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The Use of Plurilingual Strategies to Enhance Students' A1/A2 English Speaking Skills: Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract   The present study investigated the current status of language support provision for migrant children in Irish schools and the role of English as an Additional Language (henceforth EAL) teachers in this process. The focus was on the potential of plurilingual strategies in the EAL classroom. EAL teachers were interviewed, in relation to their attitudes to the use of L1, plurilingualism and the implementation of plurilingual pedagogies to enhance A1/A2 CEFR level speaking skills.A mixed methods approach was adopted involving a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews. Findings here have shown that plurilingualism was encouraged by more than half of the sample interviewed.The research showed the specific ways EAL teachers supported the use of L1 in the classroom, the ways in which they tried to break psychological barriers before teaching and the role of L1 in the creation of a low anxiety atmosphere for both the learners and the teachers. This study also reports on how teachers compared and contrasted L1 and L2 to enrich metacognition in the students' approach towards foreign languages and how teachers were able to use plurilingualism in the EAL classroom.

Keywords   plurilingualism, CEFR, English as an Additional Language, Speaking Skills

Purpose of the study

This research sought to explore the awareness of teachers of their students' communicative lifeworlds, and to reflect on their stance towards students' languages, in contexts, where the focus is learning English as an additional language.

The findings illustrate pedagogical practices which go to subvert the dominance of English-only structures, as well as demonstrating that teacher positioning, towards the use of first languages, is pivotal. It is also responsive to changes in student context, as well as to introduce new good practices, such as taking into consideration all the languages in the classroom, rather than focusing on one foreign language at a time (Slaughter & Cross, 2021).

Knowledge is virtually inseparable from the language that embodies it, therefore schools should be sensitive to the linguistic background of their students. For this reason, teachers need to be properly equipped to cope with multilingual classrooms and become efficient agents for developing the language of schooling. Systems of continuing professional development, for principals and other school staff, need to provide information that helps them to perform their roles in an appropriately supportive way (Little, 2010: 18).

The development of plurilingual and intercultural competence is one of the foundations of democratic co-existence. It plays an essential role in the management of diversity and allows every citizen in Europe to participate effectively in the national and transnational public arena. The integration of migrant pupils is most likely to succeed when it is underpinned by a language education policy explicitly associated with non-educational aspects of integration policy (Little, 2010).

Literature Review

The notion of multi-competence proposed by Cook (1999:1991) opened the way to an acceptance of the use of L1 in the classroom. It describes the development of the concept of 'multicompetence' as a result of the benefits of using both L1 and L2 in teaching L2. The bilingual person has one specific, complex and composite competence, one linguistic repertoire that does not consist of the sum of languages.

Piccardo (2019: 2) states that this competence has been acquired in and through the languages and cultures encountered in one's personal trajectory. Therefore, the core of plurilingualism is "learners and the development of their individual plurilingual repertoire, and not each specific language to be learnt." (Beacco etal, 2015: 23).

Cook recommends that teachers 'develop the systematic use of the L1 in the classroom alongside the L2 as an aid to learning and as a model for the world outside' (Sampson, 2012: 294). Another relevant fact is that learners' previous knowledge is embedded within them, thus bilingual speakers bring to the classroom their competence in L1 and, therefore, judging them against native speakers is inappropriate.

On the contrary, the monolingual approach, which consists in keeping the languages separated, is seen as unnatural and defined as "two solitudes" by Cummins (2007; 229).

The first serious discussion of the importance of L1 in second language teaching emerged during the year 2000 with Cummins. There is a relationship between the levels of competence achieved in a first language and the level of proficiency achieved in a second language. Therefore, if the L1 is highly developed, this will positively affect the L2 learning (Cummins, 2000). According to the author, the mutual influence of the languages is due to the existence of the so-called: Common Underlying Proficiency (henceforth, CUP). CUP is an integrated source of thought, irrespective of the language in which the bilingual/multilingual person is functioning.

The context: Ireland

Ireland has generally been more familiar with emigration than immigration. Alongside immigration from other EU countries, the state recently began issuing visas and work permits to citizens of non-EU countries, and immigration became a fact of daily life in Ireland. (Murtagh et. al 2012: 201). Schools need to make the curriculum accessible from the complex of knowledge and beliefs, experience and skills they have accumulated outside the classroom (Barnes, 2008). Migrant students are encouraged to support their learning in whatever way seems appropriate to them (Little, Kirwan: 2018). This approach turned out to be successful also because it reflected the principles of the Irish Primary curriculum (1999): *'the child is an active agent in his or her learning, its existing knowledge and experience form the basis for learning'* (Tormey, 2005).

Since 2006, in Post-Primary schools, the Junior Certificate Modern Languages syllabus makes several specific references to the importance of culture under its general educational aims. Similarly, at Senior Cycle, the general aims of the syllabus include: '*to equip learners with a broad acquaintance with the cultural, social and political complexities of the countries in which the target language is a normal medium of communication and thus to help raise their awareness of cultural, social and political diversity generally.*' (Post-Primary Intercultural Guidelines, 2006: 70).

Teachers should aim to achieve a wide and varied language programme with their students. Diversity of texts, materials and approaches is a necessary condition for achieving the desired variety of linguistic experience. (Junior Certificate English Syllabus p.5)

Data Collection

This study sought to explore the role of teachers' perceptions about the use of plurilingual strategies to enhance (CEFR) A1/A2 level English speaking skills. Data was gathered in the form of questionnaires and interviews for teachers in Primary, Post-Primary schools and Education and Training Board in Ireland. The comparison and contrast of these results from these sources, makes it possible to cross-check data to identify patterns in the awareness of plurilingualism. Survey and interview data are combined below to summarise participants' views in relation to issues of training and their views on current provision for pupils with EAL in schools.

This research seeks to address the following questions:

> 1) What are teachers' perspectives on the use of plurilingualism in the classroom?
>
> 2) How do teachers explore plurilingualism as a pedagogical tool?
>
> 3) What approaches do teachers use to exploit the plurilingual background of their students?

Initial questionnaires were sent via email to the Principals of the schools involved: six completed questionnaires were received. They provided an overall impression of the way plurilingualism is perceived by the teachers in the mainstream classes and their perception of its advantages and disadvantages. Following this initial information, meetings for interviews were agreed with the teachers, and five of them were interviewed for approximately 20 minutes. The format of the interview was structured but open to additional informal information.

The main focus of the interviews was the teachers' perception about the use of plurilingual strategies used to enhance (CEFR) A1/A2 level English speaking skills. The interviews were recorded and transcribed (audio and video). In order to provide an overview of the practices and impressions of all teachers participating in the implementation of the experiments for holistic multilingual education, key quotes were selected from the 31 interviews and focus groups. The collected data was analysed and compared, for similarities and differences, grouping items of significance in order to interpret them (Bell, 2005, p. 203). It will help achieve a holistic view of the research questions as well as agreement and differences between teachers' perspectives and beliefs.

Sampling Design

Prior to undertaking the investigation, ethical approval was obtained from the UCD Human Research Ethics Committee. Teachers and principals were also provided with the information sheets and consent forms.

An email questionnaire was distributed to a purposive sample of 252 schools: Primary, Post-Primary schools and Adult education centres LSTs in Dublin inner city and suburban schools. The questionnaire contained a mixed methodology of qualitative and quantitative questions on the use of online learning. 6 interviews and 6 questionnaires collected in various schools will provide an insight into the offerings of different schools and students' perception of these possibilities.

The most relevant criteria for selecting schools were related to the presence of the English Additional Language Department and teachers. Each school is equipped with an EAL department and each school has, at least, an EAL teacher. The study was carried out in 5 schools: except one Primary mainstream school, in County Mayo. One International School, two Post-Primary schools and one Adult Education Centre, are all located in Dublin.

The six schools will be named as S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6. The 5 teachers interviewed will be indicated as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5. By choosing a number of schools it is hoped to gain an 32 insight into different teachers profiles, a variety of nationalities, a varying range of approach to plurilingualism and, in this way, generate a general overview rather than

solely focusing on one school. The final sample was selected according to the response rate. It is representative of different social class backgrounds in urban settings provided with an EAL teacher. A mixed methods approach was adopted in the research study since it provided the opportunity to research the topic from different perspectives.

The qualitative interview consists of an anonymous questionnaire seeking information in relation to teachers' linguistic background and the benefits of this background in learning new languages. It also included organisation of the EAL department, teachers' perception about CEFR. It also inquired about the level of satisfaction in the materials used and teaching strategies adopted in the classroom. The qualitative interview included open-ended items at the end of the questionnaire elicited general comments in relation to language support provision in the school. Respondents were invited to participate in a follow-up semi-structured interview via online platforms (Zoom) or in person after compiling the questionnaire. Interviews have the advantage of a high degree of adaptability and ideas can be followed up, making them a suitable tool particularly for the investigation of motivation and perceived feelings (Bell, 2005, p. 157).

The quantitative questionnaire was composed of closed items including binary/multiple-choice items and Likert scales. It contained questions about teachers background, such as languages spoken, benefits of being polyglot, numbers of timetabled EAL hours and questions about plurilingualism, the CEFR and teaching practices in the classroom. Once the general questionnaire was received, 1 teacher from each school was interviewed on their perception of plurilingualism and how they use plurilingual strategies in the classroom. In total 5 interviews were conducted.

Results

Quantitative Data

Teachers were asked about:

1.   *Teachers' linguistic background;*
2.   *Teaching experience:*
3.   *EAL in the school*:
4.   *Plurilingualism in the classroom*:
5.   *Teacher's perception in the involvement of parents in the development of L1;*
6.   *The weakest skill among students;*
7.   Comfort in using L1 among students;
8.   Resources used to teach EAL

To gain an overview of the sample interviewed, teachers were asked about their linguistic background. All teachers, except one, speak a language other than English. The most common combination was English and Irish, one teacher spoke 4 languages, as shown in Figure 1.
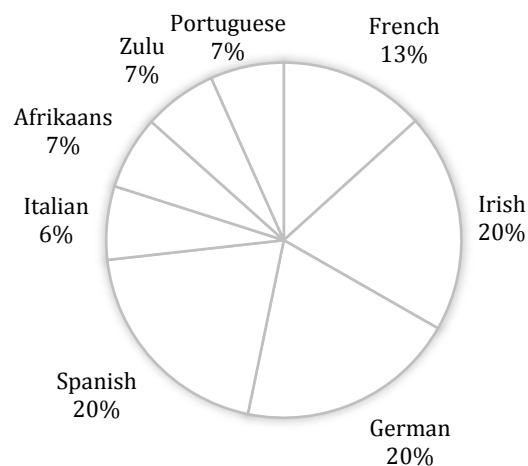

Figure 1

2. Teaching experience: in order to gain an overview of how the linguistic support is implemented in the Irish Education System, teachers were asked about their teaching experience. The results consisted of 57,1% having more than 5 years of experience while 42,9% have two years of less teaching experience.

A majority of the teachers (five) referred to gaining a lot of benefits from being polyglot, such as: "Identifying common patterns in grammar"(T3), or "Teaching the children Irish has helped my own Irish" (T1) , or also: "You can make connections between the different languages in terms of similar vocabulary, understanding the origin of words, making sense of grammatical structuresI think you are more aware of how a language works" (T3).

3. EAL in the school: the results obtained from the multiple-choice question asking about the number of the EAL teachers in the school, How many teachers are currently teaching EAL in your school? Nearly half of the participants (42,9%) state 2 teachers teach EAL in their school. However, a minority of teachers (28,6%) stated that the number of EAL teachers in their school was more than 4.
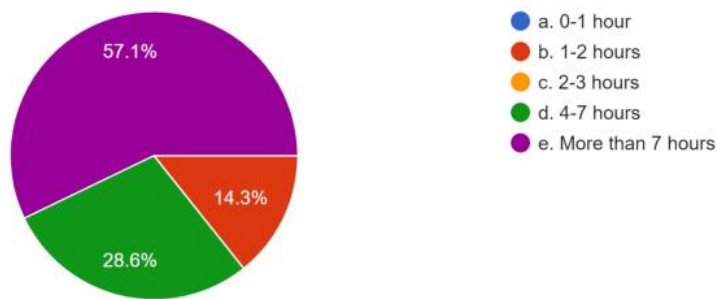

Figure 7: Numbers of hours per week timetabled to teach EAL

More than half of the participants have more than 7 hours scheduled to teach EAL, 28,6% have 4 to 7 hours and 14,3%, from 1 to 2 hours.

4. Plurilingualism in the classroom: teachers were asked about the extent to which foreign languages are allowed in the classroom. Five of the teachers interviewed admitted that foreign languages are allowed in the classroom: *Yes, students will often converse with each other or translate for others* (T5), Or also: *Yes we often use a more fluent English speaker to assist the new arrival by translating* (T3). Two teachers interviewed also stated that: *We encourage students to bring books/songs from home. When doing presentations we suggest students to add an element in their mother tongue. This is particularly useful if their parents don't speak much English, to get them involved* (T6). A number of participants admit that the use of students' mother tongue is only allowed during breaks or by scheduling same language groups that meet socially.

5. Comfort in using L1 among students: students feel comfortable using their L1 in the classroom, according to 85,7% of teachers while 14,3% of teachers do not know about it.
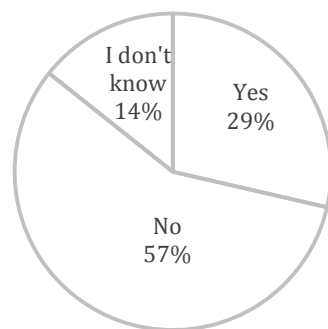

Figure 9: Teachers awareness about plurilingualism and CEFR

8. Teacher's perception in the involvement of parents in the development of L1. Moreover, the figure above shows teachers' perception about parents' involvement in the development of students' mother tongue. More than half of the participants (57,1%) stated that parents encourage children to use their mother tongue. On the contrary, 42,9% are not able to answer this question.

9. *The weakest skill among students* When the participants were asked "Which is the weakest skill among the A1 - A2 level students, the majority of them (85,7%) indicated writing as the weakest skill among students, while 14,3% indicated speaking as the weakest skill. Both the skills mentioned are productive skills. As the graph shows:

Figure 12: The weakest skill among the A1 - A2 level students.
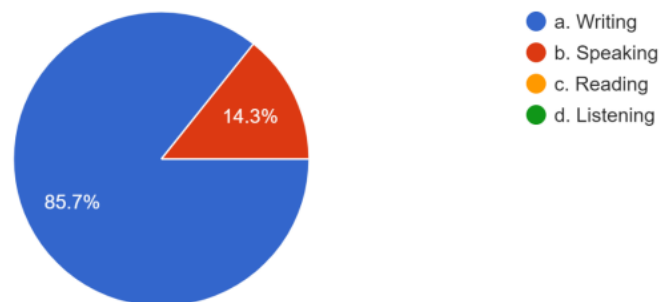
6.2. Qualitative research: Analysis of teacher interviews

The main purpose of the interviews in this study was to investigate the teachers' perception of the use of plurilingual strategies used to enhance (CEFR) A1/A2 level English speaking skills. Semi-structured interviews were used as they are more flexible tools and can be adapted to the given information with follow-up questions and probes (Denscombe, 1998 cited in Zou, 2008). The main themes of these interviews were: EAL organisation in teachers' schools, resources used to teach EAL, Irish policies and attitudes towards plurilingualism and teaching strategies.

6.2.1. EAL organisation in teachers' schools

To gain an overview of how the English as an Additional Language is structured in the schools involved, I was interested in the type of organisation as it may affect the work of teachers and therefore the correct implementation of the linguistic support in Irish schools. Teachers reported that the most common approach, for language support, was withdrawal from the classroom. On average, the teachers interviewed have 3 hours timetabled twice a week and groups can be mixed according to their level, rather than their age.

6.2.2. Resources used to teach EAL

The sample interviewed mentioned different materials used to teach EAL. Official tools, such as NCCA (2006) and the Trinity database were mentioned only once. Only one teacher mentioned the use of official tools, such as NCCA Self made materials were also mentioned by half of the sample. Given the situatedness of the EAL context, adapting resources to the context is extremely important. The fact of working in a highly situated context, makes it necessary to adapt resources to the reality they work at. The English level of students is an important factor for the choice of materials, this is the reason why most of the self - made materials are for the recently arrived students and they are about the features of the school, such as the name of objects (pencil, toilet) in the language spoken in the classroom.

Irish policies and attitudes towards plurilingualism; Two divergent discourses emerged about the approach of the current English curriculum towards plurilingualism. Three of the teachers interviewed would allow students to speak their first language in the classroom during EAL hours, others would allow them outside of the classroom but all the sample agreed with the recognition of this habit and its encouragement. It has been encouraged, either inside or outside the classroom. Some of the teachers were reluctant and they clearly stated they don't see any benefits in terms of improving the mastery of English. On the other hand, some teachers would support the plurilingual approach in the English classroom.

A teacher reported a very strong approach towards plurilingualism but still defines it as multilingualism, confirming lack of information in terms of CEFR which defines, clearly, plurilingualism and multilingualism. "In our school, multilingualism is considered really important. One of the elements of International Baccalaureate schools in the primary program is that students have to learn a second language [...] when there is a new student that does not speak English at all, we always make sure if there's any other students in the school, or any staf that have even a little bit of their mother tongue, we make sure to let them know to show that personally, and to let them know, and to introduce them. [...] But it's you know. It's very multicultural" (T3). A variety of perspectives were expressed in terms of a support of the monolingual approach. A teacher declares to use other languages than English only if there are problems in communication in the classroom. Another teacher reported that the "English only" policy is established by national guidelines, such as the curriculum: The only time I let them use this is if they're with somebody of their own language, and they can explain if somebody is having a difficulty in the room. And sometimes maybe their students, who speak their language, can explain something to them. [...] So in general I prefer to use the English language in the classroom for everything (T5).

Teaching strategies to enhance speaking skills in the A1 - A2 (CEFR) level Teachers were asked about their awareness of teaching strategies to enhance speaking skills in the A1 - A2 (CEFR) levels. The majority of them (6 teachers) referred to strategies such as pictures, repetition, visual and online tools. Two teachers highlighted the importance of focusing on students' immediate needs and trying to expand the sentence structure to develop basic social skills. Another participant commented on the importance of focusing on the same language groups to create resources.

Another teacher expressed this opinion: "Speaking is a skill used to practice the grammar they are studying" (T5) Another core question of the interviews was related to the teachers' perception of the utility of brainstorming students' ideas in their L1, which would have improved their performance in speaking tasks. A majority (4 teachers) focused on the importance of plurilingual strategies which should be an effective tool to educate students regardless of their ability to communicate in their L2. They share the view that the strategy will make them more confident. Another teacher commented on the fact that this could be an effective way depending on the age of students and it has to be implemented as a classroom activity.

Discussion of findings: questions

The aim of this study was to assess the importance of plurilingualism in the EAL classroom.

This research seeks to address the following questions:

1) What are teachers' perspectives on the use of plurilingualism in the classroom?

2) How do teachers explore plurilingualism as a pedagogical tool?

3) What approaches do teachers use to exploit the plurilingual background of their students?

1) The first question of the project was aimed at identifying the perception of teachers on the use of plurilingualism in the classroom, in terms of theirs' perceptions. As Piccardo has noted, it is relatively easy to discuss the implications and the potential of a plurilingual vision in academic publications. On the contrary, the reality for teachers is very challenging when it comes to making space for plurilingualism in their practice (Piccardo, 2020:20).

The main finding of this study concerns the visibility of EAL. Apparently, EAL seems to be visible as timetabled in teachers schedules but in reality, teachers seem not to be aware of its potential techniques, such as plurilingual pedagogies. Teachers are only aware of how the plurilingual classroom works based on their experience but they have not received any formal training or CPD about it. However, the teachers interviewed recognised plurilingual strategies as a common occurrence in the EAL classroom. Plurilingual activities are encouraged and used, both formally and informally by teachers for the inclusion of students. This could also be due to the plurilingualism of the sample since the sample interviewed spoke, at least, two languages. They are able to perceive the benefits of a plurilingual education in terms of the transfer of the skills and the struggle gained from learning to speak more than one language for themselves.

Findings also confirm the fact that the awareness of teachers who speak many languages develops a common ability to transfer skills from one language to another. This is, the so-called "Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP)", theorised by Cummins (1980). According to the author, there is a relationship between the levels of competence achieved in a first language and the level of proficiency achieved in a second language. Therefore, if the L1 is highly developed, this will positively affect the L2 learning (Cummins, 2000). As mentioned in the literature review, the slow development of CALP skills is a consequence of insufficient hours of language support, dedicated to the English Language Support. Contrary to the claims of a lack of EAL visibility, the English as an Additional Language Support seems to have visibility but the amount of hours are insufficient. They would have been sufficient, if it had been implemented in a period longer than two years, as stated by the Circular 0015/2009.

Moreover, in order to achieve a true continuum of teacher education in Ireland, it is recommended that a standardised approach to training in EAL teaching across initial-teacher and CPD education providers be adopted. Providing high-level training for teachers in the field of EAL teaching is a key element in sensitising them to the diverse needs of this group of learners. In order to achieve the best result, students with EAL and their teachers need access to good quality resources which take on board the key issues identified in the growing body of research in EAL provision in Ireland and elsewhere (Murtagh & Francis, 2020:210).

The majority of teachers interviewed recognised the occurrence of plurilingual practices in the classroom, even those who disagreed with the presence of languages other than English, in the classroom, they saw the importance of plurilingual interactions among pupils. This is an important factor that may encourage principals to implement continual Professional Development, on a regular basis, in the schools. It is important to implement a designated support service for practising teachers to include training in plurilingualism to be fully included in the life of the school and to access the curriculum. good quality assessment and teaching resources.

Overall, the acceptance and recognition of plurilingual approaches to teach EAL is also confirmed by the data expressing the level of comfort felt by students in using their L1 in the classroom. Students are also encouraged to use their first language at home and some of the schools interviewed, encourage this exchange by inviting parents and students to bring foreign language books to the classroom and by reading them. The involvement with parents demonstrates positive correlation between home-school partnership in terms of improved academic, social and emotional outcomes' (Stewart et.al, 2022:2).

2) The second question of the project was aimed at identifying the strategies, used by teachers, to exploit the plurilingual background of their students. It emerges from the claim that teachers are open to plurilingual strategies but seem not to have clear guidelines. When asked about their knowledge of CEFR plurilingual descriptors, the results revealed that the respondents lacked familiarity with these concepts. They did not feel that the standardised English language curriculum supports this approach but it is oriented toward a monolingual approach. It is, therefore, the teacher's role to decide which strategies to implement, either plurilingual or not, according to the features of the classroom.

Every EAL classroom is a plurilingual world and teachers need to exploit the languages in the classroom to let the communication flow and to include students, especially at low levels. Even though they have not been trained and aware of plurilingualism in a formal way, they exploited plurilingualism in an informal way. The majority of the sample interviewed is aware of the benefits of plurilingual strategies but they lack formal knowledge.

The findings obtained highlight the fact that the implementation of plurilingual strategies does not require teachers to be polyglot. The only effort requested of teachers is to overcome their "monolingual disposition" to focus on teaching the whole person rather than merely teaching the language, thus helping learners to become autonomous, to integrate formal and informal learning, and to effectively reflect on their learning (Piccardo, 2013). The sample recognized the existence of plurilingual strategies as a natural dynamic in the EAL classroom, and few of them decided to exploit them as a pedagogical tool, according to certain conditions. These conditions could be the domain of skills in students L1 and the age of the students involved. These findings further confirm the situatedness of the plurilingual approach. The adoption of a plurilingualism-inspired pedagogy calls for the definition of certain key principles.

On a broader level, strategies are applicable from the context of the classroom to language policies. Firstly, teaching and learning of any one language should be seen in conjunction with the overall objective of promoting plurilingualism and linguistic diversity; secondly, the idea of a curriculum for each language taken in isolation should be replaced by consideration of the role of languages in general education, where knowledge, skills, and the ability to learn are transversal and transferable across languages; thirdly, the transfer of skills should play a pivotal role and be seen in a cost-efficiency perspective in terms of a greater awareness, self-esteem of learners and they would potentially optimise learning (Piccardo, 2013: 609).

3) The third question of the project was aimed at identifying the approaches teachers use to exploit the plurilingual background of their students. Depending on the classroom, languages can be seen in conjunction with the overall learning objectives. This is a good starting point for the future perspective of a plurilingual approach. Another important finding that emerged was that writing and speaking seemed to be the weakest skills among the students. The reason may be due to the fact that, for the development of both of the skills, an internal process occurs in every student's mind.

As stated in Nazary (2008:21)Auerbach stated that every student has an internal speech and this happens in L1. This confirms that the technique of brainstorming students' ideas, in their L1, could be an effective tool to develop productive skills as, thinking in students' L1 would develop a better process of students' ideas. On the question about brainstorming students' ideas in their L1, the sample answered in different ways: almost all of them took into consideration the idea except one. An effective CPD could have been a useful guide despite teachers' personal beliefs, against plurilingualism, and in support to overcome the English-only belief. This outdated approach is also confirmed by the same teacher as she mentioned that speaking skill had to be considered as a tool to practise grammar in the classroom. This is an outdated approach towards the speaking skill and shows the extent of the presence of Grammar - translation method in the English language Teaching context.

Plurilingualism could be implemented in the classroom in several ways: one of them is theorised by Schnorr (2020) by using micro strategies such as wordless books. It consists of an effective strategy used to promote their development could be wordless books. This kind of book tells a story through a series of illustrations without written text". (Louie, Sierschynski, 2015)

Moreover, teachers mention strategies, such as comparing and contrasting the languages in the classroom but as a personal initiative rather than a professional approach enhanced by an effective CPD. In order to focus student's attention towards lexical patterns between English and romance languages, teachers need to invite connections to home- culture images and experiences.   The consequent process of selection, connection and projection helps learners and others to navigate the world. Discussion groups help children to find space to practise their voices regardless of their English proficiency levels and diverse linguistic backgrounds. These linguistic backgrounds can be used in working with one another, in small groups (Louie, Sierschynski, 2015).

Working in small groups is also a useful strategy for scaffolding students' speaking skills. This scaffolding should occur in small groups. According to Vygotsky, working in the same language groups decreases anxiety and creates the Zone of Proximal Development. Therefore, working in small groups is also in line with what the Council of Europe says in terms of co-construction of meaning. The CEFR puts the co-construction of meaning (through interaction) at the centre of the learning and teaching process. This dynamic has clear implications for the classroom: usually, this interaction occurs between teacher and learner(s), but at times, it will take a collaborative nature among learners themselves. The precise balance between teacher-centred instruction and the interaction between learners in small groups is likely to reflect the context, and the proficiency level of the learners concerned (Council of Europe, 2018).

Limitations of the study.

Considering that the findings derive from small samples, it would be desirable to replicate the study with larger samples. This data therefore needs to be interpreted with caution. In order to determine more accurate results the study should also be longitudinal, which would allow for a more valid and larger sample size.

An initial objective of the project was to identify Post-Primary teachers' attitude towards plurilingualism in the classroom but given the low response rate received it has been necessary to extend the questionnaire among

Primary teachers and ETB teachers. The only requirement requested for them was to be certified. English as an additional language teacher. Findings in this area could only be derived from some teachers' answers on the advantages and disadvantages of the plurilingual strategies in the classroom. However, more research on this topic needs to be undertaken before the association/benefits between the use of L1 and enhancement of English language/speaking skills is more clearly understood.

Conclusion

Findings in this study highlight plurilingual strategies as an important l component of the multilingual classroom. The sample interviewed has recognised the occurrence of plurilingual strategies and, in certain cases they have been included in the teaching practices. In other cases, teachers seem to be reluctant to engage with them but this could be due to lack of training, exposure and experience.

Because all English language instructors, employed in state-run Irish schools, are exposed to similar teacher training and development programs, it is possible to assume that the experiences and knowledge of the participants are commensurate with that of their peers. Therefore, based on the overall lack of depth of awareness of the respondents concerning plurilingualism and pluriculturalism and the perceived absence of sufficient resources to develop these skills, it can be concluded that in spite of the government goals to promote plurilingualism, promoting conditions favourable to the teaching and learning of these competences, could be implemented in terms of Continuing Professional Development as the current circumstances in Ireland are not sufficient focused on advancing this objective. Providing high-level training for teachers in the field of EAL teaching is a key element in sensitising them to the diverse needs of this group of learners. In order to achieve the best result, students with EAL and their teachers need access to good quality assessment and teaching resources which take on board the key issues identified in the growing body of research in EAL provision in Ireland and elsewhere.

In light of these findings, it is clear that further research on a larger scale is necessary in order to determine the extent of the understanding and lack shared by the Irish's foreign language instructors concerning the concepts of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism and their implications in terms of language learning and to identify the steps required to ensure the educational goals concerning foreign language education set by the Governmental policies in Ireland , and the Council of Europe, are reached. Interesting areas to investigate seem to be the approach towards EAL in Post-Primary schools, teachers awareness towards the implementation of plurilingual pedagogies, how Post-Primary schools handle Special Education Needs in Eal students and how the pandemic has affected EAL students in online learning.

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