properly taught to my child	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
10. Desire to preserve the language for posterity	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
11. My child's wishes to attend a Gaelscoil	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
12. My child's wishes to attend this particular school	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
13. My child's level of Irish at the time	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
14. Desire to offer my child a good grounding in Irish for secondary school	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
15. Parental ability to assist child with Irish homework etc.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃

Other

19. What were the main factors in your decision to choose this school? Each of the reasons/factors above is numbered. Please try to decide which were the three most important factors to you in making this decision, and put the numbers of those factors in the boxes below.

Top Three Factors: ☐ ₁ ☐ ₂ ☐ ₃

☐ ₁

20. If you had to choose one 'Crunch' factor from these, what would it be?

21. How would you rate your satisfaction now with your decision? Please circle ONE number only.

Very Dissatisfied			Neutral			Very Satisfied
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

22. Given the recent proposal about offering more 'partial immersion' schools (where children do some subjects through the medium of Irish) how interested would you be in choosing that option over full immersion (all subjects through Irish)? Please circle ONE number only.

Totally NOT interested			Neutral			Very Interested
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

23. Please estimate how much Irish you might use with your child in the following situations:

<i>Please circle ONE number on each line.</i>	Never	Rarely	Some of the time	50/50	Most of time	All of the time
At mealtimes	1	2	3	4	5	6
Helping children with homework	1	2	3	4	5	6
Reading or telling stories to children	1	2	3	4	5	6
Playing with the children	1	2	3	4	5	6
While watching TV with children	1	2	3	4	5	6
In the car/listening to the radio/CDs in car	1	2	3	4	5	6
Gardening, housework, etc. with child.	1	2	3	4	5	6
At religious services/family prayer	1	2	3	4	5	6
Visiting extended family/relatives	1	2	3	4	5	6
OVERALL, at home	1	2	3	4	5	6

24. How much Irish do you think your child might use Irish in the following situations?

<i>Please circle ONE number on each line</i>	Never	Rarely	Some of the time	50/50	Most of time	All of the time
While being driven to/from school	1	2	3	4	5	6
While playing with friends	1	2	3	4	5	6
While on the telephone	1	2	3	4	5	6
While online/playing computer games	1	2	3	4	5	6
While talking with siblings	1	2	3	4	5	6
While doing homework	1	2	3	4	5	6

25. What do you think are the main obstacles to increasing the use of Irish in your home?

<i>Please circle one number on each line</i>	Not true					Very true
I am not good enough at speaking Irish to use it effectively in my home	1	2	3	4	5	
My child is reluctant to speak Irish outside of school	1	2	3	4	5	
I feel my child has enough exposure to Irish at school	1	2	3	4	5	
I do not think it is important to increase the use of Irish in my home	1	2	3	4	5	
I haven't time to give the effort needed to increase Irish use at home	1	2	3	4	5	
I don't see any obstacles to increasing the use of Irish in my home	1	2	3	4	5	
I try every now and then but it is hard to keep it going	1	2	3	4	5	

26. Would you say that your involvement with the school (apart from depositing or collecting kids) is more or less than the average for the other parents of children in your child's class? Please circle ONE number.

A lot less 1	2	3	Average 4	5	6	A lot more 7
-----------------	---	---	--------------	---	---	-----------------

27. How often, if ever, do you supervise (or help with) your child's homework?

Please circle one number on each line

	Never/ Rarely	Some times	Often	Daily
I listen to my child read aloud in English	1	2	3	4
I listen to my child read aloud in Irish	1	2	3	4
I test my child's spellings/multiplication tables	1	2	3	4
I help my child with English homework	1	2	3	4
I help my child with Irish homework	1	2	3	4
I help my child with Maths homework	1	2	3	4
I help my child with project work	1	2	3	4
I help my child with art/craft activities	1	2	3	4
I make sure my child has a quiet place in which to do homework	1	2	3	4
I check that my child has completed all homework assignments	1	2	3	4
I direct my child towards learning resources (e.g. dictionaries, reference books, websites, etc.)	1	2	3	4

28. How often would you do any of the following activities?

Please circle one number on each line

	Never/ Rarely	Some times	Often	Daily
Reading a story to your child in English	1	2	3	4
Reading a story to your child in Irish	1	2	3	4
Asking your child about his/her day in school	1	2	3	4
Volunteering in your child's classroom	1	2	3	4
Offering to help your child with homework activities	1	2	3	4

29. Are you a member of any of the following, or have you ever been?

Please tick ✓ one box for each line

	No	In past	Yes, Currently
Parent-Teacher Association	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
Board of Management	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃
Other (please specify)			

30. How often would you praise your child's achievements in the following subjects?

<i>Please circle one number for each line.</i>	Never	Sometimes	Often	Daily	<i>Office Use</i>
English reading	1	2	3	4	30_1
Mathematics	1	2	3	4	30_2
English writing	1	2	3	4	30_3
Project work	1	2	3	4	30_4
Irish reading	1	2	3	4	30_5
Oral/spoken Irish	1	2	3	4	30_6
Irish writing	1	2	3	4	30_7

31. How much contact do you have with the school your child is attending? *Please circle ONE number*

No Contact	Some contact			A lot of Contact	
1	2	3	4	5	6
					7

32. Are you satisfied with the amount of contact you have with the school? *Please circle ONE number*

Very Dissatisfied	Neutral			Very Satisfied	
1	2	3	4	5	6
					7

33. How often do you visit your child's school for the following reasons?

<i>Please tick ✓ one box for each line</i>	Rarely/ Never	Once a year	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	<i>Office Use</i>
To deposit or collect child	1	2	3	4	5	33_1
To check on child's progress	1	2	3	4	5	33_2
To help out in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5	33_3
To attend a school occasion e.g. concert	1	2	3	4	5	33_4
To attend a fundraising event for the school	1	2	3	4	5	33_5
To attend Irish language classes	1	2	3	4	5	33_6
To attend other adult classes	1	2	3	4	5	33_7

34. What language do you use most often when on school premises? *Circle ONE number only.*

English only	50:50			Irish only	
1	2	3	4	5	6
					7

35. Please explain the main reasons why you use this language (or language mixture) in the school.

Tick as many boxes as are relevant to you.

I speak mostly/all English because I am uncomfortable/unable to use Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>
I try to speak Irish because the teachers ask parents to	<input type="checkbox"/>
I try to speak Irish because I see other parents doing so	<input type="checkbox"/>
I try to use Irish because it's important to keep an 'all-Irish' atmosphere in the school	<input type="checkbox"/>
I use only/mostly Irish and feel comfortable doing so	<input type="checkbox"/>

If your child is in 3rd class- 6th class please answer the following questions.

If your child is in a class lower than 3rd class, please skip to question 38.

36. Do you think you have become more involved, less involved, or have the same level of involvement in your child's education over the course of your child's time in school? Please circle ONE number

Less Involved	About the same				More involved	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

37. Are you more likely to engage in the following activities NOW than when your child was younger?

Please tick ✓ one box for each item

	More likely	Less likely	No change	Office Use
Read to your child in English	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	37_1
Read to your child in Irish	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	37_2
Check that your child has completed his/her homework	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	37_3
Help your child with homework activities	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	37_4
Ask your child about his/her day at school	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	37_5
Praise your child's school achievements	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	37_6
Speak Irish to your child	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	37_7
Volunteer at your child's school	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	37_8

38. How useful would you find each of the following?

	Very Useful			No use at all
Irish classes for parents which focus on conversation	1	2	3	4
Irish classes for parents which focus on helping children with homework/textbooks	1	2	3	4
More information about what your child is learning at school	1	2	3	4
Advice on sourcing and selecting Irish reading material for your child	1	2	3	4
An internet forum to discuss issues with other parents	1	2	3	4
Instruction on how to support your child's English literacy skills	1	2	3	4
Instruction on how to support your child's Irish literacy skills	1	2	3	4
More information on TV programmes/films/DVDs in Irish for your child	1	2	3	4
More information on educational games in Irish for your child	1	2	3	4
A newsletter that would advise parents on using Irish in the home	1	2	3	4
CDs of Irish songs/Nursery Rhymes/Poems, etc.	1	2	3	4
Information on Irish-language activities in your local area	1	2	3	4
Information on web resources in Irish for your child	1	2	3	4

Other (please specify):.....

We would be most grateful if you would please answer some brief background questions about yourself.

39. How would you describe your present principal status?

	You	Partner		You	Partner
Working for payment or profit	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Looking after home/family	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Unemployed	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Retired from employment	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
Student	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Other	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆

40. If you are employed outside of the home, what is your occupation? _____

41. If applicable, what is the occupation of your partner? _____

42. What is the highest level of education which you have completed to date?

	You	Partner		You	Partner
Primary education	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	Third Level non-degree (diploma, national certificate, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Junior Certificate (or equivalent)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	Primary degree (third level Bachelor degree)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
Leaving Certificate (or equivalent)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	Postgraduate qualification	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆

43. How many books would you estimate are in your home? Tick one box only

A few books (less than 50) ☐₁
 A moderate amount of books (50-300) ☐₂
 More than 300 books ☐₃

45. Do you hold a medical card?

Yes: ☐₁
 No: ☐₂
 I choose not to answer: ☐₃

46. Do you have internet access at home? Yes

☐₁
 No ☐₂

If you have any further comments to make regarding your involvement in your child's education, or have any further suggestions for supports which could help you to take a more active role in your child's education, please give details here:

47. The following items comprise a measure used internationally to assess parental involvement, and will help us to compare with other research. This is the final part, and can be completed very quickly just by circling a number on each line to show how frequently you do the activities listed:

This section of the questionnaire is omitted for copyright reasons.

Appendix C: Research Materials for Study 2

C1: Letter to Principals

C2: Sample Information Sheet

C3: Consent Form

C4: Interview Protocol

C5: Coding Frame

C2: Sample Letter to Principals



UCD School of Psychology

Newman Building
University College Dublin
Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland

T: +353 1 7168369/8363
F: +353 1 7161181

Scoil na Sícolaíochta UCD

Áras Newman
An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath
Belfield, Baile Átha Cliath 4, Éire

www.ucd.ie/psychology

A chara,

My name is Lauren Kavanagh and I am a PhD candidate in the School of Psychology, UCD. I am writing to you in relation to research which I am conducting on parental involvement and home-school relations in Irish-medium primary schools. The research project is funded by An Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscoilaíochta. You kindly allowed me to send out surveys to parents in your school in an earlier phase of the project, which was extremely helpful. In this final stage of the research I am again recruiting schools to participate. This time, I am looking to talk to principals and teachers about their experiences of, and attitudes towards, parental involvement in their schools.

I am hoping to interview the principal and two teachers in each school I visit. The interviews would last approximately half an hour and I have enclosed an information sheet for yourself, and for teachers, which outlines the aims of the study and what participation entails.

I understand how busy schools are coming to the end of the school year, however, if you feel that you, and/or any teachers in your school would be happy to be interviewed, I would be very grateful. As you aware, parental involvement is hugely important for children's outcomes and for schools themselves. My research aims to identifying ways of increasing such involvement in the context where parents may not be proficient in the language of the school.

If you would like any more information, or if you would be happy to be interviewed at some stage before the end of term, you can contact me on 086164364 or email me at lauren.kavanagh@ucdconnect.ie.

Is mise le meas,

Lauren Kavanagh

C2: Sample Information Sheet



UCD School of Psychology

Newman Building
University College Dublin
Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland

T: +353 1 7168369/8363
F: +353 1 7161181

Scoil na Sícolaíochta UCD

Áras Newman
An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath
Belfield, Baile Átha Cliath 4, Éire

www.ucd.ie/psychology

Parental Involvement in Irish Immersion Education- Teachers' Experiences

Information Sheet for Participants

You have been invited to participate in a research study on the above topic - thank you for taking the time to read this leaflet. My name is Lauren Kavanagh and I am a PhD candidate in the School of Psychology, UCD. I am undertaking research which aims to explore the nature and extent of parental involvement in Irish-medium schools.²

What is the study about? Research has shown that parental involvement in education is important for children's academic and social success at school. The aim of the present research project is to explore what parental involvement means in the context of Irish immersion education i.e. when the language of the home and the language of the school differ.

Why have I been invited to participate? You have been invited to take part in this phase of the research because you are a teacher in a Gaelscoil. We have already spoken to Gaelscoil parents and pupils about their experiences of parental involvement in Gaelscoileanna, and now we are interested in hearing the opinions and practices of principals and teachers in relation to this issue.

What is involved? If you agree to take part, you will participate in a short (30-40 min.) interview conducted at a location and a time convenient to you. Please be aware that the interview will be audio-recorded in order to facilitate analysis. The interview will be conducted in English.

Confidentiality All of the information collected will remain confidential to the research team. While quotes may be used in the reporting of the study, no participant will be identified or identifiable from the quotes used. The findings may be presented at conferences and for publication, but no individual will be

² The research is funded by an Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscoilíachta.

identified. Audiofiles of interviews will be kept until the research study has been completed in accordance with examiners' requirements and will then be destroyed.

What if I change my mind? Your participation is entirely voluntary and if you do decide to take part you can then change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time without difficulty.

Contact Details: If you have any further queries about the research please contact me at 086XXXXXXX or lauren.kavanagh@ucdconnect.ie. Alternatively you can contact my research supervisor, Dr Tina Hickey, at tina.hickey@ucd.ie

Thank you for reading this information sheet

C3: Sample Consent Form



UCD School of Psychology

Scoil na Sícolaíochta UCD

Newman Building

Áras Newman

University College Dublin

An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath

Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland

Belfield, Baile Átha Cliath 4, Éire

T: +353 1 7168369/8363

www.ucd.ie/psychology

F: +353 1 7161181

Consent Form

Participant name: _____

Name of School: _____

- This study aims to investigate Irish immersion principals' experiences of parental involvement in their schools.
- The study involves a short (30-40 minutes) interview, which will be recorded to facilitate analysis.
- De-identified direct quotes will be used in the reporting of the study. It is also possible that research findings may be presented in public, and submitted for publication.

I have read and understood the information sheet and have been given an opportunity to ask questions.

I agree to take part in the study:

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

C4: Sample Interview Protocol: Principals

Section 1: Principals' attitudes towards parental involvement

1. What does the term 'parental involvement' mean to you?
2. How valuable/important do you feel parental involvement in education?
3. Which involvement activities by parents do you value most as a principal?
4. Which do you think have are most beneficial for school/children?
5. Would you like to see increased involvement on the part of parents?

Section 2: Schools' practices of involving parents

1. Are there any particular ways in which you invite/attempt to increase the involvement of parents?
2. Can you tell me about any of these which have been particularly successful? Or particularly ineffective?
3. Are there any particular school-wide policies/practices for involving parents?
4. Do you have any strategies for dealing with parents who you perceive to be very uninvolved?

Section 3: Communication and information exchange

1. What are the ways in which you communicate with parents?

(Prompts: In person, email circle, notes).

2. For what main purposes are each of these used?
3. What language is normally used in the course of your communication with parents?
What is the school's policy on this?
4. What are the main types of information you give to parents?
5. What are the main types of information parents give to you? Does this inform your teaching practice in any way?

Section 4: Principals' experiences of parental involvement

1. Can you describe an example of a positive experience of parental involvement you have had?
2. Can you describe an example of a negative experience of parental involvement you have had?
3. Can you describe the nature of a typical parent's involvement?
4. Do you think parents of younger and older children differ in the amount and type of involvement they engage in?
5. How did you develop your approach to relationships with parents?

(Prompts: Teacher training, past experience, other teachers, school policies, student behaviours)

Section 5: Barriers and Suggestions for Support

1. Could you describe how you ideally like parents to be involved?/ What would a parent who is ideally involved be like?
2. How does this differ from the reality?
3. What do you think are the main barriers to parental involvement generally?
4. Do you think that there are any barriers to parental involvement which are specific to immersion education?
5. Do you feel that you are doing enough to involve parents? If not, why?

(Prompts: time pressures, unwillingness of parents, language barriers)

6. Can you think of any ways in which parents could be supported to become more involved?
7. Can you think of any ways in which teachers could be supported to develop better relationships with parents?

C6: Coding Frame for Educator Qualitative Data

Topic	Codes for Themes and Subthemes
1: Aspects of Parental Profile	1a Sociodemographic
	(i) High sociodemographic Profile
	(ii) Low sociodemographic Profile
	(iii) Mixed sociodemographic Profile
	1b Linguistic Profile
	(i) Low numbers of proficient parents
	(ii) Low numbers of parents using Irish with children
	1c Change in parental profile over time
	1d Parent Attitudes
	(i) Positive attitudes towards Irish
	(ii) Positive attitudes towards immersion
	(iii) Questioning the immersion model
	2: Perceptions of Parents' Reasons for School Choice
	2a Educational Advantages
	(i) General perception that Gaelscoil children have advantages over English-medium children
	(ii) Mistaken beliefs about Gaelscoil resources
	2b Alternative to other local schools
	(i) Parents general wish for 'something different'
	(ii) Wish for alternative to local convent schools
	(iii) Wish for co-educational education
	2c Economic/Employment Benefits
	2d School Atmosphere/Openness
	(i) Welcoming to SEN children
	(ii) Positive atmosphere of Gaelscoileanna in General
	2e Family History/Prior Connections
	(i) Parents are Past Pupils
	(ii) Parents have friends/siblings with children in Gaelscoileanna
	2f Cultural Affiliation
	(i) Irish identity
	(ii) Irish culture (dance, music, sport etc)
	(iii) Interest in Irish language
3: Definitions of Parental Involvement	3a School-Based Involvement
	(i) Fundraising
	(ii) Membership of committees
	(iii) Sharing expertise (ECAs, cultural activities etc.)
	3b Home-Based Involvement
	(i) Helping with/monitoring homework
	3c Home-School Communication
	(i) Attending parent-teacher meetings
	(ii) Informal meetings with school staff
	3d Evolving Definitions of Parental Involvement
4: Attitudes towards Parental Involvement	4a Positive Attitudes towards overall Parental Involvement
	(i) Benefits for parents
	(ii) Benefits for schools
	(iii) Benefits for children
	4b Importance of School-Based Involvement
	(i) Contributing to the running of school
	(ii) Children observing parents in the School
	4c Importance of Home-Based Involvement
	(i) Benefits for Child's Literacy

	4d Benefits of Home-School Communication
	(i) Benefits for School Discipline
	4e Ambivalent Attitudes towards Parental Involvement
	(ii) Parents as 'monitors' of children's learning
	(iii) Parents as 'advocates' for children
	(iv) Parents as 'supporters' of Irish development
	(v) Questioning other parents role constructions
	3b Home-Based Activities
	(i) Monitoring Homework
	(ii) Helping with Homework
	(iii) Supporting English Literacy
	(iv) Supporting Irish Literacy
	(v) Little or no English literacy activities happening at home
	(v) Little or no Irish literacy activities happening at home
	3c School-Based Activities
	(i) Limited to attendance of school occasions
	(ii) Volunteering in school-based learning activities
	(iii) Low levels of school based involvement perceived
	3d Change in Involvement Over Time
	i) Increased involvement as child needs more parental support
	ii) Decreased involvement as learning content becomes more difficult
	iii) Decreased involvement as children become more autonomous
5: Experiences of Parental Involvement	5a School-Based Involvement
	(i) Positive Experiences
	(ii) Negative Experiences
	5b Home-Based Involvement
	5c Home-School Communication
	5d Change in Involvement over Time
	(i) Lower levels of involvement over life cycle of school
	(ii) Higher levels of involvement over life cycle of school
	(iii) Change of involvement over child's school career
	5e 'Core' Involvement Group
	5f 'Absent' Parents
6: Use of Irish in the Home	6a Experiences
	(i) Low levels of home Irish use
	(ii) Decrease in out-of-school Irish use over time
	6b Expectations
	(i) Home use of Irish not expected.
	6c Attitudes
	(i) Home use of Irish is unnecessary
	(ii) Home use of Irish is beneficial
7 Policies and Practices	7a Eliciting Parent Commitment to Immersion
	(i) Meeting with Parents
	(ii) Contract
	7b Inviting School-Based Involvement
	7c Guiding/Encouraging Home-Based Involvement
	7d Communicating with Parents
	(i) Reasons for Communication
	(ii) Language(s) of Communication
	(iii) Parents are expected/encouraged to attempt to speak Irish
	(iv) Parents given the option to speak Irish or English in formal communications (e.g. parent-teacher meeting)
	7e Providing Resources/Supports to Parents

	(i) Irish classes/lessons
	(ii) Bringing parents together (coffee morning, ciorcal comhrá, etc.)
	(iii) English language versions of textbooks
	7f Lapsed/Failed Practices
8: Facilitators of Parental Involvement	8a School Outreach/Invitations
	8b Welcoming School Atmosphere
	8c Parent Characteristics
	(i) Parent SES
	(ii) Parent Irish proficiency
	6f Inappropriate Supports Offered
	6g Lack of Invitations/Opportunities for Involvement from School
9: Barriers to Parental Involvement	9a Practical Issues
	(i) Physical Features of the School
	(ii) School Security Policies
	(iii) Parents' time constraints (work hours, etc.)
	9b Low Parental Proficiency/Confidence
	9c Low Teacher Confidence
	9d Parents' Construction of their Role

Appendix D: Research Materials for Study 3

D1: Letter to Parents

D2: Information Sheet for Parents

D3: Information Sheet for Senior Children

D4: Information Sheet for Junior Children

D5: Parental Consent Form

D6: Child Assent Form

D7: Interview Schedule for Senior Children

D8: Interview Schedule for Junior Children

D9: Protocol for Disclosure

D10: Protocol for Distress

D11: Coding Frame for Pupil Interviews

D1: Letter to Parents



UCD School of Psychology

Newman Building

University College Dublin

Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland

T: +353 1 7168369/8363

F: +353 1 7161181

Scoil na Sícolaíochta UCD

Áras Newman

An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath

Belfield, Baile Átha Cliath 4, Éire

www.ucd.ie/psychology

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Please find attached details of a research project currently underway in University College Dublin. You will see from the information sheet provided that this research project aims to gather information on how Gaelscoil parents involve themselves in their child's homework, and schooling in general. The research is funded by An Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG). We have already surveyed and interviewed parents, and this phase of the project is focused on **children's** perspectives on parental involvement in Irish-medium primary schools. We aim to talk to children about this topic in a positive and non-judgemental fashion, recognising that families differ and that parents have many reasons for different levels of involvement in their children's education. The interviews with children will take about 10-15 minutes only, and will be in the child's classroom, or nearby if the teacher prefers.

Please take time to consider whether or not you want your child to take part in this study. If you have any questions about the study, you are very welcome to telephone me at 0861643642 or contact me by e-mail (lauren.kavanagh@ucdconnect.ie). If you consent to your child taking part in the study, please sign the form below and return it to your child's school.

Yours sincerely,

Lauren Kavanagh

Postgraduate Researcher

D2: Information Sheet for Parents



UCD School of Psychology

Newman Building

University College Dublin

Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland

T: +353 1 7168369/8363

F: +353 1 7161181

Scoil na Sícolaíochta UCD

Áras Newman

An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath

Belfield, Baile Átha Cliath 4, Éire

www.ucd.ie/psychology

Research Information for Parents and Guardians

Study Title: Investigating Parental Involvement in Irish-medium Primary Schools

Researcher: Lauren Kavanagh, PhD Candidate, School of Psychology, UCD

Aims of the Study

Parental involvement in education has been found to have great benefits for children's learning, but given the pressures of modern life, that can be problematic at times. The present research aims to explore the nature and extent of parental involvement in Gaelscoileanna, where the language of the school and the language of the home may be different. We have already consulted with parents, teachers and principals on their experiences of parental involvement, and now we are interested in hearing from children themselves.

Why has my child been asked to participate?

Your child has been invited to participate because he/she is a pupil in Senior Infants or Fourth Class in a Gaelscoil. We are interested in hearing the different perspectives of children near the beginning of their school experience and those who have been in school for a number of years.

What happens if I agree for my child to take part?

If you agree for your child to participate, please sign and return the consent form. On the day, your child will also be asked if they themselves agree to take part in a short interview, lasting about 10-15 minutes. The interview will be carried out in your child's school, during class time. The interview will be conducted in English. Your child's responses to interview questions will be recorded using a tape recorder. The researcher will ask your child some questions about doing homework, reading, his/her use of Irish outside of school and also about how they feel about their parents' involvement in each of these areas. The research aims to get children's perspectives and is non-judgemental: children will be reminded that families are different and do things in different ways. In the unlikely event that very large numbers of children want to take part, please note that while all will be accommodated, due to time pressures some children may be interviewed for a shorter time than others.

Are there any risks to taking part?

There are no known risks to your child participating. Every effort will be made to put children at their ease by the researcher, who is experienced at working with young children. Please discuss the study with your child so that they are aware of it and know what to expect. If you feel that your child would not like to take part, or could become upset at being interviewed, then perhaps you will decide not to have your child participate. If you think your child would like to have the opportunity to participate, but you would like to inform us of any special needs, please feel free to do this on the consent form provided, so that we can take that into account. If you give your permission, we also ask you to give us some basic information about who your child lives with, so that appropriate adjustment to wording can be made when interviewing your child.

What are the benefits of my child participating?

The results of this study will be combined with results from studies of parent, teacher and principal experiences of parental involvement in order to develop a complete picture of parental involvement in Irish immersion education. It aims to identify factors that facilitate successful involvement so that teachers and parents can be supported to be effective partners in education.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The interview responses will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to the researcher and her supervisor. Anonymised excerpts from interviews may be made part of the final research report or included in presentations or papers, but under no names or identifying characteristics be included. The only circumstances under which confidentiality will be breached are if your child discloses something of concern relating to his/her safety or well-being. Mandatory reporting of any such disclosure will apply.

Voluntary participation

Parents or guardians are asked for written consent for their child to take part in this study. Verbal assent will be sought from the children themselves at the beginning of the study. Participation in this research is voluntary. The children are free to refuse to take part at any time, without giving a reason. Each child may refuse to answer any questions and may stop taking part in the study at any time without disadvantage.

Further Information

If you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me, Lauren Kavanagh, at XXXXXXX (email: lauren.kavanagh@ucdconnect.ie). You can also contact my supervisor, Dr Tina Hickey at 01 XXXXXXX (email: tina.hickey@ucd.ie).

Thank you very much for reading this information sheet!

D3: Information Sheet for Senior Children



Research Information for Children

Study Title: *Gaelscoil children's views about parents' involvement in school and homework*

Researcher: Lauren Kavanagh, PhD Candidate, School of Psychology, UCD

Aims of the Study:

We are interested in finding out how children in *Gaelscoileanna* feel about how their parents are involved with their and school and with their learning at home.

Why I have been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because you are a pupil in a *Gaelscoil*. We are interested in learning more about how children like you learn at home and at school. We have already spoken to parents, *Múinteoirí* and *Príomhoidí* about this and now we would like to hear the opinions of children like you.

What happens if I take part?

If you and your parents are happy for you to participate, you will be asked to take part in a short interview. You will be asked 7 or 8 questions about things like homework, how much you speak Irish at home, about reading at

home, and who helps you with these things. Your answers will be recorded using a tape recorder. The interviews will be in English, and will take about 15 minutes. The interview will take place in your classroom or nearby, during class time.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The information from your answers will be put together with information we have gotten from other children, parents, teachers and principals. We hope that we will be able to find ways to make it easier for parents and schools to work together to help children to learn.

Confidentiality/Anonymity

You will not be asked to give your name on the recording. Some of the things you say might be published or presented in public, but your name won't be used and nobody else will know that it was you who said them.

Voluntary Participation

It is up to you and your parents to decide whether you are going to take part or not. You don't have to if you don't want to.

What happens if I decide not to take part?

There is no problem if you decide not to take part. If you do decide to take part but want to stop you can change your mind at any time without giving a reason.

Further Information

We really hope that you will agree to take part in the research. If you have any questions about the research study, please feel free to ask any questions you want to.

**Thank you very much for reading this information
sheet!**

D4: Information Sheet for Junior Children



Research Information for Children

Parents, please read this to your child

What this is about: How children feel about parents' help with schoolwork

We are interested in finding out how children in *Gaelscoileanna* feel about how their parents are involved with their homework and school and in their learning at home.

Researcher: Lauren Kavanagh, PhD Candidate, School of Psychology, UCD

Why have I been invited to take part?

We would like to talk to you because you are a pupil in a *Gaelscoil*. We are interested in learning more about how children like you learn at home and at school. We have already spoken to parents, *Múinteoirí* and *Príomhoidí* about this and now we would like to hear the opinions of children like you.

What happens if I take part?

If you and your parents are happy for you to take part, Lauren will come to your class and ask you 5 or 6 questions about things like homework, how much you speak Irish at home, and reading at home, and who helps you with these things. Your answers will be recorded using a tape recorder. The interviews will be in English, and will take about 10 minutes. The interview will take place in your classroom or nearby, during class time.

What will happen then?

The information from your answers will be put together with information we have already got from other children, parents and teachers. We hope that we will be able to find ways to make it easier for parents and schools to work together to help children to learn.

Will everyone know it is me? (Confidentiality/Anonymity)

Some of the things you say might be published or presented in public, but your name won't be used and nobody else will know that it was you who said them.

YOU decide, with your parents

It is up to you and your parents to decide whether you are going to take part or not. You don't have to if you don't want to, and nobody will be cross.

What happens if I decide not to take part?

There is no problem if you decide not to take part. You will just have a normal day in school. If you do decide to take part but want to stop you can change your mind at any time without giving a reason.

Further Information

We really hope that you will agree to take part in the research. If you have any questions about the research study, I am happy to answer your questions when I come to your class, or you can ask your parents to ask me.



Thank you very much for reading this information sheet

D6: Assent Form for Older Children

Please read the statements below and tick the box next to each if you agree with it

- I have read the information sheet and understand what the study is about ☐
- I understand that the interview will be recorded using a tape recorder ☐
- I understand that some of the things I say might be used in a written report or presented in public, but without my name ☐
- I have asked any questions I wanted to about the study ☐
- I am happy to take part in the study ☐

If you ticked all of the boxes above, please sign your name below:

Name

Date

D7: Interview Protocol for Senior Children

Thanks for agreeing to help with this research. Your mum/dad/other has told me that he/she is happy for you to talk to me today. Did you talk about the study with your mum/dad/other? Remember, you don't have to talk to me if you don't want to, it's up to you. I sent you out a leaflet about the study to read, but I'll just go over some of the information from it again now. You can ask me a question at any stage.

Reiterate/Clarify the Purpose of the Study

We are interested in learning more about how children in Gaelscoileanna learn at home and how their parents are involved in this learning. I have already spoken to parents about this, and now we want to hear from children themselves. We hope to discover ways to make it easier for parents to be involved.

Outline what is Involved

If you are happy to go ahead we will have a short chat. I will ask you some questions about things like speaking Irish at home, homework, reading, and how your parents/guardians are involved in these things. It will take about 10-15 minutes and we will be speaking in English. I will be recording what we say using this recorder. This is so I can listen back to what we've said later. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions I will ask you. If you decide that you don't want to answer any of the questions, we can just skip to the next one. Or we can also stop talking at any time, you just have to tell me that you want to.

Explain Confidentiality/Anonymity

When we have finished talking I will go away and listen back to the recording we've made and then type up the things that we've said. Nobody will see what I type up except me and my supervisor (explain if necessary). We might write up some of the things you say in a report we make about the study, but nobody else will know or be able to tell that it was you that said them. The only time I will have to tell somebody else about something you've said is if you tell me something that makes me worried about you, and I think that you need help. Then I will have to talk to about it.

I see that you live with your mum/dad/parents/grandparents/other. We will be talking a bit about him/her/them today. Remember, all families are different and all families do things in different ways. That's ok. We're just interested in hearing about some of the things that your family do.

- Have you understood everything so far?
- Do you have any questions you'd like to ask me?
- Are you still happy to go ahead?

Interview Questions

- 1. At school you speak *as Gaeilge* with your friends and your teachers. Do you ever speak Irish when you're at home/not at school?**

If no: Why do you think this is? If yes: With who? (Friends, siblings, parents, others)

At what times do you mostly speak Irish? (On the way to/from school? At mealtimes? While doing homework?)

Do you ever watch Irish TV programmes? Does anyone else watch with you?

Do you think that it is easy or hard for mums and dads to help children with Irish?

- 2. Do you ever do any reading at home that is not for school?**

What do you like to read? (Comics? Magazines? Books?)

Do you ever read anything/these in Irish?

Do you always read on your own or do you ever read with someone else?

Who?

- 3. Where do you do your homework?**

Do you have a set time to do it?

Do you ever need any help with your homework? Which parts?

Who would you ask if you needed help?

Are there some parts of homework you can't get help with at home?

- 4. Do you talk to anyone at home about your day at school? Who?**

- 5. Does your mum/dad/other ever come to visit the school? For what reasons?**

(Prompt meetings, talk to teacher, school play, school day out, sports)

D8: Interview Protocol for Junior Children

“Thanks for talking to me today. If it’s okay with you, we’re just going to have a short talk now. I am going to record what we say using this recorder (Give a quick demonstration as to how the audio-recorder works). Your mum/dad/other has said it’s alright for you to talk to me today. I will ask you some questions that I’d like you to answer. They will be about things you do at school, and at home with your family. All families are different and do different things. That’s ok. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. If you don’t want to answer a question you don’t have to and if you want to stop talking to me and go back to class then you just have to tell me. Do you understand? Do you have any questions you want to ask me? Are you ready to start?”

Protocol for eliciting recorded verbal assent from Senior Infants:

“I’ve now turned on the tape recorder. Can you say your name for me please? And your surname (second name/last name)?

- Do you understand what we’re going to talk about?
- Have you asked any questions you wanted to?
- Are you still happy to talk to me?”

Questions

1. In school your teacher speaks Irish/*Gaeilge* with you and your friends. Does anyone ever talk Irish/*Gaeilge* when you’re at home?/ Who do you speak Irish with outside school? Do you like talking Irish at home?
2. Do you like stories? Does anybody at home read stories to you at home? When? Do you ever read Irish books together?
3. Think about when you go home from school every day: Do you like to tell anybody at home about your day at school? Do you ever use any Irish words?
4. Do you ever get homework? (If so) tell me what kind of homework you get? Does anyone ever help you with it or check it for you?
5. Does your mum/dad/other ever come to your school (apart from bringing/collecting you)? When? (meet teacher, play, helping)
6. What’s your favourite thing to do at school? (Numbers, writing, reading, drawing) Do you ever do this at home? Does anybody do it with you?

D9: Distress Protocol

Protocol to follow if a child becomes visibly distressed during interview

- “[Name of Child] I see that you are feeling upset about this. Would you like to take a break? Or we can stop the interview if you like. Remember, we can stop at any time you want to, you just have to tell me”
- Depending on child’s response, take a break or end the interview
- Give the child time to regain composure before resuming the interview or returning to class. If the child wishes to continue with the interview, ask 1-2 more questions on an unrelated topic, e.g. hobbies, before gently ending the interview
- Encourage the child to discuss the interview and their distress with a parent or other trusted adult
- Accompany the child back to class and discreetly inform the child’s teacher of his/her distress. Suggest that the teacher be vigilant for further signs of distress from the child in the coming days.

D10: Disclosure Protocol

Protocol to follow if child makes a disclosure relating to his/her safety or well-being

- “[Name of child] you’ve told me that……. This is something that I cannot keep private. I have to tell someone so that you can be helped. I am going to tell [name of DLP] so that he/she can arranged for you to be helped with this.’
- End interview gently. Allow the child the time to regain composure if he/she is distressed before accompanying him/her back to class
- Immediately inform the school’s designated liaison person (normally the school principal) of the disclosure.
- Consult with the liaison person on whether or not to inform the child’s parents of the disclosure, depending on its nature.
- Provide a copy of the recording of the disclosure to the DLP or other authorities if requested/required.

D11: Coding Frame for Pupil Interviews

<i>D11: Coding Frame for Children Qualitative Data</i>	
Topic	Codes for Themes and Subthemes
1: Out-of-School Use of Irish	1a Frequency of Home Irish Use
	(i) Regular home use of Irish
	(ii) Little/no home use of Irish
	1b Barriers to Irish Use
	(i) Low parental proficiency in Irish
	(ii) Low proficiency of peers (e.g. friends, siblings)
	(iii) Associating Irish with school, work, effort
	1c Facilitators of Irish Use
	(i) Irish overflowing into home interactions
	(ii) Adopting a role as language teacher
	(iii) Irish as a 'secret language'
	(iv) Irish language television
2: Reading	2a English Reading Habits
	(i) Child enjoys English reading
	(ii) Parent reads to child in English
	(iii) Parent does not/has never read to child in English
	(iv) Child has many English books
	2b Irish Reading Habits
	(i) Child sometimes reads in Irish for pleasure
	(ii) Child never reads in Irish for pleasure
	(iii) Child has no/very few Irish books at home
3: School-Based Involvement	3a Frequency of Parents' Presence in School
	(i) Parent rarely, if ever, at school
	3b Types of School-Based Involvement
	i) Audience for performance
	ii) To elicit or impart specific information
	iii) Involvement in reading activities
	iv) Attending classes for parents
	v) Involvement at decision-making level
	3c Language(s) Used by Parents on School Premises
	(i) Mostly, or only, English
	(ii) Attempt Irish, but revert to English when necessary
4: Home-Based Parental Involvement	3a Homework
	(i) Parent not involved at all with homework
	(ii) Child sometimes, or regularly, requires parental help
	3b Overcoming Challenges to Parental Involvement with homework
	(i) Child translates homework for parents
	(ii) Online translation services are used
	(iii) Parent refers child to Irish-English dictionary
	(iv) Seeking help from older siblings
	(v) Helping younger siblings