



Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University

# Attrition and Continuity in Immersion Education: Implications for Policy

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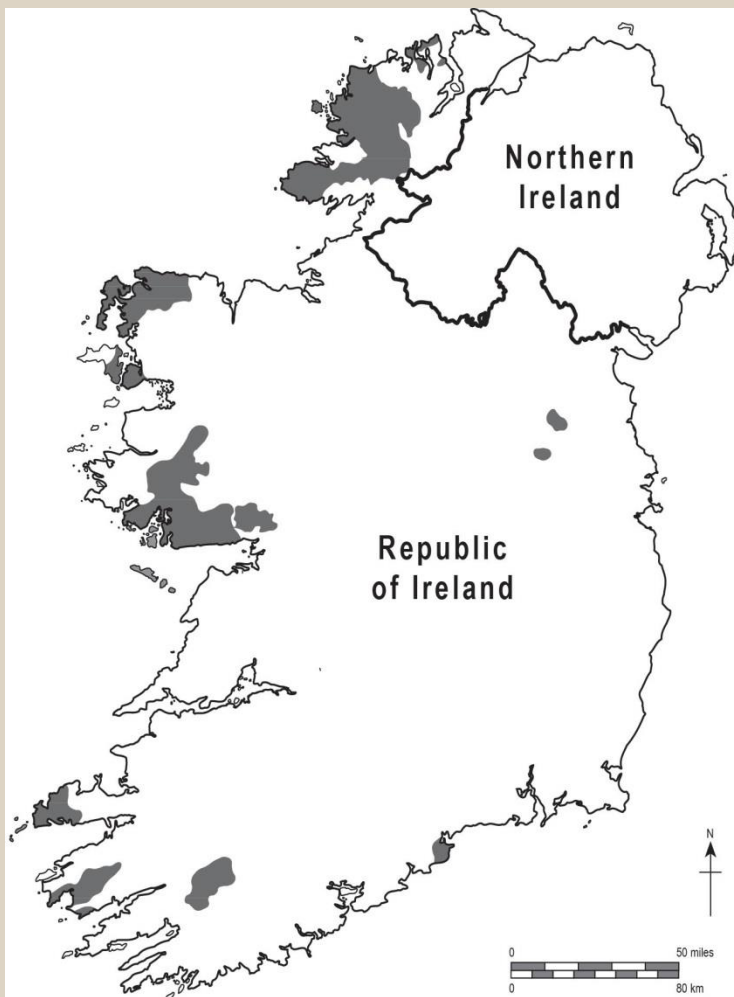
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Connecting Research and Practice Across Contexts  
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# Institiúid Oideachais

# Overview

- Context
- Attrition and progression in bilingual education
- Current progression trends
- What is the situation in your context?
- Methodology
- Progression rates in Irish immersion education in the Republic of Ireland
- The decision to progress: Who? When? Why?
- Common causes for concern
- Conclusions

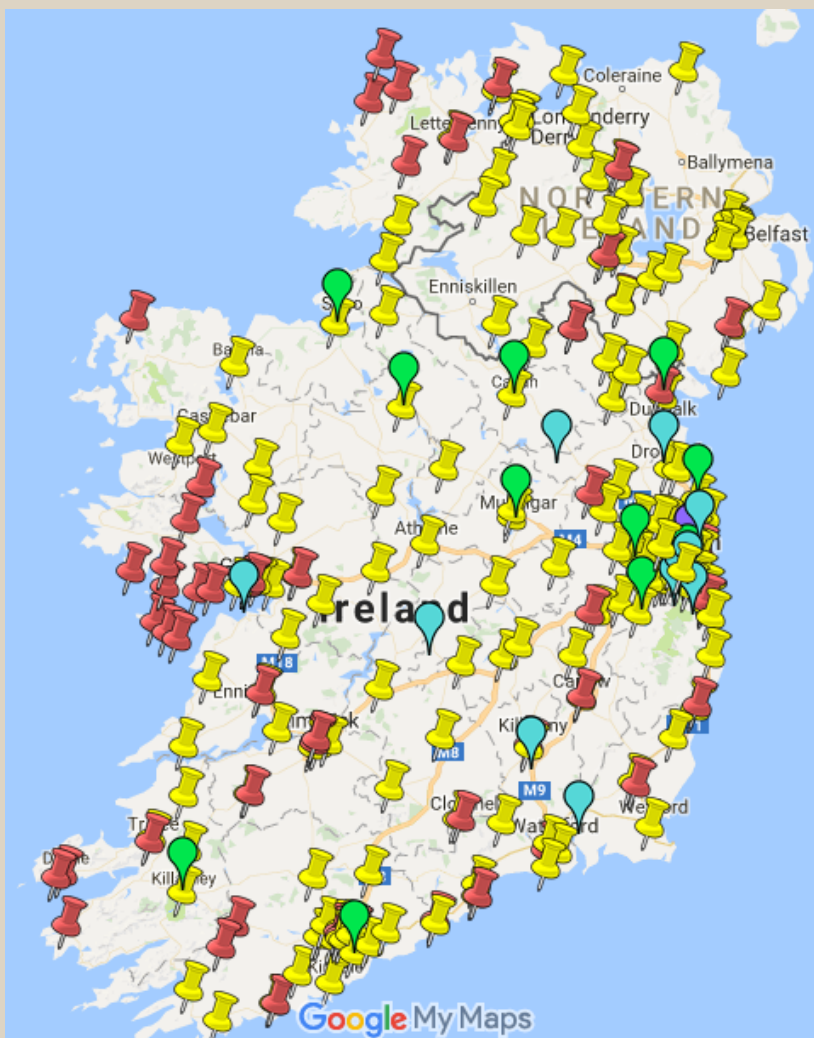
# Context



- Role of schools in language revitalisation
- Immersion programs since 1922 in Republic of Ireland

	Census 2011
Can speak Irish (> 3yrs)	1.77m (41.4%)
Speaks Irish on a daily basis outside education	77,185 (1.8%)

# Enrolment and demand



	Schools	Students	% total students
Primary immersion	179	41,000	5.84%
Post-primary immersion	48	11,000	2.14%

Number of primary schools able to satisfy student demand	No of primary schools who had to refuse entry to students	No response	Number of students refused entry due to lack of places
73/143	55/143	15/143	1,656

# Attrition as a challenge for immersion education

- Despite the negative impact attrition can have on immersion education (Bourdreaux & Olivier, 2009; Kerbow, Azcoitia & Buell, 2003), it is very hard to measure (Culligan, 2010; Halsall, 1994; Morton, Lemieux, Diffey & Awender 1999).
- Progression statistics are very rarely gathered and analysed (Culligan, 2010; Halsall, 1994)
- Progression to bilingual models adds to the confusion in analysis (Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru, 2016)

# Attrition and Progression in bilingual education

- Attrition is a significant obstacle to the Immersion Education continuum, particularly at the point of transfer between primary and post-primary education (Bourdreaux, 2011; Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru, 2010; Makropoulos, 2010; Wesley & Baig, 2012).
- Common point of attrition among many international immersion education contexts (Bourdreaux & Olivier, 2009; Cadez, 2006; Canadian Council for Learning, 2007; Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru 2009; Redknap 2006)
- Poses a particular challenge in contexts where students have linguistic access to both the immersion language and the majority language
  - Scotland (O’Hanlon, 2010)
  - Basque country (Gardner, 2002)
  - Canada (Makropoulos, 2010)
  - Wales (Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru, 2016)

# Reasons for attrition

- Concerns regarding the ability and capacity of immersion schools to cater for the child's learning difficulties and requirements (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Dillon, 2012; Harding, 2012; Ó Duibhir et al., 2015; Wise & Chen, 2009)
- Concerns regarding limited subject choice or immersion content (Culligan 2010; Halsall, 1994; Lewis & Shapson, 1989; Obadia & Theriault, 1995; Ó Duibhir et al., 2015)

# Reasons for attrition: unrealistic expectations

- Parents' expectations do not match pupil language development (Wesley & Baig, 2012)
- satisfied customers do not leave; however, dissatisfied customers must choose either to communicate their reasons for being dissatisfied (voice) or simply to leave (exit). Similarly, the dissatisfaction some immersion parents experience leads them to withdraw their child, often without first attempting to use their voice and make their frustrations known. Exploring the reasons why people are dissatisfied enough to withdraw their child from a program is important information if we are going to address the attrition challenge [(Hirsch, 1980) in Bourdreaux, 2011]



# Reasons for attrition: parental participation

- Research highlights the positive effects parental participation can have on a child's educational experience and academic development (Bartram, 2006; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002).
- Parental participation can also have an important impact on language education (Ó Duibhir et al., 2015; Wesley & Baig, 2012).
- Parental participation lessens at post-primary as subject content grows increasingly complex and parent self-efficacy reduces as a result (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).
- Parents in Irish-medium Education define participation as help with and through the medium of Irish (Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013), while Harris et al. (2006) state that the lack of proficiency among the majority of parents in the IM sector, makes this very challenging

# Current progression trends in immersion education in Ireland

- Relatively high non-progression but low attrition rates in Ireland (Ó Duibhir et al. 2015)
- While some students transfer from Irish-medium education during primary school, these figures are quite low, with 1.5% and 0.94% percent of pupils transferring from Irish medium primary schools in the south and in the north of Ireland respectively
- 59.4% of IM primary schools in the south and 30% and in the north of Ireland have access to IM post-primary education (Ó Duibhir et al., 2015: 78)

# What is the situation regarding attrition and progression in your context?

- Is attrition an issue in your context?
- Is progression important in your context?
- Do students progress from elementary to high school immersion programs?
- What factors influence these decisions?
- Are there high school immersion programs available?
- Are there transfer programs in place?
- Who makes the decision to progress or not?

# Methodology

- Random sample representing 20% of IM schools (26) in the Republic of Ireland
- Questionnaires to primary school principals
- 571 questionnaires sent to parents and pupils in Grade 6 (6<sup>th</sup> Class):
  - 284 (49.7%) were returned by pupils)
  - 321 (56.2%) returned by parents
- In-depth interviews conducted with a further sample of 26 parents
- Themes explored included: linguistic background; language use and proficiency; satisfaction with IM thus far; support provided regarding progression; reasoning behind decision to continue or not with IM education

# Parental satisfaction with primary immersion education (n=321 Grade 6, Rol)

**Are you happy with the educational and language experience that your child has had to date? (Grade 6, Rol parents n=315)**

<b>Yes</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>99%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1%</b>

# Progression rates from Irish immersion primary to post-primary schools (Principals)

	Pupils in Grade 6 - 2014	Number of pupils from 6 <sup>th</sup> class 2014 who progressed to Imm. post-primary school	% transfer
All schools	<b>764</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>40.2%</b>
Schools without Imm. post-primary school within catchment area			
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Schools with Imm. post-primary school within catchment area	<b>539</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>53.6%</b>



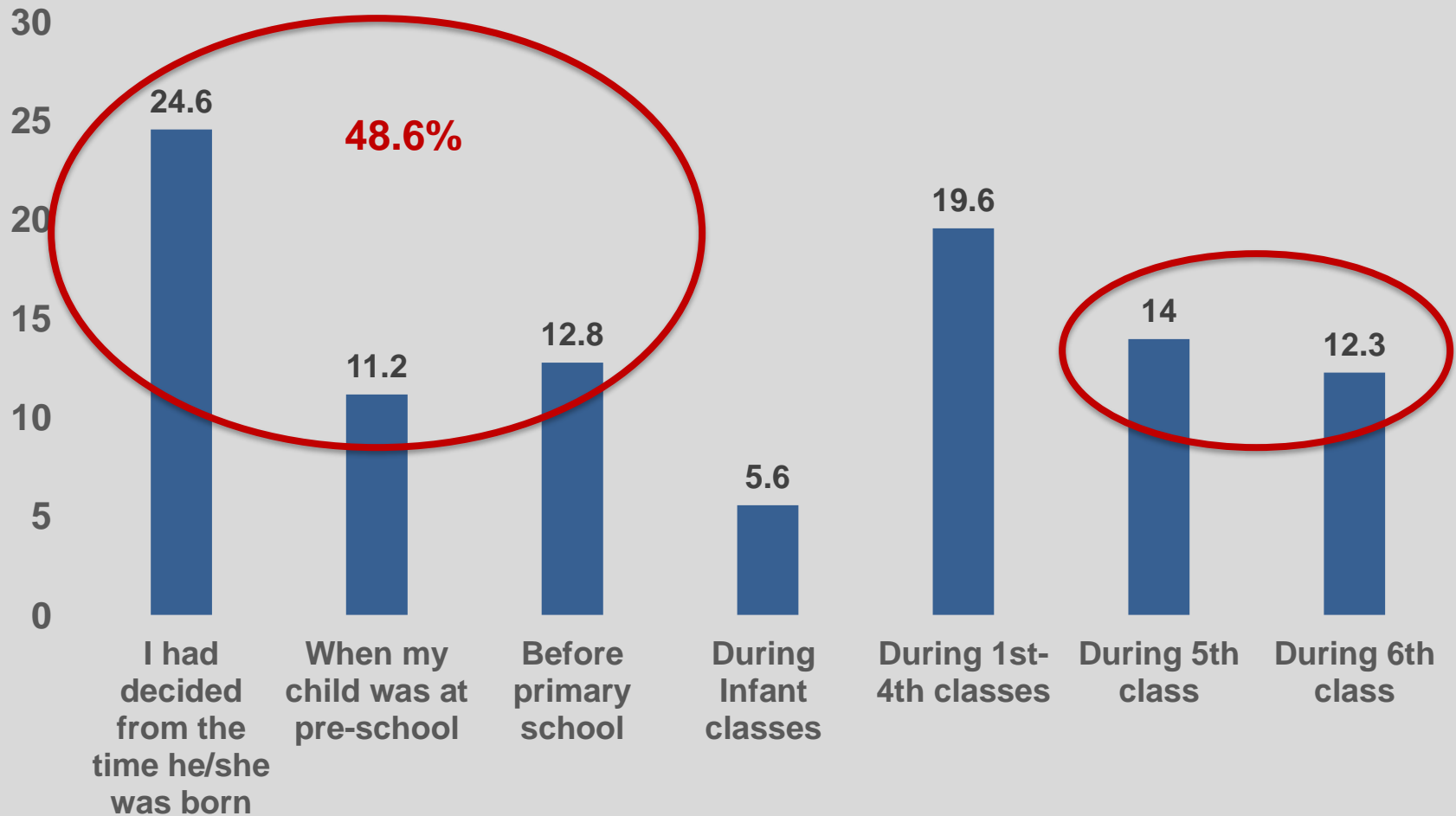
# Progression rates from immersion primary to post-primary schools (Parents)

- 49.8% of parents reported that they intend for their child to progress to immersion post-primary education
- 42.1% of parents reported that they intend for their child to progress to English-medium post-primary education
- 5.3% are unsure
- This progression rate compares with international progression rates in other immersion contexts (Llywodraeth Cymru, 2015; Makropoulos, 2010).

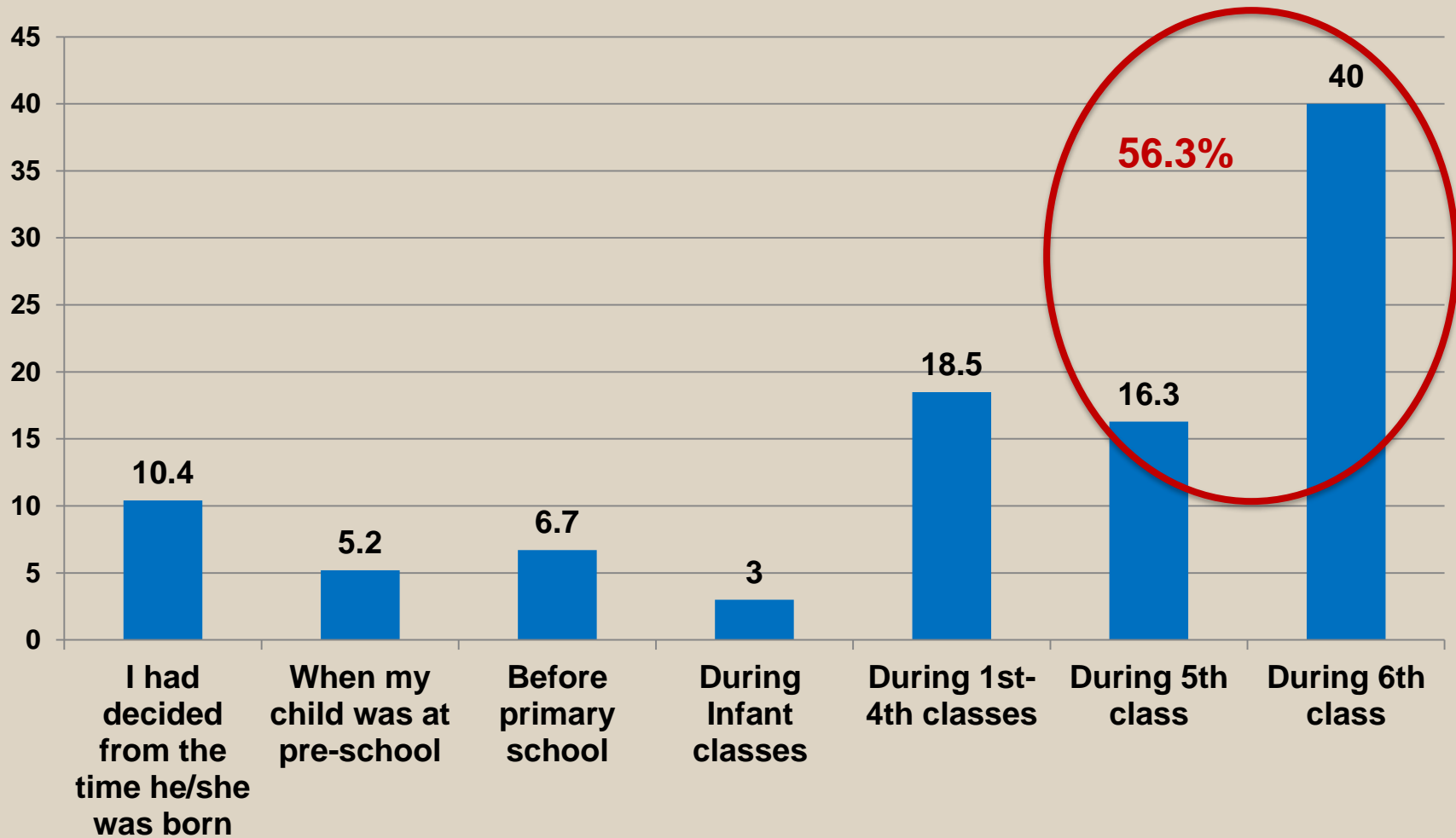
# The decision to progress: who?

- A higher level of engagement with decision regarding Post-Primary with emphasis shifted to academic success leading to employment opportunities:
  - “maybe the atmosphere and a nice feeling to the school is more important for primary school ... whereas you have a little bit more of an eye ... to the kind of results output even though I hate the kind of idea of the league table which I can't help having a quick glance.”
  - “I think you're just thinking short term really when they're starting school you know but when it gets nearer it's long term you're kind of trying to help them make the right decisions”
- Decision a collaborative process with the final decision made in most cases by pupils themselves

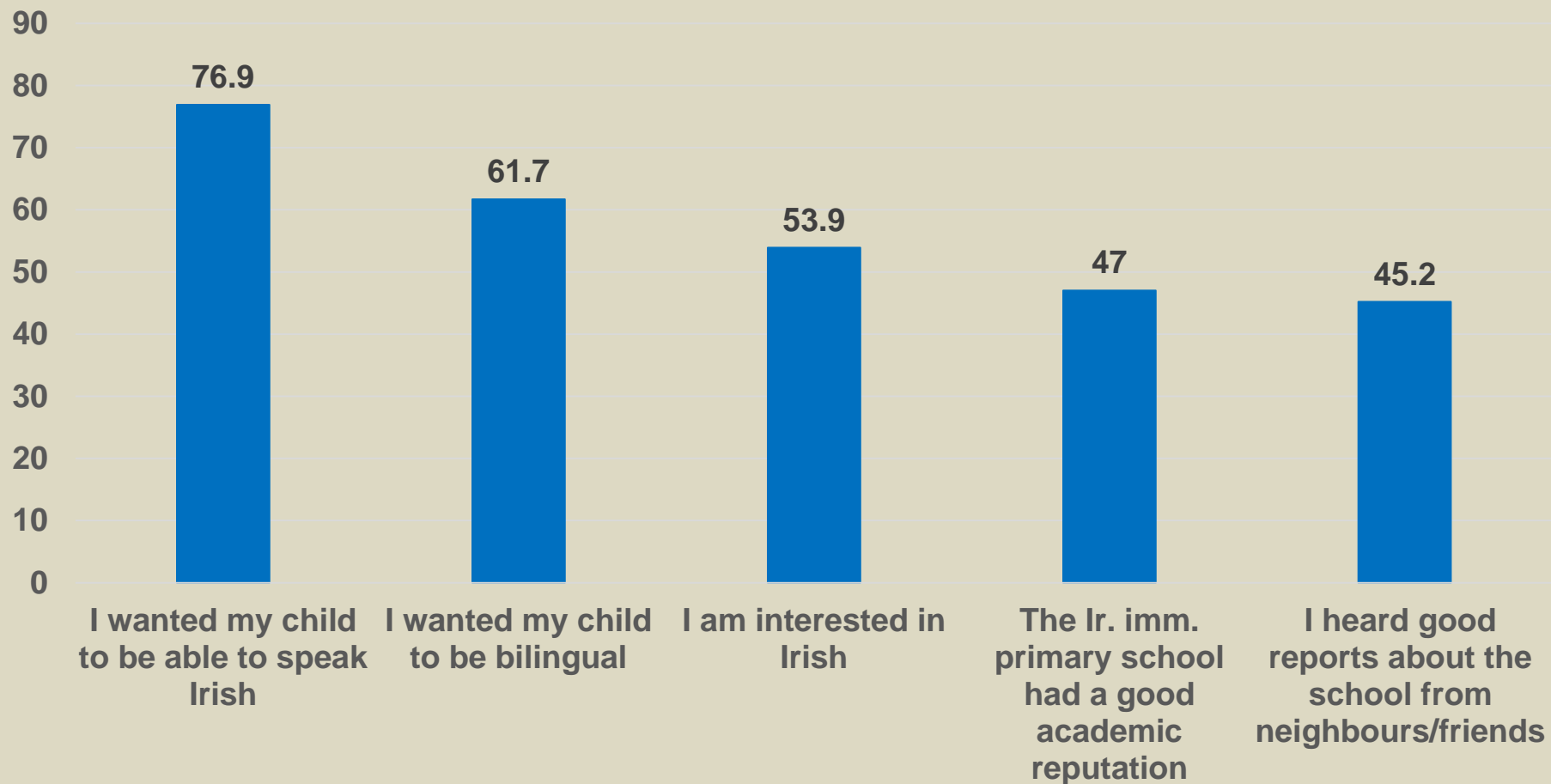
# The decision to progress to Irish-medium post-primary: when? (n=179)



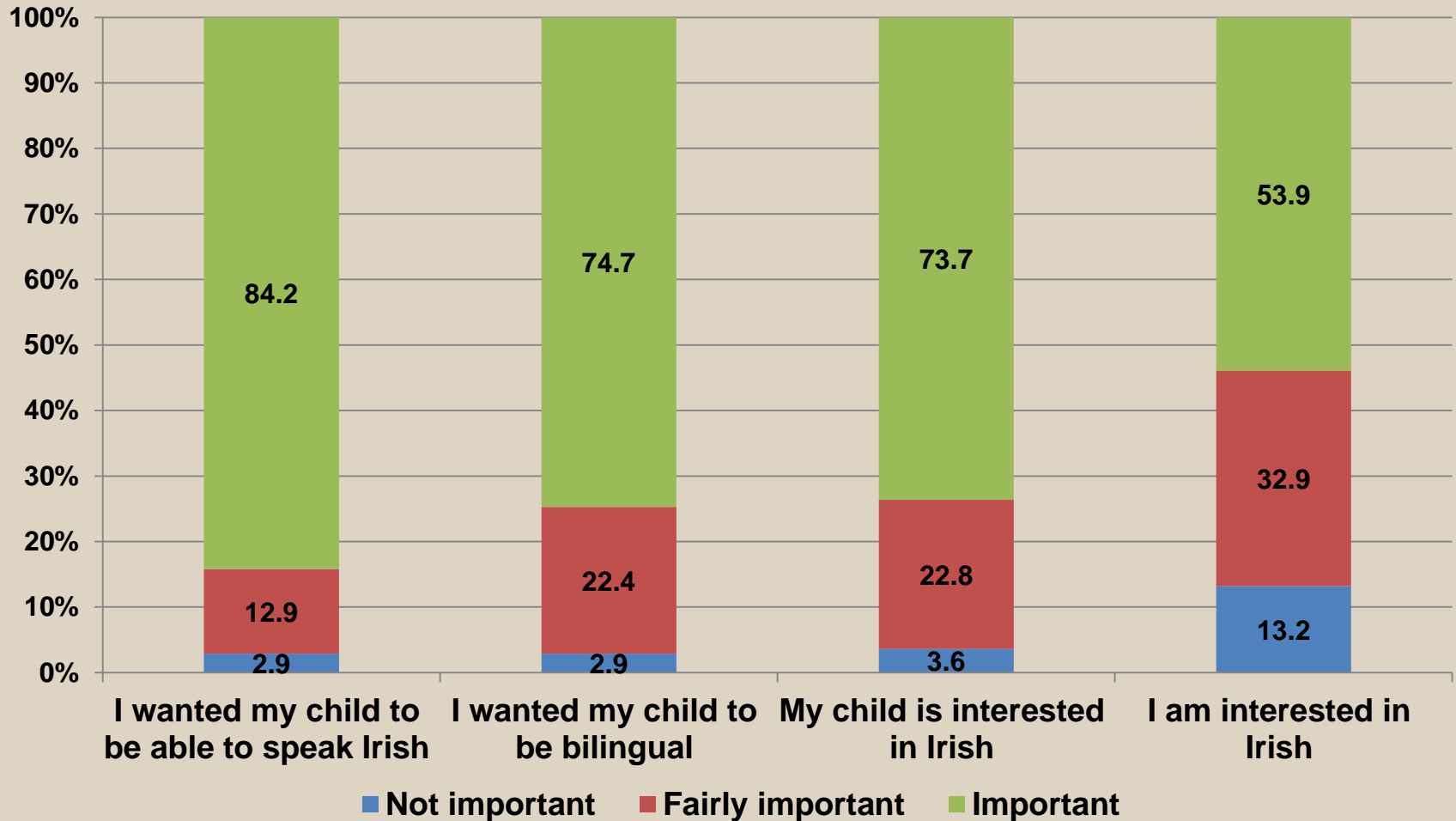
# The decision to progress to English medium post-primary: when? (n=135)



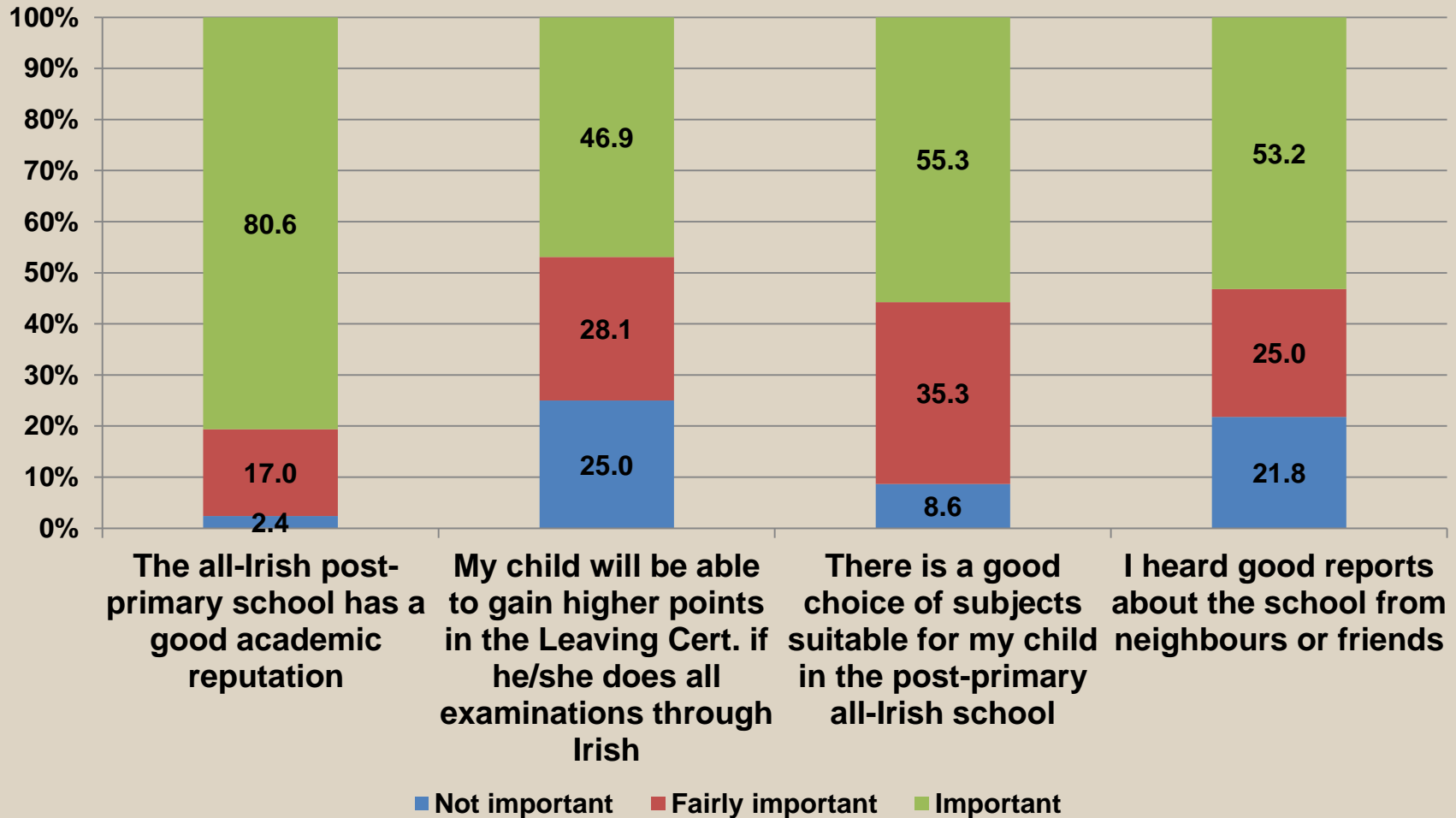
# Parental motivation to choose primary immersion education (n=321 Grade 6, RoI)



# Factors influencing parents' decision to send their children to immersion post-primary education (n=160–179)



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## (Other) Factors influencing parents' decision to send their children to immersion post-primary education

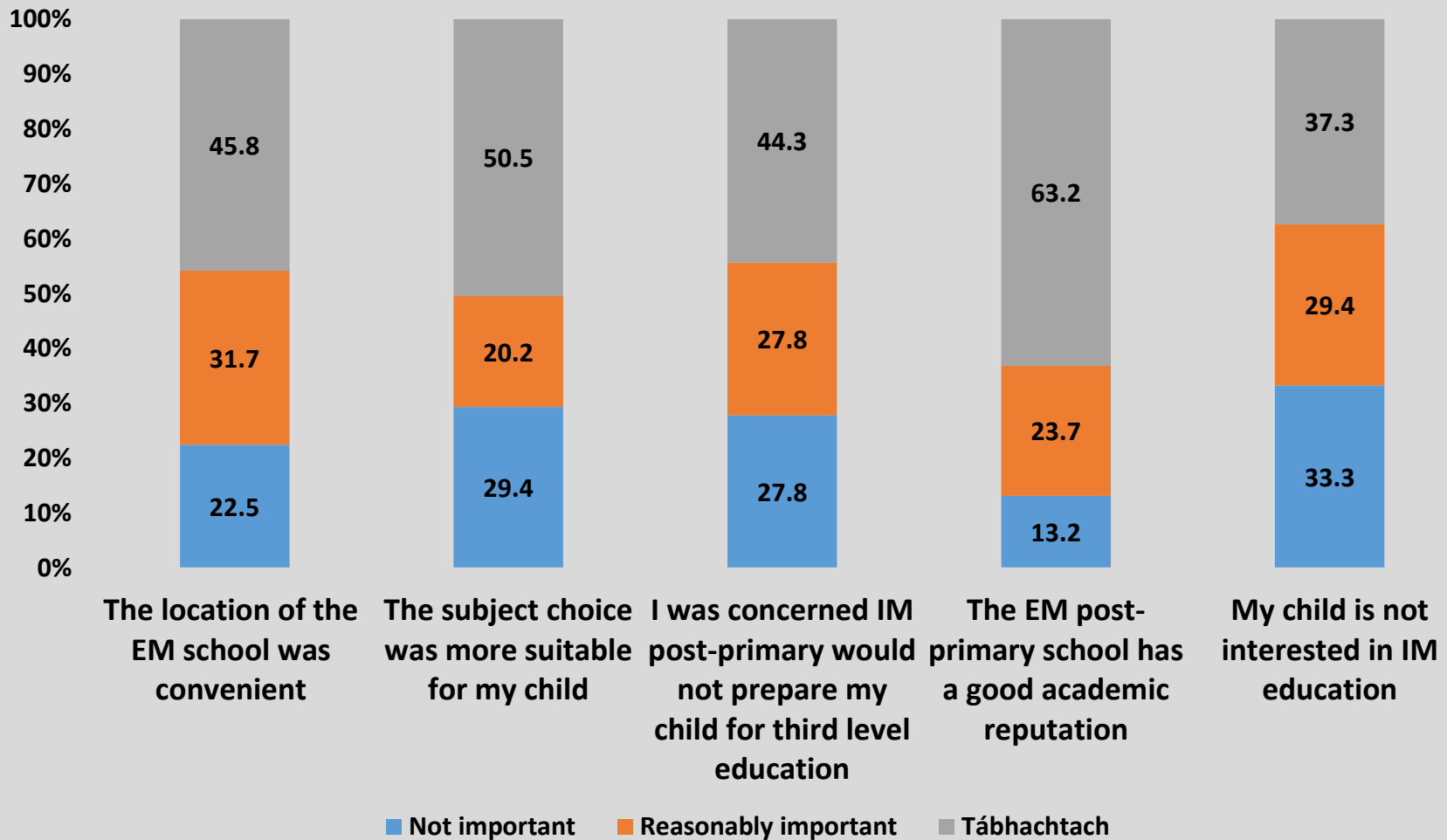
- Composition of immersion post-primary school

“the good schools locally, secondary schools, would be single sex and you know I just think it’s such a relaxed school here and it’s just really worked for both of my children and I think both of them could struggle to go to a same sex now”
- Location of immersion post-primary school

“In terms of the logistics the proximity to the school etc. and things like that are the key factors too and it’s actually walking distance for us to send the children there which is good”



# Factors influencing parents' decision to send their children to English-medium post-primary education (n=102-120)



# Concerns regarding special educational requirements in an immersion setting

- 21.3% of parents maintain this was a contributing factor while 64% of principals do not believe that parents' concerns regarding special educational needs of children would be a factor in the decision making process

“My child has a speech and language difficulty and I think English post primary would benefit him greatly”

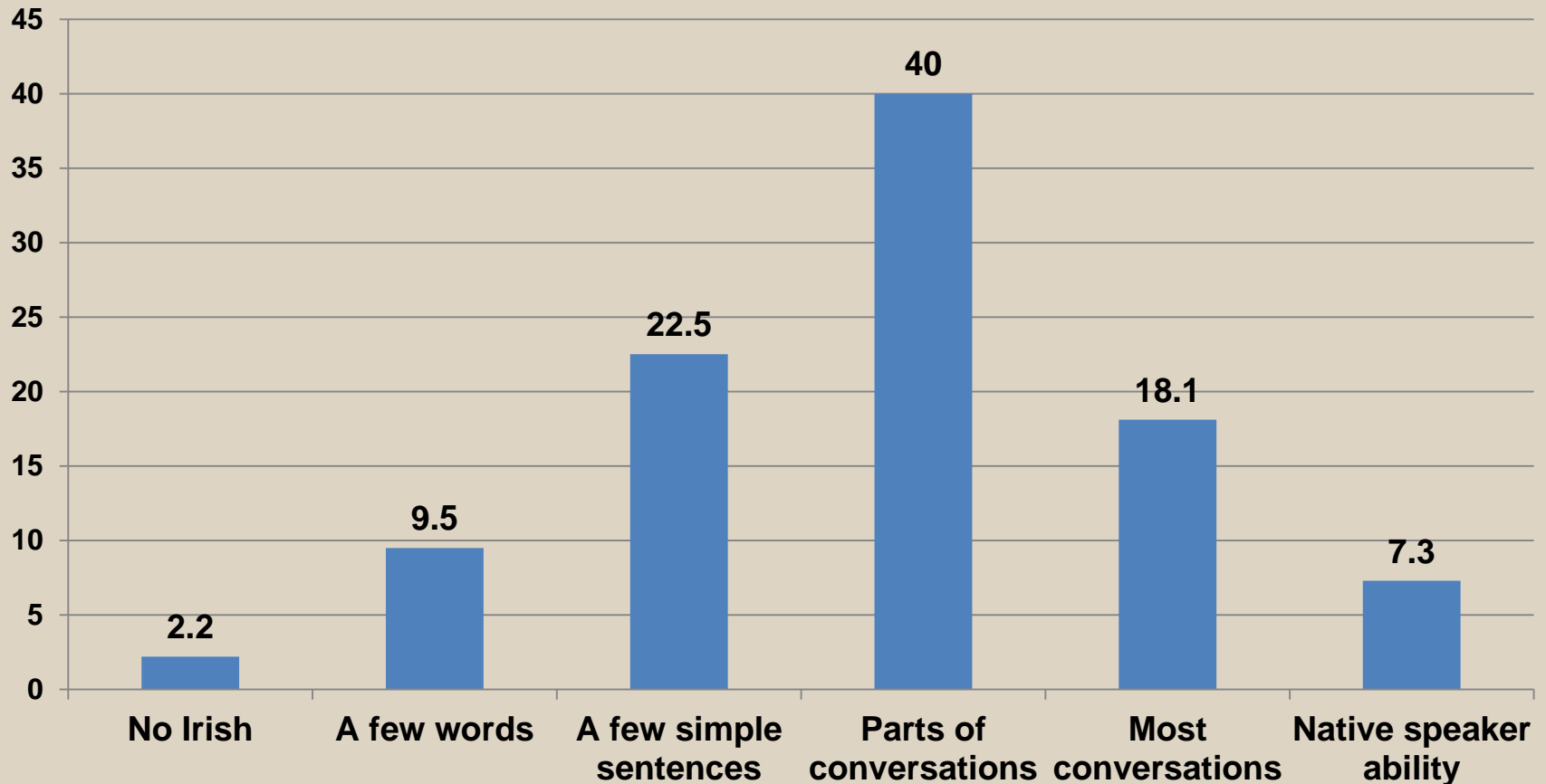
“My child has ADHD & dyspraxia, I would have loved him to attend an Irish-speaking school but between the resource teacher and myself it was decided it would be difficult for him.”

“My daughter is dyslexic and although very happy in an all-Irish primary school, I believe a post primary English school is the best choice for her ability.”

# Parental participation in Irish immersion education

- Current opportunities rely on parents' proficiency in the target language, resulting in withdrawal and feelings of low self-efficacy
- “I am a little bit worried that if she needs help with school work I won't understand or be able.”
- “I feel that I will not have the Irish vocabulary to help with homework such as Science/tech groups “
- “My own ability to be of assistance and understanding subjects through Irish.”
- A need to reform current approaches to parent participation in immersion education (without undermining language ethos and policy) (Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013)

# Parents ability to speak Irish (n=315)



# Conclusions

- An imbalance in the provision of Irish immersion post-primary schools across the Republic of Ireland needs to be addressed
- Parents' low level of proficiency in the Irish language leading to low self-efficacy acts as a significant barrier to participation.
  - A need to develop a reformed model of parental participation which allows for activities where proficiency in the target language is not obligatory
- A significant portion of parents fear their child's special educational needs would not and could not be addressed sufficiently or effectively in an immersion setting at post-primary level.
  - A need for more effective and clearer communication of how special learning and educational needs of pupils are addressed in an immersion setting, particularly the possible impact of L2 on L1 development

# Conclusions

- Many parents have little if any first-hand experience of Irish immersion education. While the majority of parents profess an interest in bilingualism for their children, many worry about the impact this will have on their English language development
  - A need to develop an education and awareness strategy to inform parents (and students) about the language acquisition process as a lifelong endeavour and promote IM education as a continuum which runs from pre-school to post-primary (or third level/university)

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Go raibh maith agaibh!

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