

# An Exploratory Study into Home Minority Language Usage and Maintenance in Bilingual Primary School Children in Northern Ireland's growing Multicultural Community



Dr Andrew Fogarty

School of Social Sciences,  
Education and Social Work



## Introduction

The idea for this study came about following informal discussions with concerned culturally and linguistically diverse parents of primary school children living in Northern Ireland who were raising their children to be bilingual but had concerns about their children's home minority language attrition.

Unlike countries such as America, Australia and many EU member states, Northern Ireland in the past has had a low percentage of immigrants due to the conflict commonly referred to as 'The Troubles' (McDermott, 2008) and as noted by Mussano (2004), has left Northern Ireland ill prepared and without the relevant experience needed to deal with the rapid rise of ethnic diversity that it is now experiencing in this post conflict context.



## Rational for the study

The researcher wanted to investigate what home language maintenance techniques and methods were working and to what degree with the parents of different linguistic backgrounds in his local area.

## Methodology

Data was collected from parents and children through one-to-one semi-structured interviews and self completed language use charts then analysed using grounded theory.

Data generated in the study was then triangulated with data from a content analysis of children's picture books and compared with the academic literature.

## Findings

- All Parents see the advantages of bilingualism whilst the children interviewed were generally unaware of advantages of being bilingual
- Parents motivation to raise children to be bilingual is not being explained to children
- Perceived problems, myths and lay theories about bilingualism in local population and globally
- Children are uncomfortable speaking minority home language in public
- Children Want to fit in/blend in/ not stick out
- Pressure to conform in school classes and playground by only speaking the majority language (school language)
- No picture books that show minority home language retention or even mention the subject of the home language

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Children's picture books should be made available that cover the concept of being bilingual that can be read to the children in their own home language by their parents.

The benefits of bilingualism should be disseminated to all key stakeholders and professionals who work with children, highlighting common myths that are often in circulation that lack any scientific evidence.



Promote partnerships between the mainstream schools and the complementary schools allowing children to learn/re-learn their own home language in after school clubs.

These home language clubs should also be accessible to local monolingual children. All children should be given recognition in the form of a formal qualification if they have attained a certain proficiency in any language.

I Would like to thank my Ed.D TESOL supervisors Dr Caroline Linse and Dr Karen Kerr

School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, Queens University, Belfast

Contact details for Dr Andrew Fogarty:

Email: [afogarty03@qub.ac.uk](mailto:afogarty03@qub.ac.uk) or [a.fogarty@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:a.fogarty@ulster.ac.uk)

Phone: (44) 07588265865 [linkedin.com/in/andrew-fogarty-577162220](https://www.linkedin.com/in/andrew-fogarty-577162220)

항상 기뻐하라, 쉬지 말고 기도하라, 범사에 감사하라.

### References:

McDermott, P (2008) Acquisition, Loss or Multilingualism? Educational Planning for Speakers of Migrant Community Languages in Northern Ireland, *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 9:4, 483-500

Mussano, S. (2004) Citizenship education policies in Northern Ireland and the recognition of ethnic and racial diversity in the wake of new migration. *Migration Letters* 1 (1), 2-10.