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Parental engagement and involvement in supporting (language) learning: lessons from the “bringing Gaelic home” study

Ingeborg Birnie, ingeborg.birnie@strath.ac.uk

University of Strathclyde, Scotland

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8227-9364>

Kerrie Kennedy

University of Strathclyde / Argyll & Bute Council

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Parental engagement and involvement in supporting (language) learning: lessons from the “bringing Gaelic home” study

Ingeborg Birnie, ingeborg.birnie@strath.ac.uk

University of Strathclyde, Scotland

Kerrie Kennedy

University of Strathclyde / Argyll & Bute Council

Abstract

This paper explores the findings of a small-scale mixed methods study set in one school which set out to investigate the effects of the school closures because of the Covid-19 pandemic, and subsequent home-learning periods, on language acquisition in children in lower primary of Gaelic medium education. Using data collected through parental and teacher surveys, together with information from in-class observations and assessments as well as learning conversations with the pupils themselves, this study found that there were limited opportunities for most children to use Gaelic in the home, before and during the school closures, but that the provision of different online learning materials, audio-visual materials (in particular those produced by the class teacher) but also online games enabled children to continue their (language) learning and provided opportunities for taking Gaelic into the home in a way that also helped overcome the caregivers' anxieties regarding Gaelic medium homework and made them feel included in the learning process of their children.

Keywords: Gaelic Medium Education, minority language education, parental engagement, mixed methods, language acquisition

Introduction

Like many other countries around the world, schools in Scotland closed their doors for face-to-face teaching and learning for most children at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in the early spring of 2020. In Scotland this first school closure continued until August 2020, which was then followed, in January 2021, with a further two-month period where schools were closed for face-to-face teaching and learning activities. During these school closure periods the teaching and learning had to be reimagined; away from the traditional model of education, with children being physically present in the classroom to participate in learning activities, and towards a model that focussed on remote provision. This remote provision included both synchronous inputs, where children and young people would participate in 'live' online sessions through digital meeting platforms with their teachers, as well as asynchronous tasks, where activities were provided for completion within a given timeframe but without the (direct) supervision of the teacher (Brown et al., 2021).

The periods of school closures for in-person teaching coincided with other societal restrictions on face-to-face meetings and participation in (group) leisure activities. The resulting discourse has focussed on the negative impact these restrictions have had on children's health and wellbeing (see, for example, Wu et al., 2022; Chaabane et al., 2021; Hoffman and Miller, 2020) and how these have increased the inequalities of access to educational input and resources (Bayrakdar and Guveli, 2020; Pensiero et al., 2020), with the Scottish Government (2021) acknowledging that 'children and young people might not have had access to a full curriculum' during the school closure periods. However, what has been overlooked in the discourse around the impact of school closures on children's learning and health and wellbeing and the focus on 'recovery' of 'lost learning' (Whitehead et al., 2021; Nugroho et al., 2020) is that was also a period of great innovation in teaching and learning, creating opportunities for educators to evaluate their current practices and approaches to teaching and learning and trial new strategies.

This article will discuss the findings of a small-scale, multi-modal study conducted in a Gaelic Medium Education classroom and set within the practitioner enquiry paradigm. Using parental questionnaires, classroom observations, class-based assessment and pupil focus groups, this study aimed to evaluate the impact of online asynchronous literacy and Gaelic language learning activities on the children's progress and engagement with the language both during and after the Covid-19 school closures. This study identified that children who had actively engaged with online homework activities showed a greater confidence and proficiency in their use of Gaelic compared with their peers who had either not engaged or engaged to a limited extent (less than 50%) with the tasks.

The findings also identified that the children's main caregivers were the most crucial factor in determining whether children engaged with home learning tasks. The level of engagement was influenced by technical factors (access to technology and digital literacy) but also by caregiver ideologies towards the Gaelic language and (perceived) ability to be able to support their children's learning activities in and through the language. Compared to more traditional homework tasks, which typically involve the development of literacy skills through reading and writing tasks, caregivers expressed more positive attitudes towards the provision of audio-visual asynchronous home-learning activities. The provision of these online materials in a blended approach resulted in an increased

involvement by the caregivers in the homework tasks and an increased presence of Gaelic in the home. These findings allow for a re-imagining of approaches to homework tasks, both within the context of (additional) language and literacy development, but also within wider educational contexts for supporting learning partnerships between the school and the home.

Study context

This study was conducted in a Gaelic Medium (GM) school setting. At the time of this study, GM education was available in 61 locations across 15 of Scotland's 32 local authorities, with 3,701 pupils (0.9% of the total primary school aged pupils) enrolled (Morgan, 2021). GM education is based on the principles of minority language education first established in the 1960s in Canada for the teaching of French to English speaking children (Genesee and Jared, 2008) and aims to ensure that children achieve equal fluency and literacy in Gaelic and English (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (Scotland), 2011). In Scotland this means that in the first three years of primary school (for children aged 5 to 7) all teaching and learning activities are expected to place through the medium of Gaelic (the total immersion phase), which is then followed by a four-year immersion phase where teaching and learning activities continue to be delivered through the medium of Gaelic but where English is introduced (O'Hanlon, 2010).

The ability to speak Gaelic, or come from a household or family with links to the language, is not a prerequisite for GM education (unlike, for example, Sami language education in Norway where enrolment is only available to children with direct familial connections to the language and associated culture (Jakobsen, 2011)). In fact, most children receiving GM education live in households where one or all the caregivers do not speak Gaelic (McLeod, 2010) and live in communities where fewer than 2% of the population can speak the language (National Records of Scotland, 2015). This raises important questions around the reasons for enrolment in GM education. Decisions on educational choices are, according to Ule et al. (2015), mainly based on parental decisions and to enrol their children in GM education, caregivers have to make an active choice and apply to have their children educated through the medium of Gaelic (Johnstone, 2002).

O'Hanlon et al. (2010) identified that caregivers choose to GM education for their children for a variety of different reasons, including associations with heritage and links to local and national identity, but also the (perceived) cognitive benefits of bilingualism and bilingual education. Other, local, factors, also play a role. These can include the availability of GM education in the local area (including the provision of school transport), the reputation of the school (O'Hanlon, 2014), but also assumptions around smaller class sizes and the quality of provision can influence caregivers' decisions (Birnie, 2018; Stephen et al., 2011). The decision to opt in to GM education is frequently complex, even where all factors favour enrolment, with one of the main barriers identified by caregivers is their own limited or lack of proficiency in Gaelic and thus their ability to support their children's learning and in particular the completion of homework tasks (O'Hanlon, 2014). The Covid-19 school closures with the explicit expectation that children were supported with their learning activities in the home (Hajar and Manan, 2022), would, therefore, have provided further additional challenges for caregivers with children in GM education.

The expectations on caregivers during the Covid-19 school closures could be considered an extension of homework tasks, where homework can be defined as tasks assigned by teachers for students to be completed outside of the school context (Patall et al., 2008). Epstein and Sheldon (2002) have described homework as the connector between the school learning environment and the home, with caregivers identifying this as the main mechanism in which they can engage with their children's education (Katz et al., 2014) and provide support with the 'practices of work and time management' (Farrell and Danby, 2015). Caregivers can play different roles in supporting their children with homework, which might include supervision, providing equipment (Safriyani, 2022; Fitzmaurice et al., 2020), but also giving psychological and mental support to accomplish the tasks set by the teacher (Ule et al., 2015). The extent to which caregivers are involved in homework tasks is determined by their perceptions of self-efficacy and their (perceived) competence in being able to contribute to their children's learning outcomes (Green et al., 2007).

Primary school teachers expect that parents support their children with developing literacy and language skills through (listening to) reading and spelling tasks (Fitzmaurice et al., 2020). In the case of GM education this will mean the development of literacy skills in Gaelic, especially during the total immersion phase of lower primary school, the focus of this study, and a stage where caregivers are typically more involved in their children's education and learning (Daniela et al., 2021; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). This expectation will provide a particular challenge to caregivers with children in GM education as they are unlikely to be proficient in the language themselves (O'Hanlon et al., 2010).

This represents a dichotomy between the caregivers' investment in the successful outcomes of their children's education – however defined - (Ule et al., 2015), as a result of their active choice to enrol their children in GM education (Johnstone, 2002), and their ability to support their children in achieving these outcomes. This resultant friction can result in caregivers experiencing feelings of anxiety (Kavanagh and Hickey, 2013), which, in turn, can result in negative parental attitudes towards the homework tasks, and even towards their willingness to engage with their children's learning and the wider school (Fitzmaurice et al., 2020; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). These attitudes, explicitly or implicitly stated by caregivers can play a significant role in the motivation of children to complete homework tasks (Head, 2020; Hutchison, 2012; Patall et al., 2008). The attitudes and ideologies of caregivers towards their children's learning would have been particularly important during the Covid-19 school closures when many of the tasks set by the school would be asynchronous, and, as with homework, there was the expectation that caregivers supported their children with completion (Safriyani, 2022).

The school closures resulted in the establishment of emergency remote teaching methods— these teaching approaches were not planned in advance as part of an online programme but were conceptualised in direct response to the move to online teaching and learning (Hodges et al., 2020). This move to online technologies brought the demands of schools more directly into the home (Head, 2020), and due to the emergency nature of the move from face-to-face to remote learning, there was limited support for children and parents on the use of these digital learning materials (Daniela et al., 2021). This, coupled with additional pressures on caregivers who had to manage their own (professional) activities (Hajar and Manan, 2022), added a further factor to the already complex

relationship between this group of caregivers with children in Gaelic Medium education and expectations around supporting learning through homework tasks.

Study

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the School of Education Ethics Committee at the University of Strathclyde, with further permissions granted by the headteacher of the school where this study was situated. This small-scale study, which follows the practitioner enquiry paradigm (Baumfield et al., 2012), was conducted in one GM location in the north of Scotland. The set-up of this GM location is typical of many others across Scotland, with a small number of classes (two in this study) offering GM education in a school where the language of schooling for all the other classes is English. The classes in this setting were both multi-composite (with one class covering the total immersion phase and the other class covering the immersion phase respectively). The school was set in a community where around 1% of the general population can speak Gaelic. At the time of this study there were three GM primary teachers working in the school to support the classes in addition to a pupil support assistant.

This study adopted a multi-model approach which included the evaluation of baseline data, gathered as part of the normal teaching and learning processes on the children's Gaelic comprehension skills and their engagement with homework tasks. This information was supplemented with parental questionnaires and learning journey conversations with the children. This study was conducted longitudinally, starting in the period immediately after the schools re-opened for face-to-face learning and teaching in August 2020 and continued until after the second school closure period in April 2021. The data collection focussed on the early stages of the primary school, in particular the Primary 2 pupils (6-year-old children) as this group was considered to have been particularly affected, in terms of Gaelic language development, by the lack of direct teacher input and the opportunity to be immersed in the language as a result of the first school closures (when these pupils would have been in primary 1).

Parental questionnaires

All the caregivers of children enrolled across the GM classes were invited to participate in the parental questionnaire, which were created and administered using online data collection software. This self-administration of the questionnaire meant that the caregivers could complete the survey at a time that was convenient to them (Bryman, 2012) and that any responses remained anonymous (McNeill, 2005). The ability to provide anonymous responses was particularly pertinent in this study as the researcher was one of the classroom teachers and was known to the caregivers, as this allowed the respondents to be less self-protecting (Dörnyei and Taguchi, 2009). The questionnaire was designed to be completed in a short period of time, around 10 to 15 minutes and contained 18 questions with 13 of these requiring participants to select one answer from a range of options and five questions which invited participants to provide a more elaborate response. All questions in the survey were optional, allowing participants to decide which questions they felt comfortable engaging with.

The questions in the survey were designed to provide an overview of the extent to which children were using Gaelic and engaged with home learning tasks and could be assigned to one of four themes. The

first of these themes was the use of Gaelic in the home or with the family. The second of the themes focussed on engagement with homework prior to the school closures. The third theme looked at the engagement with online materials during the emergency remote teaching and learning periods, with the fourth theme linked to this by looking at the access to online resources, which also included the availability of internet-enabled devices and the internet in the family home. The parental questionnaires were distributed through the normal school information channels to all caregivers with children in GME (n = 19) with a response rate of 68%. The responses were evenly distributed between caregivers with children in the total immersion phase and those with children in the immersion phase, with a small number of caregivers having one or more children in each of the classes.

Classroom observations, assessments, and learning conversations

In addition to the parental questionnaires, in-class observations were conducted which focussed on talking and listening activities during routine classroom teaching and learning. This was supplemented by in-class assignment which were completed by all children at the start of the term in August 2020, immediately on the return after the first school closure period. This assessment was repeated at the end of the first term, in October 2020. This assessment had previously been used in the school to assess the children's linguistic progress and were based on the Curriculum for Excellence outcomes in the Early level (covering the early stages of primary school) (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2008). These classroom observations and assessments considered the age and stage of the child and the disruption because of the Covid-19 closures. The listening and speaking assessment consisted of the class teacher reading out a question in Gaelic, during a one-to-one session, which the child was then expected to respond to verbally. The teacher recorded whether the child answered in Gaelic, in English, or did not understand the question. If the child responded to the prompt in English, or with an incorrect answer, the correct answer was provided and modelled by the researcher, in line with the advice given to Gaelic medium practitioners on addressing language related errors (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (Scotland), 2011).

All the children in the total immersion phase (P1 to P3) participated in the language assessment task, regardless of whether they were participants in this study. Observations on the participating children was discussed with all the teachers to ensure that these provided an accurate overview of the language proficiency and progress of the children. Two further listening and speaking assessments were conducted with all the P1 to P3 pupils participating: one at the start of the term, immediately after the autumn break and a further set, just before the winter break. This was the period during which planned (rather than emergency) blended learning activities were introduced. These are defined by Garrison and Kanuka (2004) as the 'thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences'. These activities were planned to support learning whilst also considering the government restrictions in place during this period which meant that physical materials (such as worksheets or reading books) could not be shared between the school and the home.

These activities consisted of online learning tasks which were to compliment the language learning in the classroom. Children and their caregivers were presented with a selection of different online activities, including audio-visual content, either created by the teachers themselves or by external

Gaelic educational or support organisations. Children were asked to indicate which activities they had engaged with during the week and to share their learning, both in class and at home, at the end of each week. All children were also invited to participate in learning conversations with the class teachers. During these learning observations they were asked about their engagement with the home learning tasks, both during the school closure period and the planned blended activities, as well as their use of Gaelic at home.

Results and discussion

Analysis of the three in-class language assessments allowed the progress of the children's proficiency and confidence in Gaelic to be tracked over the period of the study. The average score of this standardised Gaelic language assessment in August 2020, immediately after the schools re-opened, was 42.9%. The return to face-to-face teaching, within the language immersion learning environment resulted in an overall increase of 16% when the assessment was repeated in October. The improvement was, however, not universal across the cohort, with the overall score of two children remaining unchanged and a further three children who scored lower during this second assessment. This slight regression is not statistically significant and can be attributed to the timing of the second assessment which took place immediately after the two-week autumn break. A further language assessment was conducted prior to the winter break, with the results showing an overall increase in Gaelic proficiency of 24.1% compared to the August assessment and an overall 8% increase over the autumn term during which the blended learning approaches were introduced.

These results represent the average increase in proficiency across all the children, but detailed analysis of this third assessment, and comparing this to the earlier results, clearly shows the impact of engagement with the online homework tasks on language skills. Children who had fully engaged with these online homework tasks as part of the blended learning approach made 14.3% more progress than they did in the period between August and October, when language learning input was limited to the classroom and no homework tasks were issued. This increase in proficiency stands in sharp contrast to the progress made those children who engaged in fewer than half of the online homework tasks. This group of children increased their score, on average, by 1.8% between October and December. Although these results appear to indicate a clear correlation between increased Gaelic proficiency and engagement with the online homework activities, but it also raises important questions about the factors that impact on the engagement with these tasks.

Technology

Analysis of the parental questionnaires and the learning conversations with the children revealed a complex range of factors which influenced, directly and indirectly, the engagement with, and completion of, tasks. One of these factors was the availability of technology and tools to access and complete the tasks, an issue that was first identified during the first school closure period as a further contributing factor to increased educational inequalities (Easterbrook et al., 2022; Dimopoulos et al., 2021; Bayrakdar and Guveli, 2020). This primarily included having to share devices with different family members, especially if there was more than one child living in the household, mirroring the findings by

Hajar and Manan (2022), or having devices that were limited in functionality. Furthermore, some caregivers reported not having access to some of the recommended websites (for example, audio-visual content produced by BBC Alba, the Gaelic BBC channel, which requires a TV licence) – although some of these resources were later made available through other digital platforms (such as YouTube) (Scottish Government, 2020).

The (limited) availability of technology was not the only factor affecting engagement with the homework tasks. As identified by Farrell and Danby (2015) and Head (2020), caregivers act as ‘gatekeepers’ of homework tasks, especially for younger children. This study identified two broad types of gatekeeping: one associated use of technology for homework tasks and the other linked to the Gaelic language. These types of gatekeeping affected the extent to which online homework tasks were completed, in different ways, but, in all instances, resulted in limited engagement by the children. Although some research (see, for example, Head, 2020) has identified that caregivers might prefer physical copies of homework tasks and instructions, this appeared not to be the case in this study, with 84% of the caregivers indicating, through the questionnaire, that they would engage with the online homework task (and the remaining 16% that they would consider engaging) – although it should be noted that this was before the blended learning was introduced.

A further type of digital gatekeeping is associated with the caregivers’ digital literacy skills. Digital literacy skills, similar to the availability of the technology in the home, limited the support that caregivers could give their children in accessing and completing the task (Safriyani, 2022). The children at the focus of this study were likely to require some (initial) support to access the online resources and caregivers were contacted by the teacher, through the digital school communication tools, of the expectation to support their children with the online tasks. Digital literacy skills, like the availability of the technology in the home, limited the support that caregivers could give their children in accessing and completing the task (Safriyani, 2022). Caregivers were made directly responsible for reporting on the homework that their children engaged in through the completion of a grid and share this with the teacher. This carried the demands of the school more directly into the home (Head, 2020), resulting in the professionalisation of the domestic sphere (McRobbie, 2013), where caregivers pass on the instructions from the teacher to the children, facilitate their learning and report progress back to the class teacher (Mahaffey and Kinard, 2020).

Gaelic

The responses to the questionnaire also exposed the ideologies of the caregivers toward Gaelic and these were reflected in their responses about supporting their children with homework, both traditional and online tasks. In this study 47% of the caregivers indicated that there was someone in the (extended) household with whom the children could use their Gaelic, but, at the same time, reported that the *de facto* use of (spoken) Gaelic in the home was very limited. Caregivers reported that they relied on the teachers to provide the language input, including during the school closure periods when the teachers offered synchronous online video conversations. Access to these synchronous sessions was not universal however, with some caregivers reporting technical difficulties, which, as outlined above,

centred around access to technology but also that not all children felt comfortable using the online platform as a means of communication.

This limited engagement with Gaelic, even where the language might have been used in the home, was also reflected in the ideologies towards homework tasks. Caregivers were asked to provide information about their children's engagement with homework. Starting with engagement before the Covid-19 closures, most parents (84%) reported that their children engaged with the homework. During the school closure periods this dropped to 74% and although digital factors (as discussed in the previous section) contributed to this, a further, and significant factor was the caregivers' own (perceived) competence and proficiency in Gaelic. Aligning with the findings by O'Hanlon et al. (2010), caregivers in this study reported that they were not confident that they could support their children's Gaelic language acquisition due to their own limited skills in the language.

As discussed by Epstein and Sheldon (2002), children's learning does not only take place within the educational setting of the school but also in the home and family settings, with Fitzmaurice et al. (2020) identifying that caregivers feel it to be part of their responsibility to support their children in their learning. Children's educational outcomes are influenced by parental involvement supporting both motivation and achievement (Daniela et al., 2021), with Howard et al. (2003) identifying these as particularly important to support the language outcomes of immersion programmes, such as GM education. This lack of proficiency in the target language of school is a significant barrier to parental involvement, with caregivers in this study reporting that they found it particularly challenging to support their children with literacy, typically the focus of homework tasks (Fitzmaurice et al., 2020). This included, for example, Gaelic phonics and reading in the language with Gaelic reading books being considered by the caregivers, even those with some proficiency in Gaelic, to be difficult, especially compared to early-literacy English language books, with one caregiver commenting that they felt their "learner" Gaelic might be off-putting to their child.

This lack of proficiency in the target language of school, in this instance Gaelic, and the result inability to support their children's learning can lead, according to Kavanagh and Hickey (2013) to a lack of confidence and feelings of invalidation as an educational partner on the part of the caregiver, which, in turn might result in feelings of anxiety, with one caregiver commenting in the questionnaire that they found "Gaelic homework very stressful, which is not helpful for my child". These feelings of anxiety did not appear to result in caregivers reaching out for support, for example through the free online national Gaelic homework help service (Gaelic4Parents) online resources provided and curated by Gaelic educational resource organisation Stòrlann). Caregivers in this study indicated that they were aware of the website but that they had not accessed the service, suggesting that there is a barrier to ask for external support.

These feelings of invalidation as educational partners and the stress associated with Gaelic homework tasks impacted significantly on the home learning experience of the children. The children at the focus of this study might only have experienced 26 weeks of total immersion education before the first school closure in March 2020, which means that they would still have been at the early stages of developing

their Gaelic literacy skills, and although in the total immersion phase, with limited expectations around full proficiency in Gaelic comprehension and production. This meant that this group of children required the support of their caregivers to access (written) instructions for home learning tasks, with teachers providing instructions on the school's online learning platform in English, further emphasising the language proficiency deficit of the caregivers and resulting in negative attitudes and resistance to the tasks (Hutchison, 2012). In this study this resistance resulted in some caregivers opting to offer English-medium resources to their children during the school closure period as these were deemed to be "easier" and more readily accessible than materials in Gaelic, especially associated with literacy and phonics.

The use of English for these learning activities resulted in these children making a link between the use of English and learning, whereas previously this had been the one domain where Gaelic was used and expected further weakening the role and position of the language in their lives. Upon return to face-to-face teaching, this meant that some children were reluctant to use Gaelic in the classroom as they had become accustomed to using English for learning activities, negatively impacting on their overall Gaelic proficiency and progress in developing their language skills. The results from the questionnaire suggest that caregivers recognised that the lack of Gaelic during the school-closure period had impacted on the language proficiency of their children, but also identified that they had a positive view towards the introduction of blended learning approaches, including online homework tasks to support the 'recovery phase'. Caregivers indicated a preference for teacher-led videos, other online video content and online games for (online) home learning tasks; meaning that they did not have to be proficient in Gaelic, but that their role could be to provide technological support (Ule et al., 2015) and encouragement (Hajar and Manan, 2022) whilst allowing their children to take the lead on their learning (Fitzmaurice et al., 2020).

Responding to these findings from parental questionnaire, the teachers provided videos they created themselves as homework tasks. These videos aligned with the language used and content taught in the classroom and caregivers were encouraged to watch these with their children. In the learning conversations with the teacher, the children were asked to indicate how they had engaged with these online homework tasks. The children all referred to the role of their main caregiver when discussing their engagement, supporting the findings by Hutchison (2012) who found that mothers are more frequently involved than fathers, but also showing that homework is a 'parent-monitored set of practices' (Farrell and Danby, 2015), with caregivers acting as the gatekeepers to homework engagement and completion.

The responses by the children could be categorised according to their level of engagement with the online homework tasks. The children that had not been able to complete the tasks cited technical factors, and in particular the lack of access to digital devices as barriers. Several of the children also mentioned ideological factors – typically expressed as their caregiver not being available to support them in accessing the videos (examples of this include "mum is busy", "mum forgot to do it as she has work to do on the computer" and "I didn't get much time to watch them") – this might be due to a lack

of confidence in supporting their children's learning as a result of not speaking Gaelic (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011).

The children that indicated that they had been given opportunities by their caregivers to engage with the online homework tasks, all reported that they watched these together, with a typical response that they "liked the video and could watch them over and over again. Mum likes to help with learning new vocabulary" and another child commenting that "the videos helped lots" and that they "got to learn with their mum". The description of by these children would suggest that this group of caregivers positively engaged with these online tasks and that the lack of proficiency on their part was not a barrier to supporting their children's learning but was, in fact, viewed as a positive by their children – creating a co-learning environment and changing the balance from the caregiver as being the main facilitator or learning to them being an active participant in the learning process, with one child stating that it was "fun" to be able to learn with their caregivers.

Conclusion

Gaelic medium education is the main mechanism for Gaelic acquisition in young people, and this provision has grown because of parental demand. Most of the children enrolled in Gaelic Medium Education do neither have caregivers at home who are proficient in the language, nor have opportunities to use the language in a range of domains of communication. This means that the classroom teacher is the main source of Gaelic language input and support and limiting the role that parents feel that they can play in their children's (language learning). This study explored the nature of these challenges, and which were further highlighted and exacerbated during the Covid-19 school closure periods and the emphasis on home learning tasks. This period also not only introduced new expectations on the role of the caregiver in supporting their children's learning (Hajar and Manan, 2022) but also emphasised the role of technology in supporting this learning, both of which resulted in the demands of the school being brought directly into the home (Reay, 2005).

In this study the children's language proficiency improved on the return to face-to-face teaching and returning to a Gaelic immersion setting, with some children having had little or no Gaelic input during the school closure periods, and caregivers opting for English language input and materials during this period. The introduction of a blended approach, where online home learning activities (videos) were created to support the in-class activities and language learning indicated that engagement with these tasks supported progression with Gaelic language skills. The engagement with these tasks was, however, dependent on both technological and ideological gatekeeping. The Technological gatekeeping was linked to access to devices and digital literacy skills of the caregivers, which was expressed in different ways, for example by suggesting that they preferred paper-based activities for their children to complete but also the children indicating that they did not have devices to access the tasks.

This type of gatekeeping does, however, overlap with ideological gatekeeping, with caregivers indicating that they found engaging with the homework tasks (prior to the introduction of the blended learning approach), stressful and that they did not feel able to support their children's learning. What

the findings from this study do, however, indicate that using online audio-visual materials to support classroom learning, rather than traditional literacy-based activities (such as spelling and reading), do not require proficiency in the target language (in this instance Gaelic), and that this allowed children to share their learning with their caregivers through low-stakes activities, whilst also fostering positive attitudes towards the (use of the) language, which in turn is likely to result in greater confidence in using the language, and leading, as this study has shown, to an improved proficiency compared to children who were not provided with these opportunities by their caregivers.

Children in this study reported that they enjoyed learning together with their caregivers and that the online materials could be readily accessed repeatedly. The provision of online materials did not need to focus on language skills but could also cover other areas of the curriculum, for example mathematics, delivered through Gaelic, providing an immersive linguistic soundscape in Gaelic at home. Although passive exposure, for example through videos or other materials, does not necessarily lead to better language learning outcomes by itself (Oh et al., 2020), it does create an environment where Gaelic is included and part of the environment: it takes Gaelic out of the classroom and into the home in such a way that it does not require linguistic proficiency on the part of the caregiver and reduces some of the anxieties associated with homework, whilst still encourage parental engagement (Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2012).

These findings have implications for how the links between parental engagement and the classroom can be strengthened in other situations where the language of the class is not the language of the home, but also in the wider context of supporting learning. The school closures have shown that new technologies can be used, not to replace face-to-face learning, but to enhance the overall learning experience and support a holistic approach towards learning, acknowledging that learning takes place across many domains outside of the education system and recognising the role of parents in supporting this learning.

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