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I declare that this dissertation is entirely my own work and all sources have

been duly acknowledged

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation has not been submitted as an exercise

for a degree at any other university and, except where otherwise

acknowledged it is entirely my own work.

Lorcán Owens

16/05/14

Abstract

This research aimed to ascertain the challenges for teachers and pupils in teaching and learning Irish dialects in a standardised Irish curriculum. As Irish dialects are declining with the demise of Irish in the Gaeltacht, this research comes at an opportune moment and intends to outline those challenges and offer appropriate recommendations. Six people with practical experience of teaching in Irish medium education participated in qualitative research by means of interviews. The interviews consisted of nine questions relating to challenges in teaching and using dialects, resources for dialects, the *Séideán Sí* programme and the curriculum and teachers' attitudes. Further questions addressed teachers' attitude and standard of Irish. The findings convey an acute need for adequate resources to be produced for teaching all subjects through a dialect. The research underlines the lack of a dedicated phonics component for Connacht and Munster Dialects. The teacher's responsibility in fulfilling curriculum objectives is underscored. It is also recommended that a review of entry requirements in Irish for candidates wishing to enter teacher training be undertaken with a corresponding review of teacher education courses. The implications of the research address the areas of funding for resources, accurately translating books and addressing initial teacher education. Recommendations for further research are outlined.

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Most of all, I would like to acknowledge the support of my family who have encouraged me throughout my four years of study.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents Margaret and Pádraig Owens and my Grandmother Maggie Jane Owens. Your constant support and belief in me will always be cherished.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Aim of Research

The aim of this research was to ascertain if the curriculum is supportive in promoting and preserving dialects, to investigate the challenges facing teachers in teaching dialects and to elicit whether or not appropriate educational resources are available for all dialects.

I investigated the challenges teachers encounter when trying to teach Irish through a specific dialect, and what steps need to be taken to ensure the survival of Irish Dialects in Primary Schools. The focus of the research was on non-Gaeltacht *Gaelscoileanna* and how teachers work with the challenge of teaching Irish in their specific dialect to non-native children. The context of my research was based on the Gaeilge Primary Curriculum which is based on standardised Irish.

1.2 Rationale of Dissertation

I believe there is an acute need for this research, at a critical juncture for the Irish language. Many Gaeltacht areas, particularly in Mayo, Cork, Meath and Waterford are endangered. While much research has taken place in the linguistics of Irish dialects, there is little comprehensive research on the challenges teachers face in trying to preserve dialects in school. There is also a lack of research on whether the curriculum and the education system generally does enough to promote and value dialects or discourages the use of dialects in favour of Standardised Irish. I hope that my research in this area reveals the challenges that teachers face and the actions that should be taken in order to preserve and promote the teaching and use of Irish dialects in primary schools.

1.3 Overview of Methodologies Used

I utilised qualitative methods in conducting research by means of interviews. The depth of detail from interviews was viewed by the researcher as the most appropriate means of collecting data as the broad range of issues regarding dialects in education could be analysed in greater detail.

1.4 Overview of Content

Review of the Literature: A review of relevant literature on the causes, issues and challenges regarding the teaching and learning of Irish dialects.

Methodologies: A description of the methodologies used including the design, advantages and disadvantages of interviews, sampling, piloting, ethical issues and validity and reliability of data.

Findings: An outline of the results from the interviews organised in thematic format.

Discussion and Analysis of Data: A detailed analysis of the findings with reference to the literature.

Conclusion and Recommendations: An overview of the main results, a list of recommendations and suggestions for further research.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

2.1 Introduction

Teaching Irish in modern Ireland is a challenge for teachers, given the critical position of the language. The Irish language is entering an uncertain stage in its history. The results of Census 2011 show that only 23,175 people in the Gaeltacht speak Irish daily outside of the Education system (Central Statistics Office, 2012). On the other hand, 54,010 people speak Irish daily outside of the Gaeltacht and in the education system (Central Statistics Office, 2012). These figures illustrate the changing face of the Irish language in Ireland. Irish speakers may live anywhere in Ireland but if the native, core language community continues to decline, native dialects and Irish as a community language will be lost. The recent resignation of *An Coimisinéir Teanga* Seán Ó Cuirreáin highlights the difficulties faced by speakers in maintaining Irish as a community language. It also depicts the challenge in providing services to speakers in what is Ireland's first official language. Ó Cuirreáin was Ireland's first Language Commissioner under the legislation of the Official Languages Act (2003) but in December he announced his intention to resign due to his frustration with government bodies: "Requiring the people of the Gaeltacht to conduct their business in English with state agencies flies in the face of any policy which suggests that the survival of the Gaeltacht is on the State's agenda," (Ó Caollaí, 2013). Significantly, Ó Cuirreáin also highlighted the endangered position of Irish, "It would be a travesty if we were to lose our linguistic sovereignty … I believe this to be a clear and present danger" (Ó Caollaí, 2013).

2.2 The status of Irish Nationally

Ó Cuirreáin's resignation as Language Commissioner, due to what he perceives as a failure by the State to implement policies for Irish appears to be an indictment of the State's attempts in preserving the language. Since the foundation of the Free State in 1922, Irish has been recognised as the national and first official language and this remains the case under Article 8 of the Constitution (Constitution of Ireland, 1937). Paradoxically, however, the Gaeltacht has continued to decline since independence. The Housing (Gaeltacht) Act of 1929 provided grants to Gaeltacht or semi-Gaeltacht areas in which 25% or more people spoke Irish. In 1929, all of Munster and Connacht plus Cavan, Donegal and Louth contained areas which qualified for Gaeltacht or Breac-Ghaeltacht status (Government of Ireland, 1929). Contrast this to the most recent study on the Gaeltacht, the Comprehensive Linguistic Report on the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht (Dept. of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2007). The Report recommended that the Gaeltacht should be redefined into three areas:

- Category A: Areas in which Irish is spoken daily by more than 67% of the population.
- Category B: 44% - 66% of the population are daily speakers of Irish.
- Category C: Predominantly English speaking with less than 44% speaking Irish daily.

According to the findings and recommendations of this report Irish as a living, community language (Category A) only exists in four counties: Donegal, Galway, Mayo and Kerry and the latter two counties only contain fíor-Ghaeltacht areas of a few District Electoral Divisions (Dept. of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs, 2007). A recently launched website based on Irish dialect recordings of 1928-1931, the Doegen Records Web Project (Royal Irish Academy, 2009) is another poignant reminder of the dramatic decline in native Irish

throughout the 20th century. These recordings represent one of the last links to the native dialects of Irish in counties such as Louth, Cavan, Roscommon and Tipperary.

Based on the current Census data and the revised Gaeltacht boundaries of 2007, it is clear that the government's Irish policy needs to be addressed as part of a comprehensive plan to stem the rate of decline in native Irish speaking communities. Irish language policy since 1922 has been overly reliant on the Education sector, especially at primary level, as a means of ensuring the transmission and survival of the language (Harris 2006, as cited in Harris, 2008; Mac Giolla Chríost, 2005). This fact has been criticised quite recently in the most unusual of circumstances. A native Irish speaker from Connemara launched an appeal to the Supreme Court requesting that his case be heard by a jury in Irish, without the need for translation. He lost his appeal by a four to one majority as the Court found that while it was his constitutional right to have his case heard in Irish, it would not be fair or representative to have a bilingual jury. However, ruling in favour of the man, Mr. Justice Adrian Hardiman said "the State and organs of Government had cast the entire burden of promoting Irish on successive generations of school children" (RTÉ, 2014). He decried the policy of successive Governments towards Irish as "uniformly minimalist and grudging" and remarked upon the peculiar situation here in Ireland in which a citizen is unable to have their case heard in court in the national and first official language of the State (RTÉ, 2014).

2.3 Decline in the use of Native Dialects of Irish

The reasons for the decline in Irish are many but they continue to pose challenges for teachers who wish to teach and preserve dialects in the classroom. Teachers face overwhelming challenges, some beyond their control. Perhaps the most pertinent and visible challenge is the fact that the native dialects are declining and have been in a state of

decline since the famine (Romaine, 2008). The famine resulted in mass migration from Gaeltacht strongholds such as Connacht (Mac Giolla Chríost, 2005; Hickey, 2011) which meant that by the turn of the century, many formerly Irish speaking regions in the east and centre of the province had switched to English (Hickey, 2011). The psychological impact of this language change resulted in a perception of Irish as ''the language of poverty, illiteracy and marginalisation and English the language of education, emigration and employment'' (Mac Giolla Chríost, 2005, p.117). The new status afforded to Irish post-Independence did not alter the position of Irish as a language of the poor and marginalised. Irish remained a language whose "heartland was overwhelmingly in the western periphery, its core-base, of agricultural smallholders and fishing families, an economically depressed and vulnerable community, experiencing heavy emigration" (Ó Tuathaigh, 2008, p.27). The depressed Irish economy of the 1920s to the 1950s and a return of recession again in the 1980s exacerbated the crisis of emigration and continued to drain the Gaeltacht of the young (Ó Tuathaigh, 2008), which meant that learning English became a life skill for future émigrés to Anglophone countries. Seasonal migration to England and Scotland from the Mayo and Donegal Gaeltachtaí in particular meant that people were speaking English for large parts of the year and bringing home English upon their return. As Ireland began to urbanise from the 1960s onwards, the influence of English became more acute. Television, improved transport, urban sprawl and the media meant that people from the Gaeltacht had access to English on a daily basis (Ó Tuathaigh, 2008). This not only undermined the Irish language but simultaneously placed huge strain on the traditional dialect communities (Hickey, 2011). For teachers who are trying to preserve dialects in the education system, often with limited resources, the challenge of keeping pace with the pressure from English was and is often overwhelming (Ó Giollagáin & Mac Donnacha, 2008; Ní Chonchúir, 2012).

The influence of English on young speakers in particular cannot be underestimated (Ó Giollagáin & Mac Donnacha, 2008). Popular music, social media, and contact with English speaking people all mean that English is absolutely necessary to survive in modern Ireland. The Irish speaking young also feel the need to appear "contemporary and sophisticated and fully fluent in English by their non-Irish speaking peers" (Hickey, 2011). This desire to be seen as modern and contemporary illustrates that many Irish speakers feel their minority language status is not only a mark of difference but is something negative and even undesirable.

While it may be regrettable that native speakers of our first official language should feel this way, it conveys the socio-linguistic reality that many minority language speakers feel regarding their language. Irish is a minority language that has to compete with the overwhelming influence of an Anglophone culture, media and society (Ó Giollagáin & Mac Donnacha, 2008). Irish is also localised which gives rise to three main dialects, Ulster, Connacht and Munster Irish (Hickey, 2011). These can also be subdivided so that in Mayo there are Tourmakeady, Achill and Erris sub-dialects (Wagner, 1966; Hickey, 2011). The localised nature of these dialects may reinforce the belief among young people that their Irish is not in tune with the contemporary world that they are bombarded with in the media. These young people show "a sophisticated appreciation of linguistic reality" (Mac Mathúna, 2008, p.85). Mac Mathúna (2008) also notes an interesting example of Irish speakers preferring to use English terminology for technical and new terms as using the equivalent Irish terms would be perceived negatively. The fact that these terms are invented by intellectuals as opposed to the natural Irish of the people also illustrates a divide between

natural, native Irish, *Caint na nDaoine* and Official Irish, or *An Caighdeán Oifigiúil* (Mac Mathúna, 2008)*.*

2.4 The Impact of Standardisation on Dialects

While the standardization of modern languages is necessary in terms of spelling, grammar and communication it can also lead to the loss of local nuances and expressions. An example is the spelling of *''bia''.* Before standardization, *''bia''* was spelt *''biadh''.* In Munster Irish in the genitive case, this became *''greim bídh''* with the *''dh* ''pronounced as *''g''.* In Connacht and Ulster the *''dh''* becomes silent (Wagner, 1958). However, with the modern spelling even native speakers, particularly in the younger generations, frequently pronounce *''bia''* in the same way as they would in the nominative due to the fact that *''bia''* is spelt the same in both cases (Hickey, 2011).

Similarly, the standardization of Irish grammar has meant that features of local dialects have become obsolete. For example, where once a native speaker in East Mayo would have said *''Abróidh mé''* and a person from Kerry would say *''níor chuaig''* (Wagner, 1958) these variations are now demonised as bad grammar and the official *''Déarfaidh mé* and *ní dheachaigh''* are the only written forms acceptable. The implications of setting a strict written standard can lead to the stigmatisation of dialects and set the standard form in a prestigious position that all local or regional forms are compared negatively with (Wardhaugh, 1992). In fact, it has been pointed out that there is a link between the acceptance of *An Caighdeán Óifigiúil* as a compromise standard and the simultaneous decline of the dialects (Ó hIfearnáin, as cited in Ní Ghearáin, 2012).

This has happened even in English. In Scotland, a study (Menzies, 1991) was conducted among secondary school children regarding their attitudes to Scots and their own Glaswegian dialect. It found that while 93% were happy with their own speech, they regarded 'Received Pronunciation' or Standard English as having a higher standing and would stand them better when seeking employment. They also regarded Scots words such as ''hame'' for ''home'' and ''dae'' for ''do'' as inferior and ''bad'' English. Crucially, regarding education and resources for teaching dialects, only 8-10% could name a Scots writer other than Burns but 84% were familiar with the works of Shakespeare.

2.5 The Challenges of using Irish Dialects in Education

While Irish dialects are not stigmatised to the extent of the example above, the enormous influence of the predominant Anglophone culture in Ireland is leading to the demise of the idiosyncrasies and richness associated with fluency in a language (Ó Giollagáin & Mac Donnacha, 2008). Ní Chonchúir's (2012) research on native Irish speaking secondary students and teachers in the Gaeltacht of Corca Dhuibhne confirms that *Béarlachas* or the use of English words, phrases and syntax is becoming more and more prominent in the speech of young people in particular. One teacher felt that the decline in fluency among the young was such that *"Tá an saibhreas imithe agus tá na nathanna cainte imithe"* (Ní Chonchúir, 2012, p122). The teachers believed it was during the 1980s when the decline became apparent. When asked if they had difficulties speaking with elderly people in Irish, one student stated *"Neain, an Ghaelainn atá aici tá sé <u>really</u> críonna anois. Cuid de na focail ní thuigfeá in aon chor iad"* (Ní Chonchúir, 2012, p. 124). Regarding the teaching of Irish and the education system generally, the pupils had mixed feelings. One pupil, when explaining how pupils from Anglophone Dingle or Lispole achieved better grades in the Junior Cert than

they did remarked *"an scríbhneoireacht arís. Bhíodar san aig <u>like</u> díriú isteach ar an scríbhneoireacht nuair a bhí mídne aig díriú ar an caint"* (Ní Chonchúir, 2012, p.126). The students felt that textbooks were written in a standard that they could not understand. One girl gave an example of a history book in which the teacher made copies of the text in English as the Irish was too difficult. For native speakers of Irish in school, the books used are often standardised so that the language may be too technical or difficult in a subject like Maths and on the other extreme the language used may be too easy, particularly in novels aimed at young people (Nic Cionnaith, 2012). This research highlights the challenges for teachers in trying to maintain high standards when the fluency and richness of Irish is in decline among students. It also illustrates a lack of resources for teaching through a dialect and the subsequent necessity for teachers to rephrase or even translate books in order for the students to understand.

2.6 Teaching through Dialects

Nic Cionnaith's (2012) research provides some interesting results regarding the teaching of Irish as a first language. It was felt by many parents that Irish reading books were not of a high enough standard for first language speakers and were more suited for second language students. There was little or no emphasis on the use of dialects in such books. Regarding maths and science, parents complained that the language was too complicated and for homework teachers would 'Tippex' the language used in the books and write "Gaeilge cheart" in its place (Nic Cionnaith, 2012, p.156). The use of inaccessible, technical language further verifies the lack of dialect oriented materials for students and pupils who speak dialects and presents significant challenges for teachers aiming to teach through dialects. One female student in Ní Chonchúir's (2012) interviews suggested that the technical

language unfamiliar to her native Irish was probably from a dictionary or translated by a woman in Dublin! While these views highlight issues regarding the translation and language of textbooks, the use of code switching and English syntax (Ó Giollagáin & Mac Donnacha, 2008) in Ní Chonchúir's sample of native speaking students highlights "the fragile nature … in the variety of Irish spoken by the young" (Ó Giollagáin & Mac Donnacha, 2008, p. 115). If standards of Irish continue to weaken among young Irish speakers, teachers will find it increasingly difficult to maintain a dialect in the classroom (Harris, 2012).

2.7 Teachers' Standards and Attitudes to Irish

It is clear from this research that there are multiple problems facing the people of the Gaeltacht, but the education system itself needs to be examined to address the needs of native speakers. If 14 out of 18 Gaeltacht parents feel that their children's Irish is worse in school than it was before they started (Nic Cionnaith, 2012), that raises serious cause for concern. Some parents also believed the teachers' own standard of Irish wasn't "100 % ceart" (Nic Cionnaith, 2012, p.157). If these same teachers are the product of an education system that may not be adequately developing the skills of fluency in Irish, inevitably this will manifest itself in their teaching of Irish. The parents' comment on standards of Irish among teachers highlights the issue of teacher training at third level. Ní Ghallachair (2008, p. 197) points out that ''the particular needs of native speakers of Irish, whether in the Gaeltacht or outside, are addressed neither by teacher education nor the curriculum.'' If this is the case that there is ''a disconnect between the training provided by universities for student teachers and the reality of the classroom'' (Ní Ghallachair, 2008, p.197) inevitably this will impact on teachers' attitudes and teaching of Irish in general. Harris (2006, as cited in Harris, 2008) outlines some of the causes of negative attitudes to teaching Irish including:

- Disillusionment among teachers

- Lack of appropriate resources in teaching Irish

- A delay in responding to diminishing standards by the Department of Education and Skills

- The cumulative effect of all these factors which is turning some teachers against Irish.

2.8 Curriculum and Resources for teaching Dialects

Regarding Irish in the curriculum itself, it is paradoxical that the revised child centred curriculum, with all its emphasis on communication skills, may not be adequately addressing the needs of first language Irish speakers. The curriculum emphasises the communicative approach, and for students who enter English medium primary school, the curriculum is devoted entirely in developing auditory and oral skills until second class (DES, 1999). However, the curriculum does not mention dialects until the senior classes of 5th and 6th and this only takes place in Irish medium schools. At this level, students are expected to *"ag leibhéal simplí"* (DES, 1999, p132) listen to and compare dialects and discuss the status of Irish in the Gaeltacht (DES, 1999) but not learn a great deal about either. In a positive sense, the curriculum recommends that older native speakers be invited to discuss the local area and folklore with the children and it also encourages teachers to access the often vast repertoire of local poetry, song, story, sayings and language games (DES, 1999) that enrich and expand the children's language while also bringing the language back to its roots as a source of cultural pride and value.

The development of a comprehensive suite of resources for Irish medium education, the *Séideán Sí* (DES & Foras na Gaeilge, 2003), is a very welcome addition to Irish medium education as it combines story, song, and games in an attractive and stimulating program and most importantly, provides books and recordings in the three main dialects. However, such resources only exist for the teaching of Irish as a subject. All books and resources for other subjects are written in Standard Irish, the technical Irish that the students in Ní Chonchúir's study could not understand.

2.9 Welsh Language Policy and the Status of Welsh in Education

These and the other factors described previously indicate a need to examine our approach to teaching and learning Irish dialects to ensure their survival into the future. Perhaps it is time for policy makers and the public in general to look elsewhere at how other jurisdictions sustain minority languages and dialects. A very relevant example is how Welsh successfully managed to remain a vibrant, community language. Welsh is similar to Irish in many ways. It is a Celtic language closely related to Breton and has historically been in a power struggle with English (Laugharne, 2007). Remarkably, despite Wales' historic union with England, only gaining a degree of home rule in 1999, Welsh has maintained a strong presence in Wales, with 22% speaking Welsh daily in 2001 (Laugharne, 2007). The growth of Welsh medium education has been strong since the 1970s and encouraging statistics from the Welsh Language Board (2004, as referenced in Laugharne, 2007) report that 40.8% of Welsh speakers are in the (5 – 15) age group. Critically, as there is no Welsh standard, schools use the local or nearest relevant dialect for teaching and learning Welsh (Laugharne, 2007).

There has been a consistent effort on the part of the National Assembly for Wales to increase numbers of Welsh speakers but the emphasis is on creating a bilingual Wales (Laugharne, 2007). The Assembly's policy for Welsh, *Iaith Pawb* (2003, as referenced in Laugharne, 2007), was developed based on research undertaken in the 1980s and 1990s on bilingualism and the factors that influence attitudes to Welsh among young people. The research confirmed the long held belief that minority languages need to find a place in the culture of teenagers if they are to survive (Baker, 1992, as found in Laugharne, 2007). The high proportion of Welsh speakers among children and teenagers suggests that Welsh has gained acceptance as part of their culture and government initiatives such as *Twf* (1999) which promotes intergenerational language transfer (Laugharne, 2007), foster a sense of pride in the language while maintaining fluency in the language.

2.10 Conclusion

The example of Welsh is a sobering reminder of a collective failure to maintain the number of Irish speakers that existed upon independence, let alone increase that figure. Welsh arguably had greater success in forty years than we have had in ninety in reviving its language. However, despite failed policies, emigration and *Béarlachas,* Irish is still alive as a community language. The extinction of Irish has been predicted many times but it has still not come to pass. Yet, the figures indicate that this may be the final opportunity to save the Irish language, in all its variations and dialects. As one speaker from An Rinn, Co. Waterford starkly puts it *"Sé mo thuairim gur i mbeagán blianta nach mbeidh aon Ghaeltacht ann, chun an fhírinne a rá libh"* (Hickey, 2011, p21). If Irish is to survive, the core Gaeltacht areas in which Irish is a real, community language must be preserved. Otherwise, Irish will only exist

as an academic language consigned to the status of Latin and Greek. It is time for a national debate to take place about our attitude to Irish and what future, if any, do we see for the language. In particular, we must acknowledge that the thirteen years our children spend learning Irish is not yielding a satisfactory return in terms of language proficiency and fluency (An Coimisinéir Teanga, 2005 as cited in Ní Ghallachair, 2008). The onus is on government, universities, teachers, parents and students to radically address the failings in the education system and develop a modern, ambitious Irish curriculum that is based on current research and best practice. Perhaps the following article from a contributor to a parish annual, in an area where Irish phrases survive in the colloquial English, can offer some food for thought on the matter:

> The thought struck me that the Department of Education may be going all the wrong way about reviving Irish in schools. Why impose 'buachaill' on children when 'gasún' is more natural? Why not build on the words already known even though they may not be the Irish equivalent of the 'Queen's English'? Wouldn't [these words] be more natural to a Clonown or Drumlosh child than all the fancy unpronounceable words in Buntús or Fios Feasa? (Uí Fhallúin, 1989).

Chapter Three: Research Methods

3.1 Introduction

The type of research conducted during this dissertation will be outlined in this section. This chapter will also include a description of the research design, the merits and weaknesses of qualitative research, the sample and pilot interviews, procedures and ethical issues and the validity and reliability of the data.

3.2 Research Design

The researcher, in discussion with the academic supervisor, assessed the appropriateness of qualitative or quantitative methods in designing and conducting the research. At proposal stage, the researcher had envisaged using quantitative methods. Quantitative methods are advantageous in that they involve a large sample of people and data analysis is simplified using graphs, charts and other visual means (Denscombe, 1998). The researcher initially felt that conducting surveys among a broad cross section of teachers, policy makers, educationalists and Department of Education inspectors would offer breadth of opinion and data on topic. However, following consultation with the academic supervisor, it was decided that qualitative methods were the most suitable for the research question.

Qualitative methods allow for greater detail and depth of opinion in which the person's own thoughts and ideas are analysed rather than simply stated (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2010). Examples of qualitative methods are interviews and focus groups. In qualitative research, experience and context form the basis for data. It is the quality of the answers given in interviews rather the number of interviewees that is important. Given the volume of data involved in discussing a topic during interview, the sample tends to be much smaller than in quantitative methods.

The primary focus of this research was to ascertain the challenges in teaching and transmitting Irish dialects in primary school, so this question formed the key to the interview. The researcher and supervisor agreed that questions on resources for teaching through dialects, the status of dialects in the curriculum and teachers' own standards of Irish should form the core of the interview. The questions were designed in an open-ended fashion, e.g. *what is the biggest challenge in teaching through dialects* to allow the contributors' themselves to air their own views and opinions without bias or partiality from the researcher. Nine questions were asked with the intention of each question lasting approximately five minutes.

3.3 Advantages of Interviews

Interviews were the most reliable and appropriate method of research in this particular topic as it allowed the sample to analyse and reflect their thoughts through open-ended questioning. The participants could explain these issues in detail, providing the context and nuance that formed their opinion and offering greater insight for the researcher. Qualitative methods would provide a great deal of data to analyse but the major themes and ideas emerging from the interviews would provide a high quality volume of research which was justified by the interviewees experience and expertise on the topic.

3.4 Disadvantages of Interviews

Data is more difficult to compare as answers vary from person to person (Denscombe, 1998). There was a considerable variation among the sample of the length of each interview and the depth of detail in each response. The researcher was mindful of the effect phrasing, tone and wording of questions could influence the candidates' responses (Hennink et al, 2010).

3.5 Justification of Research Methodology

The academic supervisor recommended qualitative methods for this question on the basis that it would allow for more analysis, depth and detail on the particular challenges associated with teaching dialects. The researcher agreed that it was beneficial to ascertain the sample's own experience working with curriculum and resources and this could best be researched using interviews. Interviews would allow for detailed information to be later analysed and important themes and ideas to be assessed from the sample as a whole. This would afford the researcher a clearer insight into the complexities that inform the participants' opinions on teaching Irish dialects.

3.6 Pilot Interviews

Pilot interviews were conducted with two teachers who work in Gaelscoileanna. One teacher felt that some of the questions were worded in a biased fashion, e.g. ''*What, do you feel, are the main weaknesses of the Séideán Sí program?*'' The teacher felt that this was worded negatively as it assumed that there were weaknesses in the programme. The researcher reworded this and other questions so they were more open-ended, so the aforementioned question was rephrased to: *What is your opinion of the Séideán Sí programme and does it adequately cater for each dialect?* The more open-ended style of

questioning allowed teachers to air positive, negative or neutral views while still stretching the questions in a way that addressed the fundamental issue of teaching dialects.

3.7 Sampling

Given the nature of the questions in the interview, which were based on teaching experience, it was necessary that all of the members of the sample had teaching experience in an Irish Primary school. Six people formed the sample and it was agreed by both the researcher and supervisor that these six should compose current teachers in Irish medium education, a current or recently retired principal of a Gaeltacht or Gaelscoil, a current or recently retired Department of Education inspector and a representative from third level with expertise in both Irish and Primary Education. Four teachers were interviewed, all native Irish speakers from the Mayo, Donegal and Kerry Gaeltacht districts. Two of the four teachers had taught in both Gaeltacht and urban Gaelscoileanna. One of these teachers had almost forty years of experience. A further two had worked for over ten years. A former Department of Education Inspector was interviewed who also had worked as a third level teaching placement Supervisor with over thirty years of experience working as a primary teacher prior to becoming an inspector. Finally, a retired principal of a Gaelscoil was interviewed who currently works as a lecturer in Irish.

3.8 Procedures

Three Gaelscoileanna in the Dublin area were contacted by email, addressed to the principal of each school. The email outlined the researcher's personal details and a description of the purpose of contacting the schools was given with the research question and the purpose. The email informed the principals that the researcher was seeking to conduct research by means of interviews among a member or members of the teaching staff who were native Irish speakers from the Gaeltacht. The email was closed with an invitation for the principals to respond either by telephone or email informing the researcher of their interest in participating in the research. Equally, if principals did not wish to participate in the research, they were advised to ignore the email and if there was no response after three days, the researcher accepted this as the school's wish not to participate. Two schools responded to inform that they were happy to participate. The researcher proceeded to post a letter to the schools in question outlining in greater detail the nature and purpose of the research and relevant details such as the number of questions, anticipated length of each question and ethical issues regarding their participation. The school principals responded by phone informing the researcher of candidates willing to participate and arrangements for dates and times of interviews were agreed.

The researcher contacted a former principal and third level lecturer and a former DES Inspector in a similar way as above and they accepted via telephone. Dates, times and locations for interviews were arranged with all parties in a way that was convenient to the candidates and avoided a need to travel on their part.

3.9 Ethics

The researcher had to be mindful of a number of ethical issues especially given that the participants were offering their voluntary informed consent to be recorded during interview and have their thoughts and opinions discussed for others to see. The privacy and anonymity of the participants' views was preserved in line with academic norms. Participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the research at their own discretion at any time and without reason (Hennink et al, 2010).

3.10 Validity and Reliability

The research was valid and reliable in that it met the criteria of upholding current research in the area, the sample fulfilled the objectives of the research and the candidates had detailed knowledge and experience of the topic to provide reliable data (Hennick et al, 2011). The validity of the research data reinforced and was comparable to the existing research as depicted in the literature review. The sample was reflective of Irish speaking medium education.

3.11 Conclusion

The type of research undertaken by the researcher was discussed as well as how the process itself was designed and achieved. A depiction of the sample, the advantages and disadvantages of interviews and how they were operated was outlined. Other factors such as ethics were explained. The data provided by the sample was analysed for discussion.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter details the results of the data that emerged from the research. A summary of the results will be outlined and then a more detailed analysis and discussion of the findings will follow in Chapter Five.

For the purposes of presenting the data, the six candidates will be referred to as Teacher A, B, C and D while the remaining two candidates will be known as Principal X and Inspector Y. The results for the core themes that formed the interviews will now be given in chronological order.

4.2 The challenges of teaching Irish dialects in schools

The sample had varying opinions on what they felt was the greatest challenge, for them, in teaching Irish as or through a dialect. There were those who felt the use of dialects was secondary to using Standard Irish and could even be perceived negatively:

''You do tone it down quite a bit … my Irish wouldn't be as strong here as it would be if I was working in a school at home … you don't want to come across too strong'' (Teacher A).

''There's another more fundamental problem … it would be counterproductive … and frustrate people even more when you have a more fundamental attitudinal issue'' (Inspector Y).

For two out of six of the sample, the issue of dialects was not relevant as they taught in Standard Irish, even though they identified themselves as dialect speakers,

''They [The children] are not coming to you with *Gaeilge* … so you're not dealing with a dialect as such'' (Teacher B).

However, Teacher B admitted that ''it kind of creeps in without you knowing it'' but she was often conscious of the grammatical accuracy of her native Irish.

For one teacher, who had worked in both Gaeltacht and Gaelscolaíocht, acquiring adequate resources for specific dialects was a major challenge:

''We use some Irish books for the senior classes … however those Irish books are really for adult readers and some of the themes might be unsuitable'' (Teacher C).

She also highlighted that Irish was declining in the Gaeltacht and this, coupled with borrowings from English, was undermining the dialects themselves.

The wide variety of dialects was the biggest challenge for one teacher. If infants were accustomed to one dialect, it was very difficult for them to understand another dialect until they were older. This was also referred to by another candidate, who indicated that it was difficult to teach multiple dialects as he believed that:

''depending on the teacher they had in Junior Infants that was the accent they picked up and that was the accent they kept through the school'' (Principal X).

4.3 Teachers' Perception of the *Séideán Sí* Program

There were very mixed opinions of the *Séideán Sí* program. Two of the teachers rated it very positively as it catered for each dialect and was suitable for Irish medium education: ''I think it's terrific'' (Principal X), ''It's fantastic … I've a very high opinion of it'' (Teacher D).

However, three current teachers had reservations with the program. One had tried it in a Dublin Gaelscoil ''but it just didn't work ... it was too difficult.'' (Teacher A). There was a consensus among four of the interviewees, including Principal X who praised *Séideán Sí* that it was more suitable for Gaeltacht schools than in Gaelscoileanna outside of the Gealtacht: ''It's designed, I feel, for the Gaeltacht situation'' (Teacher B). Inspector Y believed that advocating a dialect program was ''a distraction'' from the main task of creating an Irish speaking community in Gaelscoileanna.

Teacher B expressed concern that ''something is lost along the way'', referring to a specific phonics element in the program. The same teacher considered it to be the most suitable program for Gaelscolaíocht as the others were ''dumbed down''.

The greatest concern regarding *Séideán Sí* that emerged was the class readers. Teachers B and C regarded the books as not challenging enough:

''Some of the themes, especially for the senior classes, are a bit silly'' (Teacher C).

Teacher C gave an example of a school in the Gaeltacht which used articles from newspapers such as *Foinse* as a replacement for the *Séideán Sí* readers. Conversely, Teacher A pointed out that the readers were the only aspect of the program that her school had continued to use and Principal X thought the readers were too difficult for use in Gaelscoileanna.

4.4 Resources for teaching Irish and the wider Curriculum using Irish Dialects

There was unanimous agreement that there was a general lack of resources, not only for teaching through the medium of dialects, but for the Irish language in general.

Five of the six people interviewed deemed the translations of textbooks to be too literal and complex. Religion and history books were rendered incomprehensible among teachers as well as pupils:

''I had to read out of the Alive O book … I didn't understand it, never mind expect the children to understand it'' (Teacher C).

''They translated stuff almost word for word … there were religions books which were unintelligible … it was ridiculous'' (Principal X).

''Sometimes, I've got the impression that the translations are rather stilted and lack a bit of flow'' (Inspector Y).

Teacher B stated that there have been problems with translations for decades and the poor translations were a hindrance for teachers: ''you lose the whole feel for a subject when a translation is wrong, the fun goes out of it''.

Two teachers suggested that the reason for the literal translations was due to copyright issues.

Aside from the textbooks, three candidates identified a lack of modern, child centred resources in Irish:

''All these songs that you already know that have been re-recorded for the last fifty years.'' (Teacher C)

''The resources are not there to back up teaching through Irish in general, especially in IT.'' (Teacher D)

All of the candidates were of the opinion that resources for subjects such as Maths and Science were not available for dialects:

''As far as other subjects go, there's no emphasis on dialect, it's purely just standard Irish … it's a pity … it loses the richness of Irish.'' (Teacher D)

''There needs to be a publishing house in each province that is solely responsible for each dialect.'' (Teacher C)

Four of the contributors in the sample highlighted an exception to the lack of available resources in the dialects. The work of Saint Mary's University College in Belfast in providing resources for Ulster Irish throughout the curriculum received high praise:

''There actually isn't any quite like it in the country [Republic of Ireland].'' (Teacher C)

''A lot of money and resources have been poured into Irish in the North, more so than here, and the results of this are clearly visible in the wealth of material that's now available … put out in Ulster Irish more than in any other Irish'' (Principal X).

4.5 The role of the Irish language Curriculum in teaching and promoting dialects

Three members of the sample were satisfied that the curriculum was challenging enough for Irish medium education in both Gaeltacht and Gaelscoileanna and adequately catered for dialects: ''I would not find any great fault with the curriculum, I think the curriculum is fine.'' (Principal X)

Inspector Y felt that the curriculum was broad enough to accommodate dialects: ''there's nothing stopping teachers … stretching it out.'' However he did feel that certain elements such as *Saibhreas na Cainte* ''needs to be emphasised more''.

Teachers C expressed general satisfaction with the curriculum but believed the resources did not always match the age or ability of the pupils, in either Irish or English speaking schools:

''The resources aren't there to teach it adequately. Take the *Bun go Barr* books … in fifth class you're still doing *Mo Shiopa Peataí!* … really like, when they're at that age they should be learning how to converse in Irish and actually learning skills that they're going to use in their day to day lives … not learning about *coinín* and *éan*.'' (Teacher C)

Teacher D concurred that ''The Irish reading in particular is a bit (pause) can be a bit repetitive … in other books [besides *Séideán Sí*] … the reading just isn't challenging enough for a 5th and 6th class level … there needs to be more of an emphasis on writing.''

Teacher B was the most critical of the curriculum:''It's very *lug ar lag* [weak] … you constantly are adding … the ordinary [English speaking] school would be very lacking in *Saibhreas na Gaeilge.''*

Four of the members emphasised that it was the teacher's responsibility to tailor the curriculum for the particular needs of the class:

''The teacher is responsible for choosing resources for the class and the *Feidhmeanna Teanga* which – most teachers don't actually know where it is in the curriculum … the children should know their *Feidhmeanna Teanga …* there's only twenty *Feidhmenna Teanga* to learn every year, and that is a major issue.'' (Teacher C)

''If it [Irish] was taught properly, it would be'' [sufficiently challenging]. (Principal X)

4.6 Teachers' own standards of Irish

While five interviewees referred to ''fantastic'' (Teacher B and Inspector Y) teachers who work in Gaelscoileanna, there was a unanimous belief among the sample that some teachers' standard of Irish, in particular in English speaking schools, was ''very low'' (Teacher D) ''a disgrace'' (Principal X) and ''weak to very weak'' (Inspector Y).

Teachers B, C and D felt that personal confidence was an issue for some teachers:

''I think that there are a lot of teachers who are qualified who aren't confident in their own speaking of the Irish language, never mind going in and try and teach a different dialect to what they've already known and learnt.'' (Teacher C)

Four people believed that one of the causes for poor standards of Irish among some teachers was the negative attitude they held towards the language:

''Some teachers do have a negative attitude towards Irish and that kind of leads to an 'I'm not going to bother' attitude … it's so disheartening to see.'' (Teacher D)

''Do they really believe this is worth teaching … that's going to come across.'' (Inspector Y).

Teacher C and Inspector Y believed the problem lay in standards expected for entering teacher training:

''I think there needs to be a major upheaval in the expectancy of teachers' Irish and that simply (pause) a C in Honours Irish just isn't good enough.'' (Teacher C)

Principal X and Inspector Y were particularly scathing of standards among some teachers:

''I think it's an absolute disgrace … that people are put teaching children Irish and if I come and knock on their door and say, *'conas atá tú? Caidé a d'ith tú don bhricfeasta ar maidin?* A ha? Ya what? This happens!'' (Principal X)

''Many young teachers, unfortunately, really cannot speak Irish, they can hardly put two sentences together.'' (Inspector Y)

In spite of this, the standard of Irish among teachers working in Irish speaking schools was considered ''quite high'' (Teacher A) among five of the six questioned. There was recognition that:

''the teachers who are dedicated to Irish, are very dedicated to Irish and I have seen the most heart-warming and wonderful lessons being taught by young teachers.'' (Inspector Y)

Chapter Five: Analysis and Discussion of Data

5.1 Introduction

These results will now be discussed and analysed in more detail. The main themes and topics that arose from the research will be discussed in the same chronological order.

5.2 The challenges of teaching Irish dialects in primary schools

The data illustrate that there are a number of challenges facing teachers regarding the use of dialects in schools. In Gaelscoileanna outside of the Gaeltacht, children ''are coming to you from a neutral background'' (Teacher B) meaning they are English speaking and teachers in these settings must start from scratch and teach accessible Irish. As Teacher D rightly pointed out, teachers often have a variety of dialects which can vary greatly from each other. If children are exposed to one form of dialect at infant level, they could find it difficult to learn or understand other dialects.

Teacher A referred to the fact that the teaching staff in the school were from the three main dialect areas and it was necessary therefore to speak a general standard when teaching: ''you don't want to confuse them''.

Inspector Y's opinion that the dialects are almost a hindrance due to a bigger problem with attitude and standards highlights the precarious position of the Irish language itself, as depicted in Ní Chonchúir's (2012) study. If the basic structure of Irish such as grammar and syntax is in decline, well then dialects themselves are surely threatened. The decline of Irish

in the Gaeltacht was mentioned by Teachers A and C: ''the standard of Irish has fallen in Gaeltacht areas'' (Teacher C).

Teacher C gave an example of people adding ''áil and áilte'' to English words which confirms Ó Giollagáin and Mac Donnacha's (2008) research that *Béarlachas* is weakening the core dialect communities themselves. One can envisage that if this pattern continues, it will become increasing difficult to use or teach a dialect in schools and preservation of the dialect will become more difficult.

The fact that two of the teachers never taught in their own dialect and that another had to ''calm it down a bit'' (Teacher A) is indicative of the established position of Standard Irish, in Dublin Gaelscoileanna at least. While there are legitimate reasons for introducing a uniform standard, discouraging the use of dialects could have implications in terms of acquiring resources. For example, s such as *Séideán Sí* are designed exclusively for Gaeloideachas. However, it is the only such available for use in Gaelscoileanna as others are designed for English medium schools. This was the situation in Teacher A's school, where 3rd class used the 4th class *Sin É!* textbook which is normally used in English speaking schools. Had the school chosen one dialect from the *Séideán Sí* instead of trying all three at once, as Teacher A insinuated, perhaps they would not have had ''to abandon it completely''. Teacher B used tapes in the Munster dialect and the children had become accustomed to it.

The issue of resources also featured as a significant challenge and is discussed later.

5.3 Teachers' Perception of the Séideán Sí Program and the use of dialects in the Irish Curriculum

There was a wide variation of opinion on the *Séideán Sí* program centred predominantly on its suitability for Gaeltacht schools or Gaelscoileanna in the rest of Ireland. While the sample was satisfied with the oral elements, issues regarding reading and writing were mentioned, especially for Gaeltacht and senior classes:

''When they're in 5th and 6th class you are ultimately preparing them for secondary school … I think people forget that … and then you're expected to write an A4 page in Irish … for reading and writing, I think it [*Séideán* Sí] needs to be a little bit more challenging.''

The issue of the reading materials corresponds with Nic Cionnaith's (2012) research in which novels aimed at Irish speaking children and teenagers were not considered age or ability appropriate or written in a stimulating dialectic form. Three teachers who worked in senior classes felt that the *Séideán Sí* readers were not challenging enough but Principal X believed they were too difficult for Gaelscoileanna. It could be argued that the idea of marrying a programme for Gaeltacht schools and Gaelscoileanna needs to be revised and a separate one developed for each. However, all three teachers work in Dublin Gaelscoileanna, using a purely dialectic programmeme. Teacher A, who tried the *Séideán Sí* but later abandoned it, continued to use the readers in class.

It is clear that the readers need to be revised for senior students in particular and more age appropriate language and themes incorporated. Children should be able to access books and novels that are challenging enough to sustain their interest and be of an equivalent level with books in English. The language used in *Séideán Sí* readers should illustrate

progression of syntax, style and *saibhreas* in the three dialects. Teachers B, C, and D felt that children in Gaelscoileanna were more than capable of dealing with dialects and that the issue was not too much complexity in language but that "they'll race through stuff." (Teacher B) Evidently, the education system and writers of textbooks need to reflect on who they are producing these books for. Children who speak Irish as their first language or who are immersed in the language at school should expect to be able to read books that reflect that reality and not underestimate their ability simply because they speak a minority language.

While Principal X and Inspector Y held the view that *Séideán Sí* was more suitable for Gaeltacht schools, there is no reason why a Gaelscoil could not chose one dialect to focus on in the junior classes, given that materials are provided in each, and then gradually introduce other dialects as the children become more confident and fluent.

Two teachers drew attention to the peculiar situation of the lack of a phonics component in the *Séideán Sí*. The schools in question used a Northern Irish based programme that was originally intended for use in schools in that jurisdiction which generally use Ulster Irish. This means there are currently no programmes available for Munster or Connacht dialects and that children whose native language is Irish are being denied to right to a comprehensive programme that teaches the very basic elements of their language.

The Curriculum itself was broadly commended. However, the issue of *Saibhreas* was mentioned by three candidates, which suggests that it may not emphasised enough in the curriculum or that teachers themselves don't have the richness in the language to teach it. Teacher B alluded to this: "as older teachers are retiring that – it's very difficult to get that feel for Gaeilge back into things." This implies that even in Gaelscoileanna, teachers' may

not have the degree of fluency as was found in previous generations and again confirms the perception of weakening Irish in Nic Cionnaith's (2012) study.

The issue of the *Feidhmeanna Teanga*: ''most teachers don't know where it is in the curriculum'' (Teacher C) draws to attention the need for teacher's to meet their objectives in Irish like in other subjects. The curriculum is quite specific on what's expected for each class and this point suggests that ultimately one cannot lay fault with the curriculum. As four interviewees pointed out, teachers have a responsibility to fulfil their objectives as set out in the curriculum, even if a lack of resources is an issue: ''it's what schools and teachers make of it'' (Inspector Y).

5.4 Resources for Teaching Dialects

There were unexpected yet positive results in relation to the issue of resources, specifically the growth of resources in the Ulster dialect by Coláiste Mhuire, Belfast. However, the sample's agreement on the need for more specific resources for teaching both dialects and Irish in general in indicative of the problems facing teachers in Irish medium schools.

The need for a proper phonics programme for Gaeloideachas, as mentioned by two teachers, illustrates that Government and the DES have not sought to resource Irish in parity to English. Teachers A and B had to use a Northern Irish phonics programme, even though this was based exclusively on the Ulster dialect.

While four candidates emphasised that resources had improved from a very low base, and anticipated further improvement in the future, the fact that they frequently referred favourably to Northern Ireland is a reflection on the the money, resources, time and effort

that have been invested in promoting Irish there. The four interviewees said the Ulster dialect was the only one that was adequately accommodated for in all subjects and that was due to the work of Coláiste Mhuire in Belfast.

With the exception of *Séideán Sí,* there are no resources available in the Republic for teaching Irish as a dialect and for other subjects the language is standardised to the degree that it's ''unintelligible'' (Principal X). The issue of literal translations of original English textbooks such as *Alive O/Beo go Deo* confirms the feelings of exasperation among teachers and pupils in the studies conducted by Ní Chonchúir (2012) and Nic Cionnaith (2012).

The issue of poorly translated books is simply not acceptable for either teachers or pupils. That teachers have to translate books that parents must pay for, or worse still use the English text and discuss the topic in Irish is farcical and contradicts the whole purpose of *Oideachas trí mheán na Gaeilge.* Not only does it undermine dialects, it has a negative impact on students' attitude to Irish if they cannot understand what is written in textbooks and it makes the job of teaching and learning much harder, as expressed by Teachers B, C and D. Children are entitled to have resources ''that are clearly and easily read and understood … and are flowing naturally.'' (Inspector Y) Resources should supplement their learning, not hinder it. It is ironic that copyright is the cause of poor translations when teachers, parents and pupils believe ''it's been completely lost in translation.'' (Teacher D) The establishment of a publishing house for each dialect would go some way towards resolving the issue as it would establish the dialects as acceptable to learn and use and would enhance teaching and learning.

5.5 Teachers' Standards of Irish

The researcher had expected the sample to refer to poor standards of Irish among some teachers. However, the general opinion that standards were ''a disgrace'' (Principal X) is a serious cause for concern.

It has gone from a situation in the 1960's when: ''it would be expected of teachers to be fluent in Irish'' to the present situation where ''sadly, in a general sense, there has been a deterioration in the standard of Irish among teachers.'' (Inspector Y) This is an indictment on the entire education system. It is sobering to believe that teachers can emerge from seventeen years of learning Irish at first, second and third level and be unable to understand a principal speaking Irish on a speaker system, as Principal X has himself witnessed among colleagues who came knocking on his door to find out what the principal had said.

With the new Irish curriculum at second level, which has a greater focus on oral Irish, one would hope that this will ameliorate the standard of Irish among prospective teachers. However, Teacher C could be correct in saying that a C grade at higher level is not a satisfactory level for teachers and perhaps it is time to evaluate this.

The ''minority'' (Principal X) of teachers who were identified as ''passionate about the language'' (Principal X) confirms that ''teachers in Irish medium schools are generally quite dedicated to the language.''(Inspector Y) Five candidates recognised that teachers in Irish medium schools had a high standard of Irish and instilled a love of Irish language and culture in pupils.

Yet, Teacher B described how she is conscious of her own native Irish: ''you have to think about it.'' Grammatical accuracy as espoused in Standard Irish can vary with local varieties

as seen in Wagner's (1958) linguistic maps. These localisms are then perceived as poor Irish and the example above reinforces Wardhaugh's (1992) view that local variations of grammar and syntax are often stigmatised.

Four of the interviewees felt that teachers' own attitude to Irish had an impact on how they taught the language and this is something that may need to be addressed at third level: ''I wonder … how much is there in the education of teachers, in giving them a chance to think 'why am I teaching Irish, what's the value of it?'' (Inspector Y) From the researcher's experience, this reflection on the purpose and value of teaching Irish does not take place in teacher education. If some teachers have a negative attitude towards Irish prior to entering third level and Irish is imposed on them without debate, inevitably these attitudes will continue and manifest in an indifferent or even hostile attitude to teaching Irish.

Nevertheless, Irish is a compulsory subject and teachers have a duty to teach it to the best of their ability and with the same attitude as would be expected in teaching other subjects. As Teacher B rightly stated, if teachers have weak Irish, it is their duty to up-skill and improve their ability. It is a matter of professional development, ''a sacred obligation'' (Principal X) A negative attitude, whether the teacher has good Irish or not, will impact on the pupils and ultimately it is the children who will suffer: ''those kids are not getting the maximum benefit from education and you are not doing your job properly, you might as well leave the profession.'' (Teacher D) In the case of Gaeltacht schools, teachers have an added obligation to master the local dialect and ensure, to the best of their ability, that the children's native Irish is recognised, cherished and maintained in the learning dynamic of the school.

5.6 Limitations of the Research

The researcher is mindful that the research is of a small scale and is not reflective of the entire teaching profession. The interviewees do or have worked in Irish medium education and are all fluent in Irish which therefore might influence their attitude to teachers in English speaking schools and their attitudes to the status of Irish both within education and nationally. There was gender bias in that the teachers were female while the higher status professions of principal and inspector were male.

Chapter Six: Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Findings

There were many challenges mentioned by the sample regarding teaching through dialects but the principal ones highlighted were:

- The lack of appropriate resources for teaching both Irish and other subjects in the dialects

- The pressure for teachers to prioritise teaching and speaking standard Irish in the classroom

- The declining standard of Irish among students in the Gaeltacht and those pupils who enter Gaelscoileanna with no fluency or competency in the language

- The difficulties facing children in being exposed to multiple dialects, particularly at infant level.

The respondents requested the need for more age appropriate books for children in the Irish dialects that conveyed progression and were written in clear, accessible language that was challenging enough to maintain their interest. There was consensus that there was little or no dialectic resources in subjects other than Irish save for books and resources in Northern Ireland. Attention was drawn to the lack of an appropriate phonics programme for each of the dialects. Teachers wanted translations of books from English to Irish to be accurate yet understandable, with consideration for the rhythm and syntax of Irish. More modern resources for teaching Irish dialects were stressed in particular in the areas of Music and IT.

The curriculum was seen as adequate enough in encouraging the use of dialects, however, it was found that there was a need to emphasise *Saibhreas* and that resources should match the *Feidhmeanna Teanga* in terms of objectives and progression, as outlined in the curriculum. There was a strong emphasis on the responsibility of the teacher is acquiring adequate resources to suit the ability of the class and in adapting the curriculum for teaching and encouraging dialects in the classroom.

There was recognition that teachers' attitudes to Irish could contribute to their style of teaching. Poor standards of Irish among many teachers were underlined as a significant problem and the necessity to review teacher training and entry requirements for education courses was expressed. Teachers who worked in Gaeloideachas were generally capable and enthusiastic teachers of Irish and Irish dialects.

6.2 Key Findings

- There are few if any resources available in the Republic in dialect format for subjects other than Irish.

- The language and themes of the *Séideán Sí* readers are not always age or ability appropriate for first language Irish speaking children, particularly at the senior level.

- There are no phonic programmes available for Munster or Connacht dialects.

- The curriculum does not explicitly emphasise the importance of developing *Saibhreas* in Irish, nor does it explicitly promote the use of dialects. However, the curriculum is broad enough to accommodate the use and promotion of dialects and it is the teacher's responsibility to adapt the curriculum for the class.

- Books translated from English to Irish are often too literal and the translations are unintelligible for both teachers and pupils.

- Teachers' attitudes to Irish, both positive and negative, have a significant impact on how they teach the language and many teachers have very poor standards of spoken Irish.

- Entry requirements in Irish for prospective teachers should be revised reviewed and third level institutes need to address the purpose of teaching and learning Irish in teacher training.

6.3 Recommendations

- A publisher should be established for each dialect with the purpose of producing books, DVDs, and other resources for all subjects in Gaeloideachas. Provision should be made to include recordings from all Gaeltacht regions.

- A comprehensive phonics programme needs to be developed for the Munster and Connacht dialects.

- Issues of copyright in relation to the translation of books need to be resolved and books must be written in an age and ability appropriate style that is comprehensible for teachers and pupils.

- Entry requirements for prospective teachers need to be revised upwards from the current 'C' grade in the Leaving Certificate and teacher training should incorporate discussion on the purpose and value of teaching and learning Irish.

6.4 Implications of the Research

The researcher anticipates that adequate funding needs to be allocated towards Irish with the aim of developing resources for all subjects in each dialect. While the curriculum is largely adequate for ensuring the transmission and maintenance of dialects, a complete phonics programme should be developed for each dialect. All books intended for use in Gaeloideachas ought to be written in clear, intelligible Irish and should illustrate progression in syntax and richness of language. This would prove very beneficial in ameliorating the position of dialects in the curriculum. Entry requirements for prospective teachers ought to be revised upwards and initial teacher education incorporate would benefit from a discussion and examination component on the purpose of teaching and learning Irish in schools.

6.5 Suggestions for further Research

- How has targeted resourcing in Irish medium education promoted the use of Ulster Irish in Northern Ireland?

- Students' attitudes to the *Séideán Sí* programme in the Gaeltacht/Gaelscoileanna.

- Parental attitudes to teachers' Irish in the Gaeltacht.

- The development of fluency in Irish dialects in Gaelscoileanna

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Appendices

A Phríomhoide, a chara,

Is mise Lorcán Owens agus tá mé i mo scoláire sa Cheathrú Bliain in Institiúid Oideachais Marino. Táim ag scríobh chugat maidir le taighde a bheas ar siúl agam mar chuid den Chéim Onórach. Is í aidhm an tráchtais ná cé hiad na dúshláin is mó maidir le teagasc agus caomhnú na gcanúintí Gaeilge ins an gCuraclam caighdeánach bunscolaíochta?

Ba mhaith liom agallamh a chur le múinteoirí a bhfuil Gaeilge ó dhúchas acu agus atá ag obair nó ag plé leis an nGaeloideachas. Dá mbeadh múinteoir nó múinteoirí sásta glacadh leis an agallamh, ba mhaith liom agallamh a chur leo. Bheadh aimnmeacha agus sonraí pearsanta na n-iarrathóirí coinnithe faoi cheilt agus d'fhéadfadh le éinne a ghlac páirt sna hagallaimh éirí as an taighde ag am ar bith, gan cúis ar bith dá mba mhian leo.

Tá ocht gceist san agallamh agus táthar ag súil go mairfidh sé daichead nóiméad ar an mhéad.

Seo mo chuid sonraí teagmhála: Guthán – 0872130714 agus Ríomhphost – lowens10@momail.mie.ie. Má tá aon cheist agat, bheinn sásta labhairt faoi agus muna bhfuil tú fein nó na múinteoirí sásta a bheith páirteach, tabhair neamhaird ar an litir seo agus tabharfaidh mé faoi deara nach mian leat páirt a ghlacadh.

Go raibh maith agat as ucht na litreach seo a léamh.

Is mise le meas,

Lorcán Owens.

Interview Questions

1. What is the greatest challenge in teaching Irish as a dialect as opposed to teaching Standard Irish?
2. Are there any other challenges?
3. What is your opinion of the *Séideán Sí* program?
4. Does it adequately cater for each dialect?
5. Are there enough/adequate resources for teaching Irish in the dialects?
6. Are other textbooks/ resources in subjects such as Maths or History appropriate/ catered towards each dialect?
7. Is the Irish language curriculum challenging enough for Irish medium education?
8. Do you believe teachers' own standard of Irish is adequate for teaching Irish or Irish dialects?
9. Do you believe teachers' attitude to Irish or dialects impacts on their teaching style?