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Language-sensitive teaching as an emergent response to increasing linguistic diversity in Irish post-primary schools: Challenges, opportunities and implications for teacher education

ABSTRACT. The 21st century has been characterised by an unprecedented growth in transnational migration with education systems in many countries challenged to address the implications of this ongoing global phenomenon. This paper reports on a recent study that was undertaken amongst teachers and school managers in post-primary state schools in Ireland to explore the current position regarding language-sensitive teaching as an emergent response to the growing reality of linguistic diversity in schools. Bottom-up research of this kind is vital as it can shed light on the perceptions and experiences of the key stakeholders involved in order to determine their related professional needs and shape future directions in teacher education in this area. The key findings show that language-sensitive teaching remains in its infancy in the Irish post-primary educational context with an urgent need for teacher awareness-raising and upskilling in relation to this approach and its implementation in different subject classrooms. The research has also indicated that language support teachers can play a central role in developing language-sensitive teaching at the whole school level but this potential remains largely under-exploited in the Irish post-primary educational context.

KEYWORDS: Diversity, inclusion, multilingualism, language-sensitive teaching, teacher professional needs, teacher education, language support teachers, whole-school approach.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past quarter century or so, there has been a dramatic transformation in the demographic landscape of Ireland, as is the case in many other EU member states (Gallagher 2021; OECD 2020; Little & Kirwan 2019; Parker-Jenkins & Masterson 2013). This transformation has seen the country move towards becoming a more ethnically diverse society with a richer and more complex linguistic and cultural tapestry (CSO 2022b). This has come about in large part as a result of Ireland's growing economic prosperity over the past fifty years or so, which has made it an increasingly attractive destination for economic migrants, with these upward trends expected to continue, especially in the light of Brexit. The country is also now home to a growing number of displaced persons including, more recently, from the Ukraine. As a testament to Ireland's growing linguistic and cultural diversity, the most recent national survey carried out in Ireland (CSO 2022b) has revealed that there are now around two hundred languages spoken in the country with Polish, Lithuanian, Romanian, Brazilian Portuguese and Ukrainian currently the most widely used alongside English and Irish which are the country's two official languages (CSO 2022a).

This ongoing demographic transformation, which is impacting on Irish society at all levels, is also challenging the Irish education system in terms of the development of educational approaches that can take better address the ever more diverse and complex needs of pupils in Irish schools. Teachers in Ireland now routinely teach pupils whose first language is other than English which is the language of instruction in most schools except for a small number of schools where Irish is used for this purpose (known as *Gailscoil*). Moreover, an increasing number of pupils from migrant and displaced person backgrounds are entering Irish state schools with varying levels of English language proficiency depending on the amount of time they have lived in the country and their prior educational provision. The most recent national census (CSO 2022b) has indicated that there are now circa 30,000 pupils enrolled on the post-primary online database who have reported a first language other than English or Irish, which represents about thirteen percent of the overall school population. These numbers were spread over approximately seven hundred schools with a greater concentration in Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway which are the country's four biggest cities.

In Ireland, as elsewhere, the educational challenges faced by newly arrived pupils from a migrant or displaced person background are greatest in the post-primary school context when they are at an age when the development of academic language skills and knowledge of subject matter is crucial for their future success (Butler & Goschler 2019). This situation has led to recommendations by the Teaching Council of Ireland, which is the statutory body that regulates

schools in the country, for the development of language-sensitive teaching. This is envisaged as a broad, educational approach that incorporates an explicit focus on language awareness-raising across the curriculum and draws on the entire linguistic repertoire of pupils to support the learning process (Teaching Council 2020: 3–4), in line with broader European Commission educational policy.

At this initial stage, it is pertiant to highlight that while language-sensitive teaching shares some elements of a range of educational approaches such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and bilingual education and immersion, which have been in operation in some countries and contexts for a number of years, it can be differentiated from these approaches in a number of ways. For instance, CLIL is a dual-focused educational approach in which an *additional* language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language (Coyle, Hood & Marsh 2010), as for example, the teaching of geography or mathematics through English in schools in countries such as Brazil or Latvia where English it is not the native language (Coyle, Hood & Marsh 2010). By contrast, language-sensitive teaching involves the use of the *majority* language of the country in subject teaching, so for example, the use of English in schools in Ireland to teach geography and history, or the use of German in schools in Germany to teach biology and business studies, with subject teachers also encouraged to make reference to minority and heritage languages where this is considered relevant and useful. This approach is supported by a growing body of international research which has investigated the links between language-sensitive teaching, language awareness, educational attainment and integration efforts in different migrant contexts within a variety of theoretical frameworks (e.g. García 2009; Finkbeiner, Knierim, Smasal & Ludwig 2012; van Dijk, Hajer, Kuiper & Eijkelhof 2020; Viesca et al. 2022). It is also an approach that is now increasingly advocated for on the basis that it can better promote inclusive education more widely, and that in so doing, it can help to address wider issues around inequality in society (Boisvert & Thiede 2020).

However, despite the growing consensus in support of this approach, progress in this area has been slow at the "chalk face" in many EU countries and this includes in the Irish post-primary educational context (Farrell & Baumgart 2019; Baumgart 2021). This has been attributed to three main factors: the first is a lack of appreciation on the part of school managers and subject teachers of the linguistic challenges that are associated with different subject areas; the second is the limited competences in schools for teaching subject content in a language-sensitive manner, which includes a lack of awareness on the part of subject teachers of subject-specific language; and the third is a general failure on the part of educators to understand that linguistic diversity in schools cre-

ates new opportunities for enhanced learning experiences and outcomes for all pupils (Farrell & Baumgart 2019).

Education has a fundamental role to play in the promotion of inclusion in schools (Eurydice 2019) with educational policy makers and theorists alike increasingly stressing the need for the development and implementation of educational approaches that can take better account of the needs and abilities of all pupils in schools (Little & Kirwan 2021). Inclusive education is now viewed as a fundamental social right and priority area by the European Union Commission (2020) and the United Nations (2015). In Ireland, the Education Act of 1998 marked a watershed moment with its recognition of the statutory requirement of the government to ensure the provision of education that is appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of each individual pupil, including a pupil with a disability, or who has other special educational needs (OECD 2009: 20). Since 2013, European Commission policy aims to support Member States to integrate learners from a migrant background in their education and training systems, from early childhood education to higher education.

In response to the need to address the additional, educational needs of newly arrived pupils from migrant and refugee backgrounds, a model for the provision of English as an additional language (EAL), and for the development of inter-cultural skills in schools more broadly, was introduced into Irish state schools in 2007 by the Department of Education and Science (renamed the Department of Education and Skills [DES] in 2012). However, while some progress has been made in promoting inter-cultural education in Irish schools (DES & The Office of the Minister for Integration 2010), there has been criticism that the model of EAL provision introduced fails to provide EAL pupils with an adequate level of language support for their needs (Rodriguez-Izquierdo & Darmody 2019). Moreover, it has led to a situation whereby the responsibility for integration at the linguistic and cultural levels is often seen as the sole responsibility of language support teachers rather than subject teachers. This situation has thwarted the development of whole-school approaches based around consultation and cooperation between these two key stakeholders (Farrell & Baumgart 2019).

The cultivation of multilingualism in schools has been a key European Commission educational goal since 2008 and in the Irish context, this has been reaffirmed by the recently launched National Languages Strategy (*Languages Connect*) (DES 2017). This recognises the importance of actively promoting multilingual educational practices for the country's future economic development and it has explicitly identified the "new Irish" and the languages they bring as a strength that must be cultivated. From this, a number of initiatives have been introduced to increase the range of foreign languages taught in post-primary schools, and to support the teaching of heritage languages from an early age. This includes a new

primary language curriculum which acknowledges that developing skills in one language will help children to develop similar skills in another language (DES 2019). Against this backdrop, significant progress has been made in Irish primary schools in recent years in developing innovative, multilingual educational practices at the whole-school level (Little & Kirwan 2019) with this progress at the bottom-up level commended by the European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2019).

Of significance also, is the fact that the National Languages Strategy highlights the crucial role that all teachers can play in encouraging children of different languages and cultures to embrace and share their heritage (DES 2019), and it further stresses the need for parents to become more involved in their child's language development. However, despite the greater recognition of the role and importance of language development across the school curriculum, no specific reference is made in the policy documents as to the kind of specialised knowledge and skills that will be required of subject teachers if they are to play a central role in driving this approach. This brings us to the present study which was undertaken to provide a snapshot of the current state of play concerning the development and implementation of language-sensitive teaching in Irish post-primary schools viewed from the perspective of the perceptions and experiences of subject teachers, language support teachers and school managers, from which to determine what this might mean for teacher education in this area.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research aims and approach

The research being reported on had four key aims:

1) To determine the awareness of subject teachers, language support teachers and school managers in relation to growing linguistic and cultural diversity in schools.
2) To explore their perceptions as to what this phenomenon might hold for their own subject classroom practices, and for schools more broadly.
3) To gauge their understanding and skills in relation to language-sensitive teaching as an educational approach and their related concerns and practices in this area.
4) To determine their related professional needs and how these might be addressed by teacher education, to enable them to respond more effectively to the changing linguistic landscape in Irish schools.

The context of the research and the methods used to address these research aims are outlined in the following section.

2.2. Research context and participants

The research was carried out over the course of the academic year 2021/2022 in six, post-primary schools in Limerick, a city in the mid, south-west of Ireland with a population of circa 120,000 (CSO 2022b) including migrant and displaced person communities. Convenience sampling (Creswell 2009) was used to ensure the recruitment of a representative sample of teachers across age, gender and career stage/teaching and the schools involved were selected based on their varying geographic location and pupil socio-economic background. As Figure 1 shows, the participants were 12 subject teachers (females, n = 6; males, n = 6), 12 language support teachers (females, n = 3; males, n = 3) and 12 school managers (females, n = 6; males, n = 6), with one subject teacher, one language support teacher and one school manager recruited from each of the six participating schools.
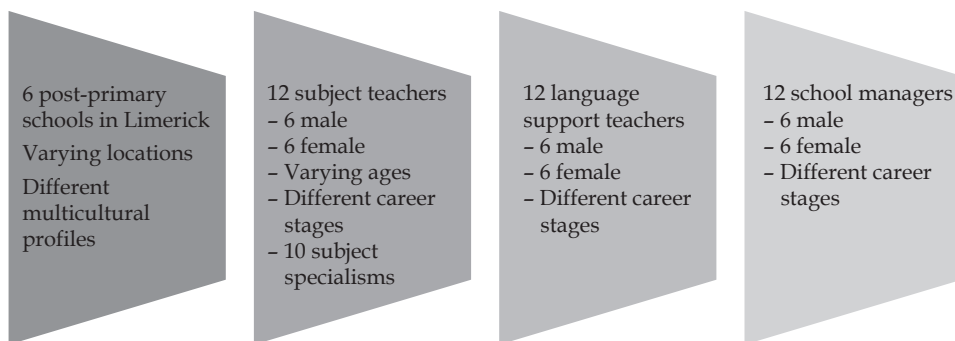
6 post-primary schools in Limerick

Varying locations

Different multicultural profiles

12 subject teachers
– 6 male
– 6 female
– Varying ages
– Different career stages
– 10 subject specialisms

12 language support teachers
– 6 male
– 6 female
– Different career stages

12 school managers
– 6 male
– 6 female
– Different career stages

Figure 1. School and participant profile

Source: current study.

Participant teaching/management experience varied in length from two to twenty-eight years. Each of the subject teachers was involved in the teaching of two subject areas with an overall range of ten subject specialisms: these were: Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Business, French, Spanish, English, History and Geography. The teachers all taught at both junior and senior school cycles which meant that they had experience of preparing pupils for state examinations.

The language support teachers were all involved in the provision of EAL classes to newly arrived pupils from migrant and displaced person backgrounds with classes typically taking place outside the main classroom context. In three of the participating schools, a subject teacher also taught EAL as a second area

of subject specialism. In these instances, the subject areas taught were either French or Spanish.

As far as their teaching qualifications and prior teacher education were concerned, post-primary subject teachers in Ireland are required to hold an initial subject degree and a post-graduate teacher education qualification with teacher education programmes providing core content in relation to general and subject specific pedagogical theory and there is also a teaching practicum which involves two extensive placements in schools under the supervision of a cooperating teacher and university tutors.

Post-primary teachers make pedagogical decisions and undertake student assessments within the framework of a national curriculum. They may also take part in developing the local school curriculum. The language support teachers all held a teaching qualification in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) but only one of the three subject teachers who were involved in the teaching of EAL held a similar teaching qualification.

2.3. Primary data and research methods

The study gathered qualitative data, which was sourced from individual online, dyadic interviews between the present researchers and the participants. As Figure 2 shows, these were structured around the four main themes of awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity in their own classrooms, and in their school and Ireland more widely, their perceptions of the educational challenges and opportunities this brings, their experiences of language sensitivity teaching as an approach, if any; and their related professional and teacher education needs.
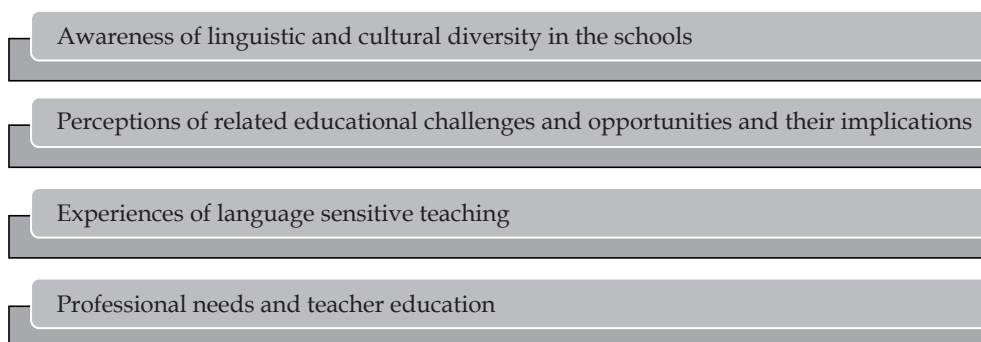
Awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity in the schools

Perceptions of related educational challenges and opportunities and their implications

Experiences of language sensitive teaching

Professional needs and teacher education

Figure 2. Main thematic areas of focus for qualitative analysis

Source: current study.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

As shown in Table 1, the analysis involved identifying and coding sub-categories around the four main analytical themes.

Table 1. Main themes, sub-themes and key related findings

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and its implications	a) In schools generally b) In their classrooms
2. Perceptions of the educational challenges and opportunities in linguistically diverse subject classrooms	a) Challenges b) Opportunities
3. Experiences of language-sensitive teaching	a) Factors promoting b) Factors impeding c) Evidence of emergent practices
4. Professional needs and teacher education	a) Language-related knowledge b) Strategic pedagogical skills c) Key role of language support teachers

Source: current study.

Following this, the interview data were explored in greater depth to gain a more finely nuanced understanding of the teachers' awareness, perceptions, teaching experiences and professional needs in the specified areas. The findings are discussed in the following section drawing on extracts from the individual dyadic interviews for illustrative purposes. In all instances, the identities of the teachers have been protected using pseudonyms.

3.1. Theme 1: Awareness of growing linguistic and cultural diversity and its implications

A common recurring theme observed was that while the teachers and school managers were aware of the changing ethnic and cultural landscape in their own schools and in the wider community, they showed only a limited critical understanding as to the implications of this change for their own teaching practices, as Extract 1 exemplifies:

Extract 1. Teacher of Business and Geography (Louise)
I've been a teacher for more than twenty years and in the past, I would have taught only Irish pupils, and then we started to see increasing number of children from

a Polish background coming into schools, and a few other nationalities too so I suppose there has been quite a change, but it hasn't really influenced the way I teach.

Interestingly, subject teachers who were more recently qualified were found to have a stronger sense of the cultural backgrounds of pupils they taught, which they attributed to their prior teacher education, as is evident in the following extract:

Extract 2. Teacher of Biology and Physics (Conor)
I'm from Limerick and I've seen the population of the city change a lot over the years with different groups of immigrants coming to live and work here. We studied the ways in which schools are changing as a result of migration on my teacher education programme, so this made me more aware of what to expect when I started teaching and helped me to notice pupils from other cultures.

As might be expected, amongst the subject teachers, it was only those who taught a foreign language and EAL who demonstrated an awareness of both the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their pupils. They attributed this to the fact that they were language teachers which made them more sensitive to these aspects, as Extract 3 exemplifies:

Extract 3. Teacher of French and EAL (language support) (Libby)
There are about twenty different nationalities in the school where I teach including pupils from the Ukraine and this says a lot about how Limerick and Ireland have become more multicultural especially in the last decade. I know more about the pupils from non-Irish backgrounds than other teachers would because by nature, foreign language teachers have the antenna up when it comes to noticing different languages and cultures and I also teach EAL, so I get to meet pupils from non-English backgrounds when they arrive, and I test their English language proficiency.

This was also the case for the other language support teachers who participated in the study who were also better informed about multicultural profiles of the schools and the linguistic and cultural identities of those they taught.

3.2. Theme 2: Perceptions of challenges and opportunities in linguistically diverse classrooms

When we explore perceptions relating to the implications of teaching in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms, the most common view expressed by the subject teachers and school managers was that it created difficulties due

to the additional workload it brought as well as problems in classroom communication and integration, as Extract 4 and 5 exemplify:

Extract 4. School Manager (Patrick)
Trying to integrate pupils with a limited understanding of English can place a great deal of strain on teachers and for schools as communication issues arise and teachers end up having to give them a lot of attention, so it adds to our workload.

Extract 5. Teacher of History and English (James)
I have a few pupils from the Ukraine who only have a few words of English, but I don't have any extra time to devote to them and they end up just sitting there looking into space which I know is not good, but this is the problem we are faced with.

Here, we note again that only the foreign language and language support teachers showed insights into the new opportunities that linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms offer, as in Extracts 6 and 7, where the potential to advance multiculturalism and multilingualism in Ireland are mentioned as key benefits:

Extract 6. Teacher of Spanish and EAL (Marie)
I love the new diversity we are seeing because it makes for a much richer cultural experience for everyone and its lovely to hear different languages used in the school. I have two pupils from Poland, and they love talking about how things are done there compared to in Ireland which makes the whole class more aware of another culture which has to be good for the future.

Extract 7. Teacher of EAL (Claire)
With so many languages now spoken in Ireland it's a great opportunity to teach more foreign languages in schools so that all pupils can become multilingual as this would really benefit the Irish economy in the long term.

3.3. Theme 3: Experiences of language-sensitive teaching

As for the participants' experiences of language-sensitive teaching as an approach, the analysis indicates that very few subject teachers were familiar with this term and that there was a general lack of understanding of what it might entail in practice, with some also questioning its feasibility, as in Extracts 8 to 14:

Extract 8. Teacher of Mathematics and Biology (Sean)
I have never actually heard of this and I'm not a linguist so I don't really know what I would be expected to do differently to what I do ordinarily as a teacher.

Extract 9. School Manager (Rose)
I have heard of this, of course, it's in the Teaching Council recommendations, but it's unclear to many of us what it actually means.

Extract 10. Teacher of Geography and History (Martin)
How can teachers of non-language subjects be expected to do this? It would mean changing our courses so I can't see how it can work.

These comments suggest that in the Irish post-primary school context, language-sensitive teaching remains an aspirational goal of policymakers and theorists rather than an approach that schools have embraced or are actively implementing. Notwithstanding this limited overall understanding and engagement, there was evidence that a small number of subject teachers were making a conscious and concerted effort to embed language-related strategies to ensure that all pupils could access the lesson content. These strategies included modifying the pace of their speech, using targeted repetition, highlighting the linguistic aspects of the lesson, and allowing the use of assistive language learning technologies to support the learning process and to foster independent learning, as in Extracts 11, 12, 13 and 14:

Extract 11. Teacher of English and Biology (Sophie)
I am conscious that there are now more pupils who aren't from Ireland and who have come into the school with different levels of fluency in English, so I make a mental note to look out for this and I try to slow down my speech because the Irish tend to speak very quickly, and I repeat key concepts several times to give them a better chance of understanding.

Extract 12. Teacher of Business and Geography (Matthew)
I wouldn't say I really know what language-sensitive teaching is, but I do make sure that I go over the key concepts and definitions really well and keep revising them because everyone has to understand these or they would be lost and there's lots of specialised terms in both of my subjects and I know it can be harder for pupils who don't have English as their first language to understand what the meanings are.

Extract 13. Teacher of Chemistry and Physics (Lorraine)
I learned a lot about different learning technologies in my teacher education programme, so I always try to embed them into my lessons as it helps pupils to become more independent learners and it's a way of adding an extra layer of support which is especially important for pupils with low levels of English.

Interestingly, in the previously highlighted cases, there was a clear sense that the subject teachers were aware of the linguistic difficulties that the specialised language associated with their subjects posed for pupils whose first language was

other than English, and that they were actively seeking strategies to address these challenges. However, it was only the foreign language, and language support teachers who showed an awareness that all teachers can also draw on the multilingual abilities of pupils as a strength and resource, as Extract 14 exemplifies:

> **Extract 14. Teacher of Spanish and French (Libby)**
> I have pupils from lots of different backgrounds including Africa, the Middle East, Afghanistan and South America and many of them are multilingual. For example, some speak Arabic and French or Spanish and Portuguese depending on their country of origin. So, I find they are generally very good foreign language learners because they are used to communicating in different languages and they make connections between them. So, I always get them to do some comparative language analysis work when we meet new words and expressions. Does this word exist in any other language you know? Is it the same or different in English? We have really good classroom discussions about this, and I think the rest of the class benefit from this as well as they can see multilingualism in action, and it is motivating for them. It also helps raise the language awareness of all pupils. This is something that I really want to make other teachers aware of too and it is so important that we acknowledge the multilingual skills of pupils from migrant and displaced person backgrounds because it can help them to develop a more positive self-image instead of feeling they are deficient because they are not native speakers of English which can be the case.

3.4. Theme 4: Teacher professional needs and teacher education

The final aim of the present study was to identify the professional needs of teachers and schools, and to suggest some ways in which these might be addressed, to help advance language-sensitive teaching across the school curriculum in the future. The data indicates that subject teachers often feel challenged and undermined professionally because they are not equipped to address the more complex learning needs that linguistically diverse classrooms bring, as Extracts 15 and 16 exemplify:

> **Extract 15. Teacher of Mathematics and Biology (Chris)**
> I find it stressful to know that we are supposed to implementing new teaching methods to support migrant pupils and that I don't know what this involves and lack the skills to be able to do this.

> **Extract 16. Teacher of Business and English (Frances)**
> I know that we need to be making more of an effort to improve our teaching to ensure that all pupils are included but I don't feel we are being guided enough.

Meanwhile, extract 17 underscores the perceived growing need for school-wide teacher education in this area which school managers believe is becoming increasingly more urgent in the light of the large numbers of newly arrived pupils from the Ukraine now entering Irish post-primary schools.

Extract 17. School Manager (William)
The reality is that most teachers lack the pedagogical knowledge and skills to teach learners who do not have adequate competency in the language of instruction in the classroom, so this is a school-wide problem that needs to be addressed and the war in the Ukraine and the ongoing refugee crisis has brought this to a head.

One key area where school managers feel that specialised training is now vital is in in trauma informed teaching, as is highlighted in Extract 18:

Extract 18. School Manager (Pat)
The war in the Ukraine has brought to a head the need for specialised training for teachers and support staff so that we can integrate these children as quickly as possible. In particular we need training in trauma informed teaching as we are meeting children who have experienced terrible suffering with the loss of family members and their homes, and we need guidance on this urgently.

In the final four extracts, we highlight the key role that language teachers can play in the development of language-sensitive teaching at the whole school level by working alongside subject teachers to improve their language awareness and from this, their planning and teaching skills. As Extracts 19–21 exemplify, this is understood to be the crucial first step for any real advancement in this area to occur, with many of the language teachers pointing out that their language knowledge and skills need to be more valued and better exploited.

Extract 19. Language support teacher (Lucy)
It's becoming increasing obvious that the expertise and work of language support teachers needs to be better appreciated. We know that we can play a key role in the upskilling of other teachers, but the problem is that they don't really understand this. For instance, we can provide language awareness workshops and work in partnership with subject teachers around planning and lesson delivery. It is possible to introduce this but is has to be done systematically and we need subject teacher buy-in which isn't really there at the moment because many just don't see the purpose of this or how it relates to their own professional development.

Extract 20. Language support teacher (Mary)
I am excited to see that schools are finally starting to understand my role and how I can help support the introduction of language sensitive teaching practices into the

school as a whole because language matters. It lies at the heart of everything that we do so we need to give it the attention it deserves.

Extract 21. Language support teacher (Joan)
Instead of seeing my role as separate and apart from the subject teachers, which many still do, we need to know how we can all work together more effectively. In my language classes I make an effort to prepare pupils for the various school subjects and for some subjects I liaise closely with the subject teacher, so I know the themes the pupils are working on and their related tasks and assignments. However, not all teachers appreciate the supporting role I can play so my role is undervalued in the school as a whole.

This comment underscores the largely untapped potential of language teachers to play a more central role going forward in the advancement of language sensitive teaching at the whole school level and to raise appreciation and knowledge about language in schools for the wider and obvious benefits this can bring.

However, there was also a sense from the comments made by several of the language support teachers that any planned continuous professional development initiatives for subject teacher upskilling would need to consider sensitivities around subject teacher lack of language awareness and knowledge. In this regard, it was felt that while guided mentorship by language support teachers drawing on examples of classroom data in subject-specific classrooms could be the best approach to adopt, for this to work, school managers would need to incentivise teachers and create the kind of supportive environment that would encourage subject teachers to engage in mentorship initiatives of this kind, as in Extract 22:

Extract 22. (Jack)
I would be happy to collaborate with and mentor subject teachers more, but it would have to done in the right way so as to avoid them feeling undermined professionally. So, they need to see this as beneficial for them and feel that it is being done across the board to support them rather than to make them feel they are deficient in some way.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The present study has indicated that while there is a growing awareness in Irish, post-primary schools of the ways in which classrooms are becoming more linguistically and culturally diverse, there is a limited understanding

on the part of subject teachers and school managers of the implications this holds for their own classroom teaching. Moreover, there remains an overall perception in schools that this ongoing phenomenon is creating additional pressures and challenges and is therefore problematic rather than offering new learning opportunities, which suggests a need for critical awareness raising in relation to the benefits that this approach offers for all pupils irrespective of their backgrounds. The study has also highlighted that subject teachers feel ill-equipped to address the perceived additional challenges that a more linguistically diverse school population brings and that they are in obvious need of professional guidance and training in this area, with language-awareness raising a crucial first step.

By contrast, there was a strong sense that foreign language teachers and language support teachers had developed a critical understanding of both the challenges and the benefits that this situation brings, and as a result, were better equipped to implement language-sensitive strategies into their everyday teaching. In this regard, the study further found some evidence of good emergent practices in this area amongst subject teachers, mainly in the form of teacher speech modifications and the use of assistive technologies to scaffold newly arrived pupils from a non-English first language background. However, it was only the foreign language teachers and the language support teachers who recognised the potentials around drawing on the full linguistic resources of pupils and embedding an explicit language awareness-raising focus into their lessons, which was indicative both of their support for language-sensitive teaching as an approach, and of their critical understanding of what it means in practice (e.g., Cummins 2019; Gogolin 2013).

A further key finding was that language support teachers were well-informed and welcoming of the potential key role that they could play in upskilling subject teachers in areas including the development of subject-specific language awareness and the implementation of transformative pedagogies which place language at the heart of every lesson, across the school curriculum. These findings support earlier research in the Irish educational context (Gallagher & Leahy 2014; Farrell & Baumgart 2019) which has underscored the central role that language support teachers can and should play in the development and implementation of whole school approaches to language-sensitive teaching across the academic curriculum to enable this approach to be more widely advanced.

However, the overall findings of the research reported on are that language-sensitive teaching is still only very partially understood in Irish post-primary schools and that there is an obvious need for teacher education in this area for teaching professionals at all career stages. It has further underscored the key

role that language support teachers can play in subject teacher awareness raising and skills development as part of a whole school development approach, and that school managers have a vital role to play in supporting collaborations and mentoring initiatives involving language teachers and subject teaching for such purposes to help advance this approach more widely, which supports the earlier conclusions reached by Calafato (2021). In this regard, the study has also highlighted the need for school managers to provide teaching professionals with structures for mentoring and guidance, and for data-informed analysis of practice to be included, to encourage uptake and ensure an evidence-based approach to language-sensitive teaching (Castro, Kelly & Shih 2010; Chubbuck, Clift, Allard & Quinlan 2001).

As far as future directions in teacher education are concerned more widely, the findings support the arguments made for pre-service teachers to be provided with subject specific language-awareness training and pedagogical upskilling in relation to language-sensitive strategies that they can embed into their routine classroom practices (European Commission 2021; Teaching Council 2020). The results of this study, and the exemplars provided, can help to inform the development of training and professional development initiatives of this kind for teachers, teacher educators and school leaders working in increasing linguistic diverse in Irish post-primary schools. The findings can also be drawn on for comparative purposes in relation to other international school contexts, to gain a wider sense of how language-sensitive teaching is developing more widely within the EU and other global educational spaces, and to help drive language-teaching approaches. This is with the overall aim of enhancing the educational experience and learning outcomes of all pupils, and to promote more inclusive schools and societies more widely.

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