An analysis of variation in primary pupil attitudes to Gaeilge in Growing Up in Ireland study

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Background to the Study
What is the Growing Up in Ireland Study?

- National longitudinal study of children
- Most significant of its kind in Ireland
- The first wave of the project collected data on 11,000 children aged nine months and their parents (the Infant Cohort) and 8,500 children aged nine years (the Child Cohort), their parents, teachers and carers.
- Aim of study is to paint a full picture of children in Ireland and how they are developing in the current social, economic and cultural environment.
- This information will be used to assist in policy formation and in the provision of services which will ensure all children will have the best possible start in life.

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Trinity College Dublin
Aims

Do you like Irish? Always, Sometimes, Never

- Explicit focus on Gaeilge in first wave of 9 year-old cohort GUI data

- Factors that impact on engagement with Gaeilge over and above general engagement with schooling
Language Learning: Attitudes and Attainment

- Attitude: A set of beliefs in relation to target language cultures and learner’s own culture (Brown, 2007).

- Causal relationship? Does a positive attitude towards language learning brings successful learning outcomes or if success in language learning engenders positive attitudes? (Lightbown & Spada, 2006)

- High levels of motivation can compensate for “considerable deficiencies both in one’s language aptitude and learning conditions” (Dörnyei, 1998, p. 117)
Findings from McCoy et al. (2012)

Factors impacting on attitude to Gaeilge

- Study child gender
- Mother’s education
- Household type
- Special Educational Need
- Gender mix of school
- Language medium of school
Initial Expectations

- Would the linguistic or cultural background of the child impact on their engagement with Irish?
- Would the literacy habits of the child impact on engagement with Irish?
- Would teacher’s teaching and assessment style impact on engagement?
- Would the principal’s attitude to Irish in the school impact?
Data Analysis
Do you like Irish?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you like Irish?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always like it</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes like it</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never like it</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Positively disposed: 74%
Excess disengagement with Gaeilge compared to other core subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do you think about school?</th>
<th>Do you like Irish?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always like it</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes like it</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never like it</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 36% of students have a less favourable attitude to Irish compared to School
- The corresponding Stat. for Maths & Reading are 17% and 9% respectively
Statistical Model

- Ordinal logistic regression with a cumulative logits link function (Agresti, 2010).
- Corrected for general school engagement in order to focus on differences in engagement with Irish among otherwise 'similar' students – i.e. include other engagement measures as factors in the model.
- Looked at a wide selection of predictors at the child, teacher & school levels.
- Model building using AIC and LRTs and investigated the possibility of two-way interactions among factors.
- Included random effects at the teacher and school levels to model multilevel aspect – this made a considerable difference.
- Interpretation of random effects as modelling 'latent factors'.
- Software: Ordinal package (R) & Proc Glimmix (SAS)
### Factors at Child Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational engagement</th>
<th>school, teacher, maths, reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading behaviour/literacy</td>
<td>favourite pastime, reads with parents, hours reading for pleasure, use of computer, Drumcondra test, parents assessment of child's reading ability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achievement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other behaviours</td>
<td>time on computer, aggregate total screen time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household variables</td>
<td>Socio-economic status, household type, income, education of mother, siblings, multilingualism, multiculturalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Gender, order within siblings, resource hours for child in school, special needs of child</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


## Factors at Teacher Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No. of years teaching</th>
<th>Teaching qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Further qualifications</td>
<td>Multiclass classroom</td>
<td>In-service (CPD) Days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours spent on Irish teaching per week</td>
<td>Teaching style</td>
<td>Assessment style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher stress in &amp; teacher satisfaction with job</td>
<td>Teachers’ feeling of control over subjects etc.</td>
<td>Teachers feeling’s about pupil discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ feelings about happiness of students</td>
<td>Teachers’ feelings about happiness of teachers in their school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Factors at School Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>School gender mix</th>
<th>DEIS status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patronage</td>
<td>Language medium of instruction</td>
<td>Is Irish important to the school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of admin staff (FTE)</td>
<td>School size</td>
<td>Principals’ job stress &amp; satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals’ assessment of teachers’ job satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results
## Results: Child level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>Confidence Interval 95%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Sometimes/Always</td>
<td>2.3***</td>
<td>2.1, 2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Sometimes/Always</td>
<td>1.6***</td>
<td>1.4, 1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Sometimes/Always</td>
<td>1.7***</td>
<td>1.6, 1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>Never/Always</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.9, 1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- girls schools</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.4**</td>
<td>1.5, 3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- resource hours</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.9**</td>
<td>1.2, 3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Odds Ratio</td>
<td>Confidence Interval 95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multilingualism</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home language</td>
<td>English / +Irish</td>
<td>1.6***</td>
<td>1.4, 1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English / +Other</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.8, 1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English / +Irish +Other</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.6, 1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literacy engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reads for pleasure</td>
<td>less than weekly / Daily</td>
<td>1.4***</td>
<td>1.2, 1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reads with parents</td>
<td>No / Yes</td>
<td>1.1**</td>
<td>1.0, 1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screen-time</td>
<td>3 or more hours / Less than 1</td>
<td>1.3***</td>
<td>1.2, 1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special needs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource hours</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>1.9**</td>
<td>1.5, 2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-never like maths</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>1.9*</td>
<td>1.2, 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- always like maths</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.9, 1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Results: School level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>Confidence Interval 95%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School language medium</td>
<td>English / Gaelscoil</td>
<td>3.3***</td>
<td>2.6, 4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English / Gaeltacht</td>
<td>1.9**</td>
<td>1.2, 2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender mix (sometimes likes maths)</td>
<td>Boys / Coed</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.0, 1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls / Coed</td>
<td>1.3*</td>
<td>1, 1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patronage</td>
<td>Other / Catholic</td>
<td>1.5***</td>
<td>1.2, 1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Rural / Urban</td>
<td>1.1*</td>
<td>1, 1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-class teaching</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>1.2*</td>
<td>1, 1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB. No other Teacher level factors were significant.
## Results: Random Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>80% interval for Random Effects ORs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Random Effects*</td>
<td>0.6, 1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Random Effects ***</td>
<td>0.6, 1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined Random Effects</td>
<td>0.5, 2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NB:** Random effects stayed significant and with only slightly attenuated effect sizes with all predictors included in model.
Key Findings and Discussion
Key Findings

- 74% of students like Gaeilge always or sometimes

- Disproportionate disengagement with Irish compared to general engagement, compared with Maths and Reading

- What are the relevant factors?
  - Engagement with reading
  - Urban / Rural differences
  - Teacher and School Random Effects
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Children’s attitude to Gaeilge
Twenty-Class Study, Harris and Murtagh, 1999:

- To investigate primary school language teaching and learning objectives (apart from language proficiency)
  (i) to develop a positive attitude to Irish and speaking Irish
  (ii) to foster a desire to continue to study the language
  (iii) to develop an interest in learning other languages

- **Attitude to learning Irish: % agreeing strongly/slightly**
  - I really enjoy learning Irish: 48%
  - I love learning Irish: 42%
  - I want to learn as much Irish as possible: 50%
Children’s attitude to Gaeilge

- NCCA Review of Primary Curriculum found that the introduction of the 1999 curriculum for Irish had led to an increase in the children’s enjoyment of lessons and an increased sense of pride in the Irish language.

- The review also identified some problems with language production due to an imbalance between communicative and analytical language activities.

- NCCA (2008)
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Engagement with reading

- Gaeilge at early primary is largely oral
- Engagement with reading impacts engagement with Irish
- Transferable, cross-linguistic skills: metalinguistic awareness
- Common Underlying Proficiency: Developing literacy skills in one language supports literacy skills in another language (Cummins and Ó Duibhir, 2012)

- Policy Implication: Valuing languages at primary
Key Findings

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Urban / Rural Divide

- Children in urban areas more positively disposed towards Irish

- More diverse populations?
  - But no effect of community background

- Vitality of urban Irish speaking communities? (Ó Broin, 2013)

- Policy Implication: 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language - focus on urban development plans (Government of Ireland, 2010)
Key Findings

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- What are the relevant factors?
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“Irish depends on the attitudes, efforts and commitment of individual schools and teachers in a way that other subjects do not.”

(Harris, 2007, pp.37-38)
“By the same token, changes in teachers’ attitudes, motivation, self-esteem, or professional satisfaction in teaching are also of greater significance in the case of Irish.”

(Harris, 2007, pp.37-38)
Motivation & The L2 Classroom

- Framework of L2 motivation (Dörnyei, 1994):
  L2 classroom featured as a definitive level

- Components of Motivational L2 Teaching Practice
  (Dörnyei, 2010, p.112)

  - Creating the basic motivational conditions
  - Encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation
  - Generating initial motivation
  - Maintaining and protecting motivation
Teaching Context for Gaeilge

- The absence of a functional context impacting on language use and motivation (Murtagh, 2007).

- Irish tends to be ‘sealed off’ in English-medium schools which makes it “difficult for both teachers and pupils to identify an immediate goal or motivation outside school for learning to speak the language in the classroom” (Harris, 2008, p.63)

- Special role of teacher in teaching students Irish in English medium schools: “the use of Irish does not easily extend beyond the Irish slot without the special effort of the teacher” (Harris, 2008, p.63)
Teacher Attitudes to Gaeilge

- Comparison of data from 1985 and 2002, Harris 2006

- Satisfaction derived from teaching Irish:
  - Satisfied: 80% - 55%: down 35%
  - Dissatisfied: 9% - 25%: up 16%

- What factors most affect teacher’s emphasis on Irish?
  - Teacher’s own outlook on Irish: 46% to 30%: down 16%
  - Official policy: 14% - 28%: up 14%
  - School policy: 7% - 13%: up 6%

- 76.6% of teachers said Irish proficiency declined in schools
Student Teacher Attitudes to Gaeilge

- Majority of student teachers showed positive attitude to Gaeilge (Ó Laoire, 2007)
- This is in line with previous research - CILAR 1975, Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1983, 1993.
- However, this appears to be a:

  “Passive stance rather than proactive attitude”
  p.181 Ó Laoire, 2007
Classroom Practice for Gaeilge

- The Chief Inspector’s Report 2010-12: Teaching of Irish in primary schools—findings notably less positive than for English or Mathematics
- Standard of Irish of teaching unsatisfactory in one fifth of lessons
- Quality of learning unsatisfactorily in almost one quarter of lessons

Recommendations: (i) use of a more communicative approach, (ii) use of Irish throughout the school, rich language input by teachers, and improved assessment of the subject
Teacher cognition and identity

- “What teachers think, know, believe and do” (Borg, 2003, p.81)

- “Complex interplay between the personal and the professional in teachers’ life-worlds” (Devine et al, 2013, p. 103)

- Possible to impact on beliefs and so practice at pre-service and in-service (Borg, 2011)
Policy implications

- **Focus on teacher attitude and cognition**

- **20 year Strategy:**
  - Revised initial teacher education programmes:
    - Revised entry requirements
    - Changing gaeltacht requirement
  - Teachers and schools
    - National centre for Irish-medium teacher professional development
    - Short cycle and on-line CPD options

- **National Language Policy:**
  - Currently excludes Gaeilge and Primary
Comparison to Wales

- The recent Welsh language revival has been attributed to two main factors:
  - Welsh being made a compulsory language in schools
  - The availability of Welsh language television

- The demand for education and services to be available through Welsh came from community, not government policy – link to Welsh identity
Comparison to Wales

"You can have as much legislation as you want, you can have as much policy as you want but unless you get in amongst the people and persuade them that the language is useful to them, there's no hope, I think."

Meirion Prys Jones
Key Findings

- Some improvements
- Very definite challenges
- Areas to focus: literacy and the teacher
References


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