

“I want them to have a good education”: The “New Irish” Parents and the Primary School System

Claire Connaughton

Mary Immaculate College

Faulty of Education

School of Life, Society and Religious Education

This thesis was submitted to Mary Immaculate College in fulfilment of the requirements for a Masters of Arts in Education (January 2019).

Supervisor: Dr Angela Canny

Word Count: 59,817

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation- “*I want them to have a good education*”: The “New Irish” Parents and the Primary School System’ is my own work. All quotations from other sources are duly referenced and acknowledged.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deep appreciation to the following people who aided and supported this research:

To Dr Angela Canny for providing valuable advice and guidance during all stages of this research process. Your time and expertise have been invaluable.

To the parents and professionals who took part in this research study: thank you for so generously sharing your experiences and perspectives. Your contribution to this research project is very much appreciated.

To Sr. Angela Bracken and Magesh Nandikkara for offering insights and moral support during this endeavour.

And finally to my parents, Padraig and Geraldine, for facilitating me in every possible way to reach my goals. I owe an immeasurable debt to you.

Dedication

To Deirdre- for always being there.

Abstract

Just over one in 10 primary school age children in Ireland are first-generation immigrants (Department of Education and Skills [DES] 2018a). An even larger number of Irish primary school pupils have at least one immigrant parent (DES 2018; Central Statistics Office 2017). However, surprisingly little is known about the experiences of these “new Irish” parents (Roder *et al.* 2014, p.15) as they navigate the Irish primary school system. In extending the work of Cotter and Kolawole (2015) and Martin *et al.* (2018), this small-scale study employed semi-structured interviews to explore the lived realities of a small ethnically diverse group of immigrant parents. Some key people, including migrant rights advocates and ethnic minority community representatives, also shared their perspectives.

This study used Bourdieu’s theoretical framework to understand how immigrant parents learn how to “do school” in Ireland (Hickes 2002, p.217). An examination of the personal narratives provided some insight into how immigrant parents view and enact their role in their children's education. The qualitative findings also reveal the value which immigrant parents place on education and the high aspirations they hold for their children. Several obstacles to immigrant parent involvement were also identified. The results may help provide a better understanding of how immigrant parent-school partnerships can be supported in the Irish primary school context.

Key words: immigrant parents; parent-school relationships; parental involvement; ethnic capital

Chapter 1: Introduction

“If society values its children, it must cherish their parents.”

(Bowlby 1980, cited in Sunderland 2006, p.268)

1.0 Introduction

This study begins by acknowledging the vital role which parents play in their children’s education. The Irish Constitution (1937) makes parents legally responsible for their children's education, however this study observes a lack focus placed on understanding immigrant parents’ experiences with the Irish primary school system, despite the fact that immigrants are a sizeable minority within the parent body of Irish primary schools (Central Statistics Office [CSO] 2017; Department of Education and Skills [DES] 2018a). This study builds on previous studies by Cotter and Kolawole (2015) and Martin *et al.* (2018) and hears stories of positivity, hope, and challenge from a diverse group of parents who have settled in Ireland. This introductory chapter articulates the rationale underpinning this qualitative study and lists the research questions under investigation. Finally, it provides a description of the chapter layout.

1.1 Rationale

Cultural diversity is ‘the presence of a variety of cultures and cultural perspectives within a society’ (Parekh 2000, p.165). The latest census (CSO 2017) figures reveal that 535,475 individuals from 200 different nations were living in Ireland in April 2016, representing 17.3% of the total population. Irish classrooms are also culturally diverse places of learning. The National and Special School Annual Censuses (DES 2018) reveals that 6% of students originate from EU (European Union) 13 states, 2% from Asia, 1% from Africa and 2% from elsewhere. It must be noted that students with dual nationality or those with at least one immigrant parent were included in the 507,559

students registered as Irish. Therefore, it can be speculated that the total number of Irish primary school students with an ethnic minority background is likely to be in excess of the 11% figure listed in the DES (2018) report. These statistics, taken together, imply that the experiences of immigrant parents is worthy of examination. While remaining cognisant that immigrant parents are not a homogenous group (Tam *et al.* 2017), this project will spotlight the experiences of some immigrant parents with the Irish primary school system. Although the findings of this research project are not representative of all immigrant families living in Ireland, efforts were made to include the perspectives of parents from a myriad of nationalities, migration streams, educational backgrounds, and socioeconomic groupings.

This research project adds to the existing body of literature by listening to a relatively under researched population narrate their personal experiences. This study maintains that the individual story can provide insights into the everyday reality of child rearing in Ireland. It explores how immigrant parents perceive their own place and their children's place in Irish society. Furthermore, the act of individualising the immigrant experience tends to improve the visibility of their social reality and makes it more comprehensible for outsiders (O'Connor *et al.* 2017).

This study also explores whether migrant status impacts on a parents' ability to support their children's learning in school. Kao (2004) notes that there can be many barriers to immigrant parental involvement such as communication difficulties or a lack of insider knowledge of how the education system in the host country operates. However, there are several studies which suggest that migrant status is a social capital resource rather than a deficit. What Zhou and Bankston (1998) and Modood (2004) label as "ethnic capital" are the social networks and dispositions unique to migrant populations which serve to buffer them against economic and social disadvantage and facilitate the upward

mobility of their children. This study analyses the immigrant parents' habitus and capital reserves in an attempt to investigate whether such ethnic capital is evident among immigrant parents living in Ireland.

Parental involvement has been shown to improve student academic outcomes irrespective of the socioeconomic background, race, ethnicity, or the age of the child (Dotterer and Wehrspann 2016; Durisic and Bunijevac 2017; Goodall 2017). Parental engagement positively affects a host of school-related variables, such as school retention rates, social skills development, motivation, resilience, mental health and self-confidence (Emerson *et al.* 2012; Reininger and Santana López 2017). Furthermore, successful parent-school relationships are regarded as a means of reducing the migrant-native attainment gap and ensuring equal opportunities for ethnic minority students (Baert and Cockx 2013; Kiel *et al.* 2016; Ruhose and Schwerdt 2016; McGillicuddy and Devine 2018). This study, while not attempting to quantify the effects of immigrant parental involvement on their children's academic progress, seeks to examine the nature of parental involvement among immigrant parents.

Studies of parental involvement tend to be based on traditional white, middle-class norms of parent involvement as opposed to an ethnic minority understanding of parental engagement (Goldsmith and Robinson Kurpius 2018). Therefore, this study provides an insight into how the cultural values of the immigrant parents in Ireland may influence how they construct their role and responsibilities within the Irish primary school system. However, parental involvement does not "just happen." Schools have a role to play in recognising parents as equal stakeholders and in encouraging parents to "take their place in the education of their children" (Pushor and Ruitenberg 2005, p.2). Thus, it is hoped that the insights gleaned from the parents' experiences of school engagement may inform how home-school partnerships among ethnic minority families can be supported.

Finally, this study is premised on the assumption that most parents want what is best for their children (Janta and Harte 2016). Schools, however, are places of more than just academic learning: children develop socially and emotionally in the classroom and negotiate their sense of national identity (Schnepf 2007; Cherti and McNeil 2012; Baert *et al.* 2016). Thus, within the context of immigrant families, formal schooling might trigger questions of identity politics (Pinson 2014) as the ethnic minority family unit straddles two –sometimes contrasting– social and cultural worlds. Parents may find themselves torn between wanting to pass on their ethnic heritage to their children while at the same time recognising their child's identification with the culture of the host country. Mindful that differences in parental and student experiences of education exist (Hill *et al.* 2018), this study also sheds light on whether the immigrant parent and the children's sense of self are shaped by their engagement with the Irish primary school system.

1.2 Research aims

Due to the ample scope of the topic, this study limits its exploration to the lived experiences of immigrant parents in the Irish primary school, and how parents perceive their place within that system. Although the parents were asked about their levels of involvement in their children's education, it was not the purpose of this study to examine the effects of parental involvement on the academic outcomes of ethnic minority pupils. While the literature highlights how school shapes children's cultural identity (Waldron and Pike 2006), this study is not an attempt to evaluate the efficacy with which primary schools act as zones of acculturation for immigrant families. It does, however, explore whether the children's attendance of Irish schools shapes the intra-personal and interpersonal dynamics of the family unit.

Given that the overarching aim of the present research was to provide an in-depth analysis of the experiences of immigrant parents in the primary school system, it was decided that a qualitative research design would enable the researcher to provide an opportunity for the participants' voices and lived realities to be heard and documented. The study's primary objective was distilled into a number of sub-questions which guided the data collection process. The sub-questions were then organised under four themes, as presented in the table below:

Theme 1: Parenting an Irish child
1. What motivated the participants to raise their families in Ireland?
2. How do the immigrant families negotiate their identity within Irish society?
Theme 2: Immigrant parents' attitudes towards education and Irish schools
1. How much value do immigrant parents place on their children's education?
2. What aspirations do the immigrant parents hold for their children's education?
3. What do immigrant parents think of the Irish primary school system?
Theme 3: Navigating the Irish primary school system as an immigrant parent
1. How knowledgeable are immigrant parents of the primary school system?
2. How do immigrant parents learn about the Irish education system?
3. How do immigrant parents make decisions about their children's school?
Theme 4: Parental involvement among immigrant parents: facilitators and barriers
1. What is the nature and extent of immigrant parents' involvement in their children's education?
2. What are the perceived facilitators and barriers to quality parental involvement among immigrant parents?
3. How might the parents' own experiences and attitudes towards school influence their level of parental involvement?
4. Do the participants believe that their migrant status impacts their level of parental involvement?

Other

1. What are the policy implications, if any, of these experiences?

Table 1.1: Research questions underpinning the present study

1.3 Study Layout

The study comprises of four parts and is divided into eight chapters: (1) a context chapter; (2) the research methodology; (3) the research findings and; (4) the conclusion. The eight chapters combine to paint a comprehensive picture of the current realities of immigrant parents in the Irish primary school system.

Chapter 2 begins by detailing what is already known about immigrant parents living in Ireland. It catalogues the educational policies which pertain to immigrant parents in Ireland and explores the concept of ethical capital and how it relates to the education system. It then sets out the theoretical framework which will guide the thesis.

Chapter 3 describes the research approach adopted in this study. It outlines the rationale behind the implementation of a qualitative research design, notes the limitations of the chosen design, and offers suggestions on how these shortcomings have been rectified. It also provides a justification for the approaches used for participant recruitment and the utilisation of semi-structured interviews as the data collection tool. It then goes on to address the ethical issues pertaining to the research design, chosen sample and the method of data analysis.

Chapter 4 begins by considering how the second-generation immigrant children's attendance of Irish schools might affect the dynamics of the immigrant family unit. It highlights the diversity of views on the merits and challenges of raising a child in a multi-cultural Ireland. Berry's (1997) acculturation model is used as a lens through

which to explore the identity revisionary process undergone by immigrant families when they are becoming the "new Irish families".

Chapter 5 presents the findings from the qualitative investigation of immigrant parents' experiences of Irish primary schools. It details the immigrant parents' impressions of the Irish education system as a whole, as well as presenting their views on the schools attended by their own children.

Chapter 6 explores in detail how the immigrant parents obtained information about the Irish education system and how they used various information sources to make important decisions relating to their children's education, chiefly school enrolment. It assesses the immigrant parents' technical knowledge of the education system and explores whether "migrant' status" was perceived to be an asset or a liability.

Chapter 7 considers the nature of the immigrant parents' involvement in their children's education. It documents the home-based and school-based activities undertaken by the immigrant families. The facilitators and barriers to the immigrants' parental involvement are also presented in this chapter.

Finally, *chapter 8* ties together the research findings, to provide a more complete picture of the experiences of immigrant parents within the primary school system. It qualifies the research findings by outlining the limitations of the study and by identifying areas in need of further investigation. Finally, it suggests some policy and practice recommendations for how immigrant parent-school partnerships can be used to foster inter-culturally inclusive spaces of learning in Irish primary schools.

Chapter 2: Who are the “New Irish” Families?

“Irish schools are making Irish people. Irish schools are making the nation.”

(Mac an Ghaill 2012, as cited in Kitching and Curtain 2012, p. 15)

2.0 Introduction

Immigrant families in Ireland are ethnically, linguistically, religiously and socioeconomically diverse. This chapter starts by etching a demographic profile of the immigrant families living in Ireland. It then proceeds to critically appraise the Irish educational policy response to multi-culturalism in Irish primary schools and its implications for immigrant parents. The chapter ends with an outline of why a Bourdieusian framework was chosen to analyse the everyday reality of being an immigrant parent in the Irish primary school system.

2.1 Who are the “New Irish” families?

Between 1996 and 2008, Ireland enjoyed considerable economic growth (Barrett and McCarthy 2006) which, coupled with the expansion of the European Union (Honohan 2010), prompted large-scale immigration into Ireland. A country which was once almost exclusively white, Catholic and Gaelic rapidly transformed into the richly ethnically diverse nation of today (Mac Éinrí and White 2008; Faas *et al.* 2015; Jackson 2015). The latest census figures indicate that non-Irish nationals account for 17.3% of the population (CSO 2017), a number which continues to grow steadily, albeit at a slower rate relative to the 2011 census figures. Furthermore, the number of foreign-born individuals with dual nationality is also increasing (CSO 2017), implying that more immigrants are setting down roots in Ireland.

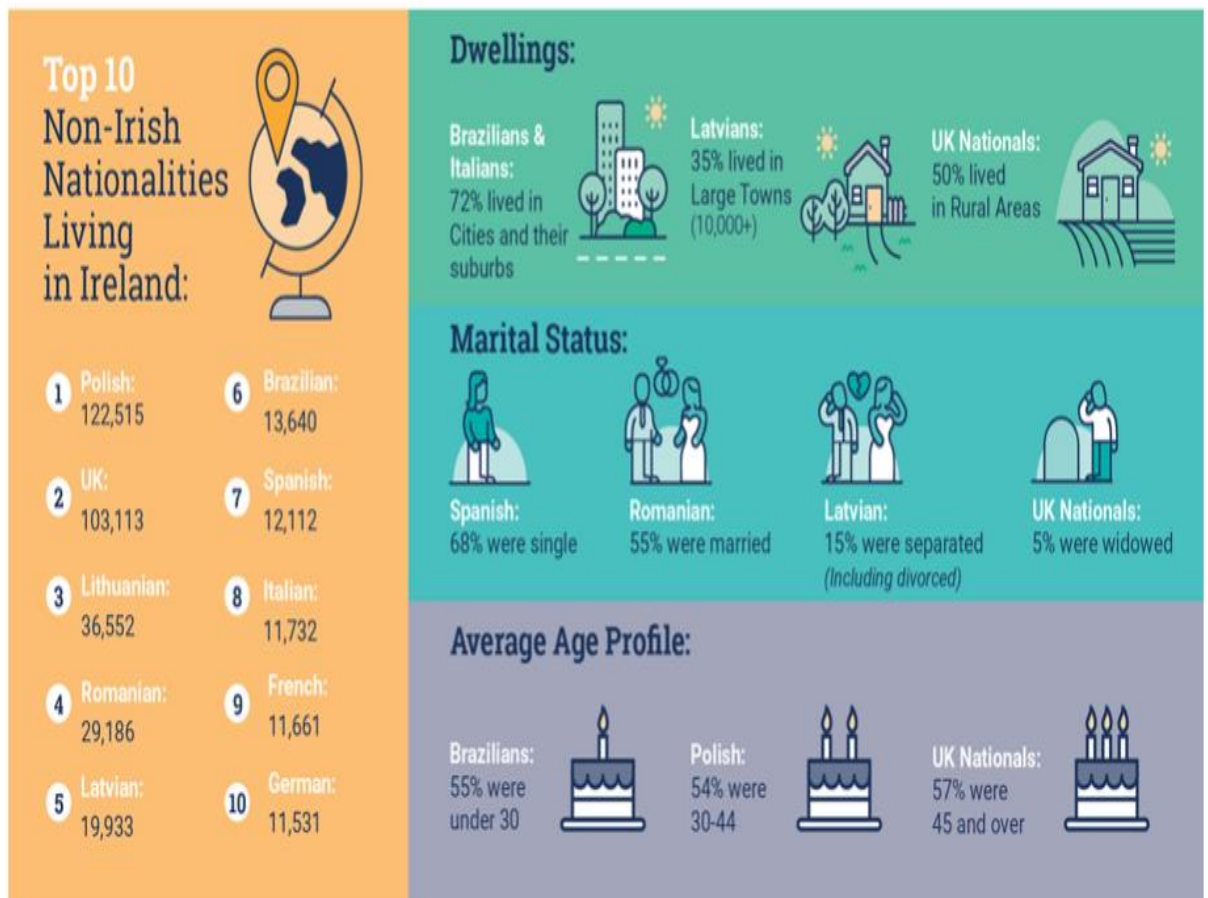


Figure 2.1: Non-Irish nationals living in Ireland (CSO 2018)

The data also shows that some immigrants are choosing to raise their families in Ireland. Using data from the Growing Up in Ireland study, Roder *et al.* (2014) calculated that “new Irish families” represented 28% of all families in the dataset (p.15). This figure was broken down into families where both parent/caregiver/guardians were non-Irish (10%); mixed-race families (13%) and families headed by a non-Irish lone parent (5%). of the European Economic Area (EEA) were Nigerian (0.4%) and Indian (0.4%). The majority of the new Irish families had two or more children under the age of 18, and the average age of the immigrant mothers ranged between 26 and 30 years. Approximately two-thirds of immigrant parents were married, but this figure was considerably higher

for Asian-born women. The language spoken in the family home depended on the ethnic background of the mother: 56% of families from the EU; 31% of Asian mothers and 11% of Africans spoke a language other than English in the family home. Mixed race families tended to speak English at home.

With regards to religious belief, Roder *et al.* (2014) found that most mothers, regardless of ethnicity, were Catholic, except for African-born mothers, who were more likely to identify as Christian (48%). Specifically, 58% of immigrant mothers surveyed were Catholic, in comparison to 90% of native Irish mothers; 14% of immigrant mothers were Christian; 13% were of no religion; 6% were Muslim, and 4% were Protestant. Furthermore, it was found that 94% of mothers had passed their faith to their children. With regards to educational qualifications, immigrant mothers were more likely than Irish-born mothers to have a third-level qualification, with 60% of mothers from the EU13 states, 46% of Asian mothers, 28% of mothers from the EU Accession States, and 27% of African mothers possessing a third level qualification. Consistent with the CSO (2017) statistics, immigrant families were found to be significantly more likely to live in rented accommodation in urban areas than native Irish families.

2.2 Examining the lived experiences of the New Irish families

Although many immigrants are now choosing to settle in Ireland, McGinnity *et al.* (2018) point to varying degrees of racism and/or financial pressures which are experienced by the new Irish families. The immigration status of families can also influence their lived experiences, particularly with respect to asylum-seeking families living in direct provision in Ireland.

2.2.1 Economic inequality among immigrant families

The disparity in labour force participation (McGinnity *et al.* 2018) and pay inequality (McGinnity *et al.* 2017) may explain why Roder *et al.* (2014) observed a difference between the socioeconomic status of immigrant and native Irish families. Roder *et al.* (2014) revealed that 58% of native Irish families report financial difficulties, in contrast with 71% of African families. While 38% of the entire sample [native Irish and migrant families combined] were living in deprivation, this figure comprised of 36% of native Irish families who lived in poverty. This percentage contrasts with 40% of Asian families, 49% of families from the EU Accession States, and 59% of African families who were found to live in poverty. More recent findings from McGinnity *et al.* (2018) confirmed that non-EU nationals were more likely than native Irish people to live in consistent poverty, with 29% of non-EU nationals were living in poverty compared with 8% of Irish people.

Roder *et al.* (2014) found that immigrant families from the EU 13 States tended to report the highest socioeconomic standing of all demographic groups in the study. Families from EU13 countries were more likely to be in a stable financial position than the general population with 45% reporting no financial difficulties and 24% of such families living in the highest socioeconomic grouping. These findings indicate that the socioeconomic status of migrant varied greatly depending on their ethnic background, with African families experiencing the most financial difficulties.

2.2.2 Asylum-seeking families in Ireland

The migration stream and immigration stream through which a family arrives in Ireland can also impact on their quality of life. Due to the EU freedom of movement laws, migrants from the EU member States can live and work in Ireland without restriction

(Honohan 2010). In contrast, asylum-seeking families, who may have not actively chosen to locate to Ireland, experience a lesser quality of life relative to other “new Irish families” due to the direct provision policy (Hinds 2018; Sheridan 2018). The latest figures published in July 2018 by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) indicate that there are 866 families living in the 35 direct provision centres across Ireland. The direct provision centres are shared accommodation centres, most of which are without self-catering facilities (RIA 2018) and not fit for family living. The communal living facilities compromise family privacy and prevent families from engaging in basic family activities, such as preparing and sharing a family meal (Cotter and Kolawole 2015). Murphy *et al.* (2018) add that this institutionalised living situation impacts negatively on asylum seekers' sense of self-worth, self-efficacy and belonging. The restrictions on the rights of asylum-seekers to work mean that many asylum-seeking families' only income is the weekly allowance of €38.80 for adults and €29.80 for children (Irish Refugee Council 2018).

Families living in direct provision have the added stress of an uncertain future, with regards to the outcome of their asylum claim. The average length of asylum application is 27 months before receiving a final decision but this waiting period can range from 3 months to over 60 months (RIA 2018). Although there have recently been improvements in accommodation standards (Irish Times 2018a), rights to child benefit (Nasc 2018a) and changes in the rights to work (Nasc 2018b), a sharp inequality between economic migrants and asylum seekers in Ireland continues to persist.

2.2.3 Racism in Irish society and Irish schools

Immigrants in Ireland have experienced racism with regards to public transport, restricted political participation and being underrepresented in the media (Fanning *et al.*

2001; Beirne and Jaichand 2006; McGinnity *et al.* 2006; Russel *et al.* 2008; Sheridan 2018). Racial discrimination in terms of seeking employment, rates of pay, promotion, redundancy and job satisfaction is another issue faced by immigrants (McGinnity *et al.* 2017). Once again, the extent to which an immigrant experiences racism depends, in part, on their racial background, with Black and Asian groups receiving the most discrimination in the workplace and in accessing public and private services, relative to other ethnic minority groups. For example, McGinnity *et al.* (2018) found that 7% of native Irish people were unemployed compared to 8% of Eastern Europeans, 9% of Asians and 16% of Africans. Mitchell (2011) explains that non-white individuals receive more racial discrimination because they are perceived as being visibly different to the native Irish population.

Several studies have also highlighted evidence of racism in Irish schools, which tends to manifest mostly in the form of name-calling (Devine 2005; Eriksson 2013; Kennedy 2014; Mannion 2016). An investigation by McGillicuddy and Devine (2018) into the practice of ability grouping in the teaching of numeracy and literacy found that teacher judgements and expectations of children's academic ability were being informed by the student's ethnic background. Chinese, Filipino, Indian and Russian children were more to be assigned to high ability groups. Teachers were more likely to identify Eastern European children and Nigerian children as having average academic ability whereas children from Slavic countries, Romania, Brazil and Irish Traveller ethnic backgrounds tended to be placed in low ability groups. Similar findings were also observed in a study of teacher attitudes toward ethnic minority students in the United States (Glock and Klapproth 2017). Parents in Cotter and Kolawole's (2015) study also perceived subtle racism among teachers towards their children. One African parent remarked how his son would be more harshly disciplined than a native Irish child simply "because he is

African” (p.314). The parents in Cotter and Kolawole’s (2015) study also complained of feeling patronised by school management and teachers.

Children who are visibly ethnically or culturally different from the white Irish majority are more likely to be on the receiving end of such racist abuse (Bryan 2010). For example, one African boy in a study by Curry *et al.* (2011) disclosed that he would like to change his skin colour so that he could avoid being ridiculed by his peers. As a result, some immigrant children adopt Irish accents, western dress and participate in Irish sports to become more socially accepted and avoid “getting slagged” (Devine 2009, p.531). Interestingly, Cotter and Kolawole’s (2015) observed similar reasoning among immigrant parents: “we are OK if we do things the Irish way, we are tolerated [by the school authorities and staff]” (p.315).

2.3 Educational policy responses to racism in Irish schools

There have been several policy responses to racism which all have their legal basis in The Equal Status Act (2000). This piece of equality legislation prohibited racial discrimination with regards to: (1) school admissions; (2) access to school courses, facilities or benefits; (3) participation in school life and; (4) expulsions or the sanctioning of students. The Equal Status Act (2000) also prohibited discrimination in the provision of education by marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, or membership of the Traveller Community. Discrimination by religion was somewhat of an exception in relation to the Irish primary school system until recent times, and discrimination on the basis of gender was permitted only in the case of single-sex schools.

The first addition to the anti-racism policy map was the *National Children’s Strategy* (Government of Ireland 2000). This policy document suggested a preventative approach

to racism through the cultivation of ‘respect for socially and culturally diverse communities’ through intercultural education (p.70). Five years later, The Department of Justice and Equality (2005) published its *Planning for Diversity–National Action Plan against Racism 2005–2008*. This policy aimed to directly combat racism and move Ireland towards being a more inclusive intercultural society by encouraging “interaction, equality of opportunity, understanding and respect” among all ethnic groups in Ireland (p.27). Once again, this policy, and later The Office of the Minister for Integration’s (2008) *Migration Nation Statement on Integration and Diversity Management*, identified intercultural education as the means through which racism and discriminatory attitudes in Irish classrooms could be challenged.

In 2005 The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment authored and released the *‘Intercultural Education in the Primary School: Guidelines for Schools’* (henceforth referred to as The Intercultural Education Guidelines). The guidelines were designed to help schools incorporate intercultural values into the school community and the curriculum through the use of integrative subject planning. The intercultural education component of the document aims to teach all students, irrespective of their ethnicity, how to “appreciate the richness of a diversity of cultures...and to challenge prejudice and discrimination where they exist” (p.17). The focus which was placed on the celebration of difference in the Intercultural Guidelines lead Bryan (2010) to argue that the document was egalitarian on the surface, but exclusionary in practice. She claimed that such rhetoric is a form of symbolic violence since the dominant (native Irish, white, settled, middle classes) group in society is the “celebrator of difference” and occupies a higher power index than the individuals being celebrated (p.255).

While the document acknowledges the importance of explicitly exploring issues of equality and human rights through formal instruction, it also states that most of the intercultural learning occurs organically through the hidden curriculum. Therefore, the guidelines stress the need to have a visual representation of many cultures in the physical environment of the school through school displays, multi-lingual posters, textbooks and toys so that the children of all ethnic backgrounds feel "represented" in school life and diversity will be recognised as "a normal part of life" in Ireland (p.40). Although the 174 paged document provided many suggestions as to how schools can implement intercultural education across the physical and social world of the school, Devine (2005) found that the resourcing of the intercultural approaches advocated in the document was inadequate.

Furthermore, while the intercultural education guidelines claim to "help prevent racism" (p.21), Kitching (2010) criticises the document for not placing enough emphasis on racism. Banks (2001) also questioned the value of intercultural education as a solution to racism because it unwittingly can reinforce racial stereotypes and tends to ignore diversity within cultures. Banks (2001) also makes the case that intercultural education can be superficial, additive and tokenistic because it does not address the structural inequalities which lie at the root of racial inequalities. Racism was also addressed in The Department of Education and Skill's [DES] (2013a) *Anti-bullying Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools*. The policy document describes racism in the same category as other as "identity-based bullying", such as homophobia and transphobia and places special emphasis on the role of the S.P.H.E. curriculum in preventing and minimising the incidence of bullying (p.5). Schools are also mandated to draw up an

anti-bullying policy detailing they will prevent and tackle allegations and incidents of racially motivated bullying.

More recently, The DES (2016a) *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019*, reaffirms the Government's commitment to the implementation of the action plan on bullying and the supporting of anti-bullying awareness initiatives. While Intercultural Education Guidelines acknowledge that the institution of school might reinforce or produce racist social and achievement outcomes, Kitching and Curtain (2012) criticise the document for not acknowledging the reality of institutional racism on a national level. Therefore, it is worth considering whether the national curriculum frameworks and educational policies are appropriate given the changed ethnic, cultural and religious background of the pupils attending Irish primary schools. Additionally, the change in the country's religious profile and the growing secularisation of Irish society has raised concerns in policy and public discourse regarding the largely denominational nature of the Irish education system (Fass *et al.* 2015).

2.4 Educational policy responses to cultural diversity

It has long been accepted that schools both institutionalise and transmit culture by moulding the attitudes, values and identities of young people (Ross 2003). With respect to the Irish education system, history tells a tale of both the British Government in the 1830s and the Independent Irish State using the education system to 'serve politicising and socialising goals, cultivating attitudes of political loyalty and cultural assimilation' (Coolahan 1981, p.4). Parekh (2000) explains that assimilation demands that newcomers blend into the dominant culture in society or face being discriminated against. In contrast, the Intercultural Education Guidelines (2005) regard diversity as something which adds value to society and places espouses values of tolerance and

respect. However, the question of what is being in Irish educational policies and what is being institutionalised in Irish primary schools are two separate issues. Therefore, this section will consider the Irish educational policy responses to cultural diversity with respect to (1) the place of religion in schools; (2) the measures to support English language learning pupils and; (3) the place of immigrant parents in the home-school relationship dynamic.

2.4.1 The place of religion in Irish primary schools: implications for immigrant parents

Education policy tends to reflect the wider socio-political climate of the time, and this certainly is true with respect to the monopolistic tradition of primary schools in Ireland. The influence of religion in school governance, policy formation and curriculum design (Gleeson and Munnely 2004; Fischer 2016) can be understood through the lens of history, but it is a topic which, if discussed in its entirety, is beyond the parameters of this chapter. However, it is important to provide a brief overview of the historical roots of the entanglement between Church and State in the Irish primary school system to provide a context to this study. Nevertheless, the main focus of this subsection is to examine how the religious control of schools might impact on immigrant parents with respect to (1) school choice; (2) school admissions and; (3) religious education.

2.4.1.1 The presence of religion in Irish schools: a brief historical overview

Education has historically been a highly valued commodity in Ireland. Rafferty (2009) explains that during Penal Times, in which it was illegal for Catholic children to attend school, Catholic parents sent their children to clandestine hedge schools to receive an education. However, by the time the National School System was established in 1831, religion was still a major consideration for British policy makers. Although the purpose

of State education for Ireland had initially been the promotion of the English language and the Protestant religion, a need for multi-denomination education was soon recognised (Coolahan 1981). The publication of the Stanley Letter, which is regarded as the blue print for the management structure of primary schools in Ireland today, decreed that all primary schools would be State funded but managerial autonomy would be vested in denominational groups. MacRuairc (2011) explained that while the government at the time favoured schools jointly managed by Church of Ireland and Roman Catholic patrons, this initiative was very much resisted by church bodies such that by the beginning of the twentieth century the school system became segregated along sectarian lines.

With the establishment of the Irish State in 1922, schools remained under the control and patronage of the individual denominational groups because it complemented the Irish State's agenda for the 're-establishment of Gaelic civilisation' (Coolahan 1981, p.40). The Catholic Church provided the educational infrastructure and resources through which cultural nationalism could be espoused. In addition to the State's financial dependence on the Church for educational provision, Drudy and Lynch (1993) add that the Irish State also lacked "the political will" to challenge the power of the Church who enjoyed much public favour and power of influence over the general public at the time (p.74). This practice of the State adopting a funding, rather than a managerial role at primary school level, has largely continued to this day, with a small number of exceptions such as the multi-denominational State operated primary schools called "Community National Schools" which were established in 2007 with the Education and Training Boards (ETB) as their patron body (Conboy 2017).

2.4.1.2 Denominational schools and the issue of school choice for parents

This lack of State managerial involvement in State-funded education has manifested in the problem of inadequate school choice for all parents in Ireland, not just immigrant parents. According to the most recent figures released by the DES (2018), 96% of state-funded primary schools have a denominational ethos, of which the overwhelming majority are run by Catholic patrons (DES 2018). Although Roder *et al.* (2014) found that 58% of immigrant mothers were Catholic, the lack of alternatives to denominationally run schools is an important issue for non-Catholic, and indeed Catholic, immigrant parents who desire a non-denominational or a multi-denominational education for their children. It is also worth acknowledging, however, that the Catholic habitus of schools was first challenged in 1975 by Irish parents who desired a secular education for their children and more democratic school management structures (Hyland 1989). Therefore, it can be said that the subsequent growth and development of multi-denominational schools, such as the Educate Together movement, is reflective of the shifting attitudes of Irish society towards religion and the church and not solely a response to the multi-faith demographic of immigrants in Ireland today (Irwin 2009).

School Ethos	Total	%
Denominational	2967	96%
Catholic/Methodist		
Church of Ireland		
Presbyterian/Quaker		
Muslim/Jewish		
Other	136	4%

Table 2.1: The patronage of mainstream Irish primary schools (DES 2018, p. 2)

School Ethos	Total	%
Catholic	2776	89%
Church of Ireland	174	6%
Multi-Denominational	119	4%
Other	37	1%
Grand total	3106	100%

Table 2.2: The breakdown of mainstream primary schools by ethos for academic year 2018/2019 (DES 2018, p. 2).

For parents who, like O’Toole (2015) believe that faith formation should be the domain of parents and communities rather than State funded schools, just 4% of Irish primary schools align with their personal preferences and the majority of these schools are clustered in urban areas (DES 2018, p.2). Furthermore, most of these multi-denominational schools are oversubscribed with lengthy waiting lists (Mawhinney 2012). Therefore, some parents are compelled to send their child to a denominational school due to an absence or lack of multi-denominational schools in their catchment area (Dillion 2019).

This lack of school choice generates a number of concerns for parents. Firstly, faith schools in Ireland are only obliged to provide religious education that accords with their own ethos. Therefore, non-believing children have the option of participating in the faith formation lessons for two and a half hours on a weekly basis or being withdrawn from religious instruction if this right is exercised by their parents, as per Article 44 of the Irish Constitution and under Section 30 of the Education Act 1998. Furthermore, although all primary schools are obliged to respect parents’ rights to withdraw their children from religious instruction classes, and the Forum for Pluralism and Patronage

(Coolahan *et al.* 2012) offered some recommendations on how schools might cope with the logistics of the accommodating of children of other beliefs, there is no Department issued procedure for how parent's requests should be catered for.

Some parents may be concerned that the ethos of their child's school might influence the religiosity of their child. Mawhinney (2015) explains that this is because religion in Irish schools is more than just a subject on the timetable: the school's ethos permeates the entire school community, informs all of the subjects taught in school, as well as the social and cultural activities which are promoted by the school. The religious ethos of the school may also be evidenced in the physical environment of the school with regards to the displaying of religious artefacts. Faith schools may carry out whole school worship, such as the recitation of daily prayers or have whole-school celebrations of religious festivals. Shanneik (2016) adds that the preparation for religious sacraments takes place during school hours and can often overspill into non-designated religion teaching time. Non-co-believing parents may fear that exposing their child to the religious ethos of the school could cause their child to drift from the family faith or bring about tension between the family's religious traditional and the religious perspective affirmed by the school (McCreery *et al.* 2007).

However, the case study of a White Irish Catholic school girl called Lily in Kitching's (2017) study provides food for thought with regards to the formative influence which Catholic schools have on the child's religious identity. The dialogues between Lily and Kitching (2017) about her upcoming Holy Communion ceremony exposed clear discrepancies between the child's personal understanding of the religious education she received and the official rhetoric of The Catholic Church. Lily appeared to understand the Holy Communion ceremony to be more related to materialism as opposed to her

religious faith. She explained that she wanted to make her communion because she: “wanted to wear my dress and get my hair done and make more money so I could get my phone” (p.9). Furthermore, the faith formation programme in primary schools is generally taught by the class teachers who are contractually obliged to teach this religious programme but who do not have to be believers themselves (Sakaranaho 2018). There is also evidence that student teachers (Heinz *et al.* 2018) and qualified teachers (Rougier and Honohan 2015; Fahie 2017) hold varying levels of religious practice and religiosity, with many preferring not to teach the subject in a confessional manner. Therefore, the argument that a non-Catholic child, or indeed a Catholic child, would be indoctrinated by virtue of enrolment in a Catholic school is questionable. Nevertheless, this still causes concerns regarding Article 42.3.1 of the Irish Constitution which gives parents the right to have their children educated in a manner which aligns with their own beliefs.

On a related point, Devine (2011) explains that the religious education classes, as well as the religious ethos itself, can cause some non-co-religionists to feel excluded from the school community. This point adds weight to O'Toole's (2015) arguments that schools will only be inclusive and egalitarian when secularly, as opposed to religiously, managed. Shanneik's (2016) study of Irish seven and eight-year-olds regarding sacramental preparation for Holy Communion illustrates this point. Shanneik's (2016) argued that the Holy Communion ceremony is an initiation into an idealized notion of a white, Catholic, homogeneous Irish identity and children who do not make their communion can feel othered. Similarly, Lily in Kitching's (2017) study wanted to get baptised so that she could “[get] my Communion and my Confirmation... with the rest of my cousins and friends” (p.8).

Although initially showing a reticence to accept the Educate Together Movement (Irwin 2009), The Irish Government have taken commendable steps towards improving school choice for all parents. Starting in 2007, and triggered by the growing appetite for alternatives to denominationally run schools, the then Minister for Education, Mary Hanafin T.D. established multi-denominational State operated primary schools called "Community National Schools" with the Education and Training Boards (ETB) as their patron. The inclusivity of Community National Schools is seen in their admission policies whereby all children within the clearly defined catchment area are entitled to attend the school (Conboy 2017). The role of the parents in community national schools is central, and parents take an active role in the faith formation of their children through the *Goodness Me, Goodness You* programme (Murphy 2013).

In 2011, the Government set up *The Forum on Pluralism and Patronage* to deal with the issue of divestment of faith schools and the plan for a more diverse range of patronage types for newly built schools. The forum concluded in 2012 that a widening of school patronage types should be provided for parents (Coolahan *et al.* 2012). *The Action Plan for Education 2016-2019* reiterated the State's commitment to the phased transfer of Catholic schools to other school patrons (goal number 10.3.1) and issued a promise to establish more non-denominational and multi-denominational schools (goal number 10.3.2). In late May 2018, this promise moved closer to fulfilment with *The Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity* process which aims to establish 400 multi-denominational and non-denominational schools by 2030 (DES 2018b).

2.4.1.3 The baptism barrier in Irish primary schools

The issue of school choice, however, is not limited to a clash of values between the ethos of the school and the personal beliefs of parents. Mawhinney (2012) found that

minority-faith families in urban areas, particularly Dublin, were more likely to encounter difficulty with admissions to Catholic schools, such that non-Catholic children were being refused school places in favour of Catholic pupils. This trend of giving baptised children preference over non-baptised children in oversubscribed faith schools was referred to as the “baptism barrier”. This admission-based religious discrimination was permitted by The Equal Status Act (2000) to enable denominational schools to protect their religious ethos. However, this exemption to use religion as a selection criterion was revoked for most faith schools under the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that religion is the only issue with regards to freedom of school choice for immigrant parents. Darmody *et al.* (2014) found that oversubscribed schools tended to operate first-come-first-served policy and gave preference to children who already had siblings in the school. This policy practice favoured the native community who were settled in the area. Similarly, Byrne *et al.* (2010) found that DEIS primary and secondary schools tended to have a higher migrant student population than schools in more affluent areas. Byrne *et al.* (2010) question whether immigrant families really have “choice” when it comes to school places because DEIS schools tend to be less in demand compared to non-DEIS schools. There was also evidence of ‘white flight’ in schools which attracted high numbers of immigrant pupils (Darmody *et al.* 2014, p.146), such that such schools would become locally regarded as “immigrant zone(s)” and be actively avoided by some native families (Devine 2013, p.401). Therefore, while Government efforts to increase the availability of alternatives to denominational schools is welcomed, there is no guarantee that the divestment of faith schools will result in real choice for more vulnerable immigrant parents.

2.4.2 English language provision in schools

Religious education is not the only subject on the Irish Primary School Curriculum (NCCA 1999) which may cause concern for immigrant parents for whom English is not the family's home language. While the New Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA 2015) recognises that children can transfer language skills from their first language to their second and subsequent languages, no formal instruction of languages other than English and Irish feature in the Irish Primary School Curriculum. Therefore, parents who wish their child to receive formal instruction in the family's home language may have to pay for that tuition privately. Furthermore, given that every subject, except Irish, is taught through the medium of English, poor English language proficiency can act as a barrier to learning across the curriculum (Darmody *et al.* 2016). The centrality of language in the learning process is acknowledged in both *The Introduction to the Primary School Curriculum* (NCCA 1999) and the Intercultural Education Guidelines (NCCA 2005), and for this reason a number of policy documents (*The Planning for Diversity – National Action Plan Against Racism 2005–2008; Migration Nation (2008)* and; *The Intercultural Education Strategy, 2010-2015*) endorsed the allocation of funding towards the teaching of English as an additional (EAL) language in primary schools.

The educational supports for EAL pupils started in 1999 with the *Refugee Language Support Unit* (RLSU) which was established under the DES to (1) provide in-service training and professional support to schools and; (2) to produce quality teaching resources. The RLSU became Integrate Ireland Language and Training [IILT] in 2001 before being absorbed fully into the NCCA in 2008. The DES also allocated temporary language support posts to schools as well as additional funding for the purchasing of language support materials. Initially, schools with between three and thirteen pupils

with no English could apply for a temporary part-time EAL support teacher. This arrangement was modified in 2007 by The DES under Circular 53/07 such that there would be a maximum of six EAL teaching posts per school.

The number of EAL posts were reduced further in 2009 under Circular 15/09. However, the greatest change to EAL provision came with the general allocation model of student support (DES 2012b) whereby schools were given the autonomy to decide how children with additional learning needs would be accommodated. The number of support teacher posts sanctioned depends on the number of mainstream class teachers in the school. McGinnity *et al.* (2018) expressed concern with this decision to combine the budget allocation for English language tuition with the budget for special needs education. This means that remit of EAL teacher has been absorbed into the all-encompassing learning support brief of the “special education teacher”.

It could also be argued that, from a policy perspective, there have been short-falls in the involvement of non-native speaking parents in their children’s language development. Although parents are recognised in both the new Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA 2015) and the Intercultural Education Guidelines as being pivotal in the child’s language development, recent policy developments have firmly positioned the teacher in the role of the expert in language process, arguably distancing parents in the process. This point is clearly illustrated in the *English as an Additional Language in Irish Primary Schools: Guidelines for Teachers* (NCCA 2006). While the document acknowledges the need to involve parents in the school community by acting as interpreters and in supporting the child’s literacy of the family’s home language, it appears that the relationship dynamic between parents and teachers was one of mutual information sharing as opposed to equal partners in their child’s language development. The guidelines aimed to promote best practice with regards to keeping parents abreast of their child’s English language

learning in school. The role of the parent in this process was clearly defined: they should provide the educational history of the child to the teachers so that the child's "learning potential" could be established and a profile of the child's prior learning could be drawn up (p.11). The schools were then advised to report regularly to parents on the educational progress of the child, as per the requirements of the Education Act (1998). Some suggestions were provided on how schools could impart the English language assessment results with parents such as using a translator or providing concrete examples of the child's work. While it is the parents' right to receive information on their child's academic progress, no suggestions were given on how schools could help parents understand and use this assessment data.

The guidelines also made the recommendation that parents should be informed of the content of the school's EAL policy and be given clarity on how the school would meet their child's learning needs. However, the writing of such policies or the sharing of such policies with parents was not mandated. Furthermore, this suggestion presupposes that parents have the necessary English language skills to be able to read the policy in the first instance. It is also worth examining whether immigrant parents would feel confident enough to question the school's EAL policy or their child's assessment outcomes. Research by Lai and Vadeboncoeur (2013) on Chinese Canadian mothers found that within the parent-teacher relationship dynamic the mothers positioned themselves as the "guest" and were uneasy about making demands on the school due to a sense of gratitude for the education their children were receiving.

2.4.3 The place of parents in the Irish primary school system

Lai and Vadeboncoeur's (2013) research indicates that parents can have different understandings of their place in the host country's education system. From a historical

perspective, the Irish State's understandings of the role of parents in schools can be best summarised as a move from regarding parents as passive consumers of education for their children to being recognised as key players within a home-school-community partnership. While the extent to which home-school relationships are nurtured varies largely from school to school (Hanafin and Lynch 2002), at least on paper, parents are acknowledged as the "primary and natural educator[s]" of their children, as per article 42.1 of the Irish Constitution. It took a considerable length of time, however, for the statutory rights of parents to reflect the tone and content of DES policy documents.

The initial exclusion of parents from the education delivery process can be traced back historically to the hedge schools. Raferty (2009) explains that during penal times, parents were largely uneducated and, as a result, were heavily reliant on the expertise of the teacher, and were reluctant to challenge their professional authority. This chasm between the professionalism of the teacher and the home continued under the Irish Free State, partially due to the fact that schools were staffed by the religious orders, which in and of itself, attracted a degree of reverence from parents (Byrne and Smith 2010).

This marginalisation of parents in terms of policy-making, consultation or administration of schooling did not experience any real change until the 1970s. Coolahan (1995) explains that the modernisation of the Irish economy and the introduction of free secondary school education meant that parents became more empowered. The education system, under the influence of educational theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky, began to move away from the traditional model of teaching to a more student-centred outlook which views school as part of a learning process alongside the home and other community groups (INTO 2010). This ideological shift is evident in the 1999 Curriculum's appreciation for parental input in the education of

their children. The 1999 curriculum, and subsequently the new Primary Language Curriculum (2015), explicitly valued parental involvement and viewed learning as an integrated process between the home, school and the community. This outlook contrasts sharply with the 1971 curriculum which made no direct reference to parental involvement and parents were not consulted during its formation (Mac Giolla Phádraig 2010).

From a policy perspective, the establishment of Boards of Management in 1975 was one of the first steps towards the de facto recognition of the value of parents in school governance. Initially, schools with six or more teachers were obligated to have two parent representatives on the school board (Mac Giolla Phádraig 2010). The parental voice on school boards increased further in 1997 when equal representation between school patrons, teachers and parents was introduced (Walshe 1999). While this amendment was designed to enable parents to exercise more influence in shaping school policies, Conaty (2002) argues that, in real terms, the parental influence on student learning experiences is limited considering that training is rarely offered to parental nominees and the fact that curriculum implementation, teaching and learning is generally not a matter of discussion for school boards.

A decade after the mandating of parental representatives on school boards of management, schools were instructed to allow the formation of a parents association under Circular 7/85 (DES 1985). The circular also established the National Parents' Council that same year, to liaise with the DES as an interest group and therefore represent the voice of parents at education policy making (Cluskey 1996). However, as Drudy (2009) explains, there are several national and international forces of influence which combine to shape Irish policy-making such as the patron bodies, Teachers Unions

and Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union. Therefore, in reality, The National Parents Council is but one of several lobby groups in the scramble for influence over the direction education policy in Ireland.

Encouraging parents to become involved in their children's education became a key focus of Irish Government's agenda for education in the 1990s when it was heralded as a response to the narrowing of the achievement gap between the working and middle classes. Also fundamental to this ideological shift was political recognition of children as "public goods" –social assets worthy of state intervention- as opposed to the "private goods" of their parents (O'Doherty 2015, p.40). State investment in children started to become a social responsibility that made economic sense and this sentiment was evidenced in a catalogue of policy documents which advocated parental involvement in education: *The Report of the Primary Education Review Body* (Government of Ireland 1990), *The Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme* (1990), *Circular 24/91* (DES 1991), *Education for a Changing World* (Government of Ireland 1992) and the *Charting our Education Future* (Government of Ireland 1995), *The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014) and goal number 4 of the DES (2016a) *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019*. However, these policies were almost exclusively targeted at socially disadvantaged groups as opposed to the middle and upper classes (Hanafin and Lynch 2002). This was achieved through the allocation of additional funding to promote parental involvement in DEIS schools and the employment of a dedicated Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) teachers whose role was to actively and to facilitate partnerships between parents and teachers (Circular 0058/2013, DES 2013b).

The legislative basis for parental involvement in schools is contained in The Education Act (1998) which mandates schools to enter into 'a spirit of partnership' with parents (p.5). However, there was an absence of specific guidance on how the 'spirit of partnership' should be implemented. While it is impractical to formulate a framework of parental participation that fits every school, the absence of a prescriptive approach means that the nature of home-school partnerships varies largely from school to school. As noted by Crozier (2001), this disconnect between parental involvement policy and practice occurs because teachers generally dictate the time, agenda and location for parent-teacher interaction and the nature of parental involvement largely depends on the teacher's willingness to cooperate with parental involvement initiatives.

It is also worth noting that the interpersonal relationship between parents and teachers is an unequal power dynamic. Parents are generally positioned less powerfully than the institution of the school partially because 'teachers are the ones who decide what can be said and thought [and]...who can speak, when, and where and with what authority' (Ball 1994, p.21). Therefore, while the Education Act 1998 had significant implications for educational policy and practice, it failed to communicate how exactly parental involvement should take place schools. Nevertheless, The Education Act (1998) did much to empower parents by affording them the right to establish an active parents association and to have the principal and board of management regard their advice. The subsequent amendments to The Education Act (1998) further strengthened the position of parents in the education system. Although The Education Amendment Act 2012 and The Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (2015) which brought changes to the employment of teachers and the regulations governing universities respectively do not directly concern the parents of primary school-age children, *The Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act* in 2007 gave more protection to parents regarding

enrolment refusals, suspension and expulsion of students. *The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018* (1) abolished school admission fees; (2) gave the Minister of Education the power to compel schools to open special classes or units where demand exists and; (3) removed the use of religion as a selection criterion in school admission. Another piece of legislation which built on, rather than amended the Education Act (1998) was The Education Welfare Act (2000) which recognised the rights of the child to a minimum education and set the mandatory school going age in Ireland as between 6-16 years. This Act means that all children, regardless of their parents' or personal immigration status, are entitled to free primary education in Ireland.

While the DES educational policy and the attitudes of native parents have considerably evolved, the question remains of how immigrant parents position themselves in the Irish education system, specifically in relation to the parent-teacher relationship dynamic. Darmody *et al.* (2014) indicate that migrant students have less insider knowledge of the workings of the Irish education, and when coupled with language barriers, and in some cases, economic barriers, they are at a “cumulative disadvantage” relative to their native Irish peers (p.129). Given that immigrant students were found to be unequally positioned in terms of access to capital resources, the question of whether immigrant parents possess the linguistic or cultural capital which is valued by schools is a matter worthy of investigation. Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual framework can explain why the power indices between immigrants and the dominant host culture may appear to be neutral on the surface, but in reality, a power inequality lurks behind its meritocratic exterior.

2.5 Conceptual framework

The present study maintains that Bourdieu's theoretical model, which is summarised in *figure 2.2* below, is an appropriate instrument to examine whether an inequality of

experience exists for immigrant parents in the Irish primary school system. Bourdieu recognised the family as the site of social and cultural reproduction because social class is inherited by children from their parents (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). When applied to the context of education, Bourdieu posits that a student's academic outcome is a function of the interplay between their habitus, capital and field. In contrast with the equal opportunity theoretical perspective, which predicts that the children with the most intellectual ability and dedication will excel in school (Lynch 1999), Bourdieu (1986) expects that the middle-class children will succeed academically because the middle classes possess "a monopoly" on cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986, p.47). Thus, Bourdieu (1986) maintains that it is a student's social class, rather than their natural aptitude for learning, which is responsible for the differing educational outcomes of students.

Bourdieu's concepts have been widely used to explain "the social class attainment gap" which exists in education (Dunne and Gazeley 2008, p.451) but more recently it has been used to assess the inequality of outcomes between ethnic minority communities in pluralistic societies (e.g. Vann 2013), despite the fact that Bourdieu did not directly address the ethnicity in his original work. Given that parents must be familiar with how the Irish primary school system operates in order to help their children "do school" (Hickes 2002, p.217), Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital are useful tools through which immigrant parents' knowledge of school system can be assessed. Furthermore, Reay's (2004) operationalisation of habitus will allow for an unpacking of the attitudes and the parental involvement practices of immigrant parents. This chapter will now proceed to define the key terms within Bourdieu's conceptual framework and articulate how they relate to the present research project.

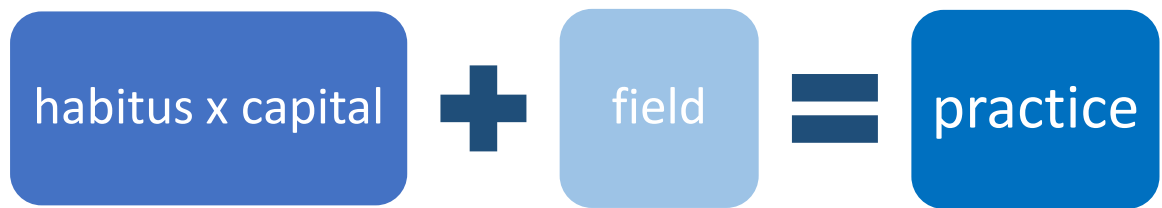


Figure 2.2: A visual representation of Bourdieu's model of cultural reproduction

2.5.1 Habitus

From an early age, people are imbued with a sense of how "people like us" (Archer *et al.* 2007, p.231) should think, dream, and behave. The attitudes, opinions and tastes which are unique to each group in the social hierarchy are referred to as habitus. People with the same habitus can relate to each other and this shared habitus creates "feelings of identification" among group members (Jones 1997, p.90). Each person can have more than one habitus, and therefore, their national identity is but one of several habitus a person may possess (Pickel 2005). Reay (1998) explains that while this internalised disposition is not deterministic, is it still "deeply engrained" (p.527) and manifests in "taken for granted expectations" of how people should live their lives (p.526). Therefore the habitus shapes people's "ways of feeling and reacting" towards life (Vann 2013, p.166).

One of the difficulties with the notion of habitus is that it lacks a discrete definition. However, Reay (2004) argues that the fluidity of this concept is a strength rather than a weakness because it enables the researcher to apply the notion of habitus to a wide variety of contexts. Reay (2004) provides a means by which habitus can be incorporated into a research design. She achieves this by identifying four aspects of habitus: (1) habitus as embodiment; (2) habitus and agency; (3) habitus as individual and collective trajectories; and (4) habitus as past and present.

Reay (2004) describes “habitus as embodiment” as the stereotypical understanding of how certain groups in society are supposed to be or what they are supposed to look like. This form of habitus is more than one’s mental attitude: one’s habitus manifests itself physically in a person’s comportment and through the food that they eat and the clothes that they wear.



Figure 2.3: A pictorial representation of Reay’s (2004, pp.432-435) understanding of habitus

Thus, it can be said that people carry their own social worlds in their bodies: they live in the social world, and the social world lives in them. When applied the present research, “habitus by embodiment” can be best illustrated as a racial stereotype (Rapoport and Lomsky 2002). For example, person X is a ‘typical’ Polish person because they ‘look

Polish' and are hard working. Within the context of this research project embodiment will be investigated by noting the stereotypes, be it social, behavioural or physical, about various ethnic minority communities which are mentioned by the participants of this study.

Reay (2004) notes how people are often unconscious of their habitus, and this lack of awareness creates the illusion that there are no restrictions on a person's behaviour or goals. However, in reality, habitus serves to constrain a person's agency. Thus Reay's (2004) understanding of "habitus and agency" refers to how the habitus tends to limit what a person thinks is achievable for people like them. Although there is the possibility that one's habitus can be transformed (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), people tend to accept the habitus they have inherited from their parents. For example, Archer *et al.* (2007) found that working-class students perceived university as a place where they would not "belong" (p.232) because it was a space reserved for "posher" people or "cleverer" people or "people with money" (p.231). Although these students surely possessed the cognitive capacity to pass university exams, their habitus served to dampen their levels of self-efficacy and educational engagement. The present research will examine the immigrant parents' sense "agency of habitus" by casting light on the ambitions they hold for their children. It will also investigate whether immigrant parents feel empowered in their ability to support their children's education within the Irish primary school system.

Reay (2004) also highlights the role of a group's collective history in the formation of habitus. This study will pay attention to the "habitus as individual and collective trajectories" by asking how the participant's membership of their ethnic minority community informs their thoughts, self-concept and actions. This concept can also be understood as a person's community attachments and their individual and national

identities. Finally, Reay (2004) adds that the collective and individual habitus is reinforced by experiences in the “past and present” realities. This study will consider this point by asking how the parent's past experience of a non-Irish education system might influence their current parental involvement practices.

To summarize, the elements of immigrant parental habitus which is of interest in this study are: (1) the internal dispositions which are accepted or challenged by the immigrant parents; (2) the parents’ knowledge of the Irish education system and their understanding of their role as parents within that education system; and (3) how their habitus from being educated in another education system influences their understanding of the Irish education system and the parental involvement decisions they make.

2.5.2 Field

It must be noted that habitus is a relational concept and cannot exist in isolation from the Bourdieusian notion of field because “the field structures the habitus” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, p.127). From a Bourdieuan perspective, the social world is composed of a number of intersecting fields. Within a given society fields overlap and people position themselves within each field both as individuals and as members of a group (Bourdieu 1984). As Ho (2009) details, these fields are essentially the social institutions of the State, such as the family, the media, the health system, the legal system and the education system. Each field had sub-fields. With respect to the education system, the school is the sub-field.

The field is not a neutral space but defined by a set of “institutions, rules and regulations” (Webb *et al.* 2002, p.22). In an analogous sense, the field is like a game, and the habitus is knowing how best to play that game (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). With respect to the present research project the field is the Irish primary school system,

the sub-field is the local primary school, and the habitus is parental knowledge of how the system works and how best to help their children succeed in the education system.

2.5.3 Capital

Every field places a different value on particular resources and dispositions (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The currency which is valued by a given field is called capital. In the strictest possible sense, three forms of capital exist (*see figure 2.4*). Economic capital relates to a person's income, such as money or institutionalised in the form of property rights. Social capital refers to one's social relations or the people "who you know" (Bathmaker *et al.* 2013, p.726). Although the concept of cultural capital is quite ill-defined (Sullivan 2002), Jæger and Breen (2016) explain that cultural capital relates to the amount of insider knowledge an individual has of how the host society's cultural and national institutions operate. With respect to education, cultural capital is generally understood as the knowledge which enables an individual to play the education system to their advantage (Bathmaker *et al.* 2013). Cultural capital can exist in an embodied state (e.g. dispositions) and in an objectified state (e.g. possession of material goods such as books), but it is in its institutionalised state (e.g. academic qualifications) that cultural capital is most recognisable (Bourdieu 1986). Each educational qualification is a "certificate of cultural competence"; a tangible sign as to whether an individual possesses the appropriate cultural capital or not (Bourdieu 1986, p.50).

Bourdieu (1990) maintains that social inequalities arise as a direct result of an uneven distribution of economic, social and cultural capital in society. This is because the individual or group's capital index is what determines how they can navigate a given field. An individual can possess varying amounts of capital, and one form of capital can be exchanged for another (Modood 2004). For example, if a person buys a college text book, they are exchanging economic capital for cultural capital.

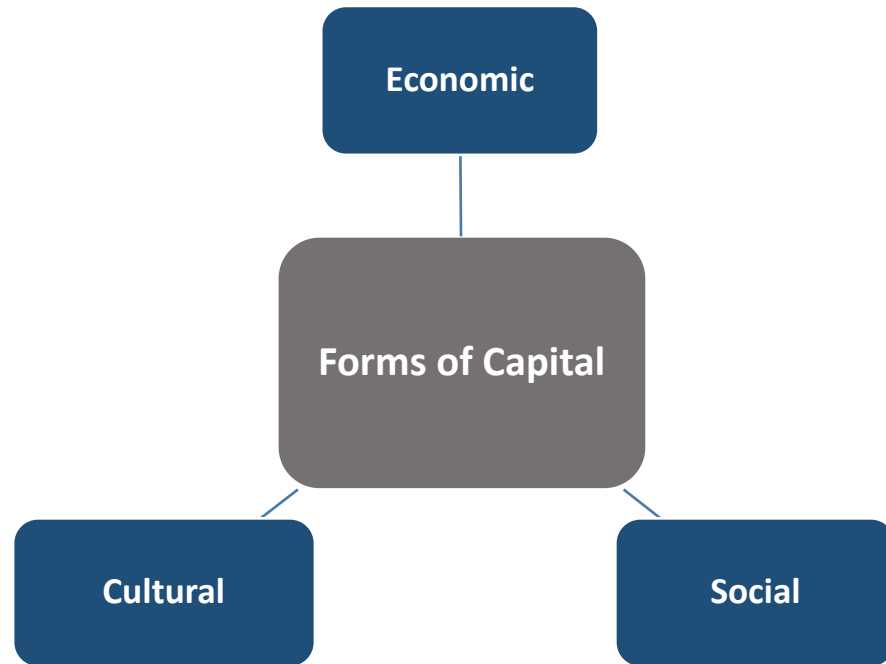


Figure 2.4: The three forms of capital in Bourdieu's conceptual framework

Therefore, although the education system might appear to be meritocratic, schools serve to propagate the class system and social inequalities because only the cultural capital of the dominant group is valued and the school system rewards students who possess such capital (Sullivan 2002; Goldthorpe 2007). Within this system, the habitus of the middle and elite classes are recognised as legitimate cultural capital and the lower classes' habitus is viewed as inferior (Tzanakis 2011). Furthermore, the parent's cultural capital has also been shown to influence the nature of their involvement in their child's learning (Lareau 2000; Levine-Rasky, 2009). Thus, it can be said that the students whose parents have a middle-class habitus will succeed in school because they are better equipped to understand the social code of the school and their parents are in a better position to facilitate their progression through the school system. This is because middle-class parents tend to be more familiar with the language and etiquette valued by the school field and consequently know how to follow "the rules of the game" (Ho 2009, p.104).

2.5.4 Practice

Practice refers to the outcome of the interaction between the field, habitus and capital. In the context of this research project, the practice will be understood as the immigrant parents' engagement experience with the Irish primary school system. It will be more neatly operationalised by observing the parental involvement practices of the immigrant parents. A summary of how the Bourdieusian framework will be applied to the present study will be illustrated in *figure 2.5* below.

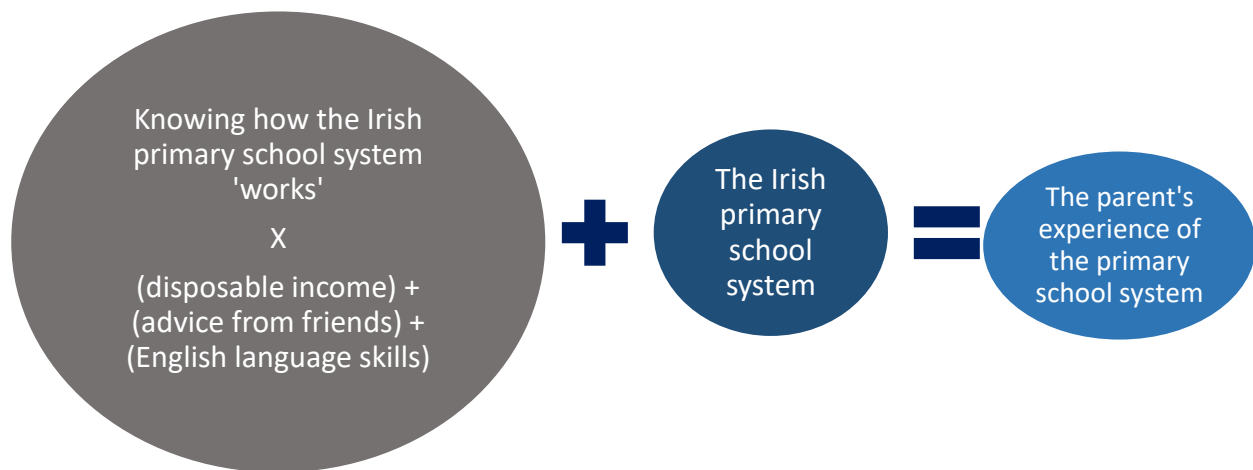


Figure 2.5: Applying Bourdieu's theoretical model to the present research study

2.6 Immigrant family habitus and ethnic capital

Although race is “invisible” within Bourdieu’s theoretical framework (Lovell 2000, p.36) there is still room to extend Bourdieu’s theoretical framework to the study of social mobility and social disadvantage among immigrants in pluralistic societies. Wallace (2017) claims that there is merit in applying Bourdieu’s theoretical concepts to the study of social inequality among ethnic minority groups, because “race can (and often does) influence experiences and expressions of cultural capital” (p.908). Rollock *et al.* (2015), for example, used a Bourdieusian framework to examine how race and social class can intersect among Black Caribbean parents in Britain such that Black

Caribbean middle-class parents were limited in their ability to actualise their cultural capital due to covert racism within State institutions and personal feelings of exclusion from White middle-class identity spaces. These findings gave rise to the conclusion that being "White and middle class is not the same as being Black and middle class" (Rollock *et al.* 2015, p.1) and consequently black cultural capital was unequivocal to white middle-class cultural capital.

Migrants require cultural capital to understand how the host country works and how to navigate the country's institutions, such as education and healthcare systems (Klugman and Pereira 2009). Migrants are often initially unfamiliar with the dominant habitus in the host society and must learn how to adapt to a new way of life and work culture (Greeff and Holtzkamp 2007). The migrant family may also experience a loss of social class and social support networks, and a change in social roles, as they re-adjust to life in the host country (Perreira *et al.* 2006; Åslund *et al.* 2015). As one Chinese man living in Ireland explained: "there are a lot of unwritten cultural expectations, and we don't know about them" (Cotter and Kolawole 2015, p.317). Thus, it can be said that migrants' position in the class system may change upon entry to the host country (Platt 2005).

Scandone's (2018) research has shown how the migrant diaspora collectively construct a habitus, which acts as an internalised frame that guides group members' behaviour. It also helps them understand their position in the social world, and what is perceived as being achievable aspirations for "those like us" (Scandone 2018, p.519). It is unsurprising, therefore, that Kindler *et al.* (2015) observed that individual migrants could acquire capital from their ethnic minority community through the social solidarity among co-ethnics and as an information source on how life operates in the host country. Carter (2005) argues that this body of knowledge contained in the ethnic community

collective is a form of social currency which enables individual migrants to exchange their social capital (embodied in their membership of the ethnic minority community) for cultural capital (knowledge of how the host culture operates). Several other researchers have affirmed that the co-ethnic social networks and the shared norms and values held by group members result in a specific form of cultural capital unique to migrants, which is termed as “ethnic capital” (Shah *et al.* 2010; Heizmann and Böhnke 2016; Konyali and Crul 2017).

This acknowledgement of ethnic capital is significant since it challenges (1) the view that ethnic minority cultures are inferior, relative to the dominant middle-class cultural capital of host countries and; (2) the notion that cultural capital is “synonymous with whiteness” (Wallace 2017, p.920). The recognition that ethnic capital can be exchanged for other forms of cultural and social capital helps to understand how migrant groups can acquire middle-class habitus through accumulated capital resources as opposed to the traditional stream of parent-child capital transfer (Crul *et al.* 2017). Thus, migrant parents can embody middle-class values despite not having the financial means to be considered as middle class in economic terms (Shain 2003).

There is, however, research to suggest that there is an unequal distribution of ethnic capital, as well as other forms of capital, among the immigrant population. This is because economically and culturally rich immigrant families are more able to “play the game” of the education system (Bourdieu 1990, p.13). In Strzemecka’s (2015) study of the integration experiences of Polish migrants in Norway, class habitus was shown to manifest in different parental approaches to their children’s education. Middle-class parents were very keen to equip their children with language skills before they entered primary school and took steps to actively improve their children’s knowledge of Norwegian by enrolling them in Norwegian language classes, encouraging them to

watch Norwegian TV shows, and reading Norwegian books or children's magazines to them. In contrast, working-class Polish parents were less likely to invest so heavily in their children's Norwegian language skills, perhaps due to the fact that they possessed a poor knowledge of Norwegian themselves and less disposable income to fund such classes and learning materials. Although both middle and working-class parents had high aspirations for their children, the middle-class Polish children in Strzemecka's (2015) study reported greater school readiness and easier school adjustments than the working-class Polish children. Similar research findings were observed among the parents of Polish migrants living in the Netherlands (Nijhoff 2017).

While middle-class migrant children are at an advantage due to their parent's economic, social and cultural capital supply, it must be acknowledged that children, irrespective of social class, are more adaptable and tend to become more familiar with the dominant habitus of the host country at a faster rate to their parents. Work by Shah *et al.* (2010), for example, observed how second-generation migrants who were educated in the host country became more cognisant of the dominant cultural capital than their first generation immigrant parents. Indeed, a study by Zhou (2014) has shown that immigrant parents with low levels of cultural capital often have to rely on their children to act as linguistic and cultural translators as they navigate their new cultural world. This point, however, raises questions of power brokerage and perhaps an unfair amount of responsibility being placed on the second-generation immigrant children. These findings also suggest that immigrant parents vary in terms of the extent to which they experience a "cumulative disadvantage" in their attempts to navigate education system in the host country (Darmody *et al.* 2014, p.129).

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter revealed that the immigrant families living in Ireland are ethnically, linguistically and socioeconomically diverse group. Some immigrant families enjoy a more comfortable lifestyle whereas other immigrant families, such as families living in direct provision in particular, face multiple challenges. For this reason, it is impossible to generalise how an immigrant parent might navigate the Irish primary school system because no ‘typical’ immigrant parent exists. However, the utilisation of Bourdieu’s conceptual framework provides an insight into how immigrants can draw on their economic, social, cultural and ethnic capital reserves to help them play the game of school (Bathmaker *et al.* 2015).

However, it should be acknowledged that there are a number of flaws inherent in Bourdieu's social reproduction thesis and thus there are limitations to interpreting the present study's findings through this theoretical lens. Jæger and Breen (2016) remark that Bourdieu fails to adequately articulate the mechanism through which cultural capital is transmitted to children and why cultural capital is a pathway to academic success. This lack of theoretical clarity and absence of a concrete input-output model may serve to restrict the present study. However, Bourdieu’s theoretical framework does offer an insight into the individual perspectives of immigrant parents within the Irish primary school system through the concept of habitus, as operationalised by Reay (2004). Therefore, this thesis maintains that the decision to adopt a Bourdieusian theoretical stance is justified.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The principal objective of this study was to describe and understand the experiences of immigrant parents with the Irish primary school system. This chapter explains why a phenomenological paradigm and a qualitative research design was employed to investigate the questions. It outlines the data collection procedure and supplies demographic information pertaining to the participants. It describes how the data obtained was analysed and stored. The chapter ends with an account of how the ethical and authenticity concerns pertaining to the study were addressed.

3.1 Research design

The purpose and context of the research project determines the most appropriate research paradigm for the study (Silverman 2010; Lewis 2013; Drisko 2016). The purpose of the present study was to listen to the voices of immigrant parents but the scope of the analysis was limited to an examination of (1) their lived experiences of the Irish primary school system; (2) their attitudes towards education and; (3) their personal accounts of their involvement in their children's education. Since the analysis did not involve quantifying the degree of parental involvement or the effect of parental involvement on the academic outcomes of ethnic minority pupils, the gathering of statistical information was not deemed necessary. Therefore, with respect to the purpose of the present study, a phenomenological interpretative paradigm was considered to have the best methodological fit.

Phenomenological research paradigms understand reality as being socially constructed (Luckmann and Berger 1964) and best explored through the eyes of the people living

within that social world (Bryman 2008; Kvale and Brinkman 2009; Creswell 2014). Phenomenological research is an idiographic method of inquiry which places the participant's voice at the centre of the research (Walsh and Koelsch 2012; Bevan 2014; Fernandez 2017) by extracting meaning from the personal narratives which are shared by the participants (Wertz *et al.* 2011; Snape and Spencer 2013).

Phenomenological research is an appropriate paradigm to study the experiences of people from marginalised or minority groups (Napier 2006; Manwaring 2010; Sohn *et al.* 2017). In contrast to positivism, which has been criticised as being overly deterministic with respect to studies involving minority groups (Lynch 1999), phenomenological research paradigms treat research participants as knowledge producers, as opposed to data points (Turton 2004). In addition, qualitative research allows for an in-depth study of the subject matter (Ritchie 2013), whereas positivistic methods require the researcher to maintain a distance between themselves and the subject matter being studied. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that phenomenological research paradigms are not devoid of criticism. Firstly, qualitative data collection methods are labour-intensive, highly time-consuming and costly (Maher and Dertadian 2018). Secondly, the research findings are difficult to generalise (Leedy and Ellis 2005) since the results are valid only for a specific group (Cruz and Tantia 2017) which attracts a lesser policy change impact compared to quantitative methods (Boysak 2012; Cain and Allan 2017).

Other critics of phenomenological research point to a lack of objectivity in a data analysis approach which relies heavily on the interpretation of the researcher (Crouch and McKenzie 2006; Adams and van Manen 2017). This subjectivity of the data analysis also means that there is a lack of robust tests to ensure quality standards (Reynolds *et al.* 2011). Furthermore, it is recognised that a number of researcher-

dependent variables, such as their socio-cultural outlook, political beliefs, and value systems influence how the study is designed and how the data is interpreted. It is also acknowledged that educational research itself is not value-free but situated within a micro-political system and thus objectivity of analysis is almost a fallacy (Rubin and Rubin 2005). However, in line with Becker's (2004) observation that at least some bias in sociological research is unavoidable, it is posited that the possibility of bias existing in the data analysis was not a sufficient reason to abandon the research investigation, particularly when the possibility of such bias existing was openly acknowledged in the first place.

3.2 Researcher's positionality

As Seidman (2006) asserts, "research has autobiographical roots" (p.32). This study acknowledges that a researcher's personal interest in the research topic, life experiences and attitudes, influences the direction and the nature of the research (Silverman 2010). Mindful of such biases, phenomenological research requires the researcher to undertake a degree of "self-scrutiny" prior to and throughout the research process (Bourke 2014, p.2). This self-reflection, termed bracketing, involves rigorously examining one's cultural background, biases, attitudes and opinions (Patton 1990). This subsection details the bracketed experience of the researcher.

The researcher is a 25-year-old childless indigenous Irish Catholic female, who was educated as a primary school teacher and spent three years working in a variety of primary schools, predominantly in Ireland. The researcher spent a short period of time working in the UK and Spain as a teacher and in the United States in the service industry. These experiences afforded the researcher some insights into life as an immigrant, albeit as a childless one. It must be noted that, because the researcher does not have children, she has only experienced the school system in the capacity of a

student and a teacher, but not in the role of parent, possibly giving rise to a reduced level of empathy for the research participants.

As an undergraduate education student, the researcher developed an interest in understanding the factors which contributed to educational inequality. Later, while working as a primary school teacher, the researcher developed an interest in the area of home-school relationships and parental involvement in education. Having worked in a considerable number of urban schools, the researcher observed evidence of inclusion of culturally diverse students through inclusive classroom practices such as corridor displays, whole-school friendship building initiatives among children of all backgrounds, additional instructional support, differentiation for children for whom English was an additional language and school policies which were sensitive to the multi-cultural make-up of the student body. However, the researcher was prompted to ask whether immigrant parents also felt the same institutional embrace from schools and whether enough culturally responsive efforts were being made by schools to nurture home-school relationships with immigrant parents.

The inspiration for this study flows from the following: the researcher's personal experiences of living as an immigrant and working as a teacher in schools with culturally diverse student bodies; her academic interest in the area of parental engagement; and some personal conversations she had with friends who were immigrants living in Ireland. The researcher's personal experiences also gave rise to a number of presuppositions with regards to how immigrant parents might experience the Irish primary school system. It was assumed from the outset that the immigrant parents would highly value the education of their children and take an active interest in supporting their children's academic progress in school. It was also assumed that there would be a number of additional barriers facing immigrant parents, due to varying

degrees of competency in the English language, a presumed lack of technical knowledge of the education system, and complications stemming from a lack of school choice for non-Catholic parents. It was expected that the immigrant parents' stories would vary in line with their socioeconomic status and educational background, and the degree of cultural distance between their country of origin and Ireland.

3.3 The gathering of immigrant parent stories: data collection phase one

The current study sought an in-depth understanding of the immigrant parents' experiences of the Irish primary school system. Therefore, it was necessary to choose a culturally sensitive data collection method. Although several qualitative research data collection methods exist, such as case studies, observation and document analysis (Cohen *et al.* 2002), the employment of a semi-structured interview technique was the most appropriate choice since it allows for the human story to be heard while enabling the extraction of specific data on the topic (Babbie 2014). Although focus groups were floated as a data collection option, it was concluded that this method might possibly lead to socially desirable results, meaning that the participants could offer socially acceptable responses as opposed to their own private thoughts. Therefore, the final research design consisted of one-to-one interviews between the researcher and the participants.

Once the decision to employ semi-structured interviews had been made, it was necessary to develop a suitable interview protocol. The construction of the immigrant parent interview schedule was based on an analysis of the parental involvement theory, findings from the empirical literature, and inventories used in previous studies examining the experiences of migrant parental involvement (see Appendix I). In accordance with Rubin and Rubin's (2005) recommendations for best practice, the

language used in the interview was deliberately free of academic jargon and written in clear, direct English to aid comprehension for participants for whom English may have been an additional language. Rubin and Rubin (2005) also advised that the researcher should avoid creating the impression that they are exploiting the community for self-promotional reasons. In response to this point, it was made explicitly clear to each participant that the data obtained was for the purposes of the researcher's master's thesis, but that it was hoped the findings could be used to inform school policy on how best to support home-school partnerships among migrant families (see Appendix C).

Initially, it was decided to conduct a single interview with the participants. However, due to the hefty amount of information which needed to be obtained from the participants, a single interview was an impractical means of harbouring the necessary data. Therefore, the decision was taken to split the data collection process into three stages: (1) a questionnaire; (2) a semi-structured interview; and (3) a follow-up. The data collection process is illustrated in *figure 3.1* below.

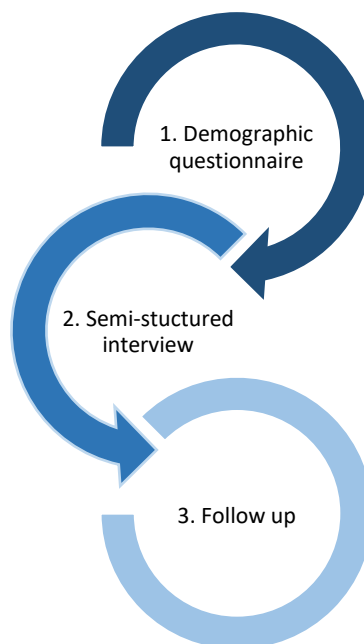


Figure 3.1: Data collection procedure for the immigrant parent sample

The first stage of the data collection process consisted of participants filling out a questionnaire, in which they supplied demographic information such as ethnicity, gender, and the number of years spent living in Ireland (see Appendix J). Initially, the responses to this questionnaire were obtained verbally ($n=5$) but the format was subsequently switched to an online format ($n=21$), to reduce the overall time spent on the interview. Participants were emailed a Google Form by the researcher, which they filled out prior to the interview (see Appendix J). The online form took approximately 10 minutes to fill out. The online form was only presented in English.

The second stage of the data collection process was a semi-structured interview (see Appendix I) which was also conducted through English. The interview itself took approximately 30 minutes to complete but the length of time ranged from 15 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes, depending on the participant. During the interview, the researcher adhered to the interview schedule, though some probes were given to participants in order to clarify the response given. Occasionally, other lines of questioning emerged from the participants' responses and these points were followed up by the researcher. However, on the whole, the interview schedule was closely observed.

During the interview itself consideration was given to Sharp's (2012) comments on the importance of making the interviewee feel comfortable. In following Rubin and Rubin's (2005) guidelines, the researcher sought to build trust with the participants by speaking to them warmly and informally. A conscious effort was made by the researcher to suspend preconceived beliefs, notions or personal experiences during the interview (Leedy and Ellis 2005). The researcher also wore casual dress during the face-to-face interviews, in line with Sharp's (2012) recommendations.

The third stage of the data collection process involved a follow-up email correspondence with the participants (see Appendix L). This final step afforded the participants the opportunity to verify the accuracy of their statements while also providing them with the option of adding or retracting any information from the original transcript. In the spirit of a phenomenological framework, this final step ensured that the participant was empowered as a knowledge provider and placed in the centre of the data sharing process.

This three-step data collection process took place between April and August 2017. All participants were aware prior to the interview that their participation was voluntary. The participants were given the option of meeting the researcher in person or conducting the interview over the telephone. The majority of the sample opted for a telephone interview. A combination of face-to-face interviews ($n=3$) and telephone interviews ($n=23$) took place. The researcher incurred the financial cost of the telephone calls. All of the interviews were recorded using the researcher's mobile phone and a free telephone recording app, ACR, for Android smartphones. The face-to-face interviews were recorded using a dictaphone.

The data verification stage took place between May and August 2017. This involved transcribing each interview verbatim. Every participant was given a pseudonym and all personally identifying information was removed to maximise confidentiality. Once the researcher had completed the transcript, the participant was promptly emailed the word document for their review.

3.4 The recruitment process: immigrant parents

The first consideration with respect to the recruitment process was the establishment of a participant selection criteria. While being mindful that the non-Irish parents may not

have self-identified as being “immigrant parents” (Young 1990), for the purposes of this study, immigrant parents were classified as parents who were born and educated in a country other than Ireland. Initially, it was decided that only the parents of sixth class pupils would be invited to the study because the researcher wished to interview parents who had several years of experience engaging with the Irish primary school system (see Appendix D). However, this eligibility criterion was later expanded to include all immigrant parents with at least one child enrolled in an Irish primary school due to the low response rate observed among the immigrant parents of sixth class pupils.

The limited budgetary resources available to the researcher also restricted the participant recruitment criteria. As the funding for this project was sourced entirely from the researcher’s personal finances, the hiring of a professional translation and transcription service was unaffordable. Therefore, only participants with an ability to communicate their opinions, feelings and personal experiences with at least some degree of clarity were included in the sample. In hindsight, the researcher acknowledges that more efforts should have been made to determine whether immigrant support organisations or charities would have been in a position to provide the required translation services so that more vulnerable immigrant parent voices could have been included in the final research sample.

Initially, a randomised sampling technique was utilised to recruit immigrant parents. A random sample of 40 Irish primary school principals were contacted by email (see Appendix A). In this email, the principal was asked to facilitate the recruitment of parents to the research study. A brief overview of the nature of the study was provided in the email, along with a request to circulate some enveloped research invitations to the immigrant parents in the school (see Appendix B), participant information sheets (see Appendix C) and the institutional consent form (see Appendix D).

It must be noted that the school principals were not given a copy of the interview schedule (see Appendix I) or the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix J). In hindsight, a copy should have been forwarded to the principals in order to foster a greater understanding of the study. However, at the time in question, the researcher assumed that if a principal wished to access this information they would have made the researcher aware of their request. This assumption was based on the fact that Appendix B and Appendix C welcomed any questions or concerns pertaining to any aspect of the study. The contact details of the researcher were also provided. Nevertheless, no principal requested a copy of the interview schedule.

Of the 40 schools that were contacted, three principals agreed to cooperate, three principals declined to participate and 34 schools did not respond to the email, resulting in a response rate of 7.5%. Although no data was obtained as to why the response rate was so low, it could be speculated that the schools declined to participate due to the heavy end-of-school-year workload. It is also possible that the decision to contact the principals by email was an inefficient means of participant recruitment. It is possible that a letter, phone-call and/or a visit in person to schools may have yielded a better response. However, emails were used because they were the most cost effective and time efficient means of contacting principals.

School distribution of research invitations response rate (N= 40)			
Agreed to distribute	Declined to distribute	No email follow-up	Response rate
3	3	34	7.5%

Table 3.1: Response rate from emails sent to schools

98 invitation letters were sent to the three schools who agreed to distribute the invitation letters on behalf of the researcher. First, 64 invitation letters were posted to an urban Catholic school in Co. Mayo. No parent from this school responded to the invitation, resulting in a response rate of 0%. A further 26 invitation letters were posted to an urban Catholic school in South Co. Dublin. Similarly, there was a 0% response rate from the parents in this school. Finally, eight letters were posted to an urban multid denominational school in Co. Meath. One parent responded to the research invitation. Taking all efforts into consideration, the overall response rate was 1%.

Parental response rate to research invitations distributed to schools (N= 98)			
Co. Mayo Catholic school	South Co. Dublin Catholic school	Co. Meath multidenominational School	Response rate for entire sample
0/64	0/26	1/8	1%

Table 3.2: Parental response rate to research invitations distributed to schools

Given the disappointing response rate both from schools and parents via the invitation letters, an outcome which, perhaps naively, was unanticipated beforehand, a change of tactic from randomised sampling to snowball sampling was deemed necessary. The researcher asked 90 of her personal contacts to invite immigrant parents they knew to the study. In addition, every new participant who took part in the study was asked to invite their personal contacts to the study. While it is impossible to establish the real response rate of this sampling method, a total of 30 parents initially agreed to take part in the study. However, five parents later withdrew their offer to participate. These parents were not asked to provide any explanation for their decision and their right to withdraw their participation was fully respected. However, one recruit cited a lack of

comprehension of the interview questions as the reason for her decision not to proceed with the research process. Therefore, it can be speculated that the language barrier was a reason why other parents declined to participate in the present research project. It is also possible that some parents did not want to share their experiences out of a fear that they might be identified (Cardona *et al.* 2009).

Snowball sampling outcome		
Total number recruited	Total number withdrawn	Net sample size
30	5	25

Table 3.3: Snowball sampling response rate

In summary, the participant recruitment efforts resulted in a final sample size of 26 immigrant parents: recruited through a mix of randomised sampling ($n=1$) and snowball sampling ($n=25$) techniques. Although there is no set sample size for qualitative research (Tai and Ajjawi 2016), the final research sample size was too small to claim that it would be representative of immigrant parents living in Ireland (Roder *et al.* 2014). The absence of a representative sample makes it difficult to draw any firm conclusions from the data obtained or provide any valuable insight into the experiences of immigrant parents with the Irish education system. An examination of the participant demographics, as presented in the next section, provides further evidence to suggest that the immigrant parent data set was not representative of immigrant parents as a whole.

3.5 Examining the immigrant parent sample: demographics

Twenty-six immigrant parents (16 female, 10 male) participated in this research project. Seventeen different ethnic backgrounds were represented in this sample by a single

participant, unless otherwise stated: New Zealand, Australia, Germany, South Africa, Nigeria, Zambia, Uganda, Pakistan, Jordan, Libya, Finland, Syria, UK ($n=2$); Poland ($n=4$), Philippines ($n=2$), Saudi Arabia ($n=3$), Sudan ($n=3$).

Gender		
Male	Female	
10	16	
Marital Status		
Married	Cohabiting	Separated
22	3	1
Location		
Urban	Rural	
21	5	

Table 3.4: Immigrant parent demographics A

The vast majority of the participants were married ($n=22$), with three participants cohabiting and one participant living as a single parent. The average family size was three children, with a minimum of one child and a maximum of seven children. The average number of children enrolled in primary school was two, with a maximum of four and a minimum of one. Five participants resided in rural areas, while the remaining 21 participants lived in urban areas. Three participants were homeowners and two of these homeowners were married to a native Irish spouse. The other homeowner was married to a naturalised Irish citizen with a professional occupation. Three participants were living in a direct provision centre. The remainder of the participants were living in rental properties ($n=20$).

Twelve participants were in the possession of a medical card while 14 participants did not have a medical card. Sixteen participants were in employment, with six in full-time employment and 10 in part-time employment. A further four participants were on leave from their jobs: three for study and one for maternity leave. Six participants were unemployed. With regards to the participants' spouses or partners, 12 were in employment, with 11 in full-time employment and one in part-time employment. No partner or spouse was on leave and no information was available on one ex-spouse. Eleven partners were unemployed.

The educational background of the parents was similar. Every parent had at least a primary-level education. Three participants had no third-level education and 10 had some third-level education. Eight participants had a bachelor's degree and five had a master's degree. No participant had a PhD, although one participant was a PhD candidate. The education level of the participants' spouse and partner was similar. Three partners had a primary-level education and seven had a secondary-level education. Five spouses had at least some level of third-level education, six had a bachelor's degree, three had a master's degree and one had a PhD. There was no information available on the educational attainment of one participant's ex-spouse. It must be noted that the sample was educated overall, as most had some third-level education.

Medical Cards (n= 26)				
Yes	No			
12	14			
Accommodation (n= 26)				
Owner-occupier	Rental property	Direct provision		
3	20	3		
Employment (n= 26)				
Full-time employment	Part-time employment	On leave	Unemployed	
6	10	4	6	
Parents' Highest Level of Education (n= 26)				
Primary level	Second level	Some third level	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree
0	3	10	8	5

Table 3.5: Immigrant parent demographics B

Eight participants had English as a first language, representing 31% of the sample. Just over half of the households were monolingual (54%). There were nine bilingual households, representing 35% of the total sample. A smaller number of households ($n=3$) spoke three languages at home. The majority of monolingual households were English-speaking ($n=8$). Two families spoke Arabic at home. The other monolingual families spoke either German, Urdu, Polish or Tagalog (a language spoken in the Philippines).

The bilingual households spoke both English and either Arabic ($n=4$), Polish ($n=3$), Zulu ($n=1$) or Afrikaans ($n=1$). Three parents spoke three languages at home. Two parents spoke Zuhawa, Arabic and English. One other parent spoke English, Finnish and Italian.

Language Spoken at Home					
Monolingual household		Bilingual household		Trilingual household	
14		9		3	
Monolingual Households ($n=14$)					
English	Arabic	German	Polish	Urdu	Tagalog
4	1	1	1	1	1
Bilingual Households ($n=9$)					
English and Arabic	English and Polish	English and Zulu	English and Afrikaans		
4	3	1	1		
Trilingual Households ($n=3$)					
English, Arabic and Zuhawa			English, Italian and Finnish		
2			1		

Table 3.6: The degree of language diversity among the immigrant parent sample

The majority of the participants had spent a considerable number of years resident in Ireland, with a maximum of 21 years and a minimum of three years. The mean number of years of residency in Ireland was 10. Consistent with Roder *et al.* (2014), most

parents intended on settling in Ireland on a long-term basis. Twenty-one parents intend to remain in Ireland permanently, whereas four participants plan to stay in Ireland temporarily. One participant was unsure about her future plans.

Reasons for Settling in Ireland (n=26)				
Work opportunities	Spouse work opportunities	To study	Family reunification	To claim asylum
9	4	4	4	5

Table 3.7: Factors influencing the participants' migration decisions

There was considerable variance in the rationale behind the parents' decisions to migrate to Ireland. The majority of participants in the study were economic migrants. Thirteen parents came for work-related reasons; nine for their own work and four for their spouse's work. As observed by Castles and Miller (2003), economic migrants often intend on staying in higher-wage societies for a short period of time to accumulate money to set up their lives in their country of origin (Pollard *et al.* 2008; White 2011). However, with the birth of children, "settlement takes on a more permanent character" (Castles and Miller 2003, p.33). This was the case with every economic migrant who participated in the study.

Most of the economic migrants had initially no intention of remaining in Ireland for the long term but with the birth of their children, they have decided to remain ($n=7$). The remainder of the immigrant parent sample had located to Ireland for study ($n=4$), to reunite with family members already living in Ireland ($n=4$), or to claim asylum ($n=5$). However, relocating to Ireland was not a "choice" for these parents. None of the participants who were living in direct provision, or who arrived in Ireland as asylum seekers, had specifically sought a life in Ireland.

In summary, the immigrant parents who participated in the present study were mostly English speaking, college educated, economic migrants who had lived in Ireland for a considerable length of time. Seven parents came from First World countries. Four parents were native English speakers and a further sixteen spoke English to their children in the family home as a second language. This meant that twenty of the parents spoke English to their children frequently. Only three parents living in Direct Provision participated in this study. This meant that a more vulnerable parent voice, although not entirely absent, was under-represented in the final data set.

3.6 Involving key people in the data collection process

Although the purpose of the present study was to explore the personal narratives of immigrant parents with respect to the Irish education system, a lack of participants ($n=26$) served to undermine the impact of the study's findings. As previously acknowledged, one major drawback of the final sample was the over-representation of an educated, English speaking perspective on the matters being explored. In an attempt to include a more marginalised immigrant parent voice, the decision was taken to invite professionals who worked with and/or represented immigrant communities to participate in the study. The inclusion of the key people was not intended to replace the first-hand, personal experiences of immigrant parents. On the contrary, it was believed that the inclusion of the key people sample would offer an alternative perspective on the experiences of immigrant parents with the primary school system from a professional standpoint. Although the data obtained from the key people was secondary information it was still regarded as being value-added because it would serve to somewhat improve the representative reach of the final research sample.

Furthermore, the key people were asked by the researcher to invite immigrant parents to participate in the study. Indeed, one immigrant parent was referred to the study by a key

person. Additionally, six of the key people offered to display a poster (see Appendix H) in their premises and/or their social media platforms to create awareness of the study and, potentially draw further participants. Unfortunately, there was a zero response rate from the participant recruitment poster but the generosity of the key people who displayed this poster is acknowledged.

3.7 Recruiting the key people

It was first necessary to draft a selection criteria to select suitable informants for the key people sample. It was decided that professionals who had experience working in the area of migrant rights, or who were acting as community or religious representatives, would be invited to participate in the research study. An attempt was made to ensure an equal gender balance, fair regional distribution, and a mix of professional and non-professional individuals.

In order to contact suitable key people to participate in the present study, a Google search was made of all organisations that represent, advocate for, or support migrant groups in Ireland. Every effort was made by the researcher to invite a representative and diverse sample of migrant groups and community leaders to the research project. 95 organisations and groups were invited to participate in the project. Seventy-eight of these individuals and organisations were contacted by telephone. There was no telephone number listed for 17 organisations and therefore these groups were invited to participate in the study by email (see Appendix E).

During this initial contact with the organisation, the researcher briefly explained the purpose of the study and asked to be referred to a member of staff in that organisation, who could undertake a short telephone interview. During this initial stage, a number of bodies asked for the interviewer to email the interview questions (see Appendix F) as

well as an information sheet which gave more details of the study (see Appendix G) in advance of the interview ($n=14$). Also during this initial telephone call, other organisations ($n=14$) informed the researcher that they were not in a position to take part in this research, because they did not serve a sufficient number of immigrant families in order to be able to comment, or because they did not have an employee with sufficient expertise to comment on the issues facing immigrant families vis-à-vis the education system. Therefore, of the 95 organisations originally contacted, only 81 were eligible to comment. Of the 81 eligible organisations, sixty agreed to participate in the project, indicating an initial response rate of 74%.

A few interviews ($n=3$) were conducted when the researcher first made telephone contact with the organisation. The remainder of the interviews ($n=29$) were rescheduled for a later date. A further 10 professionals agreed to complete the interview, but a time and date for this interview to take place was not agreed and so the interviews did not proceed. The right of these individuals to withdraw was fully respected and they were not asked to justify their decision to withdraw from the study. Eleven participants eligible to participate referred the researcher to a colleague, but these referrals did not result in an interview. A further 21 individuals who were eligible to comment did not follow up on the interview. Therefore, the real response rate was 40% because only 32 telephone interviews were conducted. The breakdown of the final response rate is displayed in the table 3.8.

Key people Response Rate (N=81)			
Interviews completed	Initially agreed to participate but later withdrew	Referred to colleague but colleague did not respond	Ignored email/no follow-up to voice message
32	10	11	21

Table 3.8: Key people response rate

3.8 Key people demographics

A total of 32 key people participated in the present study. Eight ethnic minority community leaders were represented from Afghanistan, Palestine, Cameroon, Congo, Darfor Solidarity Movement, Gambia and Ghana. Four family support charities were included: Irish Autism Action, Parent Line, Saint Vincent De Paul and Treoir. Several groups that specifically advocate for the rights of migrants, or who work to support migrants living in Ireland, provided their perspectives: the Migrants Rights Council of Ireland, Clare Migrant Support Centre, Global Enterprize Limited, Health Access, Latvian Schools, Migrant Artists Support Group, Cork Migrant Workers Support Group, NASC, and New Community Partnerships.

Five religious and one non-religious spokesperson shared their views: Atheist Ireland, The Hindu Association of Ireland, the Roman Catholic Chaplain of the Polish Community in Ireland, a representative of the Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council, and the Roman Catholic Chaplain of the Lithuanian Community in Ireland. Finally, a number of community development workers in the following local partnerships and community resource centres offered their comments: Bray Area

Partnership, Westmeath Partnership, Wicklow Partnership, Kildare Partnership, Longford Partnership, North Tipperary Leader Partnership, and the Hospital Family Resource Centre.

Profile of Key people Interviewed (N=32)				
Ethnic minority community Leaders/representatives	Migrant support groups	Religious and non- religious groups	Charities	Local partnerships/family resource centres
7	9	5	4	7

Table 3.9: Profiling the key people

3.9 Gathering the key people’s perspective: data collection phase two

In keeping with the qualitative nature of the study’s design, the decision was taken to continue with a semi-structured interview approach to data collection. The next task was the curating a suitable list of interview questions to pose to the key people. The final interview protocol was modelled on the work of Airey (1999) who also used key people in her research of marginalised groups living in Ireland. The five interview questions (see Appendix F) were designed to be open-ended in nature and to enable the key person to draw on their professional knowledge and platform of influence, to offer another perspective on the matter of immigrant parent experiences within the Irish education system. Although it was never the intention of the researcher to pose leading questions in the interview schedule, on reflection, it is acknowledged that question two should have been more carefully worded. Question two of the interview schedule asked the key people to comment on: “the main issues facing migrant parents in the Irish

primary school system”. It is possible that the semantics of question two could have been interpreted as being inconsistent with the more general purposes of the study.

The semi-structured interviews with key resource people were conducted between June 2017 and September 2017. Every interview was conducted over the telephone, with the researcher incurring the financial cost of making the telephone call. All interviews were conducted through English and took place at a time which was convenient for the participants. The interview itself took 15 minutes to complete but the length of time ranged from 10 minutes to 1 hour depending on the participant. During the interview, the researcher adhered to the interview schedule, though occasionally other lines of questioning emerged from the key people’s responses and these points were followed up by the researcher. The interviews were recorded using the free telephone recording app, ACR, for Android smartphones. Each interview was later transcribed verbatim. Each participant was given a pseudonym and all personally, and professionally, identifying information was removed to maximise confidentiality.

3.10 Data analysis

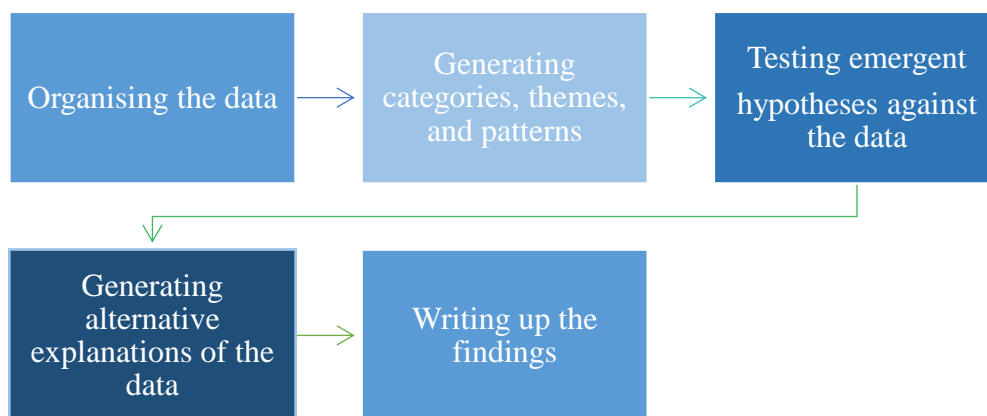


Figure 3.2: Marshall and Rossman (1995) procedure for phenomenological data analysis

Once the interview transcripts were prepared from both phases of the data collection process, Marshall and Rossman's (1995) five-step data analysis technique was applied to the data set. The steps involved in the data analysis process are displayed in *figure 3.2*. In line with Marshall and Rossman's (1995) data analysis procedure, the first step involved organising the data. The transcripts and interview observation notes were carefully read multiple times in order for the researcher to become familiar with the data set. Once this had been achieved, the second step involved identifying salient themes and patterns from the participant narratives. The key themes were initially derived from the research questions but were modified throughout the coding process. A coding frame was then drawn up, based on the identified themes. The coding frame was then applied to the data set in phase three of Marshall and Rossman's (1995) method. The identified themes are displayed in *figure 3.3*.

The third step involved testing emergent themes. The data set was searched to identify relevant meaningful units of information that could fit under the four identified themes. This process involved highlighting sections of the transcript and then grouping coded responses together. The fourth step of the data analysis process involved re-reading the coded information in a critical light to seek alternative explanations. This step challenged initial presumptions concerning patterns in the data and forced the researcher to justify why the chosen interpretation was the most plausible. Towards this end, divergent perspectives were highlighted under each theme. Throughout the entire research process, but particularly during the fourth step, all data obtained from the participants was cautiously interpreted. The fifth and final phase of the data collection involved crafting a composite description of the meaning contained within each of the four themes.

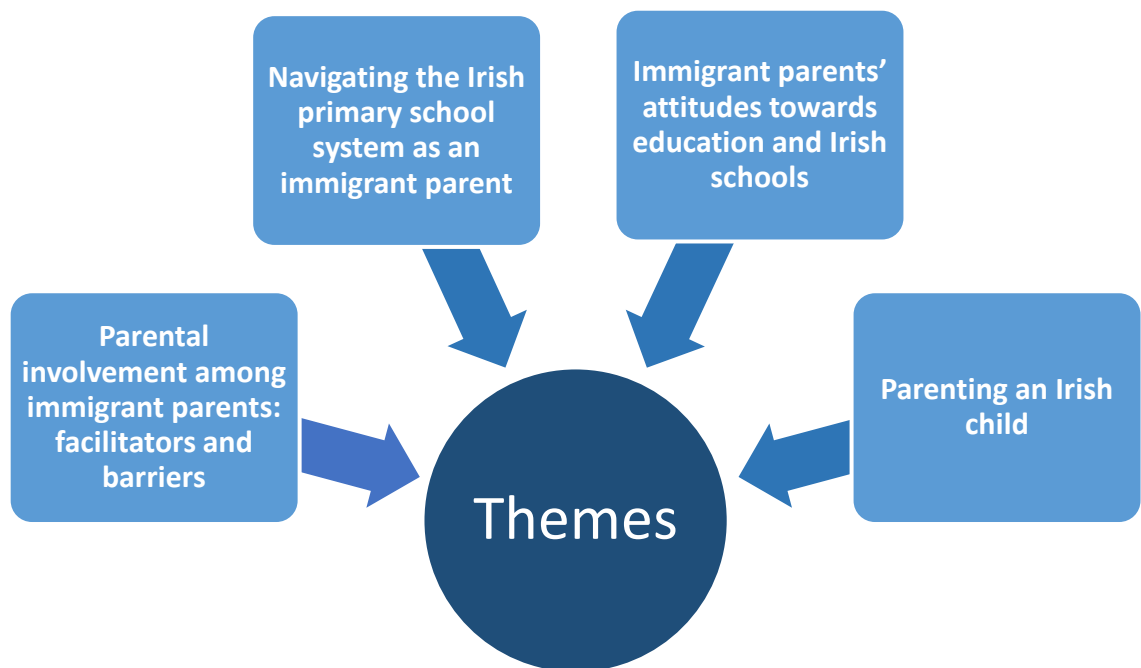


Figure 3.3: Key themes identified in the present study

3.11 Trustworthiness

Issues of validity and reliability should be addressed at every stage of the research process in quantitative research designs (Patton 1990). However, unlike research methods rooted in the positivist tradition, concepts equivalent to validity and reliability are referred to as “trustworthiness” or “credibility” in qualitative research (Golafshani 2003; Ngozwana 2018). The present study was tasked with limiting the threats to the credibility of the research findings, with respect to a qualitative research design and with regards to the chosen sample demographic of ethnic minority groups.

3.11.1 Considerations with respect to qualitative designs

Leedy and Ellis (2005) suggested four methods of maximising trustworthiness in qualitative research. Firstly, the researcher should ensure a thick description of the methodology, participants and data to enable the reader to draw their own conclusions

from the study findings. Similarly, Yin (1989) recommended that the researcher leave a copious paper trail to facilitate an independent audit. Tai and Ajjawi (2016) concurred that transparency with respect to data collection and analysis improves the rigor of the qualitative data findings. Therefore, conscious efforts were made to provide the reader with as much detail as possible, with regards to the research design, data collection methods, and participants. Presenting the participants' responses verbatim is another method of improving the credibility of the data (Ngozwana 2018). Therefore, any grammatical mistakes made by the participants for whom English was an additional language were not corrected in the transcript, so that the data could be presented in its original format.

Secondly, Leedy and Ellis (2005) advise that the researcher should invite the participants to confirm the accuracy of the findings – a procedure which is referred to as respondent validation. Sharp (2012) echoed this point by stating that the researcher has a duty to provide the participant with an opportunity to clarify what they have said, on completion of the interview. Thus, the data in the present study was member-checked, whereby the participants were asked to re-read the interview transcript and verify or clarify their responses (see Appendix L). Any subsequent corrections made by the participants were then highlighted in the transcript. In line with Stanley (2008), the transcripts were read four times to ensure that attention was given even to subtle points emerging in the data, and to allow the researcher to become more cognisant of the complexities contained in every narrative.

Thirdly, Leedy and Ellis (2005) have argued that the researcher should strive to include negative case analysis in the research, where possible. In response to this recommendation, attempts were made to maximise the recruitment of immigrant parents to the study and when all avenues were exhausted, a number of key people were

consulted to provide a secondary perspective. Fourthly, Leedy and Ellis (2005) suggested that feedback should be sought from other impartial third parties regarding the accuracy of the data analysis and interpretation. It must be clearly stated that no inter-rater reliability checks were carried out on the present data set, which serves to compromise the validity of the data findings and ultimately poses a limitation to the research impact of the present study. However, drafts of the results and discussion sections of the thesis were proofread by two critical friends and their feedback was taken into consideration when the discussion section of the thesis was being finalised.

Finally, Drisko (2016) made the point that although a considerable amount of qualitative research involves once-off interviews with participants, multiple interviews are required to improve the quality of the data set. Although the present research involved interviewing the participants on a single occasion, the study strived to improve the quality of the research findings through the use of triangulation. This was achieved by a cross-verification of the research findings from two sources: the parent sample and the key person sample. However, given that the participants were being asked to relay past events, the validity of such data depends somewhat on the accuracy of their memory (Leedy and Ellis 2005). Coupled with problems associated with memory recall, it is also worth noting that the very presence of the researcher might make the participant withhold information or give socially desirable responses (Sharp 2012). Although it may be possible that telephone interviews may have facilitated deeper conversations than face-to-face because of the increased anonymity involved, Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) found no significant differences between the quality of the qualitative data obtained from face-to-face and telephone interviews.

3.11.2 Considerations with respect to an ethnic minority sample

Lee (2008) advises researchers to adopt a culture-centred focus by recognising that both their own personal thoughts, beliefs and behaviour, as well as the participants' thoughts, attitudes and behaviour are influenced by their respective cultural heritage and cultural experiences. Considering that the researcher is a childless indigenous Irish female, it is quite probable that this difference in personal experiences may have influenced the nature of the data collected, as well as the interpretation of the data itself. Although it is likely, it is by no means certain, that participants will only freely share information if the researcher is from the same ethnic and social background as themselves (Valentine 2002). Therefore, efforts were made to compensate for possible biases arising in the research. While recognising that bias is inherent and unavoidable in qualitative research, the researcher strived to be mindful of her own privileged position and endeavoured to become aware that her personal biases, attitudes and worldview might be different from the participants' outlook and perceptions of life in Ireland.

As acknowledged by Becker (2004), "there is no position from which sociological research can be done that is not biased in one or another way" (p.27). However, this reality does not negate the researcher from making every effort to decolonise the knowledge sought from the participants and the onus is placed on the researcher to examine and challenge assumptions that underpin their attitudes (Carter and Virdee 2008; Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010). One means of which the researcher addressed the inherent bias was acknowledging the participants as collaborators within the process of knowledge production (Routledge 2001). This was achieved by using a semi-structured data collection method and by giving the participants the power to decide what narratives they shared. The researcher consciously deferred judgment with respect to the participants' stories and, where appropriate, the participants were invited to clarify and

correct the researcher's interpretation of what was shared during the follow-up stage of the data collection process (Butler 2004).

3.12 Ethical considerations

There are a number of ethical dilemmas pertaining to qualitative methods in educational research and working with an ethnic minority sample, such as issues relating to anonymity, rights of withdrawal and confidentiality (Smith *et al.* 2009; Ngozwana 2018). Firstly, this research project was subject to a full ethical review by the Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Committee (MIREC). Ethical approval for the study was granted in late May 2017. Secondly, each participant was provided with an information sheet (see Appendix C), which explained the purpose and procedure of the study in simple terms and detailed exactly what would be required from the research participants. The information sheet provided assurances of anonymity: all personal identifiers would be removed from any response appearing in the final thesis document and a pseudonym would be assigned to each participant. The participants were also made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage, without the need to provide an explanation.

Before the interviews took place, participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions about the research project. Verbal consent ($n=23$) and written consent ($n=3$) (see Appendix K) was then obtained from the participants to record the conversation for the purposes of transcription. Efforts were made to ensure that the language used in the informed consent form, and during the interviews themselves, was accessible and free from academic jargon (Rubin and Rubin 2005). In line with Rubin and Rubin's (2005) advice, the researcher adopted the role of a novice: one who is willing to learn about the cultural experiences of the participants and one who is acceptant of their culture.

Furthermore, the participants were regarded as the experts with respect to their own personal experiences.

Following the interviews, the participants were given the opportunity to view the transcripts and confirm the accuracy and clarity of their responses (see Appendix L). Subsequently, the participants' contact details were destroyed. Smith *et al.* (2009) mentioned that the researcher should be mindful of carefully storing the anonymised data. Therefore, the interview transcripts were stored electronically in a password-encrypted file on the researcher's laptop. The data files were backed up on a password-protected and encrypted USB stick in the researcher's home. In accordance with Mary Immaculate College guidelines, the files will be kept in this secure location for three years. Access will be granted to the internal examiner and the external examiner of the thesis, if requested, for assessment purposes only.

There are a number of ethical concerns which arise from selecting an ethnic minority sample. The first point of consideration concerns the categorisation of participants into ethnic minority groups. Lee (2008) points out that the process of assigning participants to ethnic groups is an ethical question in and of itself. Mertens (2015) asks whether it is possible to conceptualise race or ethnicity without simplistic stereotyping and white middle-class bias. As explained by Stanfield (2011), race is a relative concept: white people create the concept of black people and black people create the concept of white people. Perhaps more succinctly, race is associated with biology such that members of a given race are genetically distinct from another, whereas ethnicity is associated with the culture, heritage and language of people in a given geographical area (Pulido 2015). Additionally, globalisation tends to complicate conceptualisations of ethnicity and nationality and consequently the identity of transnationals and economic migrants (Banks 2008; Stake and Rizvi 2009). While there is no single accepted definition of

ethnicity, Sedikides and Brewer (2001) have suggested that each individual possesses multiple ethnic identities to varying degrees of salience, depending on the circumstances. In an attempt to resolve the ethical concerns arising from selecting an ethnic minority sample, the researcher asked the participants to disclose their own ethnic identity and they were categorised in accordance with their own self-identified nationality.

While recognising that social categorisation does take place, researchers should self-monitor their attitudes and values in order to minimise any in-group favouritism or stereotypical attitudes towards members of the out-group (Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000; Mulinari and Ratzel 2007). It is also necessary for the researcher to be able to take the other person's perspective and view them as individuals of equal status to themselves (Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000). While it may be an impossibility for the researcher to remain unbiased, Rodriguez *et al.* (2011) have stated that researchers should at least strive to become culturally responsive. The researcher achieved this in the current study by validating the personal identities of participants and by valuing and respecting their individual experiences. Additionally, a literature review on ethnic identity and the psychological issues relating to immigration and refugee status was carried out.

Finally, Drisko (2016) has observed that a participant could potentially disclose information that should be brought to the attention of a social worker or a higher authority. In the event of this happening, the onus is on the researcher to provide the participant with access to support, such as contact details for an organisation that can help. Therefore, the researcher sourced the contact details of NASC Ireland, a national migrant support group, in the event that a participant should require additional support.

In two instances the researcher provided the contact details of a charity organisation that was in a better position to provide appropriate advice to the participant concerned.

3.13 Summary

This chapter discussed in detail the research philosophy, rationale and methodology employed in the present research project. It provided a justification of why semi-structured interviews were used to collect the qualitative data from the participants and described how the interviews were conducted. Details of the difficulties encountered with the recruitment of participants was relayed. The decision to include the key people was also explained. It must be reemphasised that the key people were not a substitute for the immigrant parents; nor was it the intention of the key people to speak on behalf of the immigrant parents they represented or worked with. On the contrary, the key people were included in order to widen the diversity of perspectives, due to the failure to secure an adequate immigrant parent sample size. The chapter also offered an overview of how Marshall and Rossman's (1995) five-step data analysis technique was used to extract themes from the data collected. Finally, the chapter charted how the trustworthiness and ethical concerns of the study were addressed.

Chapter 4: Theme 1: Parenting an Irish Child

“Culture is not only what we live by. It is also, in great measure, what we live for. Affection, relationship, memory, kinship, place, community, emotional fulfilment, intellectual enjoyment, a sense of ultimate meaning.”

(Eagleton 2000 p.131)

4.0 Introduction

This chapter starts by exploring how the immigrant parents who participated in the present study have found their place in Irish society. This chapter asks what it means for immigrant parents to raise children who are products of the Irish education system. The parents’ stories reveal that their decision to send their child to an Irish primary school has shaped their child’s national identity and sense of self. It also reveals how, through their decision to raise their family in Ireland, the immigrant parents have also become moulded into “new Irish parents”.

4.1 Becoming a “New Irish” parent

Most parents ($n=21$) in the present study have decided to raise their families in Ireland on a long-term basis. Although the parents migrated to Ireland for a variety of reasons (*see table 3.7*), every parent claimed that they were satisfied living in Ireland. They believed that their children would be afforded a good quality of life and many opportunities in Ireland. As Grace, from Uganda, articulated:

I decided to raise my family here because we felt there is better opportunity here in Ireland. You know the children can get good education...it’s a better life for them.

Sara, from the Philippines, added:

My country it is really tough to raise a family over there. So, we see that we have a good job here, we have a nice employer and for the sake of my two boys [we chose to stay in Ireland. Even] though we miss my home town. We still miss my country.

Like Sara, a substantial number of participants ($n=21$) reported still feeling an affinity or longing for the country which they left behind. Sara's words imply that by moving to Ireland resulted in a loss of sorts: a loss of a country of which she had fond memories and a sense of home. Zainab, from Saudi Arabia, also reported feeling a sense of loss when she moved to Ireland to study: "We [herself and her husband] missed our family. This is the only thing that we feel we are not comfortable. But everything is okay." Patryk, from Poland, pointed out that the lack of family support made being an immigrant parent more difficult: "I feel that people who were born here have much more established and secure position because of the family members and network which you can rely on in hard times". This point also suggests that migrants can experience a decline in their social capital when they initially relocate to the host country. Immigrants can also experience a reduced social status or deskilling, which compounds their sense of loss (McGregor 2008).

The conversations with the immigrant parents in this study suggested that immigrants' social capital declines when they first move to Ireland. McCollum (1990) affirms that migrants incur losses of social support (family, friends, colleagues) but also the loss of "aspects of self" (p.22). It is generally accepted that once a person is uprooted from their native cultural space and disconnected from their social network, the shape of their national identity becomes altered (Bevelander 2011; Smith 2013; Heilbrunn *et al.* 2016). Negotiating a space within the host culture is not an easy task because it involves unpacking questions of identity and belonging. Patryk, from Poland, in reflecting on this identity as a Polish national who has been living in Ireland for 12 years, made the

following comment: “We [himself, his wife and two daughters] are Polish, but we speak English. We are sort of a new generation. I don’t know how to describe that. It’s like a hybrid thing.” Sara, from The Philippines and a naturalised citizen of Ireland, made the point that while her sense of identity has evolved since moving to Ireland, it is not necessarily recognised by others: “They [some Irish people] say people like me [Filipinos] are not real Irish...[but] I feel we are.” Sara’s comments indicate that her feelings of identity still exist, irrespective of whether or not she feels they are validated by others.

4.2 Comparing the national identities of the parent and the child

Both Patryk’s and Sara’s words support the argument that the process of identity reconstruction is an idiosyncratic, multidimensional, ongoing negotiation with shifts and alterations between the host culture and the native culture (Kim *et al.* 2008; Bhatia and Ram 2009; Phillimore 2011). It is also interesting to note that they referred to their family unit, as opposed to themselves as individuals, as having found a space within the Irish identity landscape. Patryk’s description of his family being “like a hybrid thing” in terms of national identity suggests that the parents’ national heritage and their children’s Irish nationality combine to form a unique expression of Irish identity, which Roder *et al.* (2014) term as the “new Irish” family (p.15). Further to this point is the findings that although almost every parent felt a sense of belonging to Irish society, no parent identified as being Irish whereas thirteen parents said that their children identified as Irish. Interestingly, the parents were more likely to perceive their children’s national identity as an assimilated Irish identity ($n=13$), as opposed to a dual identity ($n=2$). This finding is to be expected because second-generation immigrants are more likely to assimilate to the host culture than first-generation immigrants (Ishida *et al.* 2016).

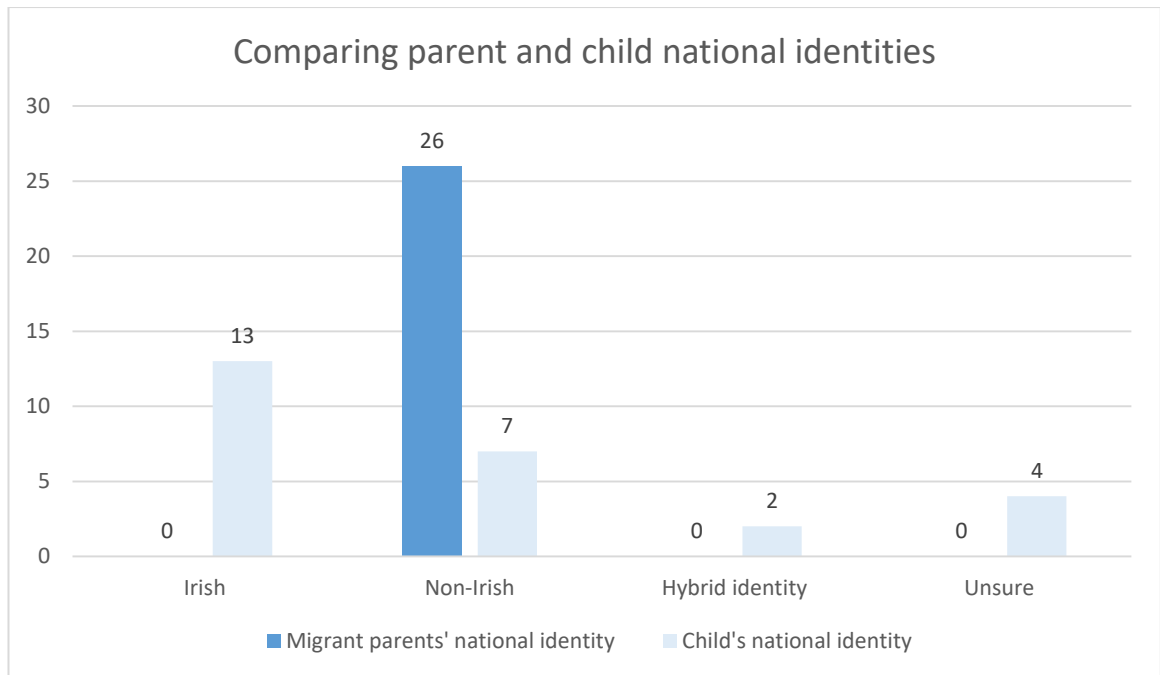


Figure 4.1: Comparing parent and child national identities

Some parents placed emphasis on their child’s birthplace when determining whether their child was Irish, a result which paralleled with the findings of Waldron and Pike’s (2006) study. Lisa, from Nigeria, was one parent who equated being born in Ireland with “being Irish”. She used this rationale to explain to her children why they were Irish, not Nigerian:

There was a time when they were asking the question, so I just explained to them, “Oh you are Irish because you are born here.” So, I would say to them that they are Irish. Their parents are African, but they are Irish.

Similarly, Zakir, from Pakistan, explained that since his Irish-born daughter was not granted Irish nationality, due to some legal complications, she did not identify as Irish:

We didn’t have any status here, so they didn’t think they are Irish. We are living in Ireland, but we are not Irish. If we take status, after that we are Irish. Even my daughter she born here but on her birth certificate she born in Ireland but her nationality Pakistani.

4.3 Striking balance between cultural worlds and cultural values

Although most parents desired for their children to have some affinity towards their parents' cultural heritage, most parents wanted their child to integrate into Irish society, as articulated by Angela, from Germany: "As an adult you have to let your child out there and integrate properly and become Irish". A representative of the Darfor Solidarity Movement offered a reason why it was important to encourage the children to integrate: "They [the second-generation] have [to] be part of society. We don't want them on the corner [of Irish society]." Other Irish studies have shown that migrant families encourage their children to adopt a binational identity, such that the children will retain a connection to their parents' native language and cultural identity, while simultaneously becoming Irish (Maiter and George 2003; Devine 2009; McGorman and Sugrue 2007).

The acculturation process, however, can sometimes bring challenges to the migrant family unit, as a representative of the Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council outlined:

Many of the parents they would like their children to stay attached with their culture, with their values back home and many parents find it difficult to know how to balance how the children get experience from their culture, but at the same time they want them to integrate.

While it is common for parents to wish to transmit their ethnic heritage to their children, sometimes their children identify more strongly with the cultural values and ideals of the host culture (Vasquez 2010) and parents feel distressed about their children "forgetting" their family's cultural roots. One Bangladeshi father in Renzaho *et al.* (2017) study disclosed how he worried that his daughter might get a boyfriend and that his extended family would shame him for not adequately controlling his daughter. Such

intra-familial conflict seems to be strongest when parents from traditional and conservative backgrounds have children who have adopted westernised outlooks and lifestyles (Ari and Cohen 2018). Towards this end, immigrant parents are faced with the delicate task of desiring to impart their native traditions and values to their own children, while simultaneously embracing their Irish born children's Irish cultural identity. As a representative of the Latvian community highlights: "They [the Irish born children of Latvian parents] prefer to be the same as Irish kids, because they are born here and mother country for them is Ireland and they prefer to be Irish people."

The representative of the Latvian community also spoke of how the parents have an innate emotional need to pass on their Latvian cultural identity to their children, but that they have to take an active role in encouraging their children to adopt a dual Latvian-Irish heritage:

For the parents it is very important to preserve the language and the culture if you are not in the mother country ... but if the family don't explain to them [their Irish born children] why to speak in Latvian, then they don't want to speak it [Latvian language].

She explained how the Latvian language weekend schools do a lot to enable the parents to instil an appreciation of a Latvian cultural heritage among the Irish-born children of Latvian parents:

When they see the other Latvian kids [in the Latvian school] and that there is a Latvian community, then they are feeling proud and they want to learn the Latvian culture and traditions.

Similarly, Sara, from the Philippines, added:

They are Irish, and they feel Irish, but I explain to them that still their parents is Filipino ... I want them to recognise my culture...And also I want him to learn my language. It's very annoying if they don't learn my language because I am not really English speaking. And also, because if they go back home, I don't want them just to speak English because not all the

people in the Philippines relatives can't understand that. And also, that they can feel what to be a Filipino people there.

Zainab, from Saudi Arabia, said that it was also important for the parents to instil a connection to their cultural heritage in their children and she believed that this could be best achieved through language: "I want my daughter to keep balance between English and Arabic. Not just speaking English." On this point it is interesting to note that only six out of the 26 parents who participated in this study did not speak English at home: eight families spoke just English, while 12 families spoke English and at least one other language. It is possible that the parents' embracing of the English language contributed to their children's sense of Irish identity. The observation that language is closely associated with national identity is also consistent with the literature (Waldron and Pike 2006).

While the language a child speaks was shown to be entangled with identity politics, a representative of the Polish community in Ireland drew attention to the role which accents play in determining how 'Irish' a person is perceived to be. He recalled a personal experience to illustrate his argument:

I was very surprised when I met one boy who was Polish, but he spoke with a [names town in Ireland] accent. He was unrecognisable as Polish...So, for the children, it is easier for them to integrate into Irish society than their parents.

Devine (2009) found that if an immigrant child possessed an Irish accent they tended to feel more accepted by their native Irish classmates. However, unlike the findings of Eriksson's (2013) study of Russian and Latvian parents living in Ireland, which revealed that parents often worried that their children would not be fully accepted by her

indigenous peers, there were no reports of the immigrant children being excluded by their Irish peers for being linguistically, religiously or racially different to the White, Gaelic, Catholic majority group. Similarly, there was no evidence of the immigrant children's co-ethnics having any influence over the children's national identities, as was the case in Kennedy's (2014) study, whereby a Nigerian teenager was the recipient of ridicule from his fellow Nigerians, because they considered him as "trying to be white or stuff", when he socialised with the native Irish students in his class (p.154). There was evidence, however, of the second-generation immigrant children's sense of identity being shaped by their Irish classmates. Ashiq, from Sudan, spoke of how his children's national identity was largely a product of them attending school in Ireland:

My children feel Irish, yeah. Because the children in the school are Irish and also we have some friend who are Irish ... But now I am trying to learn him about culture in Sudan and I had bring with me jellabiya [a traditional Sudanese outfit] you know? Sudanese like Muslim wearing. I bring one for my kids to wear this one and he refuse it. He said, "No, I am Europe and I was born in here" and he got an Irish passport like this. And he told me, "I am not Arabic. I am Irish". Yeah because when he is singing he is not singing by an Arabic. He is singing in English. And he is not dancing my Arabian country, he is dancing like European.

Kennedy's (2014) research on teenage African refugees living in Ireland which found evidence of more identity solidarity among members of the in-group: "When you're with your black friends it's like, it's more like home. Like more deep, yeah" (p.157). However, Ashiq's comments suggest that his children identified more strongly with an Irish sense of identity than their parents' Sudanese cultural background. In declaring that he is "not Arabic. I am Irish", Ashiq's son clearly asserted his sense of identity but he also displayed his Irish-ness through his choice of clothes, music and dance. Waldron and Pike (2006) define this form of identity as oppositional Irish-ness because it only became visible when contrasted with an alternative cultural identity, such as Ashiq's

Sudanese cultural background. While such inter-generational conflict between children is a natural feature of family life, especially during adolescence, Lopez-Class *et al.* (2011) explain that a parent-child acculturation discrepancy in migrant families is also likely to arise. A representative of the Polish Catholic community furthered this point by noting how differences in cultural values and orientations between immigrant parents and their second-generation immigrant children can result in an inter-generational identity struggle:

When you have this issue that the children want to be accepted by their classmates, but their parents want them to remember their traditions and there is a conflict the young generation and their parents because the parents do not have control over the parents and their ideas they are exposed to.

Another community development officer argued that the clash between the parents' longing to preserve their own cultural identity in their children and their children's identification with Irish culture and western values tends to be most difficult for families with a non-western and non-Christian heritage:

If you are from a strict Muslim country like Pakistan or Afghanistan and you now find yourself in a western civilisation, there is a struggle within the Muslim person or the Muslim family as to how do they hold on to what they brought with them and how to they embrace the new environment within which they find themselves ... So, it is a delicate balance going on with regards to finding their feet and finding their balance while desperately holding on to thousands of years of customs and behaviour.

Through his work as a community development officer in a direct provision centre, he observed that non-westernised Muslim fathers tend to struggle more than their wives when their children have absorbed western values:

[The westernisation of the children] may bring some level of conflict where daddy is trying to desperately to what makes them Muslim or whatever and mammy is maybe caught in the middle. We have come across this in a couple of instances, where mammy is trying to be the peacemaker and try to please daddy but trying to give her daughter some space and trying to

hold onto the customs and behaviour ... I' m sure it must be a great strain on the family.

According to Turton (2004), the process by which the immigrant must renegotiate their place in the world is a private affair and idiosyncratic. However, as noted by the community development officer, there is little public discourse to help migrant families tease through their identity renegotiation and this serves to further isolate such families. The community development officer noted how this was “a great strain on the family because they don't want to be seen to be weak, but they don't want to talk out loud about the struggles they face”. A representative of Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council proposed that more could be done on a school level to promote social cohesion and the integration of the migrant family unit:

I think schools have a really big role to play but they are not really taking up that role, to engage with community leaders and to create more awareness and better understanding, acceptance and tolerance of others ... It should be part of the policy of every school to promote integration.

This key person's comments that schools are not doing enough to address issues of identity and inclusion in schools is interesting considering that the Intercultural Education Guidelines (NCCA 2005) have been in place in schools for over a decade. His comments, however, raise an important issue about whether the Intercultural Guidelines serve their purpose in helping students from ethnic minorities negotiate their sense of Irish identity. While the Guidelines affirm the value which difference brings to the social fabric of the school, the institution of the school is positioned in the powerful position of the “celebrator of difference” (Bryan 2010, p.255). Bryan (2010) criticised the symbolic violence inherent in the Intercultural Guidelines in that it considers what the school can do for the ethnic minority pupils to help them feel a sense of belonging through the representation of many racial, cultural and religious identities in school displays and through the study of a diversity of cultural histories and traditions. No

acknowledgement, however, is given to the fact that an internal struggle takes place privately within the immigrant as they negotiate their place in Irish classrooms. Perhaps too much focus placed on representing plurality physically through the use of images and displays to the neglect of the need to have identity-revisionary dialogue about what it means to be Irish. Perhaps this native-centric approach is not considering the fact that ethnic minorities have to negotiate a place in Irish schools for themselves and the classroom is an appropriate space for such discussions to take place, for as Ross (2003, p.4) writes:

“education has a particular role to play in the maintenance of culture. Teachers are professionalised agents of cultural transmission. Schools institutionalise culture: the schooling process and the curriculum defines what will be the culture of the next generation...what we are doing is not neutral”.

4.4 Becoming a “New Irish” family: the acculturation process

While the literature tends to spotlight the immigrant child’s ethnic identity negotiation process, it commonly overlooks the reality that the migrant family unit must also find a place within the socio-cultural landscape of the host country. Barry (1997) has shown that the migrant family unit is a contested cultural identity space, with contrasts likely to emerge between the immigrant parents’ cultural orientation and their children’s national identity as the family discovers how they can feel “a part of this society” (Perreira *et al.* 2006, p.1396).

Acculturation is seen as an interaction between individual characteristics and the context in which the immigrant finds themselves (Ward and Kennedy 2001) and is highly subjective in terms of the meaning of its significance to the individual immigrant (Buki *et al.* 2003). This acculturation process takes place on both an individual level and on a societal level (Kuo 2014). Since immigration triggers cultural change both within the individual immigrant and in society at large, acculturation is best understood

as being a two-way process resulting in change among and between the majority and ethnic minority groups (Sam and Berry 2010). Berry (1997) explained that on an individual level, the person may undergo behavioural changes such as acquiring a new language, diet and lifestyle, while simultaneously encountering stressors, such as loneliness and isolation, as they adapt to their new environment. Acculturation also impacts the level of family cohesion, parent-child relationships, parenting practices, communication patterns and parental expectations of children's behaviour (Williams *et al.* 2017).

On a group level, change also occurs with respect to societal attitudes towards majority and minority groups and state immigration policies. This intercultural interaction usually has a more salient effect on the minority group, since the intercultural interaction takes place in a specific social and political context with the minority groups generally yielding less social power in the intercultural exchange (Kennedy 2014).

According to Berry *et al.* (2006), there are four acculturation pathways: (1) integration; (2) assimilation; (3) separation; and (4) marginalisation. The most socially desirable acculturation strategy is integration, whereby the immigrant retains their ethnic identity while simultaneously adopting elements of the host culture. Integration is a dynamic, two-way process with mutual exchanges between state residents and immigrants (European Migration Network 2018). Assimilation involves the immigrant rejecting their ethnic heritage in exchange for the host culture's dominant national identity. Separation is the opposite response to assimilation, whereby the immigrant retains their ethnic identity and does not associate with non-ethnic individuals. The final acculturation outcome involves the rejection of both the culture of origin and the host country, whereby the individual becomes marginalised.

Connects with the host culture	Maintains original cultural identity	
	Yes	No
Yes	Individual level outcome=integration	Individual level outcome=assimilation
	Society level outcome=multi-culturalism	Society level outcome=multi- mono-culturalism
No	Individual level outcome=separation	Individual level outcome=marginalisation
	Society level outcome=segregation	Society level outcome=social exclusion

Table 4.1: Berry *et al.*'s (2006) four acculturation orientations.

Although the literature is unclear as to whether acculturation results in negative effects or positive effects (Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver 2008), a number of identified factors have been shown to influence the outcome of the acculturation process. Younger immigrants appear to adapt to life in the host country more easily than older immigrants, particularly those with poor language proficiency in the dominant language of the host country (Schwartz *et al.* 2010). Better-educated immigrants are also more likely to adjust to life in the host country than less-educated ones (Buki *et al.* 2003). Greeff and Holtzkamp (2007) found that families with good economic conditions, good family resilience, external family support systems, good communication skills and a sense of cohesion are more likely to transition to life in the host country with ease.

The cultural gap between the receiving and the host culture also dictates the degree of cultural adjustment required and, in turn, influences the parent-child generational dissonance (Ball 2006). Acculturation outcomes can also depend on the migrants' immigration category. Economic migrants, for example, are likely to experience less

pre-migration stress than refugees (Yakushko *et al.* 2008). Individual willingness to adapt to life in the host culture on a personal level and opportunities to facilitate such integration on a societal level influences whether an immigrant will integrate or become marginalised (Kulu and González-Ferrer 2014). However, as migrant families amalgamate their values, belief systems and behaviours with those of the host culture, the family acquires an evolved bicultural identity.

4.5 Social capital and social belonging in Ireland

While the majority of parents in the present study felt as if they had belonged in Ireland, it is also worth noting that the average of time the parents had resided in Ireland was 10 years. As Addie, from Zambia, remarked: “You know when you live somewhere for 12 years it’s your new home.” Nevertheless, it was all agreed that the adjustment to life in Ireland took some time, as Hamad from Saudi Arabia, explained: “When we came at the first it was difficult to immerse in new culture. But now it is okay. We feel better now.” A representative of the Darfor Solidarity Movement added: “One problem they have is trying to get to grips with the new culture they find themselves in.” Therefore, while the parents experienced an initial “trauma of moving”, with the passage of time, they learned how to forge a place for themselves within Irish society (McCollum 1990, p.22).

Finding an identity space in Irish society through the acculturation process can take time but it was arguably through the acquisition of social capital which enabled most immigrant parents to gain a sense of belonging to Ireland. Research suggests that migrants can acquire social and cultural capital by making social connections with other migrants and natives (Gilmartin and Migge 2015). The interpersonal relationships which the immigrant parents in the present study made helped them feel connected and

part of the fabric of Irish life. As Tina, from South Africa, summarised: “I feel like I have made my own community [of friends here]. So, I have made my own roots.”

Like Tina, just over half of the participants said that they had a friendship circle which consisted of a mixture of both native and ethnic minority community members ($n=14$). However, Simon, from the UK, who was married to a native Irish woman and lived in a rural part of the west of Ireland, had mostly native Irish friends because there were very few British people living in the locality: “Well to be honest, there are not many British people that I know here really ... so the majority of people I know are Irish.” Similarly, Lily, from Australia, whose husband was also native Irish, also found that there were very few members of her ethnic minority community in Ireland. However, she had made a non-Irish friend and found that their shared migrant status brought them closer together: “I have a good friend from South Africa who I met here which is a little support group, but she’s South African, not Australian.” However, it is also possible that because both Simon and Lily were married to Irish people and were native English speakers, they had more opportunities to interact and form relationships with other native Irish people through their mutual association with their spouse’s friends and family. On the contrary, participants who were not in a relationship with native Irish people may have had fewer opportunities to socialise with other Irish people. Thus, social capital resources can be acquired through intermarriage as the non-native spouse increases their social ties with other people in the host country (Schwartz *et al.* 2016) and helping them feel more ‘at home’ with the local community (Gilmartin and Migge 2015, p.285).

Ager and Strang (2008) observe that social connections between co-ethnics and family members (known as social bonds), and with the native population (known as social

bridges) is an essential part of the integration process. However, an immigrant's knowledge of the host language dictates the extent to which they can interact with and form friendships with the native population. Zhang and Harzing's (2016) study of Nordic expatriates in China found that poor Chinese language skills were a barrier to the formation of personal relationships between expatriates and their Chinese work colleagues. Similarly, Gilmartin and Migge's (2015) study of EU-migrants living in Ireland found that those who were not proficient in English were more likely to socialise with their co-ethnics because they could communicate more freely in their native tongue and they were more familiar with the unwritten code of social interaction within their own ethnic community. However, Gilmartin and Migge (2015) noticed how a migrant's decision to spend more time with co-ethnics meant that they had a reduced opportunity to develop their English language skills. Thus, an over-reliance on social bonds resulted in less meaningful social bridges being forged with the native Irish community. These findings also indicate a "cumulative disadvantage" (Darmody *et al.* 2014, p.129) of sorts with regards to the transfer of the immigrant's ethnic capital and cultural capital (embodied as proficiency in the host language) into other forms of social capital.

Gilmartin and Migge's (2015) findings were evidenced in Hamad's experience of living in Ireland. As a Saudi national, Hamad was a native Arabic speaker and an English language learner. His social circle was composed almost entirely of other Saudi nationals and Arabic speakers living in the locality. His relationships with native Irish people were mostly superficial because of his conversational English was quite limited. He disclosed how "my English is okay. [It is] not too good". Therefore, Hamad's emerging English language communication skills restricted his ability to build social bridges with the native Irish community and limited the amount of social capital he was

able to accumulate. However, his levels of ethnic capital were found to compensate somewhat for this shortfall. Hamad told of how his membership of the Arabic speaking community in his city offered more than just friendship and company: “As you know, we are strangers [in Ireland]. We have to make a stronger group. If somebody need help, if somebody need hand, we are there for him. We will help him”. Hamad’s experiences illustrate the interconnectivity between his ethnic, cultural and social capital and his sense of belonging in Irish society.

4.6 Conclusion

While the reasons which promoted their decision to immigrate to Ireland was varied, all of the parents reported feeling happy with their life in Ireland. Although most of the participants felt settled in Ireland none of the parents identified as Irish or partly Irish. Rather, the parents retained their original national identity and most were keen that their children would also become mindful of their parents’ cultural heritage. However, most parents and key people in the study claimed that the second-generation immigrant children identified as being culturally Irish, a finding which suggests evidence of assimilation, rather than integration, taking place in Ireland. An examination of the parents’ narratives suggests that their children’s Irishness largely stemmed from the fact that their children were born in Ireland.

Although the majority of parents were supportive of their children’s decision to identify as Irish, several parents spoke of how they hoped that their children would cherish their family’s ethnic heritage by participating in their cultural traditions and learning to speak their parent’s native language. However, some key people mentioned that the westernisation of the second-generation can sometimes cause tension in the family unit, particularly in relation to parents from non-western cultures. The conversations

explored in this chapter imply that the second-generation migrant children's construction of Irishness was shaped by their experiences of growing up in Ireland and attending Irish schools and a feeling of being culturally different from their parents.

Chapter 5: Theme 2: Immigrant Parents' Attitudes Towards Education and Irish Schools

5.0 Introduction

This chapter explores the immigrant parents' attitudes towards their children's education and the Irish primary school system. It outlines the immigrant parents' opinions of the quality of teaching and learning taking place in Irish schools and how the Irish primary school system compares to the education systems in their pre-migration countries. The question of how the immigrant parents' habitus informed their attitudes and beliefs with respect to the Irish education system is also considered.

5.1 Valuing the education of their children

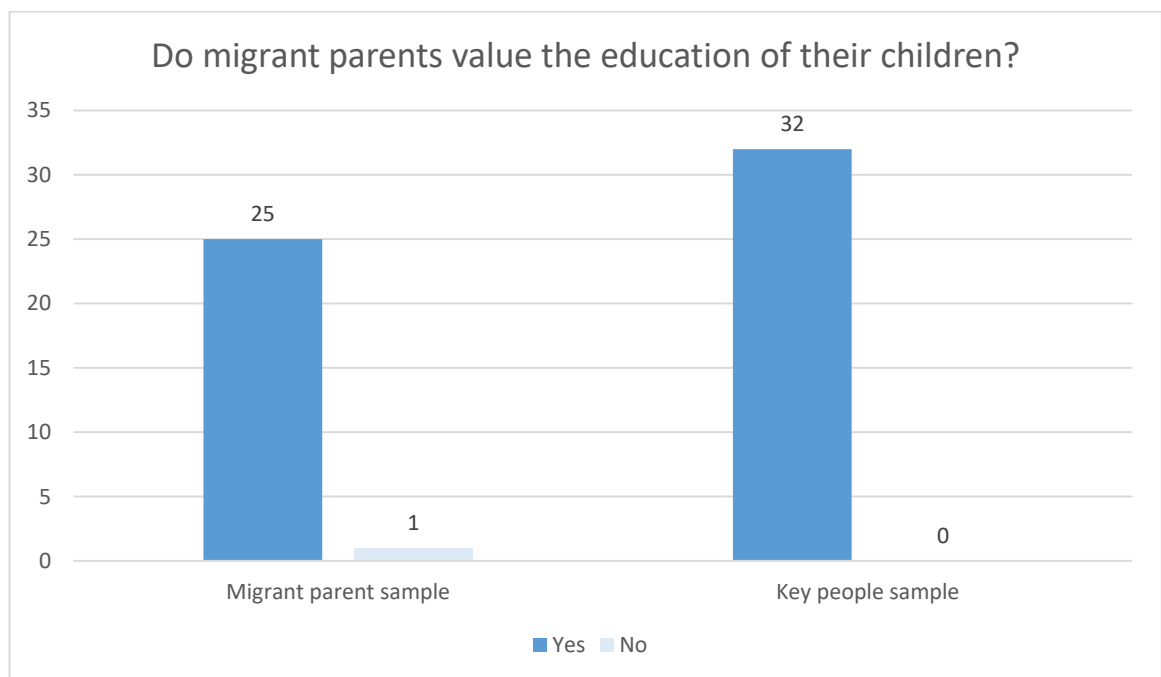


Figure 5.1: The value immigrant parents place on the education of their children

The immigrant parents in the present study highly valued the education of their children. Like Mary, from the Philippines, most parents considered their children's education to be "the best legacy we can leave them" and regarded it as a priority. Several key people noted that immigrant parents placed a big emphasis on the education of their children. One migrant rights advocate said that the immigrant parents: "place a

huge value on education...they feel a need for that child to succeed in school. There is a kind of drive you would see in the parents.” Several other studies have noted that immigrant parents prize the education of their children and set high academic aspirations for their children (Raleigh and Kao 2010; Byrne and De Tona 2012; Portes *et al.* 2013; Siahhan *et al.* 2014; Frostick *et al.* 2016; Ślusarczyk and Pustułka 2016; Bubikova-Moan 2017; Jamal Al-deen 2018).

Interestingly, there was very little disparity in the extent to which immigrant parents valued their children’s education, despite the fact that the research sample varied greatly in terms of the parents’ migration status, socioeconomic status, cultural background and time spent living in Ireland, thus giving rise to the understanding that, in general, immigrant parents in Ireland hold the education of their children in high esteem. Therefore, it can be deduced that the “new Irish” parents, irrespective of their ethnic background and socioeconomic standing, shared a common habitus with respect to education; a habitus which was distinctly middle-class, as defined by Reay *et al.* (2007). However, there appeared to be a slight distinction between the perspectives of parents who were highly educated than those who were relatively less educated.

Economically middle-class immigrants in the present study were found to believe that “there was never really any question of anything else” other than their children succeeding in school and progressing onto third level education (Smyth and Banks 2012 p.12). Lily, an Australian national who occupied a well-paying professional job in the healthcare industry, mentioned that her third-level-educated parents espoused the view that: “We were all definitely going [to university].” Consequently, she held the same expectations for her own children. This suggests evidence of social class reproduction since Lily adopted her parents’ modes of thinking, feeling and behaving. Lily

internalised her own parents' habitus and consequently assumed the same position in the social space as a middle-class college educated professional.

In contrast, the lesser-educated parents' did not take it for granted that their children would succeed academically. The lesser-educated parents tended to regard education as something that would have to be actively pursued, rather than something that would fall neatly into place. Although less-educated parents believed in their children's capability to achieve their educational goals, progressing to higher education was not a given. Indeed, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) have acknowledged that middle-class families, due to the congruence between their lifestyles and the habitus of the school system, expect to experience educational milestones with ease, whereas less-educated parents perceive academic progress to demand some deal of personal struggle, as evidenced in Abdullah's, a PhD candidate from Saudi Arabia, comments:

My father doesn't have education [but] he know how to read and write ... So, he encourage all [of] his son to try hard. To work hard to complete education. And my father encourage me to work hard to get my whole education and he is very happy to what I am to now.

Roza, from Poland, who did not have any third level education, was another parent who placed an emphasis on hard work as a means of realising educational goals: "I think it [educational achievement] depends on the children, if they have striving very well in the school. They will achieve what they want to achieve if they are working hard and studying hard". Naidoo's (2015) study of immigrant parents in Australia from lower educational and socioeconomic backgrounds also associated effort expended with academic rewards. These parents, due to possessing lower economic, social and cultural capital reserves compared to middle-class parents, relied on their determination and work ethic to succeed in school.

Also consistent with the literature was the belief among parents that education provides social mobility and future employment opportunities (Platt 2007; Byrne and De Tona 2012). Abdullah, from Saudi Arabia, shared: “If you want a lot of money you have to complete your education. It is very important. You will find a nice job if you get your education.” His belief in the value of educational qualifications made him encourage his son to acquire a good education: “If he [Abdullah’s son] doesn’t have education, he will spend a difficult life. So, I think that education will give you a good life.” Simon, a third-level degree holder from the UK, remarked that education was “a stepping stone in terms of being able to get on in the world”. One key person, who worked as a community development officer in a direct provision centre, noticed that immigrant families regarded school as a means of improving their children’s opportunities and quality of life:

In particular the African mothers, they see their daughters and sons attending schools as the way out of the poverty, the pain, the hurt, the drudgery, the war, the conflict that has got them into a situation where they had to move from their country of origin...they are putting in enormous energy as an investment into their offspring so that they can get a good education.

5.2 The aspirations for their children

In line with the findings from several studies, every parent held the expectation that their children would succeed academically in school, a finding which provided further evidence of their middle-class habitus with respect to the field of education (Vallejo 2009; Naidoo 2015). The parents in the present sample were keen, however, to avoid placing their child under pressure to achieve a certain grade or career course. Angela, from Germany, for example, did not demand that her children achieve a specific result

in school but yet she still set minimum acceptable standards of achievement for her children:

Like we wouldn't push them, but I would say that they have to perform, and they have to do their homework and they have to attend school and there is no easy way out, but I don't expect them to do more than they can, no.

Similarly, Eileen from New Zealand said that she wanted her daughter to pursue her own dreams rather than to strive to achieve a pre-determined career path:

Obviously [we want her] to do the best that she can, to keep doing what she's doing. As long as she's comfortable and happy I'm not going to be one of those mums who want her to be a rocket scientist or anything like that.

All of the parents expressed a wish for their children to finish school, and this was the case irrespective of the parent's own level of educational attainment. Mahmoud, a refugee from Sudan with only a secondary-level education, said: "Actually, my dream for all my child is to complete their education. This is my goal. This is my aims in the life." Zakir, from Pakistan, who was living in a direct provision centre and did not have a third-level qualification, added: "I am not well educated but my one dream is for my children to be more educated than me ... I want them to have a good education".

Perhaps the less educated parents were motivated by their own unrealized dreams for education and the belief that their children would have a better life if they progressed well in the Irish education system. It is also possible that the less-educated parents' ambition for their children "to be more educated than [them]" could be a source of inspiration for their children and might motivate them to succeed, as was the case in Kao's (2004) study of immigrant parents in the United States. Therefore, by encouraging their children to internalise high educational ambitions, the parents are, in

essence, utilising ethnic capital as a protective factor against educational disadvantage (Modood 2004).

The parents also reported feelings of confidence in their children's capacity to achieve academically. It is possible that the parents' beliefs in their children's academic ability lead them to participate in concerted cultivation (Lareau 2003). Lisa, from Nigeria, was one such parent who demonstrated concerted cultivation practices in the form of moral support and actively instilling self-belief in her children: "I keep pushing my children. I tell them they can do it. They are well able to do it". This strong parental support for their children suggests the presence of "mobilizing ethnic capital" among the immigrant parent sample (Shah *et al.* 2010, p.1109). Furthermore, Thapar-Bjorkert and Sanghera (2010) identified evidence of community reinforcement for educational goals in British Pakistani communities in Yorkshires such that education was regarded as a means of garnering status or "respect from family and from the community" (p.253). However, the participants' intra-communal cultural capital was not shown to influence parental attitudes towards the value of education in this study. This finding may be due to the fact that participants from a range of ethnic backgrounds participated in this study, with no single ethnic group being studied as a discrete unit.

To summarise, the findings of this subsection indicate that the immigrant parents had a middle-class habitus in terms of the value they placed on educational qualifications as a cultural capital resource. It appears that the immigrant parents were socialising their children with the norms and values of a middle-class habitus by expressing high aspirations for their children's academic outcomes. Thus, the findings provide additional support to Zhou and Bankston (1998) claim that ethnic minority status may indeed be a social capital "resource" that has the potential to buffer against the effects of

low human and economic capital (p.286). However, it must be clarified that the present study did not inquire into the children's perspectives and thus the effect of the immigrant parents' educational values on their children's academic performance cannot be ascertained. Thus, it is entirely speculative to suggest a positive impact of parental beliefs and attitudes on their children's educational outcomes at this point.

5.3 The Irish education system: not academically rigorous enough?

Although the immigrant parents in this study, irrespective of their educational, cultural or financial status, possessed middle-class habitus with regards to education, it was apparent that not all of the parents blindly accepted the norms and values of the Irish primary school system. Some parents expressed concern about the possibility of their children becoming westernised or secularised, through the influence of their peer group. Like the British-Pakistani parents in Thapar-Bjorkert and Sanghera's (2010) study who spoke of their concern that their children were losing their sense of cultural and religious identity in favour of the mainstream culture of their peers, some of the key people alluded to Muslim immigrant parents airing similar reservations about the westernisation of their children in Irish schools. A representative of the Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council explained that while most Muslim parents do not perceive this westernisation as a negative thing, they still desired "their children to stay attached with their culture, with their values".

Also consistent with Thapar-Bjorkert and Sanghera's (2010) study, another community development officer explained that this tension between the liberal values purported in Irish primary schools and the more conservative traditional values transmitted in the home was particularly difficult for the daughters in Muslim families: "The fact that the children are growing up in a western system, they are seeing Irish girls behaving in a

certain way ... [a] whole way of life which is foreign to the one she hears at home". In his professional experience working with the families in a direct provision centre, this key worker observed that the fathers in Pakistani and Afghanistani households are more resistant than their wives to their daughters adopting Irish ways. He observed that the extent to which their daughters were given room to deviate from their strict Muslim upbringing depended greatly on "the strength of conviction of the daddy or the male in the house".

The key worker's comments illustrate how ethnic capital is mediated by more than just economic variables: issues of gender also come into play, particularly when there are vast cultural differences in the role and power indices of girls. Shah *et al.* (2010) revealed that gender differences in the distribution, nature and mobilization of social capital can exist in some Muslim communities whereby girls can be expected to adopt traditional gender roles. Furthermore, Muslim girls living in Westernised countries can tend to have less power than Muslim boys to decide how they dress, less autonomy to decide the company they keep and less freedom to engage in activities without the supervision of parents because she may be the carrier of her family's honour within the ethnic minority community (Sanghera and Thapar- Björkert 2017).

As well as a desire to shield their children from 'being corrupted by Western values' (Ijaz and Abbas 2010 p.319), some parents perceived their children's peer group as having a negative influence on their studies (Thapar-Bjorkert and Sanghera 2010). One parent, Maryam from Syria, who lived in a community in which there was a considerable level of youth delinquency, described her children's friends as unhelpful distractions:

I was pushing my children and forced them to stay home to study and you will find every five minutes a child at the door, knocking at the door, “Will you come out to play? Come out to play”. And I was wondering, “Do you have exams like?”... It just seems that they [the children] don’t care or they parent don’t think that the children need to study.

She lamented that her sons would regularly resist her efforts to encourage them to study for exams, in favour of spending time socialising with their peers. Maryam’s children’s friends were almost exclusively white working-class Irish children and not members of Maryam’s middle-class co-ethnic community, therefore suggesting an incongruity between the family habitus and the dominant habitus of the community within which she lived.

Maryam also levied blame on the lack of high-stakes testing in primary schools. She stated that the lack of regular summative assessments resulted in her children possessing a laissez-faire approach to their studies. She considered this low-accountability culture damaging to her children’s progression in school:

They don’t feel the responsibility of studying what they have learned. They come home, they do their homework for half an hour and that’s it! Like every time I ask them to read more or do more lesson then they say, “No, no, no, he didn’t ask us to do that. It’s just do the homework”... And, that was really sad and now I am suffering.

Maryam, who valued the education of her children very highly, spoke of the frustration she felt with the Irish education system for not focusing on examinations. She said that regular testing took place in Syrian primary schools: “We used to have these exams in the first years in the [Syrian] primary school, so the children know that they have to study.” She maintained that frequent testing in Syrian schools enables parents to track their children’s progress in school:

They need to know what they learned over the two semesters, because they know they will get marks and it show how his level there. While here [in Ireland] you don’t know [what the child has achieved]. They will finish

the whole national school and you have no idea [what the children have achieved].

One key person, who worked as a migrant rights support worker, explained that immigrant parents who are used to an education system that placed greater emphasis on exam performance can be somewhat disoriented by the contrast in values in the Irish education system, thus indicating a difference between the parents' habitus past and present (Reay 2004):

They [the parents from the Philippines] are used to learning off by heart and then if the children are not examined in that or if they are not rewarded for it they sort of worry that the kids are not doing well.

Zakir, from Pakistan, also agreed that the weekly spelling and mental maths tests his children completed in school made him feel that he was more aware of how his children were progressing. The test scores also proved to be a source of achievement for his children and for himself: "When I check every test I see 10/10, 20/20 and I feel proud." Another mother, Ania from Poland, agreed that the more rigorously demanding education system in Poland was superior to Ireland: "I think the system in my country is better, because in my country is more homework, more test."

Parents have the right to receive regular updates on their child's learning under The Education Act (1998). However, a study by Hall *et al.* (2008) on assessments in Irish primary schools showed that standardised test results tended to be only communicated to immigrant parents at parent-teacher meetings, which generally took place once a year or by appointment. The immigrant parents in Hall *et al.* (2008), in contrast to the participants in the present study, were satisfied with the parent-teacher meeting procedure and the reporting system in Irish primary schools. In light of the findings of the present research, and indeed the results of Hall *et al.* (2008), it is interesting to note that recent policy developments have stressed the importance of quantifying the

educational progress of EAL learners and the need to share assessment data with parents. The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 (Department of Education and Skills 2011), for instance, recommends that schools track and assess the language progress of EAL children. The *English as an Additional Language in Irish Primary Schools: Guidelines for Teachers* (NCCA 2006) devotes an entire chapter to the assessment of English language learning. It provides guidance to schools on best practice with regards to the assessment of English language learners as well as many suggestions as to how schools can monitor student progress.

In addition to the lack of summative assessments in schools, some parents perceived the Irish curriculum as being less academically demanding than the curricula of other countries. As Sara, from the Philippines, explained:

In Philippines they are very competitive, because they have loads of subjects. Because I have my niece in the Philippines and she is only in 3rd class and she has lots of subjects more than my son [who is also in 3rd class].

A representative of the Polish community in Ireland added: “They [the Polish parents] think that the Polish educational system is more demanding in the area of science.” However, other parents were complimentary about the Irish curriculum. Mary, from the Philippines, considered the low accountability climate in Irish schools to be a positive thing: “Here it is more laid back. Children are given a chance to play, there is less pressure. They can be children. There is not too much homework”. A community representative for the Lithuanian community agreed that the less demanding system in Ireland was preferred by parents: “Parents are very happy with the Irish education system because in Lithuania the school is very hard and when they arrive here the studies in Ireland is much easier than in Lithuania.” Tina, from South Africa, added that

the South African education system has “a very high emphasis on competition and winning and all that. Whereas in Ireland, everybody wins but in South Africa only the best wins ... so I think that Ireland might be better.” Tina also added that the broad and balanced curriculum in Irish schools was a better alternative to the South African system: “There is some music and drama and art and so on. So, that seems to be valued in the culture here and I think that’s good.”

The finding that immigrant parents were supportive of more academically demanding education systems and more concerned about quantifiable educational attainment, such as obtaining high grades in tests and winning academic prizes in school, is consistent with several studies in the literature (Naidoo 2015; Muchacka 2015; Ślusarczyk and Pustułka 2016). This is because most immigrant parents regard school as an institution of learning where knowledge is acquired. However, a small number of parents considered the function of the primary school to be socialisation and acquiring independence. From this perspective, children’s happiness and enjoyment, rather than raw scores on class-based tests, were of importance. As revealed by Eileen, who came from New Zealand: “Basically we want her to be happy ... as long as she’s getting enjoyment and not getting bullied or doing things she doesn’t want to. I want her to have good quality time at school.”

Although there were both negative and positive criticisms levied against the Irish education system, most parents disclosed that they had always considered the Irish education system to be reputable. The perception that Ireland offered a high standard of education was a factor which motivated most parents’ decision to raise a child in Ireland. The majority of parents maintained that the Irish education system was superior

($n=15$) or equal ($n= 8$) to the quality of the education system in their country of origin. It was observed that parents who hailed from countries with lower economic development than Ireland, or those who had experienced conflicts, tended to view the Irish education system as providing their children with better opportunities and a higher standard of learning. Lisa, from Nigeria, said:

This system is better. I'm telling you that the education here is very good. The Government are trying to get the best for the students. In Nigeria, the good education is not free. You know the private schools you have to pay for it. But here the public education is very good, and it is free. You know, the children are learning a lot.

On this point, it must be acknowledged that Cardona *et al.* (2009) found that refugee parents tended to express a sense of gratitude towards the Australian education system and rarely criticised it. Cardona *et al.* (2009) query whether the parents' sense of gratitude may have made them more reluctant to critique the system in case they appeared to be ungrateful for the education their children were receiving.

5.4 Perceptions about the quality of delivery of education in Ireland

Almost every parent interviewed said that their child(ren) had a positive schooling experience and considered that their child's school was a good school ($n= 23$). Parents used a number of criteria whether deciding whether their child's school was a "good school". The child's level of happiness was the most common assessment criterion. Abduallah, from Saudia Arabia, said: "I see my child here in Ireland they are really happy to meet their education and they sometimes tell me that they would like to spend more time there so it's a great school. She loves it, yeah." The next most common benchmark was the effort made by teaching staff to meet the learning needs of their children. Grace, from Uganda, explains how the teachers in her son's school were dedicated in their mission to support all learners:

Like a few months ago I was told that my son needs some extra support with reading and they started giving him more help and I see the way that he is reading now. Like within a few weeks I can see that his reading progress is better. The school are doing a great job.

Javid, from Sudan, also shared his positive opinion of the support teacher in his son's school who provided him with EAL support: "She [the teacher] is very good. She didn't leave my child until he could communicate, because you know it is a different language and for our people it is difficult you know." Javid's experience is consistent with the findings of The Department of Education (2012) Value-for-Money review of EAL provision in primary schools which reported the quality EAL teaching and learning taking place in schools to be high.

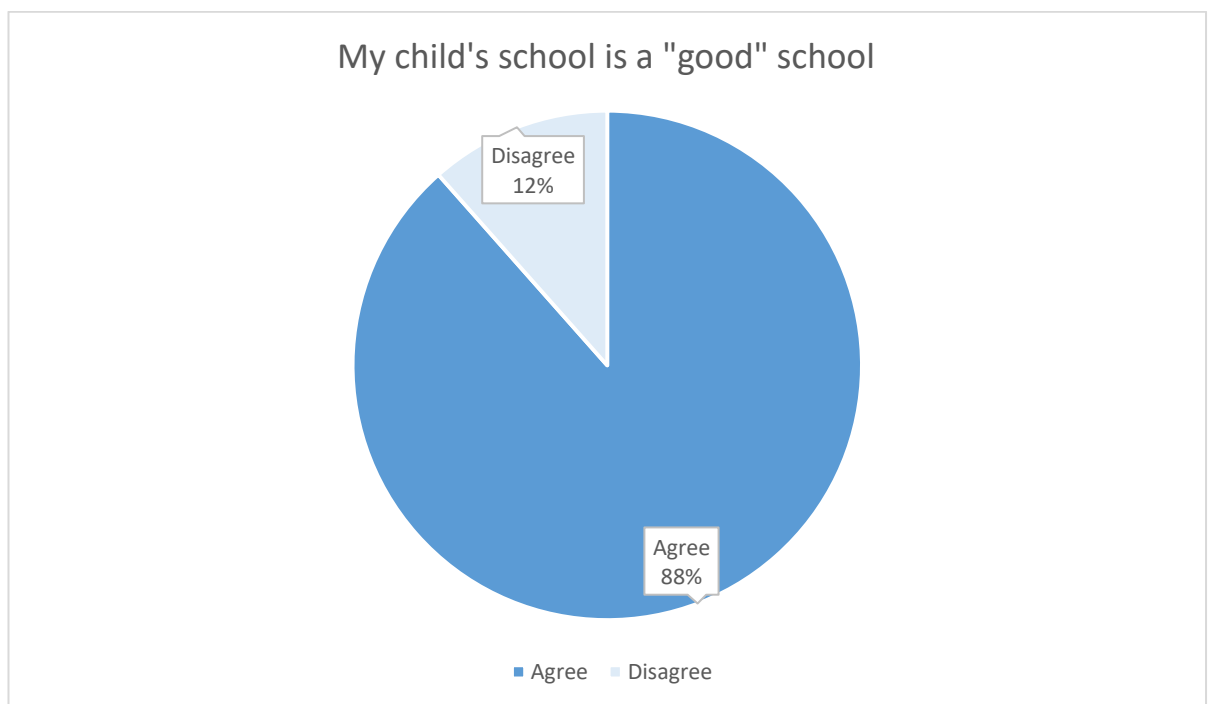


Figure 5.2: Parents' assessment of the quality of their child's school

Zakir, from Pakistan, whose youngest son is awaiting an assessment for suspected autism, was highly complementary about the efforts made by the school to accommodate him and their sensitivity to his learning needs:

They [the school] are supporting just him with extra classes ... [But] If that kind of children in my country, to be frank with you, nobody try to understand what he have problem. Autism like nobody know what is autism. The teachers will treat them very strictly but these kind of children

if you treat very strict there will be more, more hard for that child. So mostly teachers they didn't think about why he do that sort of thing.

This point was also evidenced in the explanation given by Roza, from Poland, as to why she considered her child's school to be a good school. She mentioned how the teachers taught: "more based according to the child's needs. School can accommodate the child's needs rather than every child has to 'fit in a box.'" A further five participants praised the efforts made by schools to include students with additional learning needs in mainstream schools. The Department of Education and Skills continue to commit to supporting the participation and progression of students with special education needs across the continuum of education, as stated in objective 2.2 of their Action Plan for Education 2016-2019.

The key people also concurred that the majority of parents they represent or work with hold predominantly positive opinions of their children's school and of the Irish school system in general. However, attention must also be redirected to the observation made by Cardona *et al.* (2009) that less-educated parents may be more reluctant to critique the schools or to bring their critiques to the attention of the school. Although there was no evidence of such reticence among the immigrant parents who participated in the present research study, it is possible that this trend may not have been detected during the data collection process. Cardona *et al.* (2009) maintained that the immigrant parents' uneasiness to complain about the Australian schools indicates some degree of powerlessness over their ability to confront the school and a fear of their interference potentially having negative effects on their children. Furthermore, parents may come from backgrounds where it is culturally inappropriate to question the authority of teaching staff (Cardona *et al.* 2009). This point is particularly relevant in relation to the *English as an Additional Language in Irish Primary Schools: Guidelines for Teachers*

(NCCA 2006) recommendation that parents should be informed of the content of the school's EAL policy and be given clarity on how the school would meet their child's learning needs. It is uncertain whether immigrant parents would feel confident enough to challenge the school's EAL policy or the level of instructional support their child receives. This point is particularly relevant within the context of the general allocation model of student support (Department of Education and Skills, Circular 14/17). Schools no longer received funding to employ a dedicated EAL teacher and therefore school leaders will have to make tough decisions regarding which learning needs will get prioritised in the school.

Additionally, Cotter and Kolawole's (2015) study observed that parents with lower educational backgrounds were more impressed with the Irish education system than those with higher levels of education. With respect to the present study, only three parents reported concerns about the quality of the teaching and learning taking place in their child's school. One parent Aziz, from Jordan, who was critical of the schools in his area, was reliant on state benefits and did not hold a third-level qualification. He claimed that his children's school was not a good school, because he believed that the teachers did not care about their students. He came to this conclusion based on the lack of support for his youngest son, who was non-verbal and on the autistic spectrum, to gain a school place:

My son is six and we are waiting nearly three years for school place. My wife and I are so stress. Nobody help us, nobody care. The school are not trying to help us. We are feeling really stress.

Following this disclosure, the researcher referred Aziz to a number of different support groups and organisations for parents of children with autism. Aziz's story also points to the urgency to expand school places and funding for children with special educational needs. The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 now provides the Minister of

Education with the power to compel schools to open special classes or units where demand existed among parents. Perhaps this measure will serve to meet the needs of frustrated parents, such as Aziz.

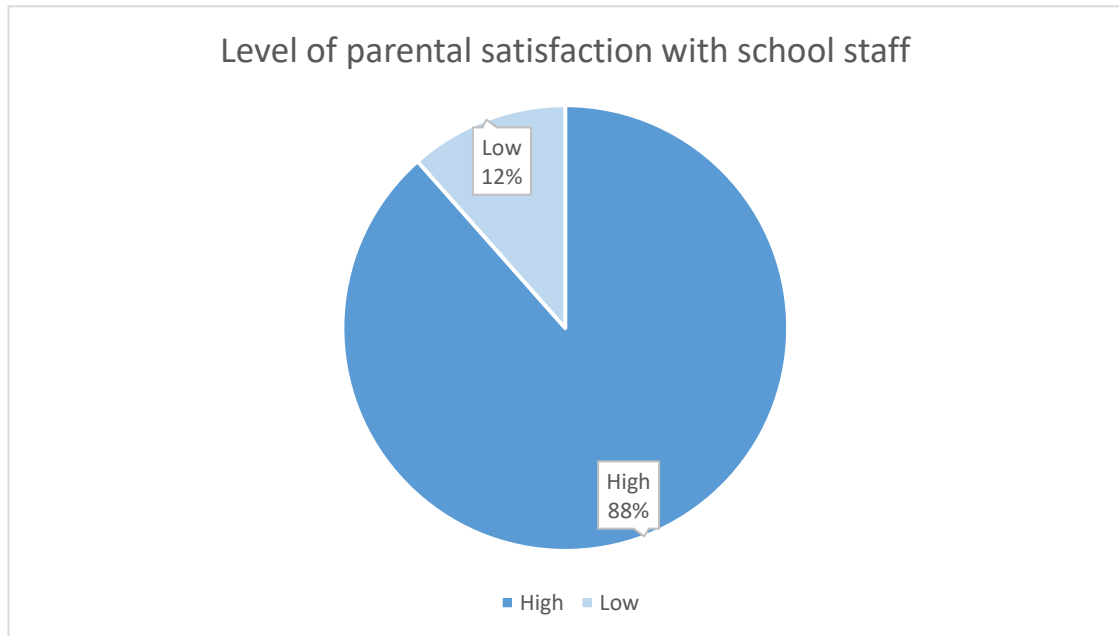


Figure 5.3: Parents' perceptions of the school staff

Nevertheless, most parents generally held a positive perception of school management and teachers. School staff were recognised for their efforts to include children from migrant backgrounds and for being approachable and helpful to parents. Almost every parent ($n=24$) believed that the school cared for their child's learning and welfare. Mary, from the Philippines, praised the school staff by saying: "The quality of the schools here are very good, the teachers do a very good job." Angela, from Germany, felt that the school cared about her daughter, because the school principal made an effort to greet her child every morning by name: "I have to admire her for that, the principal of the school seems to know every single child by name even though there are 400 girls in the school! Like you always see her [Angela's daughter] being personally greeted." Indeed, Devine (2013) found that principals are often the first point of contact

with the immigrant family and the school system and that the principal heavily influences the institutional habitus of the school. Therefore, the approach taken by the school principal can influence whether the school is perceived to be open and welcoming by immigrant parents.

Ashiq, from Sudan, offered an explanation as to why he believed his children's school cared for his children. In his experience, the Irish teachers really made an effort to ensure that the children met their learning objectives and they cared if they were not reaching their learning goals. Ashiq seemed to draw a connection between the smaller class sizes in his children's school and the quality of teacher input in the children's learning:

In my country you know, the teachers give all children learning but it doesn't matter if he understand or no. But here, if he didn't understand the teacher will help him. For example, my friend, he live here and I told him about the school in Ireland and how teacher help students to help but he said in UK a lot of people in the class and teacher didn't help him. In Ireland, you can found this option, you know?

Despite their reservations regarding school staff, both Martha and Maryam agreed with the rest of the parent sample that their children were largely happy in school. This finding was also apparent in the responses from the key people. A community representative of Cameroonians living in Ireland said, "It is one of the best in the world. So, we hold the Irish education system in very high esteem." Furthermore, although complimentary of the commitment and professionalism of the teaching staff, one key person observed the lack of racial and religious diversity was somewhat problematic when it came to providing role models for ethnic minority students. A representative of the Ghanaian community in Ireland explained:

Overall they [the Ghanaian parents] are happy [with the education system] but one problem is that there are no teachers in schools from ethnic minority backgrounds ... so when the kids don't see anybody from their own community as teachers then they will feel like it is very difficult to succeed.

Indeed, the vast majority of teachers in Ireland today are white Irish middle-class females and this the issue of the diversification of the teaching profession is an area of recent policy change within the Department of Education (*The Irish Times* 2017). Indeed, the need to change the mainly white and Catholic profile of school staff was highlighted by some of the Irish primary school principals in Devine's (2013) study. One principal regarded that the ethnic diversification of school staff 'would be integration at its best' (p.407).

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter explored immigrant parents' attitudes and perspectives on education and the Irish education system. Perhaps the most significant finding to emerge from this aspect of the investigation was the homogeneity of perspectives from both the parents and the key people, which suggests that the immigrant parents, despite being a demographically diverse group, possess a common middle-class habitus with respect to education. Both middle-class and economically working-class immigrant parents in Ireland were found to place a high value on the education of their children. They desired that their children should feel be happy in school and experience academic success. Most parents expressed the view that education was a path to social ascendancy and success in life and drew the connection between the acquisition of educational qualifications and the procurement of a well-paid job in the future. This led to the conclusion that irrespective of their cultural backgrounds or financial means, the immigrant parents displayed ethnic capital, which had the effect of making them middle-class in their outlook and orientation with respect to education.

In general, the parents were highly satisfied with the standard of education their child was receiving and tended to view the Irish education system favourably, although there were some reservations regarding the lack of summative assessments and the lack of communication of student academic progress to parents. This led most parents to perceive the Irish education system to be less academically demanding than their country of origin. There was disagreement as to whether the low-stakes approach was positive or negative, though the majority of the parents perceived the lack of formal assessments to be a system flaw, since it was believed that a lack of summative assessments would result in lower standards in core subjects such as maths, science and literacy. Perhaps this suggests that teachers need to engage with parents in an informal way, perhaps once a week, to offer reassurance that their children are progressing well in school.

Nevertheless, more than half of the sample felt that Ireland offered their children a superior education system to the standard of education available in their country of origin. There was a near absence of criticism of the professionalism of the teachers and the vast majority of parents considered their child's school to be a good school. Despite the fact that the parents placed such a big emphasis on the importance of measurable academic performance indices, such as test scores, the level of their children's contentment in school was the most common benchmark against which the parents evaluated the school system.

The parents firmly believed that their children would succeed in Irish schools. Considering that, within the Bourdieuan framework, the family unit is the primary site of social reproduction (Borjas 1992), it could be speculated that the parents' high aspirations might be internalised by their children, since "expectations and obligations" are transmitted through a process of an inter-generational disclosure of social norms

(Coleman 1990, p.101). However, this study stopped short of investigating the effect of the parents' ethnic capital on their children's academic outcomes. What can be concluded, though, is that the immigrant parents in this sample are eager that their children acquire a good education. However, as the remaining chapters will demonstrate, inequalities in the economic, social and cultural capital between the parents were evident despite their shared middle-class habitus with respect to education.

Chapter 6: Theme 3: Navigating the Irish Primary School System as an Immigrant Parent

6.0 Introduction

The immigrant parents who participated in this study were all educated outside of Ireland. This chapter reveals how the “new Irish” parents employed their capital resources to compensate for not having a past habitus (Reay 2004) to use as a frame of reference when figuring out how the Irish education system ‘works’. The dialogues with several key people, in particular, indicate that the social script of Irish schooling is not easily deciphered by every immigrant parent, thus providing more evidence to suggest the presence of a “cumulative disadvantage” among certain immigrant groups (Darmody *et al.* 2014, p.129).

6.1 Technical knowledge of the education system

Immigrant parents often lack knowledge of the host country’s school system (Schneider and Arnot 2018). This study found that while the immigrant parents did not have a great deal of technical knowledge of the Irish primary school system, the majority considered their level of understanding of the education system to be sufficient. The immigrant parents’ knowledge of some technical terms relating to the education system was first evaluated. The participants were asked whether their child attended a DEIS school. Almost every parent ($n=23$) was unsure what was meant by a “DEIS school”. When the researcher explained what was meant by that term, just over two-thirds of the sample ($n=18$) were still unsure whether their child attended a school with DEIS status. The participants were then asked whether their child attended a Gaelscoil. No participant sent their child to a Gaelscoil but more parents were unfamiliar with this term ($n=22$).

When the researcher explained what was meant by a Gaelscoil, ten parents were still unsure whether their child attended a Gaelscoil. The study then considered the parents' familiarity of the primary school curriculum. A number of people were unfamiliar with the meaning of the word "curriculum" ($n=12$), though it must be pointed out that all of the parents who did not understand this term spoke English as an additional language. Furthermore, it was only parents for whom English was a first language who were aware that parents could gain access to the curriculum documents online. However, it was interesting to note that no parent had claimed to have either accessed or read such documents online.

While it is very possible that a language barrier was the principal explanation for the parents' lack of understanding of these terms pertaining to the Irish education system, it is also probable that a lack of system knowledge, or cultural capital, may have been a contributory factor. Further evidence in support of this claim emerged when the participants were asked to self-rate their knowledge of the primary school system. One participant, Anne, trained as a primary school teacher in the UK and used to teach in Ireland for some time. Aside from Anne, every parent claimed to have a little knowledge of the specific contents of the primary school curriculum. The parents, however, had a general idea of their child's programme of learning from their observation of their children's school textbooks and homework exercises, as Omar, from Libya, explained: "I know my every child subject and what they are doing, because I sit every day and check what they are doing and check every day on a notebook. So, I know what they are doing in school."

The economically middle-class and third-level educated immigrant parents who were also native English speakers were found to more quickly understand the nature of the Irish education system. This finding aligned with Crozier's (2000) research which

showed how middle-class parents were more knowledgeable about educational matters, such as the national curriculum and assessments, in comparison to working-class parents. Crozier (2000) concluded that system-knowledge enabled middle-class parents to be more educationally confident. Interestingly, the immigrant parents' lack of technical knowledge of the Irish primary school system did not seem to reduce their confidence. Their self-confidence was clearly be seen in the fact that most parents ($n=20$) did not know how to access learning supports for their child but still felt sure that they could gain access to those supports, should the need arise. As commented by Abdullah, from Saudi Arabia:

Actually, I don't know how to exactly access learn supports ... [but] if I need it, I will find it easily. I think it is easy for me to do it but I don't have experience how to do it, because I didn't need it before. But if I need it in future, I will.

Although all of the participants in the immigrant parent cohort felt empowered to find out information about the Irish primary system, as required on a need-to-know basis, a representative of the Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council noted how parents can sometimes lack an awareness of their rights in the first place. He explained:

Some parents come to me and say they would like to get involved [in the school] and I tell them that you as a parent have a right to get involved, to question, and sometimes they are surprised and say, "Oh! I didn't know we could actually do that." So, parents need to be informed of their rights and what they can do.

In addition, a representative of Atheist Ireland noted that a lack of knowledge about the legislation pertaining to parents' rights in education can result in their rights being violated, albeit through no malicious intent by the school. There was some evidence of a lack of awareness of parental rights with regards to opting out of religious instruction,

as per Article 44 of the Irish Constitution and under Section 30 of the Education Act 1998:

A lot of the schools have religion down as compulsory and that is against the constitution, so our human rights officer would help the parents opt the child out [of religion class] ...[but] most parents just believe what the school says or don't want to cause hassle [so they take the school's statement on face value].

Indeed, an examination of the immigrant parents' narratives indicated that parents learned about the workings of the Irish primary system school system "as they went along". All but one parent decided to "go with the flow". Lily, from Australia, decided to learn more about the unwritten code of the education system by volunteering her time for a reading initiative in her children's school:

I was very proactive in trying to get to know the school, because I didn't feel like I knew the system and how it compared to what I knew in Australia... I suppose I wanted to learn more about the school, about the system and how it worked. I wanted to see inside the school. To actually physically get inside the school. To look inside the classrooms and to build relationships and to show that I was interested in my child's learning and education.

Through volunteering, she learned a great deal about:

...the atmosphere, how the teacher taught, their warmth or their techniques, meet the other teachers and people on the corridors, and see what the whole environment was like. I found it very positive and warm and that's very reassuring to get to sneak inside.

The next section details how the remainder of the sample developed their understanding of the primary school system.

6.2 Information sources

The participants were asked what strategy they employed to learn more about the education system. Consulting websites online was listed as the most popular information source by parents. Simon, from the UK, explained that although he almost never felt the need to, if he required any additional information about the Irish primary school system, he would consult official websites affiliated to the Department of Education and Skills: “I would check up the official bodies or The Department of Education website or whatever.” Crozier’s (2000) study revealed that the middle-class parents tended to draw on cold evidence such as Ofsted reports, league tables, and school ethos and curriculum documents when selecting a school for their child. The fact that the immigrant parents in this study preferred to search for information online pertaining to the education system provides evidence to the claim that they possess a middle-class habitus.

However, not every immigrant parent had the English language skills necessary to enable them to make such evidence-based decisions. Patryk, from Poland, for example, said that although he would search for information online, some official documents are written in inaccessible language:

If I need any information I will go online to find out whatever I need. But I find that all these documents are like George Orwell’s 1984 – they have a lot of language which is not accessible and then I feel like “Okay, I don’t need this, I don’t care.” Like you are talking about something, but they keep using obscure language but when you look at the technicalities of what is really is, it is quite simple, but they complicate it.

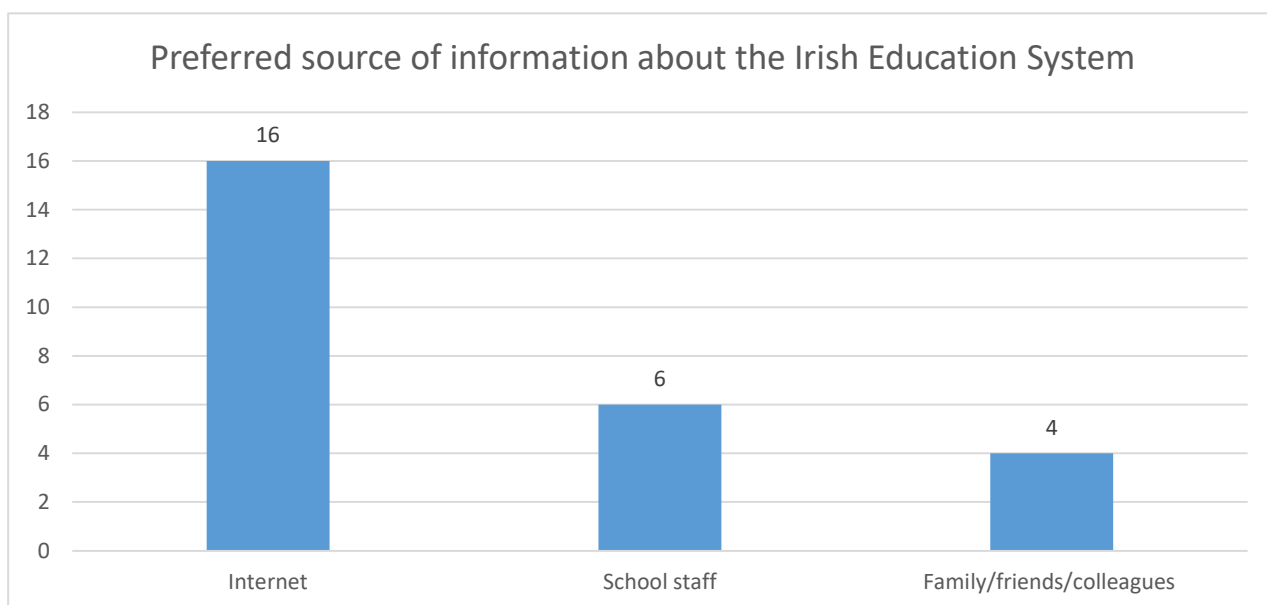


Figure 6.1: Immigrant parent information finding strategies

Patyrk’s comments raise an important question about the accessibility of language in which school correspondence and Department of Education websites can be written for parents for whom English is as an additional language. Similarly, Hennebry *et al.* (2016) observed that immigrants for whom English is not their first language can often feel “out of the loop” with regards to accessing information from official state documents (p.521). Ryan *et al.* (2013) and the *Intercultural Education Guidelines* (NCCA 2005) have highlighted the necessity of providing information to parents which describes the education system in a user-friendly way. In addition to information being inaccessible, a representative of the Afghan Community in Ireland mentioned that there can also be a general lack of awareness of where such information can be obtained:

Most of the people they don’t know where to get the information or that [there] are some organisation there to support you. So first we should give the awareness that there are organisations there to support you but most of the people they don’t know [that such organisations exist].

It is also possible that the Government's commitment to make school inspection clearer and more accessible to read as part of The Department's (2016a) *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019*, will improve the accessibility of information for non-native English speaking parents (Department of Education, 2017).

The second most common source of school-related information from school staff, as Eileen, from New Zealand, explained: "I would just go ahead and speak to the principal of the school because she is really approachable." Addie, from Zambia, added: "If I felt that she was struggling or if I wanted to find out anything, I'd always had a chat with the teacher." Adams and Kirova (2007) noted that immigrant parents might have different assumptions and expectations with regards to their communication with the school, depending on the cultural values and practices of their home country. In contrast, this study did not identify any noticeable differences in how parents of different ethnic backgrounds communicated with their child's school. However, this finding may be attributable to the study's low sample size ($N= 26$).

It is also interesting to note that despite the fact that the Intercultural Education Guidelines (NCCA 2005, p.26) advises schools to develop "a school handbook" for immigrant parents, there was an apparent absence of transparent, simplified information sharing at a school level, with regards to how immigrant parents should "do school" (Hickes 2002, p.217). While the parents knew that the school could provide information, they had to initiate contact with the school to retrieve this information. Once again, the question of whether parents would have the English language skills necessary to request such information or indeed the educational confidence (Crozier 2000) required to approach the school in the first instance is unclear.

Although asking personal contacts for school-related information was the least preferred information stream used by the immigrant parents, every parent relied on their social contacts to provide some information about the Irish primary school system. Although amassing social capital can take time (Salinas 2013), all of the parents in the present study had at least some personal contacts from their own ethnic minority community or from the native Irish population from which they could obtain “grapevine knowledge” (Ball 2006, p.232). Ten parents mentioned that their friends shared their past experiences with the education system and their personal stories provided useful insights for the participants. Tina, from South Africa, found it more useful to speak to other immigrant parents than to native Irish people because other immigrant parents had a common shared experience of approaching the system as an outsider:

My Irish friends are great, but they might not necessarily know what’s different so that they could tell me ahead of time, whereas [names immigrant parent] is foreign and she is more aware of the differences, so she would be more aware of what to point out. Yes, but they [the native Irish people] are all very approachable.

She provided an example of how her non-Irish friend was a source of information about the Irish primary school system:

I’m not Catholic and I don’t subscribe to a church. And my son is in a Catholic school ... but here you have this thing when the kids come in and there are prayers. And I didn’t even know that that was going to be part of the school system. So, I waited for my son one day and I saw through the window that they were kind of crossing themselves, I don’t know, what is it called? [Interviewer: Blessing yourself?] Yes, so before they left school they were standing in line blessing themselves. So, then I asked her [friend] what they were doing. She said they were saying a prayer and so I said, “Yeah okay. Is that normal?” and she said, “Yeah they do that all the time.” So, you know, little things like that.

She stressed the value of social networks for immigrant parents:

It's really important to try to talk to people who have children already in the school system. But I think as a parent that it is a really valuable resource, because it is informal and non-threatening, and you will be able to ask questions which you might not be able to ask in a formal situation. So, I think that certain information is better to get directly from the school and other times it better to have a parent who you can ring up and ask, "What do they need to wear for hurling?". And so, the other mother says, "Oh my son wear this", so then I know and that's grand. You know little things like that.

Tina's comments suggest that her ethnic minority group membership resulted in solidarity and mutual aid between other immigrant parents since they encountered similar challenges and confusion with regards to the expectations and norms of the Irish school system. Ethnic group membership has been shown to generate capital because it generates mobilisation of available resources and communal support (Fischer 2016). Tina's comments illustrate how her ethnic and social capital was exchanged for cultural capital. Similarly, Abdullah from Saudi Arabia, received advice from his friend but they were also a form of practical support:

Sometimes my neighbour from Saudi Arabia ask me to pick up his daughters and bring them to the apartment because he do a job and sometimes he is really busy, and he do the same for me as well.

Unlike the other participants Mary, from the Philippines, did not consult with her friends or colleagues about the education system: "I suppose I am very private. If we want to find out about anything, we will search ourselves online or ask the school directly." However, she sometimes turned to her older daughter for help:

Actually, my daughter was helpful to me when my son started school. She knew how it worked because she started in 1st class when we first came here. She helps my son with his school work, especially Irish which I cannot help him with. I don't know any Irish but my daughter, she is very good at it. So, she helps me and my son.

First-generation immigrants quite often rely on their older children to act as sources of insider information on the school system. Beattie's (2002) study of Mexican immigrants

living in the US found that parents often rely on their children to help them “to get through the system” (p.256). Similarly, Thapar-Bjorkert and Sanghera (2010) found that the older siblings in British-Pakistani families were offered counsel or guidance to their younger siblings about the school system.

6.3 Choosing the best school for their child

Choosing a school is one of the first tasks immigrant parents undertake when they come in contact with the school system (Byrne and De Tona 2012). The immigrant parents’ reliance on their social capital was clearly illustrated in the immigrant parents’ school selection decision-making process. Research has indicated that parent-to-parent conversations can shape the reputation of local schools. One Catholic primary school in Devine’s (2013) study developed the reputation of being particularly ‘Muslim friendly’ to because of how Muslim children were facilitated to learn about the Islamic faith. This reputation caused other Muslim parents to ‘deliberately seek out this area so that they can get to our school’ (p.399). Similarly, eight parents in the present study were given school recommendations by family, friends or colleagues, and such endorsements of that school which were made through the “grapevine” were more trusted. Beata, from Poland, got recommendations from her fellow Polish friends whose children attended a particular school: “I had a Polish friend who have the children and that gave me some information and she recommend that school. She said is a good school.” Addie, from Zambia, also drew on her social connections to help her select a suitable school for her children to attend: “Our neighbour’s family went there and we liked the fact that the principal had a good relationship with that family.”

Other immigrant parents looked beyond their ethnic community for suggestions, such as Zakir, from Pakistan, who lives in direct provision. He asked for school

recommendations from an Irish member of staff at the direct provision centre where he lived:

I am living in hostel and the manager, she is very good, she is from [names Irish town]. And when I came here I ask to her, "Which school is good?" and she advise me about the school, because her daughter she was there.

The seeking of help from colleagues and native Irish friends suggests that some immigrant parents in this study drew on bridging capital (Basit 2012). Other parents combined the recommendations of friends with independent research when deciding which school to send their children. Abdullah, from Saudi Arabia, explained: "When we came here I ask my friend and he recommended two schools. Also, I looked on the website and I find the same school. We use both." Abdullah was a PhD student and so it is possible that his middle-class habitus enabled him to have the confidence in negotiating and appraising his options (Reay *et al.* 2007).

Aside from school selection decision-making, the parents also used grapevine knowledge to help them understand the school system. Eight participants discussed how their friends or colleagues gave them advice about early enrolment in order for their children to secure a place in their preferred school. Eileen, from New Zealand, revealed that she learned the importance of early enrolment from a number of Irish mothers who attended a mother and baby group in the local community:

So, when we had our baby we joined the mums' group and parents were telling me there [of the need to enrol early] and I thought they were taking the piss to be totally honest. So, then we rang the school and were told that yeah, you had to do it. So, they said to fill out the form about a year or two before hand, so we thought we'd better get that done. We didn't want to get it in late.

Similarly, Angela, from Germany, learned through her friends about the importance of early enrolment. She stated that her friends and colleagues were her only source of information about the school system:

We needed a lot of advice, so we would get that from locals and find out how it [the school system] actually works. So, when we were living in [names city] and our kids were only babies, people were asking us if we signed up for this school and that school and I was like, "What?" I didn't get the whole concept ... and I think the Irish are very willing to give advice and to help and that was good and neighbours. Yeah. I'm not sure what it is now but in those days there wasn't any published information from government sites or anything to tell foreign people how to get started in the education system. It might have changed now. Or, maybe I didn't look in the right places. So, it was really advice from friends and informal advice, yeah.

Angela mentioned that perhaps she did not "look in the right places" to locate the information about the primary school system, which suggests a lack of cultural capital, since she did not know "the rules of the game" with regards to the Irish primary school system (Ho 2009, p.104) and applied the norms of her home country's education system as a frame of reference when approaching the Irish schools system.

6.4 Migrant status: an asset, a liability or an ineligible effect?

The immigrant parents were asked whether their lack of first-hand experience of the Irish primary schools affected their ability to navigate the education system. There was some variance in the responses obtained. Four parents believed their being educated in a different system was an advantage. Abdullah believed that his past habitus from being a student in Saudi Arabia enabled him to impart different teaching and learning styles to his children: "I feel I have more stronger experience to teach my child because I found different ways from the teachers how to teach my child." He also pointed out that his migrant status enabled him to pass on an additional language to his son.

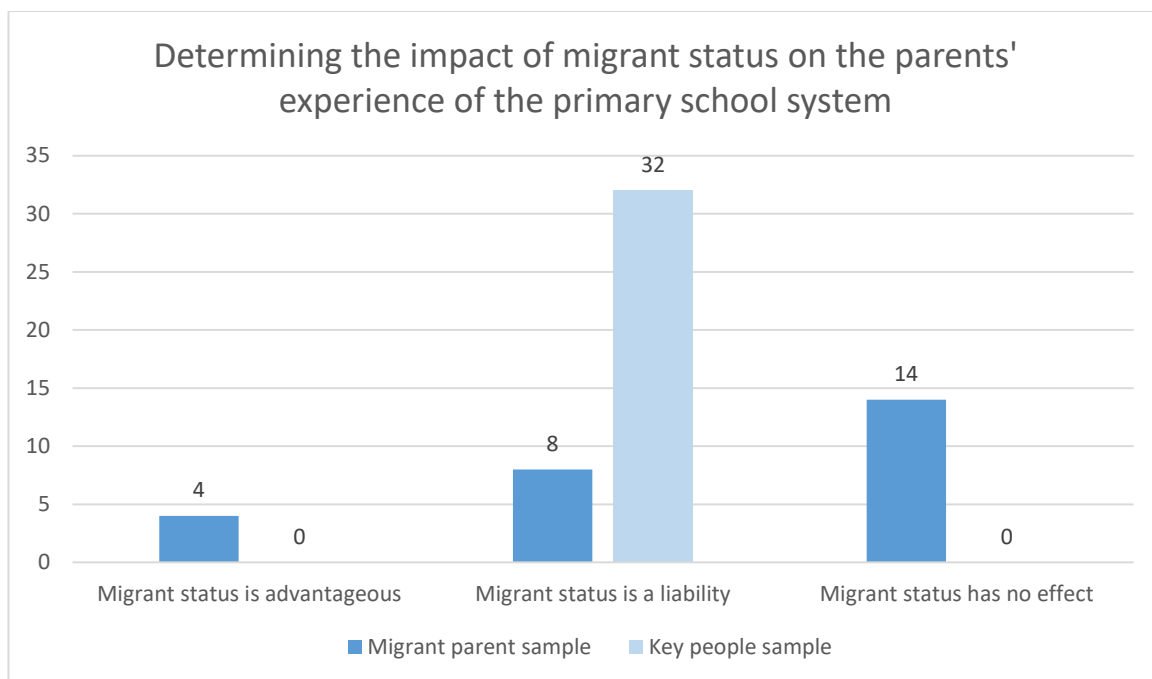


Figure 6.2: The impact of migrant status on parents' experience of the primary school system

Although the key people were not asked directly whether they perceived parental migrant status as being advantageous (see Appendix F), all of the key people believed that immigrant parents were hampered by their lack of first-hand knowledge of the education system. Several key people mentioned how this lack of insight resulted in confusion when the parents are tasked with enrolling their child in school for the first time. One migrant rights advocate stated that immigrant parents often “don’t know where to start...and it is about that knowledge really, like not knowing how to get into the school in the first place.” A representative of the Gambian Community in Ireland added that some immigrant parents:

lack information on how to gain access to the school system in the first place. They find the school system disorganised and disorientating. They don’t know that the enrolment policies vary from school to school. They are not sure how waiting lists work, so they might not register their children on time to get a place.

One migrant rights support worker explained that a lack of knowledge of the education system could prove even more problematic for immigrant parents of children with special educational needs:

They [the parents] are not really aware of the system, especially when it comes to special education or trying to get extra supports for a child with special needs. They tend to go to their GP and think that the GP can get them the supports and they don't really understand that is a huge battle to get the supports they need.

Eight parents in the immigrant parent cohort agreed that their lack of first-hand experience was a disadvantage to them as parents. Beata, from Poland, explained: "I think it is more difficult [to be an immigrant parent] I think it is disadvantage, because I don't know too much about schools here and also my English is not too good." Two parents felt that their lack of knowledge of the Irish language, as opposed to the English language, made it disadvantageous to be an immigrant parent. Lisa, from Nigeria, described how she was unable to help her children with their Irish homework:

I think it is a disadvantage and the reason being is that I didn't do my primary school here, so I don't have Irish obviously. I don't have Irish and this has affected me. You know my children would come home with a subject assignment in Irish and I would just have to say to them, "I don't know. You'll just have to go back to your teacher and ask her to explain to you because there is no way I can help because I don't speak Irish". So, this is a disadvantage to me, yeah.

One migrant rights worker advocated added that, in addition to the deficiency in subject knowledge, parents often are not aware of the learning expectations of their children: "I think one issue is immigrants not understanding the school system, what the different years mean, what are the children aspiring to achieve by the end of say first class, etc." A refugee resettlement officer added that immigrant parents are less likely than native

parents to have insider knowledge of the system: “If a child doesn’t have an advocate who has a knowledge and understands all the unwritten code of the school system, the child is at a disadvantage.” This key person went on to explain:

A parent comes into the system and they are asked to make decisions on subjects and they might have no frame of reference for these subjects or know what the implications of the subject choices are. It’s a very unfair pressure to put on the parents.

Lily, from Australia, agreed that there was a lot some assumed knowledge which native Irish people know but which may not necessarily be obvious to a parent unfamiliar with the habitus of Irish primary schools. She mentioned that it does not occur to Irish people to share this knowledge with those educated abroad because ‘they think everybody knows what to do’. She listed a number of examples of times when her lack of insider information on the workings of the Irish primary school system was apparent:

Sometimes I would turn up to the school at times it said [on the newsletter] but everybody else had arrived 10 minutes early and all of the children had been already collected and my child was left, you know that sort of thing. And that there is always a half day before the holidays, but I didn’t know that. And everybody knows that the parent council organises the tea after the Communion, and because everybody knows it, it is not necessarily said. Or when the school sends home a letter that says you are not allowed to bring in any junk food in for lunch, that lunch has to be a, b or c, so you just don’t send it in, but you discover a year later that everybody else’s kids get cereal bars sent in...[and] the uniform thing said you have to wear black shoes but then you discover after they have been there six months that everybody else wears runners and that’s okay...[or knowing] the difference between a board of management and the parent council and just things like that because we wouldn’t have had boards of management of the school in Australia.

Her lack of insider knowledge was exposed when her daughter was making her first Holy Communion:

So, I remember that in February when my daughter was making her Communion, other parents were saying to me “Have you got your outfit

yet?" And I was like, "Sorry, what?". I had no idea what she was talking about. And as it got closer they were like, "You have to get a dress" And then I learnt that she had to get shoes, and then she had to get a bag. And I was like, "You have to get a bag?! And a veil?!" Like, no one ever said to her she needs a watch, "What do you mean she needs a watch?! A watch?!"... [also] I didn't know that there was a lot of time being used to prepare for the Communion. Like, I knew they prepared them for it but I didn't realise how many hours it takes.

Crozier and Davies (2007) highlighted how migrant status can make home-school relationships more difficult to establish, because of a mutual lack of awareness of the cultural norms. Tina's comments about her experience with the parent association spotlight how cultural differences can result in complications:

I did attend the parent association meeting and I did feel very, very different ... [because] my views and opinions were in complete contrast to say 90% of the group, unless everybody wasn't willing to speak up, which I think is a cultural thing as well. I know South Africans are very direct. We are not always polite. We will say what we think or say our opinion. We just put it out there not meaning to offend. But I think in Ireland, people are more cautious not to offend other people with their views and they might have a more gentler way of saying. So, maybe not everybody were voicing their opinions, but my views were extremely different.

Tina provided one example of how she felt her opinions contrasted with those of the majority of the group:

I asked what the money [which the parent association fundraised] was for. And a lot of it seemed to go towards paying for Confirmation and Holy Communion parties and events, which to me was quite strange, because not everybody in the school attend these events. You know they put a lot of time and effort into raising this money and that seemed to be priority number one, whereas school equipment was priority number two, whereas perhaps I would have put it the other way around. And I didn't feel like I could voice everything, and I don't know how other parents feel either so yeah, so I don't know if that is something I should be accommodated in because I am the minority and I appreciate that I am joining this culture, so I should be more flexible so.

However, the majority of the sample believed that their migrant parent status made no difference to them getting involved in their children's education, as articulated by Grace, from Uganda: "So far it [being a migrant parent] doesn't make any effect." Two parents believed that children were so adaptable to their environment that it did not matter if their parents had no first-hand knowledge of the school system. Zainab, from Saudi Arabia, explained: "I think it had no effect [that the parents were not educated in the Irish education system] because children are like, their brain is very good at catching everything and they can learn." Another parent, Javid, from Sudan, made the case that the teachers in the child's school will be able to provide them with the knowledge of the Irish curriculum and the parents can support the teacher in this endeavour:

I think it is okay if you didn't attend primary here it is okay, because our job here is to support our children not to teach them, because if they go to school they have subject and teacher. Our job is just to support them and allow them to focus on one way.

Patryk, from Poland, maintained that it was the socioeconomic standing of the parents, rather than their ethnicity, which made the difference: "It's not if you are Irish or Polish but if you have money. It doesn't matter. Once you have money it is fine, you know? If you don't have money it is not so easy." On this point, it is often difficult to isolate the real influence of ethnicity on parental involvement, as it can often be confounded by socioeconomic status (Hill *et al.* 2004). Tina, from South Africa, who was married to an Irish man, explained that her being an immigrant parent had no effect on her ability to navigate the Irish education system. She explained that her husband would also offer support: "Plus my husband is Irish so you know if I'm not sure about something he can always step in." It seems that Tina may have employed her transnational cultural capital through her knowledge, disposition and values that were westernised, from attending

schools similar to those in Ireland, in the sense that they were influenced by British standards and shared knowledge of the English language (Ball *et al.* 2003).

6.5 Feelings of exclusion and inclusion in the Irish Education System

As previously detailed, almost all of the participants were satisfied with the standard of education in Irish schools. As summed up by the representative of the Gambian community: “Overall, it is positive. They [the parents] are happy with the teachers especially and their children feel happy and they feel like they fit in.” In contrast to several studies that highlighted exclusion and bullying directed towards non-native students, the parents in this study revealed that their children had made many friendships and did not feel different from their peers. Interestingly, none of the parents mentioned that their children were victims of racism or prejudice. Angela, from Germany, said: “There was not a single moment where they felt that they were picked on because they are German or because they don’t go to church, never.”

Consistent with the immigrant parent data set, most key people stated that the people they worked for or represented experienced little racism on a daily basis. A representative of the Palestinian community in Ireland disclosed:

I have been in Ireland for 35 years and I have never come across a case that I could actually recall that was based on any form of racism or discrimination against my own people [Palestinians], but I did hear some stories against other nationalities, but I can’t vouch for those.

However, in a departure from the immigrant parent dataset, four key people highlighted a few experiences of racism directed towards students, rather than against parents. A representative for Lithuanian Catholics in Ireland said:

Maybe in the last 12 years that I am a chaplain, just a few families complain that their children are treated badly by the Irish students because they are not Irish, they are Lithuanian ... but it was very few complaints in 12 years, like 0.01%.

A representative for Polish Catholics made similar comments with regards to racial bullying:

Sometimes the Polish children are suffering from their colleagues because of their nationality. It's not a general attitude, but I heard of some cases where the children were bullied by the Irish children because of their nationality.

As evidenced in the key people's remarks, racial discrimination was instigated by the students' peer group and was directed towards the students in the classroom, or in the playground. However, there was one allegation of institutionalised racism directed towards a student by the school management. Consistent with the findings of Cotter and Kolawole's (2015) report, one community support worker was able to recall a number of cases he personally dealt with, whereby a child from a migrant background was not as supported by school management:

Children with disabilities can be difficult to manage, when it is the situation where it is a migrant child, the children can be easily dismissed. They will say, "Sorry we can't do anything" or "We have done all we can". But, if it was a local child, they would have an incentive to try to do a bit more, but when you have a migrant child, that child is at fault almost instantly.

However, in contrast with the findings of Cotter and Kolawole (2015), there was no report from any immigrant parent in the present study of the school management or teachers racially discriminating against them. There were, however, a few instances of non-Catholic immigrant parents feeling discriminated against due to the denominational nature of the Irish primary school system. This finding was expected due to the high degree of Roman Catholic Church involvement in state schools (Fox and Buchanan 2008; Devine 2011). One non-Catholic parent, Eileen, from New Zealand, expressed surprise at the degree of religious influence in State schools. She had assumed from the

outset that religion would have had no place in Irish State schools and was taken aback by comments made by some Irish mothers in her local toddler group:

I was just in shock when they were just saying as if it was an everyday thing how much religion was in the day and this was a school which was not particularly religious. They had gone to the least religious school in the country.

Fortunately for Eileen, she had the option of enrolling her daughter in a non-denominational school due to the fact that there were several schools in her catchment area and as a result, she did not encounter any discrimination from religious school enrolment policies. In contrast, Patryk, from Poland, who was non-religious, explained how his daughter was refused a place in her local Catholic school because she was not baptised:

I went to the school and I spoke to the secretary and she was awful. She said "Firstly, we are taking children who are Catholic. Then we take children who have siblings already in the school" and she was listing everything until we got the point that there will be no place for her in the school.

Eventually, Patryk enrolled his daughter in a nondenominational school, but he found this negative experience with the local Catholic primary school quite distressing. A representative of the Hindu Community in Ireland mentioned that several members of his community had similar experiences to Patryk: "I heard that some of the children were not getting admission on the basis of that they are not baptised". Some of the key people explained that certain non-Catholic parents feel pressure to baptize their children into the Catholic faith to secure a place for their children in the local Catholic school. A representative of the Ghanaian Community of Ireland stated, "If the parent is Muslim or if they are not Catholic, then they feel pressure to baptise their children, so that they can get a place in the Catholic school." For this reason, several key people urged a change in school admission policy. A representative of Atheist Ireland said:

[There needs to be a] shift away from the laws that opt all the schools and religious bodies out of equality and employment legislation. We have a law which says it is okay to discriminate if the school is over-subscribed, so then you can pick Catholics first or something like that. So, if the laws were in place that were secular and treated everybody fairly and the school would have to fall in line.

Twenty-three per cent of the key people also flagged the lack of school as an issue facing immigrant parents. A representative of the Gambian Community in Ireland made the following remarks: “Most [of the parents] are Muslim and not Christian, so if they are not close to an Educate Together school then that can be difficult for them.” Choosing a school with a non-religious ethos was very important to a number of participants. Roza, from Poland, and a revert to Islam, also spoke about the importance of choosing a school with a religious ethos that matched her family’s religious faith:

Choose the right school for your child. Make sure the school has similar values and can respect your religion. I am very happy with the one I choose for my children but can hear a lot of complains about other schools.

Similarly, Abdullah, from Saudi Arabia, and a practising Muslim, explained that he wished to send his children to an Islamic school, but no such schools were available in his local area: “For me, you know I prefer to put my child in school who teach him the Islamic religion, but we didn’t have any here”. However, for some Non-Catholic parents, sending their children to a Catholic school did not seem to compromise their own religious beliefs. A representative of the Hindu community in Ireland had the following to say on the matter:

Even two Hindus will not have the same type of prayer ... [so] it doesn’t make a difference what way they do the prayer or not. So, even if they go to school and they have to do some Christian prayer or whatever, it doesn’t make a difference because it is a part of devotional activity ... because it is all prayer for the God.

A number of non-Catholic participants recognised the efforts the Catholic schools made to be respectful and inclusive of non-Catholic students and were satisfied with the provisions made to accommodate them. A representative of the Palestinian community in Ireland was particularly complimentary about how schools respected the diversity of religious beliefs in their school:

Many of them [Palestinian parents] opt for their children to leave the classroom and play on the yard when the subject of Catholic religion is being taught in the class. And I have heard that the schools are very flexible in that way. So, although it is a challenge, the flexibility and understanding of the school head masters and head mistresses is to be respected.

Angela, an atheist from Germany, also commended the Catholic school her children attended for being welcoming and inclusive:

Our children have never felt out of place. Even when both my children didn't go to Communion or Confirmation even then they had to be taken out of the class and they go to church and this and that, they never felt left out, they did something else or they just put them in a different class they did arts and crafts or whatever to keep them occupied while the others did whatever they had to do in the church. So, I think that was a really good and positive experience ... the school never ever made it awkward for them, no never ... And the children never felt by any means that it was pushed down their throat by any means or that they were different because they didn't do the confirmation or anything.

Tina, from South Africa, was a nondenominational Christian. She, like Angela, sent her children to a Catholic school and also had a positive experience, despite feeling reservations at first:

All the papers talking about children getting refused and all that malarkey. And then one day I just went to the school and asked the headmaster that we lived in the area and I'm not Catholic and was that an issue and he said that of course it was not an issue and that they would love to have him. And I just asked him there and then. So, I think a lot of fear and uncertainty comes from just lack of knowledge and then just gossip.

Interestingly, a representative of the Cameroonian community in Ireland stated that parents of religious faith, regardless of whatever sect that might be, preferred to have denominational education for their children, as opposed to a nondenominational alternative:

Most of the people in our community would prefer to send their children to Catholic schools ... [because] most of us are religious, even if we are not Catholic so we would prefer for our children to go to a religious institution ... [and] We wouldn't mind Catholic or non-Catholic because there is only slight differences in terms of doctrine ... very few would want their child to go to an Educate Together school, we would prefer a religious school.

The representative went on to add that Cameroonian parents tend to have a positive view of Catholic schools since they are fee-paying and prestigious schools in Cameroon:

Where we come from Catholic schools are the best schools, so only the wealthy can afford to send their children to such schools. So most working people in Cameroon have to send their children to government schools, but these are not well funded. So yeah, we don't have the problem of sending the children to Catholic schools. Most of our community are religious so we don't have any problem with our kids taking part in the religious classes. Culturally we believe in God and we are not atheist, so we don't mind about the small doctrinal differences.

Interestingly, despite having no conscientious objection to sending their children to Catholic schools, the representative from Cameroon acknowledged: "We would have a problem with admission" in schools that are over-subscribed if the children are not baptised Catholics. These comments indicate that efforts were made by the denominational schools to include non-believing students, while well-intentioned, can still fall short. Abdullah, from Saudi Arabia added that, although his daughter was exempt from religious education classes, she was still absorbing knowledge of Christianity:

I consult with the teacher and he confirmed that they didn't teach them the religion. But I noticed with my second daughter at home that she knows something about the [Catholic] religion and I am very sad about that because I let him [i.e. the teacher] know that we are Muslims so please don't give her any lesson about Christian religion, but until now my daughter know something about the Christian religion.

Although Abdullah's daughter was unintentionally acquiring some knowledge of the Catholic faith by virtue of being in the classroom when religious instruction was taking place, Smyth and Darmody (2011) found that some ethnic minority students purposely engaged in the religious education lessons 'in order not to be singled out as [being] different' (p.137). Furthermore, a representative of Atheist Ireland explained that the subject of religion is not the only subject to be shaped by the school's ethos: "The sex education in schools is also very much influenced by the Catholic ethos, which is not necessarily the views which are best reflective of atheist parents."

There were also a few instances whereby parents who chose denominational education for their children were unhappy with how the ethos of the school was being realised. A representative of the Polish community claimed:

I heard a few families complain to me about the standard of religious education in Catholic schools. They didn't put much emphasis on catechesis. Quite often they see that the teachers turn religion into religious education rather than catechesis.

Martha, was a Protestant from Finland, whose son attended a Church of Ireland school, felt that the school did not listen to her concerns when she had a conscientious objection to her son taking part in a mindfulness programme for children:

I am a Christian and I did not want my son getting involved in this mindfulness class. I was very annoyed because the school did not seek my consent before my son took part and the principal told me I would have to

get a letter from the bishop before I could opt my son out of those classes. I felt very frustrated because the principal was being unreasonable, and I tried to arrange meetings with her to discuss my concerns, but she wasn't accessible.

It remains to be seen, however, whether recent policy changes with The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 and The Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity process will elevate the concerns of parents regarding the lack of school choice and the place of religion in Irish primary schools.

6.6 Conclusion

Although there was no control group of native Irish parents to compare the immigrant parents' knowledge of the Irish primary school system against, it is clear from the data that, on the whole, the immigrant parents lacked some technical knowledge of the education system. The parents' narratives also provided evidence in support of the observations of Cardona *et al.* (2009) who found that some migrant groups have a greater understanding of the host country's education system than others. This hypothesis receives validation from the key peoples' conviction that immigrant parents do not have equality of opportunity with regards to the Irish primary school system.

Although the parents considered this lack of technical knowledge as unproblematic due to the fact that such technical information was considered to be superfluous, it was evident that the parents who possessed a third level education, were native English speakers or highly competent non-English speakers, and who occupied well-paying jobs were in a more privileged position than the parents who had lower levels of disposable income, less formal education and poorer language skills. Therefore, immigrant parents with more economic and cultural capital were able to be more 'system smart' than immigrant parents with less capital at their disposal. This finding was confirmed by the

narratives of the key people. However, the participants in this study felt capable of sourcing information on the education system, if the need arose. The parents, who were mostly college educated and had at least a reasonable level of English, reported feeling confident that they could find the information they required online. However, the key people mentioned that not every immigrant parent has access to such information online, due to poor English language skills or a lack of cultural capital to know where to locate the necessary information.

It also emerged that the parents drew on their social capital resources, such as family, friends and colleagues (Bathmaker *et al.* 2013) to inform their school-related decisions, the most common of which was school selection. Once again, the participants who were married to a native Irish person or who were fluent English speakers were more able to exchange the “who you know” into “what to do” (Bathmaker *et al.* 2013, p.726), providing further evidence of the capital advantage of some immigrant parents over others.

Interestingly, the majority of parents believed that being an immigrant parent did not have any effect on their ability to get involved in their child’s education. However, this may be due to the fact that the immigrant parent sample possessed a middle-class habitus. Finally, in contrast to several studies, this study noted few reports from immigrant parents and key people about racist experiences, but sectarian discrimination was flagged as a source of exclusion for some non-Catholic immigrant parents living in Ireland.

Chapter 7: Theme 4: Parental Engagement among Immigrant Parents: Experiences, Facilitators and Barriers

“When parents are involved in their children's education at home, they do better in school. And when parents are involved in school, children go farther in school and the schools they go to are better.”

(Henderson and Berla 1994, p.15)

7.0 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to explore how immigrant parents in Ireland help their children “do school” (Hickes 2002, p.217). This chapter begins by charting how the immigrant parents position themselves within the Irish primary school system. While recognising that parental engagement is multifaceted and that various definitions of parental engagement exist (Hartas 2008), an insight into the nature of the parental involvement among the immigrant parents is provided by examining the parent-teacher communication patterns, home-based involvement practices, and school-based parental involvement activities undertaken by the “new Irish” parents. This chapter also outlines the facilitators and barriers to immigrant parental involvement.

7.1 Positioning themselves within the home-school relationship dynamic

Parents are the primary educators of their children, as pertained in article 42.1 of the Irish Constitution. Every parent who participated in the present study were aware of their duties in this regard. However, the parents’ narratives conveyed a degree of variance in their level of entitlement, expectation and sense of place, in relation to the home-school domains of learning. The majority of parents ($n=18$) thought that both parents and the school were equally responsible for the child’s learning. Mahmoud, from Sudan, comments were representative of the immigrant parents who participated in the present study: “Children go to school for learning but after school parents we have to do our work ... we have to work together.” Lareau (1989) characterises this feeling of

joint responsibility for their children's education as being typically middle-class which contrasts with the working-class tendency to consider that education is the sole responsibility of the school. Therefore, more weight can be attributed to the claim made in the previous chapters that the immigrant parents in the present study possessed a middle-class habitus concerning their children's education.

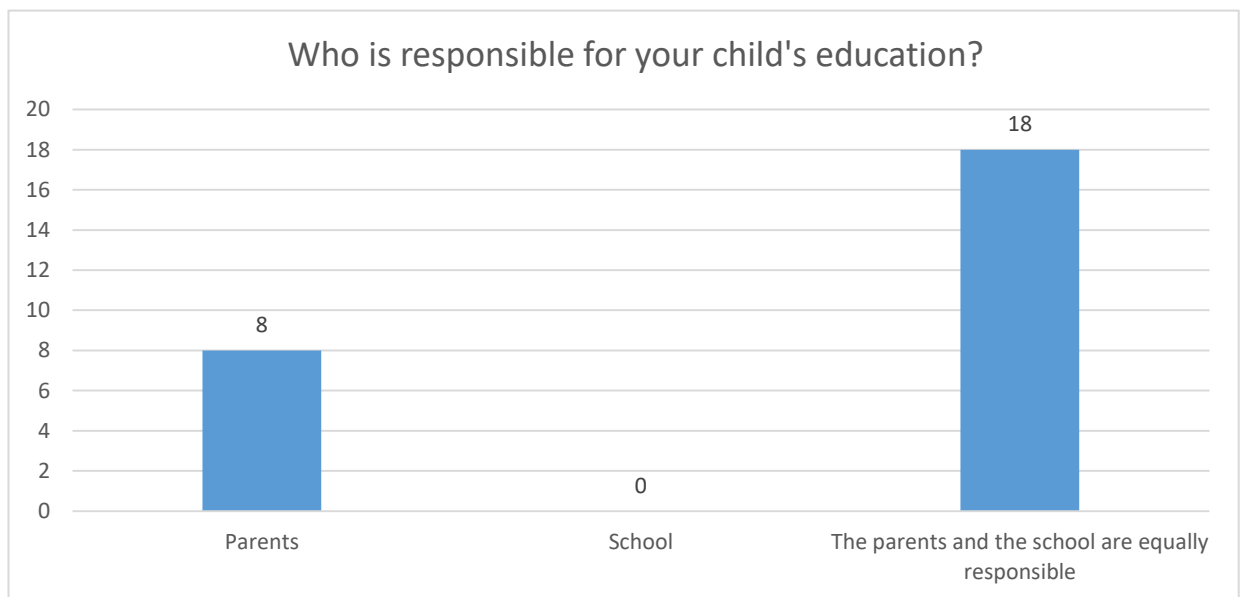


Figure 7.1: Parental level of responsibility for their children's education

Although feeling equally responsible for their children's education, the parents tended to consider that the school and the home had a distinct remit. Angela, from Germany, believed that the school should dictate the content and pace of the academic learning while the parent's role was to survey the learning which had taken place and provide emotional support:

The school plays a very important role and I think as a parent you should let the school to a certain extent do their job and don't interfere that much. But saying that you should, as a parent, lead by example, give support and ensure that your child is able to do the work.

Addie, from Zambia agreed that teaching and learning were the realm of the school but added that it was the parents' responsibility to supervise the completion of homework: "When the children are in school you know the teacher is responsible to help them to learn but at home it is up to me to tell them to do their homework". Roza, from Poland, concurred that the school bears the responsibility for curriculum delivery. She considered her job was to motivate her children to want to learn: "The school does the formal instruction but I think my job is to create a positive attitude, to make them want to learn."

Other parents rationalised that they bore a greater share of responsibility for their child's education due to the difference in contact hours between home and the school. Zakir, from Pakistan, explained: "I think it is my responsibility more than teachers, because children are over there just 4/5 hours but more time they are there with parents so they have more responsibility for children's education than teachers." As with most other parents, Zakir acknowledged that parents also have a role in reinforcing the formal learning that takes place in school: "because if they learning at school and they didn't practice at home then they are wasting their time".

Interestingly, degree-holding parents were less likely to adopt an auxiliary role concerning their children's learning. Lily, from Australia, explained how she contacted her son's class teacher for help when she noticed that her son was experiencing some difficulties with spelling:

I contacted the school to speak to the teacher and spoke to the teacher one on one. Between the teacher and I, we discussed what I could do at home. She also set up a programme with the learning support to work on his spelling. So, the teacher and I both talked about the issues he was having and what we could both do to help.

It should be noticed that Lily did not rely on the teachers to identify that her son was struggling with his spelling. She observed this weakness herself and instead of depending on the school to solve her problem on-site she sought their professional guidance on how best she could support her child at home. It is arguable that Lily's cultural capital gave her the confidence to approach her son's teacher and initiate a home-school co-ordinated response to remedy her son's weakness in spellings.

However, parents with less cultural capital may not have been as empowered as Lily to seek a home-school intervention from the school. Martin *et al.* (2018) study of refugees parents in Ireland noted that the parents were more likely to perceive an unequal balance of power between themselves and the class teacher and tended to revere the teacher as the source and gatekeeper of knowledge. Therefore, they would not approach the school in the manner which Lily did and request the school to take action to solve a particular concern. Furthermore, some parents may not have the English language skills, which Lily has as a native English speaker, to be able to provide the academic support which their child requires. The Intercultural Education Guidelines (NCCA 2005) acknowledge that some immigrant parents, especially those with poor English language skills, can be reluctant to approach the school for support. It suggests that schools improve parent-school communication by giving parents the opportunity to discuss their concerns and fears through informal meetings with the school.

Although the suggestions to support the parental involvement of immigrant parents contained in the Intercultural Education Guidelines (NCCA 2005, p.26) are useful, a problem still remains regarding the enforceability of the same. While Lily's son's school were demonstrating best practice with regards to home-school partnerships, this is not always the case, as evidenced in Martha's experience. Martha, from Finland, was

concerned about her son's progress in Irish. Despite bringing this to the attention of the school, she felt as if the school did not take action to address her concerns, and so she had to take matters in her own hands by purchasing an Irish dictionary and Irish study guides: "We had to teach our child at home ourselves because the teachers would not help." However, Martha, as a fluent English speaker and a master's degree holder, had access to the cultural and economic capital which enabled her to supplement the deficits she perceived to exist in her son's learning.

Once again, it must be acknowledged that not every parent may have as much cultural capital resources as Martha in order to compensate for the school's shortfalls in curriculum delivery, such as Javid, from Sudan, who revealed that he had to overly entrust the education of his children to the school because "my English not too good. I just have little bit". Javid, however, attempted to compensate for his lack of ability to support his children academically by encouraging his children to work hard in school and praising their academic efforts and achievements. This indicated that although Javid lacked cultural capital relative to other parents, such as Martha and Lily, he still embodied a middle-class habitus with respect to the value he placed on his children's education.

Nevertheless, Javid's experience suggests that immigrant parents with less cultural capital – despite their convictions that they were at least partially responsible for their child's education – were limited in their ability to fully actualise their ethnic capital. Similarly, a study by Riches and Curdt-Christiansen (2010) observed that poorly educated Chinese parents in Canada struggled to help their children with school homework, whereas highly educated Chinese parents furthered their learning by setting them additional schoolwork. Likewise, highly educated Chinese parents in Australia were shown to be more successful than less educated Lebanese parents in helping their

children completed school-approved literacy activities at home (Markose and Hellstén 2009).

The dependency of the relatively less competent English speaking immigrant parents on the school to assist their child with learning difficulties suggests that, while they possessed middle-class outlooks, they operated more like working-class parents. Crozier (2000) found that working-class parents felt they had less authority regarding their ability to support their child academically, in comparison to middle-class parents. Crozier (2000) noted that working-class parents tended to blindly trust the teachers more than the middle-class parents, who were likely to monitor and appraise the teacher's performance. However, what Crozier (2000) identifies as a passive approach that is characteristic of working-class parents was not detected among the immigrant parent sample. It appears that the parents' limited English language skills, and perhaps their level of formal education, contributed to their reliance on the school to guide their child's learning. However, as attested in the next section, all of the parents, irrespective of their English language skills and level of educational attainment, made an effort to play an active role in their children's learning by modelling positive attitudes to education, offering moral support, and setting high expectations for their children's school-related behaviour.

7.2 Assessing the level of parental involvement among immigrant parents

Parental involvement is an essential ingredient for favourable academic outcomes (Liu and White 2017). However, despite being regarded as "a central ingredient in a child's learning" (Patrikakou 2008, p.1), parental engagement has proven to be a difficult concept to define. Indeed, the terms "parental engagement", "parental involvement" and "parental effort" can be used interchangeably and refer to a wide, and arguably

unfenced, range of activities. In the broadest possible sense, parental engagement is an umbrella term used to describe the range of activities – both spontaneous and structured – in which a parent plays an active role in monitoring, encouraging and assisting a child’s development. Parental involvement is multifaceted (Wilder 2014) and ranges from basic “at home good parenting” (Desforges and Abouchar 2003, p.4) to a parent’s participation in their child’s education both at home and in the community (Weiss *et al.* 2010; Goodall and Vorhaus 2011; Nixon, 2015).

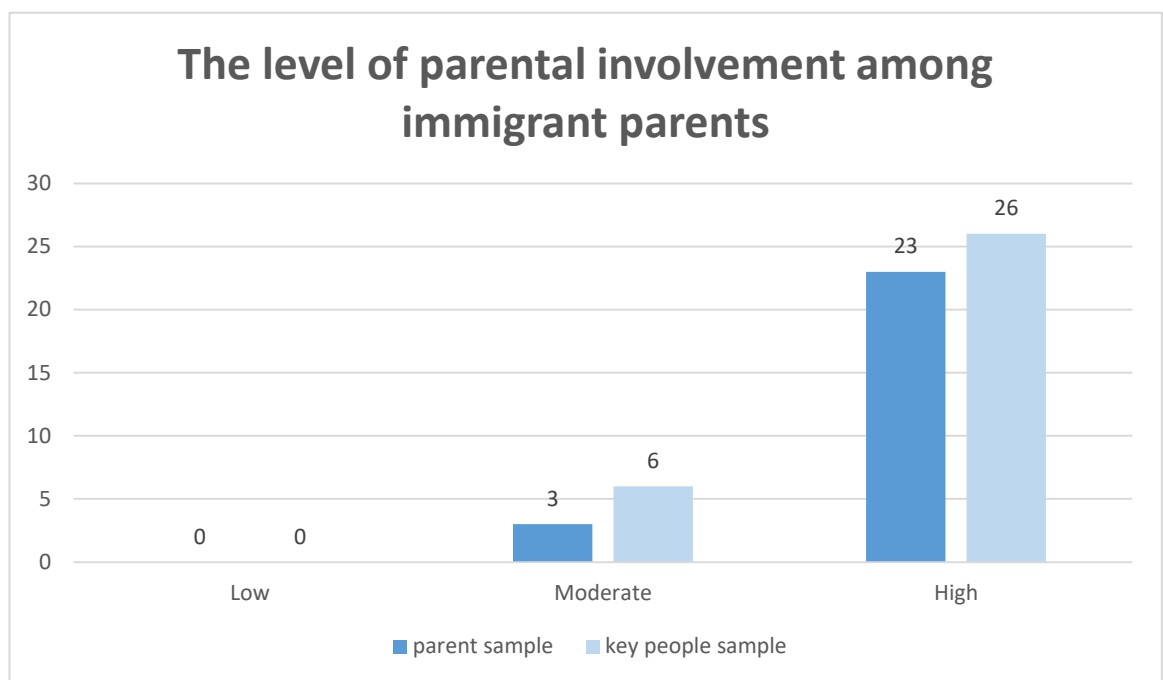


Figure 7.2: The degree of parental involvement in the present sample

Hill *et al.* (2004) have claimed that parental involvement is defined as any parent-child or parent-school interaction that “promote[s] academic success” (p.1491). Perhaps a more realistic definition of parental engagement was provided by Kreider (2002), which characterises parental involvement as any activity which directly and indirectly supports a children’s learning. Borgonovi and Montt (2012) have seconded this view, claiming that parental engagement spans beyond a parent’s involvement in their child’s academic performance and is better understood as an overall commitment to support their child’s

holistic development. Thus, for the purposes of the present research, Borgonovi and Montt's (2012) understanding of parental engagement is employed.

As previously mentioned (see section 2.3 and section 2.4), there are several references to the importance of parental involvement in government documents pertaining to the primary school sector. Also outlined in the previous chapters is the finding that all of the immigrant parents who participated in the present research had positive aspirations for their children's educational attainment and desired that they should succeed in school. This interest in their child's progress is reflected in the fact that all of the parents felt responsible for ensuring that their child would achieve a good education. Although work by McGovern and Devine (2016) indicates that immigrant parents are generally perceived by school management as being hard to reach and uninvolved, the findings of this study corroborate the results of Irish research by Cotter and Kolawole (2015) and Martin *et al.* (2018), which found that immigrant parents are eager to get involved in their children's education. It is no surprise, therefore, that the parents expressed a willingness to invest a sizeable amount of their time, focus and energy into their children's schooling, because, as stated by Lily, from Australia: "then they [the children] have more chances of succeeding".

Consistent with the findings of Schneider and Arnot (2018), the level of parental involvement observed among the present sample was high. Every parent in the present study self-rated themselves as being actively involved in their children's education. Most parents considered themselves as being highly involved ($n=23$), whereas three parents considered themselves as being somewhat involved in their child's education. The remarks of Lisa, from Nigeria, were representative of the parents' sample when she said: "Anything that has to do with my child's education, I always want to be involved

with that.” All of the three parents who claimed they were somewhat involved in their child’s learning had older children who were able learners. Patryk, from Poland, also mentioned that he reduced the amount of time spent supporting his child’s learning since his daughter has become older:

I used to sit down every night with her, making sure that she understands everything and do everything that she is supposed to do. But [since] she got to become more independent and she now would do it on her own.

In line with the literature on this topic, the parents of younger children were more involved in their children’s education. Parental engagement was shown to diminish in tandem with the child’s growth in autonomy, and as the child’s social reference group migrated from the parent to their peer group (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003; Russell and Granville 2005). It was also observed that parents intervene less when their children are not experiencing any difficulty with their studies, a finding which is consistent with Wilder’s (2014) findings on the level of parental input in homework assignments.

The immigrant parents’ deep commitment to supporting their child’s learning was also acknowledged by the key people. A representative of the Gambian Association of Ireland commented that: “Education is so important to them and they will make every effort to help their child succeed in school.” Another migrant support worker observed that the immigrant parents: “take an active approach to helping their children feel positive about school and their studies.” Although the parents’ enthusiasm to support their child’s learning was apparent, an examination of the key peoples’ narratives pointed to a variance in migrant parental understanding of what it means to be an “actively involved” parent. One key person, a migrant support worker, explained that immigrant parents might have different understandings of parental involvement, because they use the education system in their country of origin as their only frame of

reference. She stressed the importance of the school taking an active role in clarifying their expectations with regards to parental engagement. She suggested that the parent association could play a central role towards this end, suggesting that “a buddy system for parents [be established] to help them understand what’s expected and what role the school and parent should play together for the child”. Indeed, Levine-Rasky (2009) found that membership of the parent association can enrich a parent’s social capital and relationship with the school.

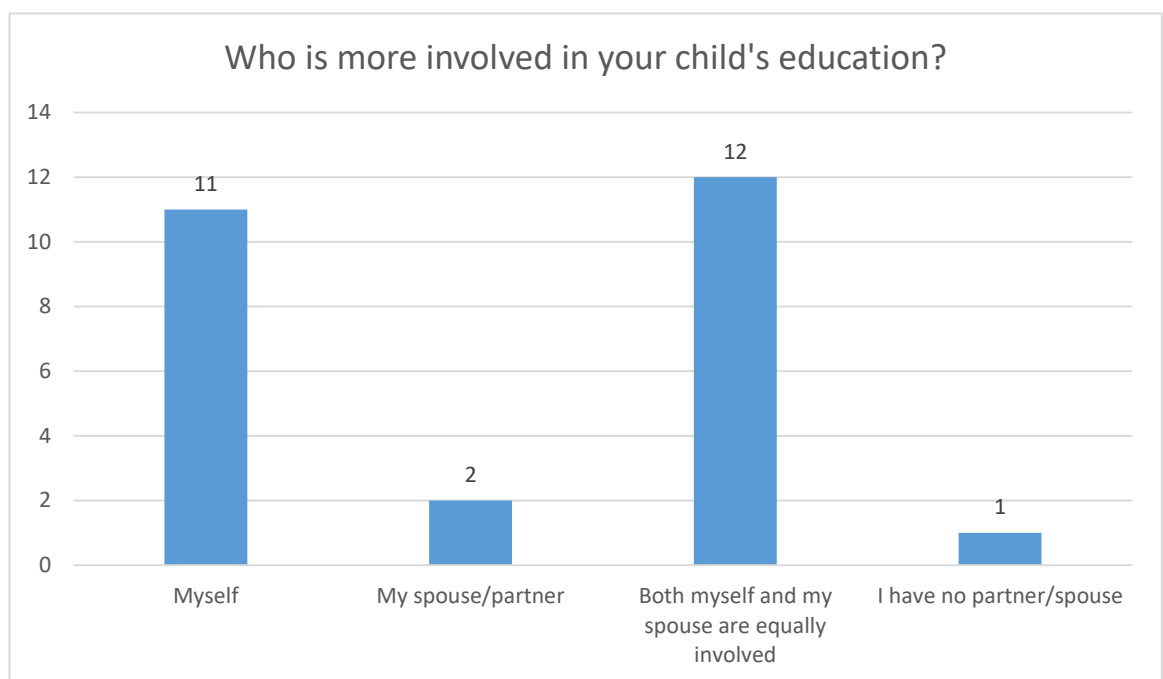


Figure 7.3: The level of spousal/partner parental involvement

The literature suggests that mothers tend to invest more time into parental involvement activities than fathers (Jeynes 2015; Kim and Hill 2015; Charles *et al.* 2018). In a departure from dominant trends in literature, immigrant fathers in the present sample were seen to be at least as equally interested and invested in their children’s education as the child’s mother. Among the 10 men and 16 women in the immigrant parent cohort, just over half of the sample ($n=13$) said that both parents were equally involved in their children’s education. However, an almost equal number of participants said that the

child's mother was more actively involved in matters pertaining to their child's schooling ($n=11$). Their partners' working hours was the most cited reason for the mother being more involved in their children's education. Only two men in the study said that they were more actively involved in their children's education than the child's mother. Both of these men were living in direct provision and had a higher level of education than their wives. Zakir, from Pakistan, was one of these men. He explained: "My wife she is housewife and she is cooking and cleaning and a lot of stuff so I help them [the children with their school work]." Ashiq, from Sudan, was the other man who rated himself as being more involved in his child's education than his wife: "My wife didn't complete her studies and she didn't know about too much English so I am helping more than wife." Therefore, it can be concluded that 58% of the sample claimed that the child's father was as at least equally involved as the child's mother in the academic affairs of their child. The exact nature of the parents' involvement in their children's education is explored in the next section.

7.2.1 Home-based parental involvement

Home-based engagement involves the parent assisting with the child's academic progress at home, such as helping them with homework or discussing ideas for a school project, or other non-school related intellectually stimulating activities, such as visits to the local library or trips to a museum (Borgonovi and Montt 2012). Home-based engagement also entails modelling positive attitudes and behaviour towards school and learning and placing a high value on education. The most popular home-based involvement activities were providing assistance with homework ($n=26$), giving encouragement and moral support ($n=26$), and showing an interest in the child's accomplishments in school ($n=26$).

With respect to parental involvement with homework, some parents assisted their children with the homework tasks, such as Zakir from Pakistan: “I sit with them for homework...if they need hand from me, I help them”. Other parents, such as Omar, from Libya, minored the accuracy of their children’s homework: “We check homework together. Checking if they have some weakness or something.” Other parents surveyed the completion of homework activities, such as Patryk, from Poland: “Occasionally I would just check on her like an unidentified police. And if she is okay, she is clear to go. And if she’s not she is having trouble.” Hamad, from Saudi Arabia, explained how he structures his daughter’s after-school time to ensure that she develops a sense of obligation to meet her responsibilities: “When [daughter’s name] come from school, the first thing I ask her, ‘Do your homework, and after that you have time to play and do anything.’”

As with Hamad, nearly all of the immigrant parents believed in the importance of homework and were eager to reinforce the discipline of completing homework. However, two parents were critical of their child’s school’s homework policies and felt that their children were receiving too much homework. Maryam was the only parent who instructed her children to stick to a study routine outside of assigned homework: “I’m keeping eyes on them every day ... and try to encourage them to try to read their lessons and go online to practise their English and maths playing games. To put a small test for the children online.” Auerbach (2007) identifies such discipline as a common tool which is regularly employed by immigrant parents to support their children’s learning in school.

The literature points to the value of family conversations around learning for moulding positive attitudes about learning (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and

Medicine 2016). Seven parents explained that they inculcated positive attitudes towards school and learning and spoke to their child on a daily basis about what they had learned that day in school. Beata, from Poland, said: “I encourage, I give advice”, to keep her children interested and dedicated to their school work. Addie, from Zambia, shared how she routinely discussed her children’s day at school during the journey home in the car: “When I pick them up I always asked them, ‘What you do at school? What your teacher say? What new thing did you learn today?’” Lily, from Australia, said that she made an effort to model positive beliefs about learning and about school: “I say, ‘School is going to be great. You’re going to meet lots of friends. The teachers are going to be great,’ so [as] to be positive and not to pass on any of your own hang-ups.”

In contrast to several studies that found certain immigrant parents are less likely to read to their children in English, compared to native parents (Diener *et al.* 2003; Boyce *et al.* 2004; Raikes *et al.* 2006; Scheele *et al.* 2010; Leyendeckera *et al.* 2011), half of the parents in the present study reported reading books to their children on a regular basis ($n=13$ for English books; $n= 5$ for native language books). Tina, whose native language is Afrikaans, reads to her child in her native language while her husband, who was Irish, reads their child in English. She said: “We read to them every night and I make a point of reading books in both languages.” Hamad explained that he regularly takes his daughter to the library and downloads audiobooks for his daughter to listen to:

I always reading to her. I usually go with [daughter’s name] to the library and I say “Choose any story that you like.” And she read it. Yes, and sometimes, I don’t know what that called, I give her reading and listening story but with a voice? [Interviewer: an audiobook?] Audiobook yes.

It was evident that the immigrant parents in this study valued reading and encouraged their children to develop a love of reading. There was also evidence of concerted cultivation (Lareau 2003), whereby parents engage their children in structured learning activities and extra-curricular activities. Such activity is a typical middle-class practice, providing further validation for the claim that the immigrant parents possessed a middle-class habitus. Nineteen parents said that their children were engaged in educational experiences outside of the home, which they considered to be value-added and enjoyed by their children. The extra-curricular activities ranged from music lessons, sports, scouts and religious activities. The immigrant parents who paid for such extra-curricular activities were also divesting their ethnic capital into cultural capital for their children. For example Ashiq, from Sudan, sent his children to his local mosque for special classes:

At the weekend my children on Sunday and Saturday, we have class Arabic [to teach the children] to how write to Arabic, how to read it. He learn Quran. In the weekend he has one two class at the mosque for six hour. Every Sunday and Monday for two hour how to read the Quran. How to read Quran and how to prayer, because you know prayer five times a day.

However, a representative of the Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council pointed out that the cost associated with extra-curricular activities can be too high for some immigrant families to afford: "It's very difficult for parents from an immigrant background to pay high fees for after-school classes." This suggests that perhaps not all immigrant parents in Ireland are in a financial position to undertake concerted cultivation for their children, further suggesting a link between the parents' economic capital and their children's cultural capital.

Activity (Immigrant parent sample, N=26)	Number of times cited
Helping with homework	26
Surveilling the completion of homework	26
Reminding their children to study	1
Encouraging their children	26
Providing moral support	22
Praising the child for efforts made	15
Taking an interest in the child's achievements and school work	26
Actively promoting positive attitudes towards school	7
Talking to their child about their day at school	26
Reading books to their child in English	13
Reading books to their child in their native language	5
Purchasing learning materials for their child	5
Taking their child on educational trips	3
Involving their child in extra-curricular activities	19

Table 7.1: Home-based parental involvement activities

Some parents created learning opportunities for their children by themselves, in addition to more formal activities organised by outside agencies. Tina, from South Africa, explained:

We sing a lot. We create opportunities for them to learn different things. Like we go swimming, we went camping last weekend and surfing. Try to be out in nature quite a bit. And teach them how to ride a bike. That sort of thing.

Patryk, from Poland, chose not to involve his child in organised activities because he wanted his child to learn how to entertain herself:

I believe that when we were young, we didn't have any extra activities, but we were forced to play and find activities on our own. You will always find something, but you just need to be able to do that. Necessity creates that thing. If you are going to overindulge in that materialistic stuff it is just

going to create a hard to entertain individual who is just keep wanting more and more. You don't want this.

7.2.2 School-based parental involvement

As explained by Borgonovi and Montt (2012), school-based engagement is the direct contact the parent makes with the school, such as attendance at school meetings and events, or volunteering at the school. In comparison to the frequency of home-based parental involvement, school-based involvement among the sample was lower, perhaps because the immigrant parents were most likely to consider the home as being the place where they could best support their children's learning. The most common form of school-based involvement was attendance at parent-teacher meetings, followed closely by attendance at school concerts and events. With respect to parent-teacher meetings, most of the sample ($n=24$) attended annual meetings. However, most parents would have liked more formal communication, such as parent-teacher meetings, to take place more frequently. Ania, from Poland, explains: "They give me information on how my child is progressing [during parent-teacher meetings]. To be honest, I wish they were held more often than once a year." It was also remarked that parents' evenings tended to be more about reporting on the child's behaviour and academic progress, rather than being treated as an opportunity to discuss how parents could continue to support their child's learning. Omar, from Libya, stated: "We have parent teaching meetings and they are showing what they are doing and inform any kind of change or progress just."

Activity (Immigrant parent sample, N=26)	Number of times cited
Attendance at parent-teacher meetings	26
Attendance at school concerts and events	23
Involvement with the parents association	3
Volunteering at the school	3

Table 7.2: School-based parental involvement activities

Three parents said that they did not attend school recitals and events, and work commitments were given as the reason for this. Mary, from the Philippines, was one such parent: “Well, I have shift work in my job, so I can’t always attend them. But...[I] will attend them if I am free.” A lack of time was also suggested as the reason why few parents volunteered at the school. Although the *Intercultural Education Guidelines* (NCCA 2005, p.26) urge schools to provide “opportunities where parents and other members of the community can support the school, for example language support, translation, homework clubs, etc.”, only one parent, Lily, from Australia, volunteered in her children’s school to support a reading initiative: “I was helping with reading one a week for an hour.” Lily explained that her volunteering enabled her to develop stronger relationships with the teachers in the school:

So, if I showed the teachers that I was interested then they would be more interested in my child’s education. Cos I do think that if you show you are interested and then I think they are going to be more aware as well and that you are not a lost cause. I definitely see that working in the hospital that the patients whose parent’s family are there and interested and asking more questions that you pay more attention to what’s happening with them, you know? So that’s the idea and I want to support the school as well as I can ... so therefore if I needed to ask the principal something I had, I felt like I had a relationship with her already, so I could talk to her informally.

Although the Intercultural Education Guidelines (NCCA 2005) mentions the role which the parents' association has to play in improving school contact for immigrant parents, only a minority of parents in the study got involved in parent committees. All three parents who were part of the parent committee said they would prefer if the parents' association had more of a governance role, rather than just being a de facto fundraising machine. Tina shared her disappointment and frustration when she realised that the function and scope of the parent association was quite limited:

I thought it was a bridge between parents and the school, a way for parents to express their views [but it seems that]... their only role was to fundraise ... I didn't think that was the best use of the association. I thought, how do they know the views of the parents if that's not part of the agenda?... In South Africa the role is actually if the school makes a decision or proposes x, y, or z the school goes to the parent association to make comments on it. They don't have a managing function [in South Africa], but they certainly have a representative function.

Although she did not attend the parent association, Angela also believed that the parent association should be given more power over decisions made at a school management level. She also mentioned that there is a parent association for each class level in Germany, in contrast to a single parent association for the entire school in Ireland:

From my background, let's say in German schools, you had let's say a parent association for each class almost. And that is not like the parent association which in my opinion only does try to raise funds for the school but has no involvement in any kind of how the daily business is done in school. In Germany you have parent councils which are only run by the parents and they look after if they are happy the way the school is doing or how the teachers treat our children and things like that. And also helping and trying to support events and things like that. But I was kind of missing that part that you have more input as a parent.

It is interesting to note, in light of Tina and Angela's comments that the *Intercultural Education Guidelines* (NCCA 2005, p.26) recommend that schools work to support the work of the parent association and solicit its input in the formulation of school policies

and plans. Indeed, one of the key people, a representative of the Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council, remarked: “The parents would like to see more engagement and more interaction and they would like to get more involved.” Simon, however, disagreed with the perception that the parent council had limited powers in his children’s school:

Well, there is an element of fundraising but if there was an outstanding issue then I think that the parent association would be able to act and speak to the staff on a parent’s behalf, for example if a person was more reticent to speak for themselves directly. But I suppose all parent associations are down to the people who actually turn up regularly to the meetings. The ones who turn up would be the same faces, so you would have about eight or nine who always turn up and then 13 or 14 families would never turn up. So, it really does depend on the parents themselves. Like you would get a lot of people who would moan at the school gate but wouldn’t come to the meetings! But you know all of the parents knew who were on the parent association so they could always ask one of the members to speak on their behalf. So, it seems that there are a lot of people who are willing to moan but are not actually willing to act. So as an active parent, I felt on the whole that we were able to express our concerns to the staff.

It must be noted that the three parents who were involved in their parent committees were all native English speakers, third-level educated and married to a native Irish person. It could be argued that they were in a more privileged position due to their higher level of cultural capital, relative to other immigrant parents in the sample from lower socioeconomic and less educated backgrounds. Further to this point, one key person, who worked as a refugee resettlement officer, highlighted that not all immigrant parents have the same opportunities to participate in parent councils:

Parents need to be supported to become involved in parent councils in school. But that would have to happen with a buddy system not, “Oh anybody is welcome to join the parent council”, because that doesn’t work. Parents have to be supported in a mentored way and until we support parents to participate in things like parent councils ... but in order for them to do that, they have to be supported. English is not the real barrier here. We need to start understanding that until you support parents in decision-making spaces, you are not going to have real integration.

A representative of the Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council added to these remarks by arguing that the intercultural school should provide more outreach facilities for immigrant parents:

Schools should do more to equip parents with the knowledge and skills they don't have. For example, teaching them the English language and maybe having a parenting class where they are informed about how parenting is done in the West.

One parent may have benefitted from such school-lead efforts to include immigrant parents on the parent council. Patryk, from Poland, expressed that he felt unsure as to whether his presence at such meetings would be welcomed:

I wouldn't feel comfortable [going to the parent association], because I don't know these people and I would have to just go there and do what? Discuss what? I don't know if I am welcome or not. Nobody really talks about it. People just come and collect their kids and go. But I'm not even sure how this works, because nobody approached me or mentioned to me about this.

Indeed, the asylum seeker parents in Martin *et al.* (2018) reported feeling directly and indirectly excluded from participating in the parent association. The teachers and principals interviewed showed a lack of understanding of the direct provision system, which complicated their efforts to facilitate the integration of the immigrant mothers into the parent body of the school. Schools, therefore, have a role to play in supporting parental involvement in schools. Devine (2011) revealed that schools tended to only offer token parental engagement activities to immigrant parents, rather than providing them with meaningful opportunities to become engaged. It must also be noted that no immigrant parent was acting as a parental representative on the board of management. However, Conaty (2002) has argued that in real terms the parental influence on boards of management is limited, considering that training is rarely offered to parental

nominees and the fact that curriculum implementation, teaching and learning are generally not a matter of discussion for boards.

7.2.3 Parent-school communication

Epstein (2001) made it clear that schools and parents must work together to ensure full parental engagement, and listed communication as one of the six pillars of active parental involvement. Epstein (2001) argued that in order for home-school and school-home communication to be effective, there should be regular and open channels of communication between the school and the home. Therefore, trust and two-way communication are essential for successful parent-teacher relationships to flourish (Barnardos 2006; Katyal and Evers 2007; Addi-Racah and Ainhoren 2009; Muller 2009).

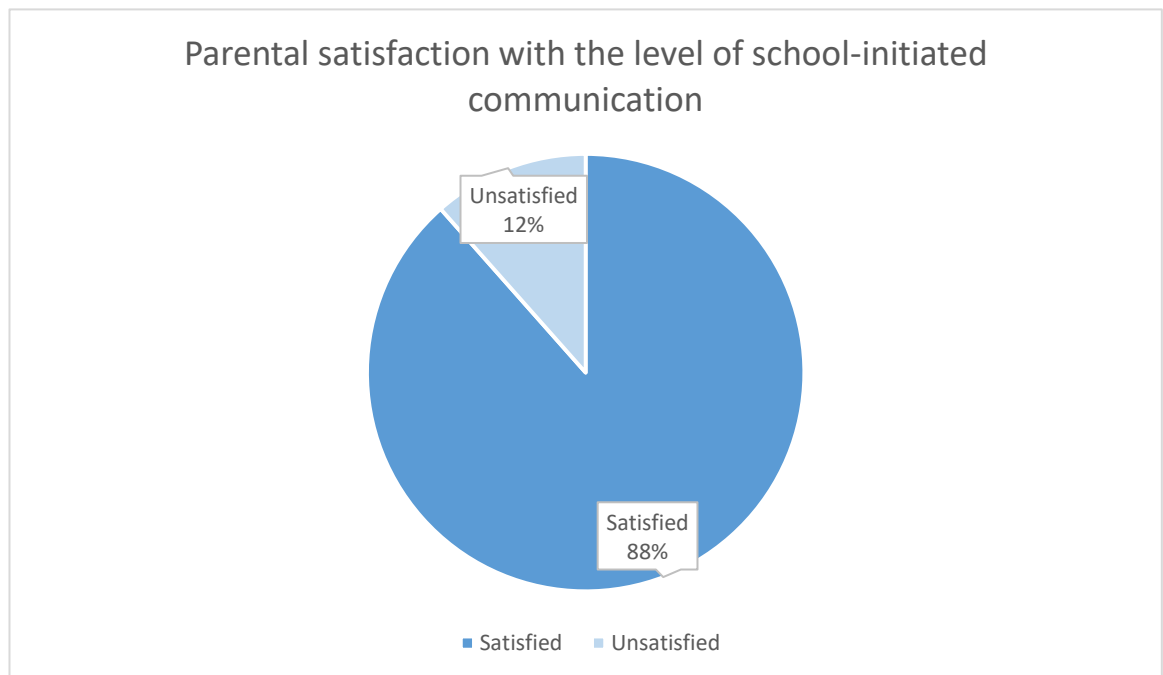


Figure 7.4: Degree of satisfaction with the amount of parent-teacher communication

The *Intercultural Education Guidelines* (NCCA 2005, p.26) states that parents should be provided with “opportunities for informal meetings of staff and parents and

establishing parent-teacher contact that offers opportunities to discuss and understand each other's points of view". Consistent with Hall *et al.* (2008), it appears that the immigrant parents in the present study were satisfied with the level of school-initiated communication. All of the immigrant parents reported that they were comfortable initiating contact with the school. Lisa, from Nigeria, explained that she usually communicates informally with her daughter's class teacher, but if she had a serious concern she would arrange an official meeting: "If I see them [the class teacher] I might ask them how my children are progressing just informally. But if there were any issues then I would contact them then." Sara, from The Philippines, also added that immigrant parents should not hesitate to contact the school if they have any problems or concerns: "They [immigrant parents] should have initiative to inquire, to ask the school, so not to be shy to go to the teacher to gather some information, to get some help."

Every parent interviewed declared that the staff in their child's school were approachable and accommodating of parents who wish to bring a concern to the attention of the school. Anne, from the UK, commented that she could arrange to speak to the teacher after school or communicate with her via email: "Our teacher is just fantastic, very approachable. I feel comfortable making contact with her." However, Patryk from Poland, complained that the tone of the school's written communication, in the form of monthly newsletter was disingenuous and made him feel disillusioned: "They give out newsletters to parents and they are like, "Oh hello! Welcome and we have had this fantastic week. We hope you enjoy your bank holiday", or whatever, but it is all fake." It appears that Patryk considered the faceless communication by the school to parents was less meaningful and did not serve to nurture trust within the home-school relationship dynamic.

A small number of parents flagged sparse communication between the school and parents as being problematic. Maryam, from Syria, explained how a miscommunication resulted in her son being withdrawn from Irish lessons:

Yeah, this school [my children attend] ... they have limited number of support teachers and I just discovered some years that one of my sons was taken to support in English during the Irish classes! And I didn't know for a while and I was just shocked, and I contacted the teacher to ask why he was taken out of the Irish classes ... and she said, "Sorry all I can do is I don't take him out," and I said, "Yeah, please do, because it will be double trouble". They usually send a letter saying that we can support this child if you agree but they never tell me how they are supporting him. And I always agree [without fully understanding what is involved].

Although all of the parents reported feeling comfortable approaching the school, most parents believed that they should only get actively involved if they had an issue or a concern. Only one parent mentioned approaching the school for a reason other than a concern she was experiencing. Lily, from Australia, said: "Especially their new teacher at the start of the school year, I would introduce myself to the teacher." She went on to explain that she would not contact the teacher regularly, unless it was a matter of concern: "So, if they are small things, if they are only small, then I wouldn't tend to go in to the teacher and talk about it." Therefore, regarding parent-teacher communication, the findings of this study fall in line with Martin *et al.* (2018), who noted that parent-initiated communication tended to be goal-directed and in reaction to a problem the parent faced.

This trend was found in Christie and Szorenyi's (2015) study of Eastern European parents in the British education system. Also consistent with Cremin *et al.* (2012) was the finding that most channels of communication between the school and the immigrant families was one-way – uni-directional from the school to the home. Nevertheless, it is clear that school culture and practice enabled the parents to feel empowered to contact

the school directly, with little evidence of what Laureau (1997) termed “self-exclusion”, in the sense of parents perceiving themselves as lacking the power to question or negotiate unfamiliar cultural and social settings. Therefore, the immigrant parents in this sample felt comfortable exercising their ability to initiate communication with the school.

7.3 Facilitators of parental involvement

Most immigrant parents reported being actively effectively involved in their children’s education. Through an examination of the parents’ narratives, it became apparent that there were a number of factors which facilitated their involvement in their children’s education. As previous sections have already detailed, and as the empirical literature supports, the parents’ value of education and their feeling of being personally responsible for supporting their child’s learning combined to promote parental involvement among the parents. Further environmental factors include the socioeconomic status of the parents, particularly concerning their ability to fund extra-curricular activities and purchase learning materials, as well as the time available for them to devote to their children (Crozier 2001; Lareau 2003; Campbell 2011; Benner *et al.* 2016; Holloway *et al.* 2016; Hemmerechts *et al.* 2017; Smyth 2018).

Another facilitator of parental involvement was the high level of parental self-efficacy among the sample. Parental self-efficacy is the extent to which a parent feels capable of adequately supporting their child with their education (Emerson *et al.* 2012). The parents were asked whether they felt their input was making a difference to their child’s learning. Every parent except one agreed that their efforts were rewarded. Zakir, from Pakistan, who helped his children every night with their homework, used his children’s test results as a barometer to gauge the effectiveness of his involvement: “Every week

10 out of 10, 20 out of 20 so that's why I'm satisfied ... a lot of the time I found my daughter student of the week so they have trophies from the mosque, from the school." Maryam, from Syria, was the only parent who felt that her efforts were not yielding the results she had hoped, because her children did not heed her words of encouragement for them to study: "Actually, this generation have no concentration. They are very easy to interrupt with their games and friends. It is really difficult [for them] to concentrate or to be forced to study." Although no statistical mapping of variables took place to establish the validity of the following claim, it is probable that the parents' high levels of efficacy contributed to their level of parental involvement (Sheldon 2002; Weiss *et al.* 2003).

Another possible facilitator of parental involvement was the fact that most of the parents ($n=18$) held fond memories of their experiences in primary school. Only a small proportion of parents stated that they had a mix of positive and negative memories of school ($n=4$). For example, Roza, a mother from Poland disclosed: "I had good friends and I liked learning, but I didn't like stress of exams and our teachers were very strict." Of the four parents who did not enjoy school, feeling pressure from exams was also listed as the primary reason why they did not enjoy school.

Studies have shown that a parent's childhood experiences of school influences their level of parental involvement. Bull *et al.* (2008) found that parents who had positive experiences of school were most likely to get involved. Mapp (2013) and Campbell (2011) revealed how a parent's negative schooling experience was more likely to make them mistrust school staff and feel unwelcome by school staff. In contrast with the findings of these studies, the four parents who told of negative childhood experiences in

school viewed education in a positive light and held high aspirations for their children's education.

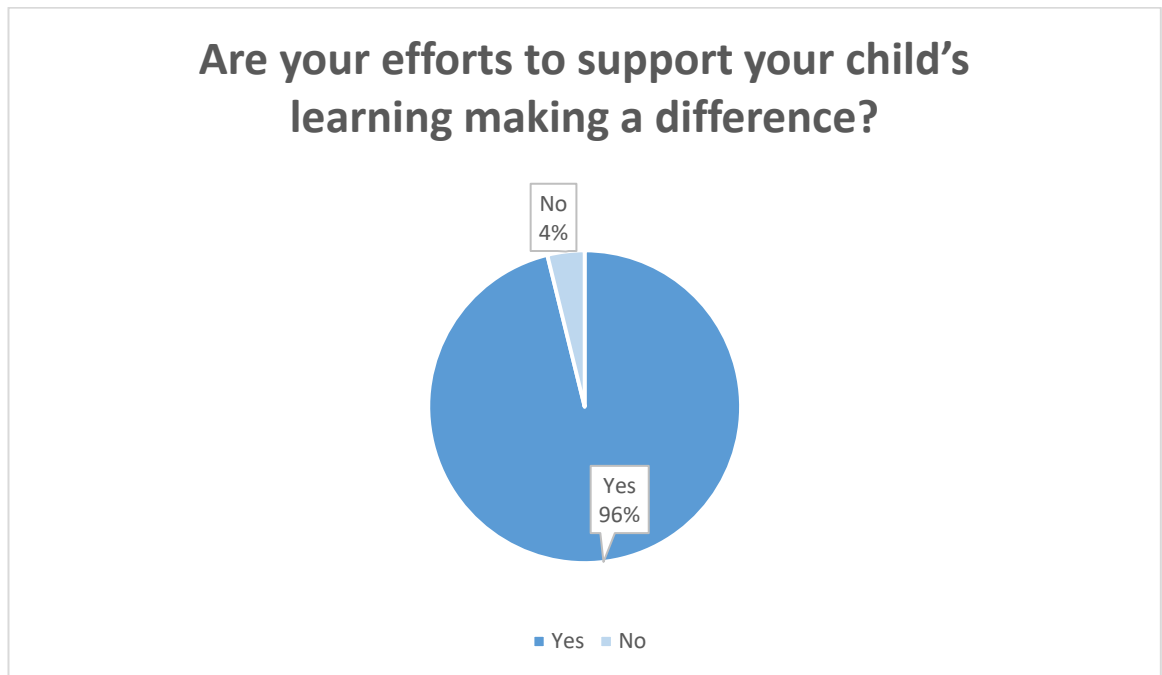


Figure 7.5: The level of parent self-efficacy

Another facilitator of parental engagement is school-lead efforts to invite, inspire and encourage parental involvement, both on a school level and at home. The *Intercultural Education Guidelines* (NCCA 2005, p.26) recommend that the school should invite immigrant parents “to become involved in extra-curricular activities or intercultural events’, and The National Strategy: Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life 2011-2020 (DES 2011) states that schools should support parents to take an active role in their children's education, by welcoming parents and encouraging them to get involved in school activities. Only six parents in the present study claimed that they received no support or encouragement from the school to get involved in their child's education. Ten parents said that the staff's availability to answer questions and provide information was enabling them to get involved in their child's education. Five parents received

information from the school in the form of pamphlets or newsletters. Eileen, from New Zealand, explained:

We get a homework sheet each week. So, it tells you what rhymes are covered during the week and the letters she was learning how to do. It tells you how to form the letter ... also the song of the week. So, this helps you get involved. Also, when her reading started we weren't sure if we had to get her to speed through the books or what she should do. For example, "This is a cow. The cow is walking." So, we weren't sure if we should be getting her to sound out the words or to look at the pictures for clues. So, we emailed the teacher and she emailed us back the next day telling us exactly what we should be doing.

Two parents said that the school provided them with parent classes. Sarah, from the Philippines, took advantage of the parenting groups and classes organised by her child's school: "Yeah, and also they have cooking, and they have speaking, coffee morning chat so that the parents can mingle." Three parents were given links to educational websites or information online. Lisa, from Nigeria, received a list of useful websites to help her to reinforce her children's learning at home:

Sometimes they give you a list of resources you can find online, like the names of websites you can use to support reading or maths. They tell us to go on this website, because it is good for the children and it will help them.

7.4 Barriers to parental involvement

A number of barriers to parental involvement were flagged in the present study, and only two parents said that they had experienced no barriers to parental involvement. Both of these parents possessed third-level qualifications, had professional jobs, were native English speakers, and had a native Irish spouse. All of the key people identified at least one barrier to parental involvement, though they also mentioned that immigrant parents were a heterogeneous group and that their experience of disadvantage varied greatly, depending on their migration status, socioeconomic status, and level of educational attainment. As one key person commented:

Immigrant parents are such a diverse group with very different levels of privilege and social disadvantage. Like, you have highly skilled expats who are working for multi-national organisations such as Google or the likes, or Pakistani doctors and then you also have Polish service industry workers or Somalian refugees, so you can't really generalise.

Some limiting factors were common to all parents, irrespective of ethnicity, such as a lack of school-initiated invitations to get involved, time, financial difficulties, transportation and problems securing childcare. Other obstacles to parental involvement were found to be arguably more pronounced, if not unique, to the immigrant parent sample, such as a lack of knowledge of the English and the Irish language; reduced access to family support; reduced understanding of the education system, and complications pertaining to their immigration status.

7.4.1 The language barrier to parental involvement

The most frequently identified barrier to parental involvement, from the perspectives of the parents' cohort and the key people, was the language barrier, a finding which chimes with the findings of a study conducted by Cotter and Kolawole (2015). Immigrant parents possess varying degrees of English language competency. Some parents could speak English well, because they had received English language tuition in school, as explained by a representative of the Cameroonian community in Ireland: "Most of the [Cameroonian] parents are fluent in English, because English is an official language in Cameroon and if you don't speak it at home, they teach it [English] in the schools." In contrast, other key people noted that some immigrant parents they work with lack basic language skills, as one community development officer commented: "You have people up to 10 years in this country who are still not capable of having a conversation in a Garda station, in a social welfare office, in a GP reception area".

Three participants in the immigrant parent cohort said that their English language competency was a barrier to them supporting their children's education. Beata, from Poland, said that her English language skills were not strong enough to enable her to support her daughter's learning: "My English not too good and when I came here I had no English at all. It was very hard work, very hard work. I used dictionary but it's very hard to help my daughter." Ashiq, from Sudan, also said that his English language skills were somewhat of a barrier to his ability to support his children. However, he took an active approach to overcome this language barrier by turning to technology: "if any [English] words difficult for me I use Google translate yeah".

Although Maryam had a good level of English, she observed that her lack of knowledge of the meanings of specific terms in English made it a challenge for her to explain some concepts to her children and this was especially the case with maths:

If I want to explain something in maths I have to explain it in Arabic and now they don't understand it, because you know there is a very specific language for maths and I'm not familiar with it. I will still be able to explain everything for them in maths but in my language and the problem is the language they don't understand me. They don't have that language. And so, every time I take really long time to explain it in English and in Arabic they don't understand it.

A key person, a refugee resettlement officer, also raised this point. She underlined the distinction between possessing a conversational level of English and an academic standard of English, and how this might impact on a parent's ability to support their child's learning:

You have parents who are learning English, but there is a huge difference between being able to hold a basic conversation in English and being able to help your child understand something like compound interest or the difference between "their", "they're" and "there".

For those parents who lack proficiency in the dominant language of the host country, everyday parental duties such as assisting their children with homework, monitoring their children's academic progress, reading school letters, and understanding the syllabus can pose a challenge (Russell and Granville 2005; Turney and Kao 2009; Ryan 2013; Takenoshita *et al.* 2014; Rahman and Azim 2015). The survey of Irish school principals by Hall *et al.* (2008) also identified the language barrier as being a significant challenge for school management in the Irish context.

The immigrant parents' reduced ability to communicate effectively in English was reported as a source of frustration for the parents since it prevented them from becoming more actively involved in their children's learning. A representative of the Darfur Solidarity Movement made the following statement:

They [the parents] cannot follow their children homework ... They don't know anything about what they [children] are doing. They rely on the school to keep the children on track and reach something ... So, if the child comes back from school and if you ask him, "What they give you, what they teach you?", but they [parents] can't help children with nothing ... This language stops them from being able to check their [children's] homework and they don't know what the teacher is writing on the diary book.

In a similar vein to Martin *et al.* (2018), there was some evidence of a lack of empathy on behalf of school staff for the difficulties parents with poor English language skills face in their attempts to support their children's education. This is despite the fact that both the Intercultural Education Guidelines (NCCA 2005) and the *English as an Additional Language in Irish Primary Schools: Guidelines for Teachers* (NCCA 2006) stress the importance of turning to the broader migrant parent body of the school to provide interpretation assistance for non-English speaking parents. A number of key people exposed the need to give more information to parents about the school system in

a language which was accessible to them. A representative of the Afghan Community in Ireland said that many families he represents lack information on the school system and how best to support their child's learning. He argued that the school should take responsibility for making such information available:

I think the school should give them more information. It would be important to have a small leaflet or booklet for the parents to know about the education system. Everything should come into a booklet and distribute this to the family. This would be the best thing for the family.

Although the *Intercultural Education Guidelines* (NCCA 2005, p.26) advises schools to develop "a school handbook" for immigrant parents, there was little evidence of schools implementing such advice. Another community support worker picked up on the lack of available information to parents and highlighted the need to provide such information in an accessible manner for parents:

Schools should have their programme and information about the school online and easily translated into whatever language is necessary, to give parents the information needed to be able to navigate the school system.

Lack of language skills can have other negative effects alongside a limited ability to support their child's learning in school. One family support worker made the case that if non-native English speakers do not feel confident in their language skills, they can become socially isolated from the other parents in their children's school: "When they don't speak English well they can't chat to the other mams at the school gate, for example."

A number of key people observed that a considerable amount of parents who are not proficient in English rely on their children to translate English into their native tongue. One family support worker told of how she: "See[s] the kids having to translate the English into their own language". One community development officer added: "[Some

Eastern European] parents come in and take their daughters and sons out of school where they have a hospital appointment in [names town] and they need them to translate for them.” He went on to voice concerns about the negative impact of this trend on family dynamics as the children take on more adult responsibilities:

When I am doing door to door and outreach work they [some Eastern European parents in a specific town] will tell me in broken English to “Come back 4 o’clock, come back 5 o’clock when Silvester is home from school.” So that the son or daughter is now the power broker in the house, they hold the balance of power, which is quite dangerous that a child should have that much power.

Other non-native English speakers drew on their social capital, in the form of their friends with stronger language skills, to help them overcome their communication difficulties, as one key person who worked in a charity remarked:

There was one lady we supported [whose child had a diagnosis of autism] and her English was very, very poor but she had a friend who could speak fluent English and she was able to help with the communication, so that was grand, that was perfect.

Similar trends were found in the study by Hall *et al.* (2008). Irish principals attempted to overcome the language barriers during parent-teacher meetings by inviting another person within the ethnic minority community to act as a translator. For the end-of-year school reports, Irish principals either asked another parent who was proficient in English to translate the report into the minority language (in just under one-third of instances) or asked the child to translate the report (1 in 6 schools). Interestingly, one key person, who represented the Lithuanian community, claimed that a lack of fluency in English is not a hindrance to some Lithuanians living in Ireland:

Most of the Lithuanian parents work in factories where there is no English language and there is no need at all because they know what to do and supervisors are Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian and they speak this language; English is barely used.

This point, however, may indicate a lack of integration and social bridging with the local Irish community (Gilmartin and Migge 2015). Nevertheless, for the most part, a deficit in English language skills was regarded as a barrier for non-native English speakers to become involved in their children's education. Furthermore, while difficulties associated with the English language were more commonly cited by the key people in this study, the immigrant parent cohort was more likely to identify their Irish language skills as being more problematic than their English language skills. In contrast to the three parents who cited their English language skills as being a barrier, eight parents said that their lack of knowledge of the Irish language prevented them from being unable to assist their child with their Irish homework. Patryk, from Poland, expressed feeling helpless from not being able to assist his daughter with her Irish homework:

Sometimes I see her, and she is sitting in front of the book and she is not too happy, and I will say, "Well what is this? Can I help you?" and she will say, "Ah this is Irish." And I'm like, "Ah okay."

Sara, from the Philippines, took time to help her sons prepare for their weekly spelling tests. Even though she cannot speak Irish, she found a creative way to overcome the language barrier:

The Gaelic language, I don't know that. But my son who is in 6th class, because every Friday they have tests for the spelling and I try my best to get away how to spell that Gaelic spelling. He made it if I test him, he can do that spelling. Because I write it down in my own spelling and I say it in his pronunciation, so he can understand that.

One issue closely linked to the level of language proficiency among parents was their own level of educational attainment. Some immigrant parents who do not have strong English language skills also do not have a high level of formal education. As a representative of the Polish community explained:

The majority of the people who come over here [to Ireland], they come from the state farms, from the East of Poland, areas which were neglected economically and culturally. So, people are doing manual work. They don't have the high school education, so they are employed in low-skilled manual jobs.

Another representative of the Congolese community spoke of how low levels of educational attainment acts as an additional obstacle to their attempts to support their children to succeed in school. He noted that this point was particularly true for mathematics:

And also, the parents, mostly they are not well educated. So, their problem is that they can't really speak English and also they lack education themselves, so they can't help the children. So, this is especially with maths, because they are not well educated so they can't help the kids and the kids become trapped somewhere.

Indeed, the possession of a university degree is a form of cultural capital (Sullivan 2002). Parents with less formal education are less likely to be able to draw on their educational background to help their children with their homework when needed. However, it must be disclosed that only two key people drew this positive correlation between English language skills and the parents' level of formal education. Furthermore, MacDonald (2013) observed that within the theoretical lens of Bourdieu, the process of acquiring English as an additional language is akin to a cultural accumulation strategy for non-native speakers. This suggests that less-educated immigrant parents might encounter more difficulties with respect to actualising their ethnic capital.

7.4.2 The financial barrier to parental involvement

All of the immigrant parents, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, wanted their children to do well in school. Although parents can make both non-monetary (encouragement and expectations) and monetary (extra tuition, extra-curricular activities) investments in their children's education (Agasisti *et al.* 2016) is the parents

with higher levels of economic capital who are the most able to do what “good parents” do in terms of supporting their children’s academic progress in school (Crosier 2001, p.10). Although the research indicates that poverty does not necessarily translate to low parental involvement, several key people argued that financial difficulties could place significant stress on immigrant parents and limit their level of parental involvement. One community development officer pointed out the income inequality which is present among immigrant families living in Ireland:

You can have ambassadors, highly paid medical doctors and consultants, wealthy Pakistani businessmen who own a string of restaurants on one side, and on the other side you can have others trying to live on under €20 a week on direct provision, with no right to employment.

The cost of school uniforms, schoolbooks and school contributions all add up, as a representative of the Gambian community in Ireland highlighted:

I heard parents had to spend as much as €120 to buy a uniform. Most families feel under pressure to pay the voluntary contribution ... it is expensive to pay for all extra classes like swimming or school trips.

According to one family support worker, sometimes parents are not aware that there they may be eligible for government assistance to cope with back-to-school costs, thus suggesting that certain immigrant parents might lack some cultural and social capital, in terms of knowing how the welfare system in Ireland works:

A lot of them don’t have awareness of what they are entitled to. I’ve heard of families who would have qualified for the back-to-school allowance, but because they didn’t know about it, or didn’t know how to claim it, they either applied for it too late and didn’t get it or they didn’t apply for it at all.

Other times, parents can be unaware that such contributions are voluntary, as mentioned by another family support worker: “Well, a lot of parents feel pressured by the

voluntary donation and they feel like they have to pay it even if they can't afford it.”

Zakir, who lives in direct provision, also struggled to make ends meet with regards to back-to-school costs and also felt pressure to pay the school's voluntary contributions.

However, his deep belief in divine providence helped to ease his stress:

One big problem I have is I have to pay a lot of money for books, uniform, lunches, tracksuit. I have to pay school €320 just for the next year like for arts and crafts and social welfare they give me €500 but I need to use this for the €320 cost and then the uniforms and all books, so it is not enough. Every year I give them €25 each child for swimming too. But thanks God, I'm not complaining, and I trust on my God and believe on my God. He will help me. He is a big planner and He will do something, because every year He will manage something and In shaa Allah [God willing] this year He will do something.

In another point which is related to the economic capital of parents, the lack of transportation was also flagged as a barrier to parental involvement by two parents.

Aziz, from Jordan, explained: “It was too much difficulty when we only had one car but now we both have a car so no longer any issue.” Another barrier which is related to the

family's income level is the amount of time they can afford to spend with their children.

Indeed, the lack of time, due to work commitments or study, was the second most common barrier to parental involvement.

Time constraints are a commonly cited obstacle to parental involvement and is a limiting factor that is not unique to immigrant parents (Goodall and Vorhaus 2011; Castro *et al.* 2015; Feugé *et al.* 2018; Hamlin and Flessa 2018). However, the relationship between economics and time was seen in the conversations with the immigrant parents. Maryam, from Syria, was one parent who felt that she lacked time to invest in monitoring her children's study. She spoke of the fortunate position of her friend, who was a stay-at-home mother and the wife of a doctor, whereas Maryam's husband worked in the UK and she was a full-time student herself, so had limited time:

Actually, one of the families which I told you moved to UK, that mother put herself completely to teach and support her children: she is reading to them, preparing for the exams with them, everything, everything like a traditional Syrian mother. The result is very good. I feel so jealous. I can't do this, because I don't have time because I am a student so all my time is for the research but my wife she is stay at home to look after the children for studying, for everything. She help them to see the homework, to see how to improve, how to read, how to write, how to improve their skills.

Tina, from South Africa, was also wary of constraints on her time and so decided to work part-time so that a lack of time would not be a barrier to her:

I work part-time to ensure that this [lack of time] is not an issue. I intentionally work part-time for this reason. So, I [work] two days a week they go to a childminder and one day a week they go to their grandmother, so they have that input as well. So, I try to have free time or for a chat or whatever.

It could be argued that Tina's economic middle-class privilege enabled her, unlike Maryam, to make the choice to work part-time. Both she and her husband held well-paid jobs, which afforded her the option of working part-time and, in turn, increased time she spent at home with her to involve him in concerted cultivation activities (Lareau 2003). However, less economically advantaged parents might not be able to reduce their contracted work hours, due to financial pressures on the household budget (Androff *et al.* 2011; Ceballo *et al.* 2014). Furthermore, the family's financial position may be different in the host country as they may lose the value of their educational qualifications or have a lesser command of the language in the host country thus limiting their work opportunities (Fernandez-Kelly and Portes 2008). This point further highlights the inter-changeability between the immigrant parent's economic and cultural capital reserves.

However, Patryk, from Poland, who disclosed that money pressures "is a big thing as a parent which stresses me most, the financial struggle every day", argued that his limited finances did not prevent him from being a good parent to his two daughters:

Some people think that, “Okay I’m going to give you money and you will be going to good schools and have a nice car when you are 18 or whatever”... [but I am] giving them affection, to read them book in the evening, to help them deal with their problems ... [I may] lack financially ... but I think what matters is to have a true connection with your child, just love, real love is what they need.

Indeed, there is evidence to support Patryk’s claims, because once social class is accounted for, parental involvement is shown to have an independent effect on student performance. In their longitudinal study of 800 three-year-olds in Northern Ireland across a five-year period, Melhuish *et al.* (2001) found that the cognitive development of pre-schooler was more closely related to their family’s home-learning environment than their socioeconomic status. Families who provided play and learning activities for their children, particularly those congruent with their pre-school facility, displayed the best cognitive development at age 7 years. While the home learning environment index was correlated to the mother’s education and socioeconomic status, the correlation was not particularly strong ($r=0.14$ and $r=0.20$ respectfully) and a number of mothers who scored highly on educational attainment and socioeconomic status were associated with a low home-learning environment index. Some homes with high socioeconomic status did not offer a high-quality learning environment for their children, whereas some families with a lower socioeconomic status provided a rich home-learning environment. This finding led the authors to conclude that what a parent does to stimulate the learning of their children in the home is more important than the parent’s socioeconomic status and their own level of formal education. Similar findings were also observed in a Spanish based study by Mora and Escardíbul (2018).

7.4.3 Immigration status and parental involvement

Although the research indicates that poverty does not necessarily translate to low parental involvement, several key people argued that financial difficulties can place significant stress on immigrant parents and limit their level of parental involvement. This point was raised quite consistently by key people who worked with families who were claiming asylum ($n=7$):

For asylum seekers they have to live on €19 and they don't have the right to work, it is difficult for them to meet the additional costs which can be hard on parents and isolating for the child as well.

Indeed, research has shown that the immigration status of the parents also influences the degree of parental involvement undertaken by immigrant parents. Russel and Granville's (2005) study of parental involvement among asylum seekers in Scotland found that some parents did not put themselves forward to volunteer in the school, because they believed that they did not have the same rights as UK citizen parents. Asylum seekers usually find themselves in poverty and may have problems with financial resources and tend to be housed in socially deprived areas (Russell and Granville 2005). A study of asylum seekers living in the Irish direct provision system (Martin *et al.* 2018) also found that the living conditions in the direct provision centres were not conducive to a suitable home-learning environment. Transportation costs and their meagre incomes put a considerable strain on the family.

Another migrant rights advocate pointed out that State immigration policies, particularly family reunification policy, can also impact negatively on asylum seekers and other non-EU immigrants' ability to get involved in their children's learning. They pointed

out that a lack of family support can also lead to financial difficulties, which can then reduced their inability to get actively involved in their children's education:

If the person wants to go out and get a job, you can't leave the children with the granny or you can't leave them with an aunt or uncle, because there is none [also living in Ireland]. And the laws for people outside of the EU makes it extremely hard for them to bring their families here.

In line with Salinas' (2013) study of Latina families in the US, several parents in the present study mentioned that the lack of family support hampered their attempts to become actively involved in their children's education. Family support is also a form of social capital (Bourdieu 1986), thus implying that perhaps some immigrant families had less social capital than native Irish families. Abdullah explained how his wife was at a loss during her pregnancy:

Our culture is we are looking after all children. As example, if I am not here for study, my father will look after my son or my daughter. I am looking after my brother daughter or son as well. Maybe I am suffering from that especially if my wife is pregnant. The last daughter, you know, she born in *City X*. My wife need help and I try to help her but if I help her then I cannot study well. This is one disadvantage. We need help especially from her mother.

Patryk, from Poland, pointed out that a lack of family support can be very stressful during difficult times in life. He explained how he had no family to rely on when his family had to move out of their privately rented home:

For example, there was a crisis with housing. Many people had to move out of their current rental accommodations because of rent increases. They couldn't afford that, they couldn't sustain that. So many people went unreported they didn't go through county councils, but I had to go through county councils, to declare that I have to become homeless at one stage. So, they helped me to secure the accommodation by giving me in a HAP scheme. But I know that at the same time many Irish people went through the same thing, but many went unreported, because they had family. They could go to their auntie or whatever. Or stay in their parents' house for a

few weeks. They [native Irish people with family members] wouldn't be so worried about this.

Occasionally, this lack of family support resulted in childcare problems, as Angela, from Germany, explains:

Well, when they were younger there was definitely a child care issue. Like even the parent association they met at 7 o'clock or 8 o'clock at night and in the evenings my partner was working so I was not going to pay a childminder for the evening to go there...[because] if you are from a foreign country and both parents have no family here, it is a bit harder, because you don't have a granny, an auntie, or whatever, where you can drop the children for a while. So, you would always have to pay for childminding and you would have to take that into consideration, so yeah.

Angela's comments also suggest a relationship between an immigrant's social capital and their economic capital. If she did have family members to rely on for childcare, she could save more money. Several key people also pointed out that reduced family support networks, gives rise to childcare problems, and in turn, economic strain for some immigrant families. One community development worker outlined:

They [immigrants] don't have that extended family structure which an Irish couple would have like a grandmother or aunt to drop the children ... I often hear of immigrant parents taking their children into their medical appointments, because they have nobody to take care of the children.

7.5 Conclusion

It was previously revealed that the immigrant parents shared a common habitus with respect to the value they placed on the education of their children and the aspirations which they held for their children's academic success. This chapter has noted that the degree of self-rated parental involvement was high, irrespective of the parents' ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender or educational background. However, consistent with the trends in the literature (Mattingly *et al.* 2002; Pomerantz *et al.* 2007; Snell *et al.* 2009), the parents were more involved in supporting their child at home, such as

offering encouragement, helping with homework, or involving them in extra-curricular activities, as opposed to getting involved at a school level, such as volunteering, attending school events, or getting involved in the parent council.

Some parents mentioned how their levels of parental involvement were facilitated by their child's school and by circumstantial factors. Some schools facilitated parental involvement by providing information on the school website, information evenings, and advice at parent-teacher meetings. Other environmental factors were at play to facilitate their participation, such as flexibility from employers to work part-time, having a spouse or partner to help with the workload, providing further evidence of the effect which economic, social and cultural capital plays in the degree of immigrant parent had when negotiating the sub-field of their child's primary school.

The key people also concurred that immigrant parents take an active interest in supporting their child's learning, but they highlighted how parents with lower levels of formal education, a lower command of the English language and with financial pressures were less able to help their children's with their academic work. This indicates an unequal distribution in cultural and economic capital among some immigrant parents which, in turn, generated barriers to parental involvement. On this point, it must be clarified that no statistical mapping of variables took place and that the assertions put forward in this chapter are purely observational.

Chapter 8: Integration and Discussion of Findings

8.0 Introduction

This concluding chapter ties together the findings of this study in an effort to provide a more complete picture of the experiences of immigrant parents within the Irish primary school system. This chapter begins by recapitulating the research findings to provide comprehensive answers to the four themes underpinning the research project. It then reflects upon and evaluates the strengths and limitations of the research. Finally, the chapter presents recommendations for future research, along with an overview of how the results might impact on current practice and policies in relation to migrant parent-school relationships.

8.1 Responding to the research questions

This study drew on the personal experiences and perspectives of immigrant parents in the Irish primary school system and extracted four main themes. The data obtained from the immigrant parent cohort and the key people sample was integrated under each theme and also served to provide answers to twelve of these research questions, which will be detailed in this section. The thirteenth research question relates to the policy implications arising from the research findings and is therefore addressed later in this chapter.

1. What motivated the participants to raise their families in Ireland?

Most of the immigrant parents who participated in this study were economic migrants and had settled in Ireland before their children were born. They tended to regard the quality of life in Ireland as superior to that of their country of origin and wanted their children to avail of a more favourable standard of living in Ireland. A number of parents cited the good international reputation of Ireland's education system as one of the

reasons which prompted them to raise their families in Ireland. Most of the parents reported feeling happy and settled in Ireland.

2. How do the immigrant families negotiate their identity within Irish society?

The conversations with the immigrant parents revealed that becoming a “new Irish” family is an idiosyncratic process which is very much shaped by the social bridges which the immigrant parents and children build with the native Irish community. Although the immigrant parents did not identify as Irish, most of their children possessed an assimilationist Irish identity which resulted in their family’s identity being “like a hybrid thing”. Their children’s exposure to Irish culture in Irish schools and the influence of their native Irish peers was understood to be the reason why the second-generation immigrant children felt Irish. However, most parents expressed the desire that their children would hold onto elements of their family’s cultural heritage. The importance of preserving the family’s native language was identified as fundamental towards this end.

However becoming a “new Irish” family was found to be a negotiation which was more difficult for some parents who originated from cultures which are culturally distant from Ireland. A number of the key people mentioned that parents from non-western and non-Christian countries can come under some strain as they adjust to the mores of life in Ireland and reconcile their children’s Irish cultural identities. The findings of this study provide a tentative suggestion that an immigrant parent’s acculturation experiences depends on how near their culture of origin is to Irish culture.

3. How much value do immigrant parents place on their children’s education?

The parents were found to highly value the education of their children and this finding was true irrespective of the parents’ cultural, socioeconomic or educational background.

4. What aspirations do the immigrant parents hold for their children's education?

The parents hold high aspirations for their children and firmly believe that their children will succeed in school.

5. What do immigrant parents think of the Irish primary school system?

The immigrant parent narratives revealed that they used their personal experiences of the school system in their country of origin as a frame of reference when appraising the quality of Irish primary schools. The overall impression was that the Irish education system was good but less academically challenging than the education system in their country of origin. Consistent with the findings in the literature, most immigrant parents preferred their children to undertake more regular standardised and classroom-based assessments. The Irish education system was also regarded as being fair, in the sense that the immigrant parents believed their children were accepted and treated with equality. They also believed that their children could achieve the same academic outcomes as indigenous children.

6. How knowledgeable are immigrant parents of the primary school system?

Although there was no control group of native Irish parents with which to compare the immigrant parents' knowledge, it can be contended that the immigrant parent sample, as a whole, lacked some technical information on the Irish primary school system. Interestingly, most immigrant parents believed that their lack of technical knowledge of the education system was not problematic, because such information was not essential. Furthermore, they felt confident about their ability to acquire such information, should the need arise. It is possible that this display of self-empowerment is due to the fact that the immigrant parent cohort was mostly college educated, had a good command of the English language and could draw on their middle-class habitus to help them decode the

unwritten social script of Irish schools and trade capital reserves where necessary to get ahead.

7. How do immigrant parents learn about the Irish education system?

Immigrant parents in Ireland learn about the nature, norms and expectations of the Irish education system from their every-day interactions as parents with the school management, staff and structures, and vicariously through their children. However, the parents' habitus and capital reserves also influences the extent to which they can understand the rules of the game that is school (Bathmaker *et al.* 2013). The parents spoke of how they drew on social capital resources in the form of other immigrant parents who had prior experience of Irish schools, as well as native Irish people, to expand their understanding of the primary school system in Ireland. Interestingly, while independent online information searches were listed as the information source of choice for most immigrant parents for any future information needs, very few immigrant parents had used the internet as their initial information source for Irish schools. Several key people and immigrant parents pointed out that there is a lack of accessible information on the Irish education system for immigrant parents, and that official governmental documents and school correspondence can often be written in inaccessible language for non-native English speakers. In line with Martin *et al.* (2018), the conversations with the key people pointed out that parents who are living in direct provision tend to be particularly vulnerable with respect to comprehending and engaging with the Irish primary school system.

8. How do immigrant parents make decisions about their children's school?

Although a few parents drew exclusively on cold evidence (Crozier 2000), by consulting the school websites, most parents drew on "grapevine knowledge" (Ball 2006, p.232) when selecting a school for their child, most parents drew on their social

capital by asking their personal contacts for school recommendations. Most schools were rated as good schools if the children attending them were happy. However, a small number of school recommendations were based on the competencies of school staff or the rapport that the school principal had with parents. No parent mentioned consulting Department of Education Inspectorate reports in the school selection process.

Almost all of the parents sent their children to a denominational school within their local catchment area. The issue of the school's ethos was highlighted both by the immigrant parent and key people samples. Given that 96% of primary schools in Ireland are owned and managed by a religious denomination, of which 90% are under the patronage of the Catholic Church (Department of Education 2016), it was expected that the lack of school choice would be flagged by non-Catholic and non-religious parents. Although many of the non-Catholic parents expressed that they would have opted for a nondenominational school if they had been given the choice, the non-Catholic parents expressed satisfaction with how their non-baptised children were included in the Catholic school community, and how the parents' wishes to exempt their children from religious education were respected. Some non-Catholic parents stated that they preferred to send their children to Catholic schools rather than non-denominational schools because they wished that their child attended a school with a religious (rather than a non-religious) ethos.

9. What is the nature and extent of immigrant parents' involvement in their children's education?

In the absence of a control group of native Irish parents with which to compare the immigrant parents' responses, the data revealed that the level of parental involvement among immigrant parents was high. Parental involvement was most likely to be home-

based and in the form of assistance with homework and the provision of moral support. Home-school communication tended to be school-initiated and generic, rather than being personalised information-sharing. Most parents, and some key people, perceived a lack of school-initiated invitations to encourage parental involvement. A number of key people stated that some immigrant parents do not know exactly how to get involved in a school level, which suggests that perhaps more explicit efforts need to be initiated by schools to invite school level parental involvement.

10. What are the perceived facilitators and barriers to quality parental involvement among immigrant parents?

A number of facilitators and barriers to parental involvement among immigrant parents were highlighted in this study. Internal protective factors included belief in the value of education, high parental efficacy, and a sense of personal responsibility to support their child's learning. Environmental factors, such as high socioeconomic status of the parents and school-led involvement initiatives also appeared to promote parental involvement. Low socioeconomic status of parents, as well as the parents' level of competency in English and Irish, were listed as the main barriers to parental involvement. A lack of knowledge of the Irish education system was also cited as a barrier to parental involvement. These findings were interpreted as evidence of how the economically middle-class immigrant parents were more capable of actualising their ethnic capital than parents with less financial leverage and fewer cultural capital resources.

11. How might the parents' own experiences and attitudes towards school influence their level of parental involvement?

Although no statistical tests were run to examine the relationship between the immigrant parents' educational values and their level of parental involvement, several key people and immigrant parents spoke of how their attitudes towards education prompted them to become actively involved in their children's education. It was interesting to note that, while the immigrant parents came from a variety of cultural backgrounds and had different economic means, they all placed a high value on the education of their children, largely because they associated a good education with social ascendancy and acquiring a well-paid job in the future. This finding led to the conclusion that the immigrant parents demonstrated a middle-class habitus with respect to education and possessed ethnic capital. Furthermore, while most of the immigrant parents spoke of positive childhood experiences of primary school, even those who had negative personal experiences of school were firmly committed to supporting their child's learning in Irish schools. More research is required to determine the exact relationship between parental belief systems and parental involvement practices.

12. Do the participants believe that their immigrant status impacts on parental involvement in their children's education?

Some parents believed that their immigrant status was a liability to them as parents, but the majority of the immigrant parent cohort maintained that their migrant status did not prevent them from actively supporting their child's education or limit their interactions with the primary school system. In contrast, all of the key people linked a parent's migrant status with increased barriers to parental involvement. This congruency in outlook may be due to the fact that the immigrant parent sample was largely well endowed in capital resources and most had a middle-class habitus, meaning that they were in a more privileged position than perhaps some of the other immigrant parents the key people represented.

8.2 Comparing immigrant parent and key people responses

A comparison of the responses from the immigrant parent and key people data sets reveals a number of interesting findings. Firstly, the samples were similar in size (immigrant parents $n=26$; key people $n=32$) and drawn from a diverse range of ethnic minority groups. Despite the considerable heterogeneity within and between both samples, there was a high degree of similarity among the responses received. The immigrant parent cohort and key people agreed on a number of points: (1) that education was treated as a top priority for immigrant parents; (2) that the immigrant parents had high aspirations for their children; (3) that immigrant parents are actively involved in supporting their children's learning; (4) immigrant parents are largely satisfied with the standard of learning taking place in Irish schools. This considerable corroboration between the responses of the immigrant parents and key people appears to be evidence of saturation, which means there can be more confidence in the accuracy of these research findings.

However, there was some divergence in terms of the extent to which the immigrant parent and the key people believed that migrant status resulted in disadvantage with regards to (1) navigating the school system and (2) the parent's ability to support their child's learning. The key people sample, as opposed to the immigrant parent sample, tended to consider migrant status to be a liability due to a general lack of insider information among migrant parents concerning the education system. Furthermore, more barriers to parental involvement were identified by the key people sample than by the immigrant parent cohort. A number of key people drew attention to a real presence, albeit small, of racial discrimination in Irish schools. The immigrant parents, on the other hand, did not report any personal experiences of racism.

The acculturation process among immigrant parents was viewed as being more problematic by the key people sample than by the immigrant parent sample, particularly with respect to immigrants from Islamic countries. Interestingly, out of a sample of 26 migrant parents, 11 parents identified as Muslim, representing 42% of the sample. The Muslim parents who participated in the research did not disclose any difficulty accepting the westernised outlook of their children. In fact, one Muslim parent told how he accepted his son's rejection of traditional Muslim garb in favour of western clothes. However, it must also be acknowledged that 10 of the Muslim parents sent their children to after-school classes in the local Mosque, which taught them how to read Arabic and recite the Holy Quran. This indicates that the Muslim parents were eager for their children to be exposed to, and formed in line with, Islamic teachings. Similarly, the key people highlighted the integrative function of schools with regards to influencing the identity of the second-generation migrant children. In contrast, nearly all of the immigrant parents viewed school as delivering the sole function of educational qualifications, rather than identity formation.

It could be argued that the divergence in the views of the immigrant parents and the key people raises more questions than answers. Firstly, the responses of the key people were more aligned with research carried out by Roder *et al.* (2014) and McGinnity *et al.* (2018) which observed that immigrants in Ireland are a highly heterogeneous group, particularly in relation to socioeconomic factors. Given that key people tended to work with more vulnerable immigrant groups, it is possible that their insights are broader, and hence possibly more accurate, than those of the parent sample. Only 3 out of 26 immigrant parents who participated in the present study did not complete their secondary level education, whereas 15 out of the 32 key people worked with immigrant parents who did not have much formal education. The immigrant parents were also

capable of expressing themselves through the English language whereas nearly all of the key people worked with or represented immigrant parents with poorer English language skills.

8.3 Limitations of the present research

A qualitative design was employed in the present research, which gives rise to a number of advantages and limitations. Qualitative research allows for the collection of rich data and enables an in-depth exploration of the participants' lived experiences, rendering it an appropriate approach to researching migrant groups (Chamberlayne *et al.* 2000; May 2011; Bell 2013). Although insightful data was obtained from the implementation of a qualitative research design, Kelle (2017) has noted that a solely qualitative study cannot provide a completely comprehensive answer to the research question. It is often contested that a mixed-methods design offers the most robust method of examining the research question. Therefore, the absence of a quantitative aspect to the present study could be regarded as a design flaw.

Given the highly heterogeneous nature of the chosen demographic of immigrant parents, the sample size for both the immigrant parent sample ($n=26$) and the key people sample ($n=32$) was small, and certainly not a nationally representative sample. It could also be argued that, due to budgetary restrictions, no translation service could be offered to non-English speaking parents and thus some parents' voices were excluded from the final sample. Furthermore, Epstein's (2001) work highlights the importance of valuing the perspectives of all stakeholders in the educational process, such as school principals, classroom teachers, school governors and the children themselves. Therefore, it could be claimed that the present study is limited by the omission of these perspectives because the inclusion of multiple perspectives may have better reflected the inter-dependent and inter-transactional nature of home-school relationships. Mindful

of this valid critique, it must be restated that the omission of school staff and migrant children from the data collection process was deliberate since the focus of the present study was a broad exploration of the lived experience of immigrant parents with the primary school system. It could also be argued that the chosen sample was limited by the absence of a control group of native Irish parents. Therefore, the findings of the present study must be interpreted with caution.

It also must be acknowledged that the data obtained was cross-sectional in nature. Considering that the purpose of the current research was to examine the immigrant parents' experiences of dealing with the primary school system, a process which occurs over a period of at least eight years of a child's life, and since longitudinal designs are capable of establishing sequences of events over a period of time, this approach could be a more effective means of answering the research question (Vogl *et al.* 2018). However, given the constraints with time and resources, a number of efforts were made to offset the limitations associated with the adopted cross-sectional design. Firstly, parents of children from a wide range of class levels were interviewed. Secondly, the use of semi-structured interviews provided parents with the opportunity to voice how their opinions, knowledge of, and experiences in, the education system might have changed over time.

The embodied positionality of the researcher would also give rise to bias within the research design and conceptual framework. The researcher exercised a degree of discretion in selecting which data segments were presented and omitted in the results section. This selection process may have resulted in more opportunities for bias. It is also likely that the differences in cultural and linguistic background between the researcher and the migrant parent sample resulted in the researcher arriving at ungrounded assumptions (Stanley 2008). However, the anonymity of each participant

may have offset the confounding effect of social desirability bias on the research findings (Dodou and De Winter 2014).

8.4 Implications of the current research

8.4.1 Recommendations for future research

The present research raises a number of points worthy of further investigation. Firstly, this study only examined whether immigrant parents perceived themselves as being disadvantaged relative to Irish parents and did not objectively examine whether real differences in experiences and outcomes exist between native and immigrant parents. While most immigrant parents' experiences of the primary school system were positive, discontent among immigrant parents was more likely to emerge when (1) their child was attending a denominational school setting which was different from the migrant family's religious faith; (2) when their child was in need of, but not receiving extra learning supports; or (3) when the parent had poor English language skills. Perhaps with the exception of language skills, it is likely that indigenous Irish families experience similar frustrations with regards to the denominational nature of the Irish education system and with the allocation of learning supports for children with additional learning needs (Frawley *et al.* 2015; O'Toole 2015; Rose *et al.* 2017; Banks and McCoy 2018; Darmody and Smyth 2018). Furthermore, future research can ascertain whether native Irish parents are more capable of accessing such learning supports for their children or securing a school place for their child in a school with their preferred ethos.

Furthermore, while it is clear that all migrant parents in this study had high aspirations for their children and wanted them to succeed in school, more rigorous study is necessary to determine whether the immigrant parents have different dispositions, personal resources and skills to native Irish parents which are necessary to positively impact their children's academic progress in school. On a related matter, further

investigation is also warranted into the divergence of opinion of the key people and the key people in relation to the effect of migrant status on the nature of immigrant parental involvement.

This study revealed that most immigrant parents were in favour of regular in-class assessments and the monitoring of student progress, with some parents expressing concern that the Irish education system was lacking in academic rigour. It also emerged that the parents found the Irish primary school system quite easy to comprehend and navigate. It would be interesting to note whether any differences might be observed with respect to the secondary school system, considering its relatively higher-stakes climate and additional challenges such as the student-lead selection of exam subjects. However, in line with previous research, it is likely that parents of secondary-school students would have lower levels of parental involvement overall, though further research is required to establish if this projection is accurate (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003).

With respect to parental involvement, the present study found immigrant parents were more likely to participate in home-based involvement. Several research studies have shown that parental willingness to get involved at a school level depends, on part, to the extent to which they feel welcomed by the school and whether trusting relationships were found (Hornby and Witte 2010). Although the parents in the present study reported positive attitudes towards the teaching staff and management in their children's school and felt valued as parents by the school, more research is required to establish exactly why the parents in this study did not feel invited or encouraged by the school to increase their level of school-based involvement. Russell and Granville (2005) found that migrant parents can often lack awareness of how they can get involved to support their child at a school level. While a number of parents in the present study agreed that

their child's school did not signpost ways in which they could get involved, more investigation is necessary to unpack their claims.

Although Irish primary schools are legally obliged to have parent associations, only five of the 26 parents interviewed were members of the parents association in their child's school. A lack of time was cited as the main reason why parents did not get involved but it was also apparent that the schools could do more to promote immigrant parents' involvement in parent committees. Martin *et al.* (2018) concluded similarly when they found that Irish primary school teachers and principals lacked an understanding of immigrant parents' circumstances and propagated a blaming culture towards migrant parents for their relatively limited involvement in the school. Furthermore, the five parents who were members of the parent council all called for the movement away from a fundraising function to one with a more governmental input. Parents need to feel real evidence that their opinions and feedback are valued (Goodall and Vorhaus 2011; Grayson 2013; See and Gorard 2013) and primary school management may need to consider how they could ensure that the voices of all parents are heard and represented. In addition, none of the immigrant parents in the present sample were acting as the parents' representative on the school's board of management. Therefore, future research is required to establish how exactly immigrant parents can be encouraged to become a more visible presence on parent councils and school boards of management.

Further to this point, although no data was obtained with regards to the number of parents who enrolled their children in D.E.I.S. schools, only one of the parents whose child did attend a D.E.I.S. school ($n=8$) referred to the mediating input of the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (DES 2016b). This parent reported how she availed of parent coffee mornings to socialise and network with other parents in the school and practice her spoken English. It is unclear whether the other seven parents were aware

that such parental outreach initiatives existed in their child's school. A more detailed and targeted examination of immigrant parents' experiences of D.E.I.S. schools, of which co-ordinated school level parental involvement supports exist, is warranted. It would also be insightful to harbour the perspectives of the Home School Community Liaison Officer with respect to their experiences promoting home-school partnerships among ethnic minority families within the school community. Future research is required to ascertain what other strategies could be employed by the school to increase school-level involvement among immigrant parents.

8.4.2 Recommendations for practice

Jamieson (2011) draws attention to the need to consider the political implications of research within the social sciences. Several calls were made by the participants to increase school choice and provide more fairness and transparency with respect to school enrolment policies. This study commends policy changes that are already taking place at a governmental level regarding fair school admissions and the promotion of the divesting of denominational patronage (DES 2016c). While acknowledging that the immigrant parents who participated in this study were complimentary about the efforts made by their children's denominational school to provide an inclusive learning environment, it must be acknowledged that there is also much evidence to the contrary (Irish Times 2018b). This study joins Coolahan and Hussey (2012) and Mannion (2016) in advocating for the divesting of school patronage so that parents are guaranteed their legislative right to educate their child in line with their personal belief, under the Education Act (1998) and Equal Status Act (2000). From a separate legal perspective, it also emerged that immigrant parents equate Irish nationality with Irish identity. A child's citizenship was closely linked to whether or not their parents perceived them to have an Irish identity. The question of how this squares with second-generation migrant

children not having citizenship due to the asylum process is in need of further investigation from a policy and legislative standpoint.

Although it was not the intention of the present study to evaluate the implementation of the Intercultural education guidelines (NCCA 2005), the research found some evidence to suggest that, at least from the immigrant parents' perspective, the guidelines were not being fully implemented in the schools. Several other studies drew similar conclusions and maintained that, while the Intercultural Education Guidelines were well-intentioned and evidenced-based, they were poorly implemented in schools. McGorman and Sugrue (2007) pointed out that while every teacher received a copy of these guidelines, no training was provided for them on how they should be implemented. Therefore, McGorman and Sugrue (2007) reason that school management and staff may not have been adequately equipped with the necessary continuous professional development to implement the guidelines.

Nowlan (2008) concluded that the implementation of the intercultural guidelines were de facto assimilationist in practice and only offered a superficial acknowledgement of "other" cultures, rather than a genuine celebration of them. McGorman and Sugrue (2007) concurred that there was evidence of a them-versus-us narrative in the publication itself. Martin *et al.* (2016) also took issue with the Intercultural education guideline's (NCCA 2005) failure to recognise the diversity of categories among immigrant students, particularly with respect to asylum seekers. The findings of the present study add to these calls for schools to reassess their intercultural education policy and to consider how effectively the evidence-based best practice recommendations are being implemented.

The immigrant parents' voices combine to suggest that Irish primary schools have been successful in creating a school culture that is at least welcoming of immigrant parents. However, consistent with the literature, home-based involvement was the most popular form of parental involvement and there was little evidence of schools encouraging parents to "take their place" in the education of their children alongside schools, with power and agenda-setting being shared and mutually determined (Pushor and Ruitenberg 2005, p.12). Although the research findings presented in this study suggest a desire among immigrant parents to get involved in their children's education, this study revealed a lack of "partnership" between the migrant parents and the school, with little evidence of "involving parents in decision-making" at a school level (Epstein 2001, p.45).

Although there tends to be a natural inclination for families to take an interest in their child's learning, parent-school partnerships tend not to "just happen" organically and therefore, it should not be viewed by schools and policy-makers as an add-on a random occurrence. Attention needs to be given to Riley's (2009) statement that positive relationships between parents and school management is – as with any relationship – springs from trust and are nurtured through the sharing of information and knowledge. Thus, parental involvement needs to be systemic, in the sense that it is purposefully designed and factored into whole school plans (Pomerantz *et al.* 2007; Jeynes, 2012). It needs to be embedded into school support structures and accompanied with the professional development of staff.

Treating parents as equal partners in their children's education is noble in theory, but schools need to establish how they define the parents' role and communicate their expectations of this role. Therefore, this study argues that schools should do more to harvest the immigrant parents' energy and enthusiasm for the mutual benefit of the

school and the home, within a home-school partnership dynamic. It has been argued that there is a danger of schools only offering parents the opportunity to get involved in a practical sense, such as accompanying students on school trips or volunteering in the school library. This means that only parents who are available can benefit from knowing “how school works”. However, the typical mindset of asking what must “be done” to involve parents is misguided (INTO 2010, p.26). Schools need to focus on the process of building dialogue between parents and teachers, rather than rigidly fixating on the roles and responsibilities of each party. This commitment to home-school partnerships must be embedded into the ethos and schedule of the school.

It is important to consider the heterogeneity of needs and circumstances among immigrant parents when selecting parental involvement initiatives. Each family has its own unique set of needs, and as this study revealed, varying degrees of capital at their disposal. Auerbach (2007) pointed out that home-school partnership models often have an assumed consensus and cooperation of parents as a “social fact” (p.251), and may not take into account social inequalities, or parents with alternative understandings of their roles in their children’s education process. Campbell (2011) has written about the importance of school leaders being sensitive to, and non-judgemental about, parents who are reluctant to get involved, and has suggested that school leaders should explore the reasons for this reluctance, and consider how the school can facilitate them to feel more secure about working together in a partnership. For school management, this may require a shift in thinking from seeing their role as working on behalf of parents to one in which they work in partnership with parents (Bojuwoye 2009).

Therefore, the system must be responsive to those needs and make concrete efforts to build positive relationships with families within the community (Harris and Goodall 2008; Campbell 2011). Different cultural and ethnic groups may have varying

interpretations of what appropriate parental involvement looks like. Demo and Cox (2000) criticise the tendency to approach the subject of ethnic minorities in education with a deficit model that focuses on the problems rather than the strengths and also assumes that some parenting practices are superior to others. For this reason, there have been calls to make parent-school contacts culturally sensitive and aware (Patrikakou 2008). Developing successful home-school partnerships requires time and there must be a commitment on a school policy level to plan for, resource and review the growth of this relationship.

Although the immigrant parent cohort claimed that they felt empowered as parents, when liaising with school staff and with the primary school system at large, it became apparent that the school could provide the parents with user-friendly information. The key people called for the introduction of an information booklet for immigrant parents that clearly and concisely explain the policies of the school, the school's expectations of the role of parents, and advice on how parents can best support their children in the context of the Irish education system. The literature is also clear on the importance of communication between the school and parents. However, most parents in the sample felt that the annual parent-teacher conferences were insufficient and would prefer more regular notifications about how their child is progressing in school, as well as being provided with information on how best to support them. It also emerged that there may have been a lack of understanding of the difficulties that families face due to the amount of assumed knowledge in Irish schools which immigrant parents may not be familiar with. This is an area worthy of consideration for school management going forward.

8.5 Contribution to research

This study contributes to the literature by offering fresh insights into the lived experiences, choices and decisions of immigrant parents in the Irish primary school

system. The findings of this study were largely consistent with previous studies and thus provide further validation of the reported experiences of immigrant parents in Ireland contained in the studies conducted by Cotter and Kolawole (2015) and Martin *et al.* (2018). As previously stated by Roder *et al.* (2014) with respect to migrant families in Ireland, and Tam *et al.* (2017) with respect to immigrant families at large, such families are a diverse demographic that vary in terms of their ethnic and religious backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and social capital. This study affirms the heterogeneity of immigrant parents but suggests that while they vary largely in terms of demographics, their attitudes, aspirations for their children and commitment to parental involvement are nevertheless similar. The congruency observed among migrant parent orientations and value systems has given rise to the conclusion that immigrant parents in Ireland possess ethnic capital (Shah *et al.* 2010), irrespective of their ethnicity, educational background or financial status. The results from these studies uncover evidence to show that, although all of the parents were middle-class in their outlook and orientation towards education, the economically middle-class migrant parents were more capable of actualising this ethnic capital. This finding highlights an area of possible inequality of opportunity with respect to immigrant families in Ireland.

However, several findings that surfaced in the present study differed from those from other studies in the field. Firstly, this study reported a low incidence of racial discrimination in Irish primary schools. In contrast to Kennedy (2014), Cotter and Kolawole (2015) and Martin *et al.* (2018), the immigrant parent cohort stated that neither they nor their children were victims of racism. Despite their children being enrolled in White-majority schools, there were no reports of their child being the victim of racial bullying or feeling out of place. Some of the key people acknowledged the existence of racism but stressed that the incidence of such racism was extremely low.

This project examined whether immigrant parents feel empowered or marginalised within the Irish education system. Although most immigrant parents reported feeling empowered with regards to information finding and approaching school staff, the key people highlighted that parents with less education and competency in English were constrained in this respect. However, it was also noticed that immigrant parents' visibility in school was low, as their tendency to get involved at a school level or enter into home-school partnerships was limited. Consistent with the findings of Martin *et al.* (2018), the school culture was not conducive to propagating home-school partnerships. Therefore, this study joins Martin *et al.* (2018) in advocating for a shift in school culture to make room for the hearing immigrant parent voices and the promotion of school-based parental involvement practices. In summary, this study casts more light on the experiences of immigrant parents in the Irish primary school system and, in so doing, exposes a number of areas in need of further investigation, so that immigrant parents can be enabled to participate in parent-school partnerships and engage in more school-based involvement practices.

8.6 Concluding remarks

The scope of this study only allowed for a cursory exploration of the experiences and perspectives of immigrant parents with respect to the Irish primary school system. The question of how immigrant parents navigate the Irish education system was answered by exploring the personal narratives within the collective migrant experience. The findings indicated that, on the whole, immigrant parents had largely positive opinions of the education system. It was also revealed that the immigrant parents highly valued education and were committed to playing an active role in their children's primary school experience, with some being more empowered than others to execute these intentions. There was also evidence to suggest a cumulative disadvantage among certain

immigrant groups which gave rise to the conclusion that the experiences of immigrant parents with the education system is greatly mediated by their capital resources. However, the question of whether the parents' ethnic capital influences their children's educational outcomes remains to be solved.

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Appendix A – Participant Recruitment Email (School)

Subject: Participant Recruitment for M.A. Research Study

Dear _____,

My name is Claire Connaughton and I am currently completing an M.A. with the Department of Learning, Society and Religious Education in Mary Immaculate College under the supervision of Dr Angela Canny. My research will focus on the experiences of immigrant parents in the Irish primary school system and an examination of the level and nature of parent involvement in their child's education.

Since being granted ethical approval for my study by Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC), I can now begin the process of recruiting participants for my study.

I am writing to you to ask whether your school would be willing to distribute either an email or a letter among non-Irish parents inviting them to participate in this study.

For confidentiality and data protection, I am not asking you to supply me with the contact details of parents in your school. Rather, I am requesting that you might circulate the research invitations on my behalf.

I am attaching a participant information letter for your own information regarding the purpose and nature of my study.

If you grant my request, I can arrange for either the letters or the generic email to be sent to your school for distribution.

Thanking you for taking the time to consider my email and I look forward to hearing your decision on my request,

Claire Connaughton

Attachments: invitation to participate in research project (appendix B); participant information sheet (appendix C); and institutional consent form (appendix D).

Appendix B – Invitation Letter to Parents



Research Study on Non-Irish Parents' Experiences of the Irish Primary School System

Invitation to Participate in a Research Project

Dear Parent,

My name is Claire Connaughton and I am a postgraduate student in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. I am presently completing an MA by research in the Department of *Learning, Society and Religious Education* under the supervision of Dr Angela Canny. My research will focus on the experiences of immigrant parents in the Irish primary school system.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project. Participation in this research is voluntary but your time would be greatly appreciated and your experiences might help schools build better relationships with migrant parents in the future. Very little is presently known about the experiences of migrant parents in the Irish school system so your contribution to this research will be valued.

I am attaching a participant information sheet to this letter to enable you to understand more about my study and what exactly would be involved. I can also be contacted directly for more information. If you would like to participate in this study, **please register your interest by phone, text or email.**

My contact details are as follows:

Phone: (089) 4196363

Email: claire.connaughton@micstudent.mic.ul.ie

Thanking you,

Claire Connaughton

Appendix C – Participant Information Sheet (Parents)



Participant Information Sheet

What is the project about?

Most Irish classrooms are ethnically diverse places of learning. Some parents, who have been born and educated in another country, are experiencing the Irish education system for the first time. This study aims to chart immigrant parents' experiences of the Irish primary school system. It is hoped that the findings of this study will help inform policy in the area of parent-school partnerships among ethnic minority families living in Ireland.

Who is undertaking it?

My name is Claire Connaughton and I am a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am presently completing an MA by research in the Department of *Learning, Society and Religious Education* under the supervision of Dr Angela Canny. The current study will form part of my thesis.

Why is it being undertaken?

The objective of the study is to investigate the information sources non-Irish parents use to learn about the Irish education system and to examine their level of parental involvement in the primary school.

What are the benefits of this research?

It is hoped that the data gathered from participants will help schools become more inclusive for all parents.

Exactly what is involved for the participant (time, location, etc.)

The study will involve **three stages**. The first stage will involve a **questionnaire**. You will be asked to supply some background information on yourself including your country of origin, your employment status and your level of education. The questionnaire will also include a short survey to measure your level of involvement in your child's education. The second stage of the study will involve an **interview** with the researcher during which you will be asked questions about your experiences of being a parent in the Irish primary school system. It will take approximately forty-five minutes to complete. This interview will be conducted at a time and date which is convenient for you. The interview will be held in a café or hotel which is convenient for you or via telephone. The final stage of the research project will involve a **follow-up interview** where you will be asked to confirm or correct the researcher's interpretation of the information you provided. You will also have the opportunity to add any additional information to the data collected. This interview will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Right to withdraw

Your anonymity is assured and you are free to withdraw from the experiment at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

How will the information be used / disseminated?

The data from your questionnaire and interviews will be combined with that of the other participants in this study and used to form the results section of my thesis. Summary data only will appear in the thesis, individual participant data will not be shown.

How will confidentiality be kept?

All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. A random ID number will be generated for each participant and it is this number rather than the participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain their anonymity.

What will happen to the data after research has been completed?

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years.

Contact details:

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study my contact details are as follows:

Principal Investigators Name: Claire Connaughton

Principal Investigators E-mail Address: claire.connaughton@micstudent.mic.ul.ie

Principal Investigators Contact Number: (089) 4196363

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

MIREC Administrator

Mary Immaculate College

South Circular Road

Limerick

061-204980

mirec@mic.ul.ie

Appendix D - Institutional Consent Form

****The parents of sixth class pupils were initially invited to participate in the study. However, the participant eligibility criteria was later expanded to include all immigrant families of primary school age children due to a low response rate among parents of sixth class pupils.*



Research Study on Non-Irish Parents' Experiences of the Irish Primary School

Institutional Consent Form

Dear Principal,

This study will examine the experiences of immigrant parents with the Irish Primary School System. The principle researcher of this project is seeking permission to recruit foreign born parents of sixth class parents in your school to participate in this postgraduate research project. The participation of parents is entirely voluntary and they are entitled to withdraw from the study at any time and without explanation. The research data will be collected outside of the school. The school will only be accessed by the researcher for the purpose of distributing the research invitations to parents.

The anonymity of the school and any staff members who may be mentioned during data collection is assured. All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all participant data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years at which time it will be destroyed.

Please read the following statements before signing the consent form.

- I have read and understood the **Institutional Consent Form**.
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I am fully aware that the involvement of my school in this project is solely for the purposes of participant recruitment.
- I know that my permission to allow the distribution of research invitation letters among parents in my school is voluntary and that the participants in this project can withdraw from the study at any stage without giving any reason.
- I am aware that the results will be kept confidential.

Name (PRINTED):

Name (Signature):

Date:

Appendix E – Participant Recruitment Email (Key People)

Subject: Seeing Professional Perspectives for M.A. Research Study

Dear _____,

My name is Claire Connaughton and I am currently completing an M.A. with the Department of Learning, Society and Religious Education in Mary Immaculate College under the supervision of Dr Angela Canny. My research will focus on the experiences of immigrant parents in the Irish primary school system and an examination of the level and nature of parent involvement in their child's education.

I am seeking professionals and/or community leaders, who work with or represent immigrant parents in Ireland, to offer insights into the issues facing immigrant parents with respect to the Irish primary school system.

If you, or a colleague, might be in a position to volunteer your perspective(s), I would be delighted to invite you to participate in this research project.

I would also like to add that the anonymity of all participants and the organisation or group they represent will be guaranteed and a transcript of the interview will be provided to you, on request.

Thanking you for taking the time to consider my email and I look forward to hearing your decision on my request,

Claire Connaughton

Attachments: interview schedule for key people (appendix F); and participant information sheet (appendix G).

Appendix F – Interview Schedule (Key People)

Questions based on Airey, S. (1999) *Challenging voices: pathways to change*, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway: Sisters of Mercy Western Province, p. 216.

1. What role does your organisation play in the lives of migrant parents?
2. In your opinion, what are the main issues facing migrant parents in the Irish primary school system?
3. How adequately are the needs of migrant parents being addressed at present? Why?
4. How should these needs be addressed?
5. Who should be involved in addressing these needs?

Appendix G – Participant Information Sheet (Key People)



Participant Information Sheet

What is the project about?

Most Irish classrooms are ethnically diverse places of learning. Some parents, who have been born and educated in another country, are experiencing the Irish education system for the first time. This study aims to chart immigrant parents' experiences of the Irish primary school system. It is hoped that the findings of this study will help inform policy in the area of parent-school partnerships among ethnic minority families living in Ireland.

Who is undertaking it?

My name is Claire Connaughton and I am a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am presently completing an MA by research in the Department of *Learning, Society and Religious Education* under the supervision of Dr Angela Canny. The current study will form part of my thesis.

Why is it being undertaken?

The objective of the study is to investigate the information sources non-Irish parents use to learn about the Irish education system and to examine their level of parental involvement in the primary school.

What are the benefits of this research?

It is hoped that the data gathered from participants will help schools become more inclusive for all parents.

Exactly what is involved for the participant (time, location, etc.)

As a professional or community leader who works with or represents immigrant groups in Ireland, your perspective will offer some valuable insights into the experiences of immigrant parents with the Irish primary school system. You will be asked to share your insights anonymously in a tele-interview at a time and date which is convenient to you. The interview will comprise of five questions and will last approximately 10 minutes.

Right to withdraw

Your personal anonymity and the anonymity of the group and organisation you represent is assured and you are free to withdraw from the experiment at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

How will the information be used / disseminated?

The data from your questionnaire and interviews will be combined with that of the other participants in this study and used to form the results section of my thesis. Summary data only will appear in the thesis, individual participant data will not be shown.

How will confidentiality be kept?

All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. A random ID number will be generated for each participant and it is this number rather than the participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain their anonymity.

What will happen to the data after research has been completed?

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years.

Contact details:

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study my contact details are as follows:

Principal Investigators Name: Claire Connaughton

Principal Investigators E-mail Address: claire.connaughton@micstudent.mic.ul.ie

Principal Investigators Contact Number: (089) 4196363

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

MIREC Administrator

Mary Immaculate College

South Circular Road

Limerick

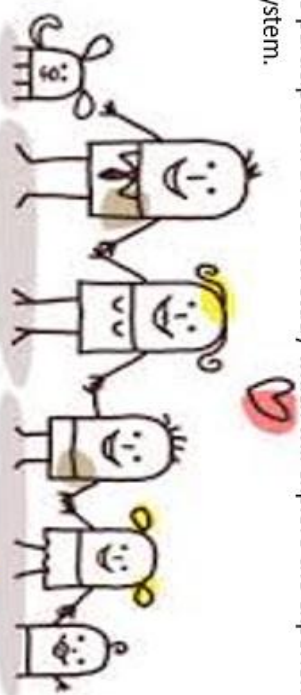
061-204980

mirec@mic.ul.ie

Appendix H – Recruitment Poster

Are you a parent, born and educated in a different country, with children attending school in Ireland?

If so, you are invited to participate in a research study which will explore the experiences of migrant parents in the Irish primary school system.



What's Involved?

- A telephone interview where you discuss your involvement in your child's learning.
- The interview will be totally anonymous, confidential and voluntary.

How Can I Participate?

- Please register your interest by contacting:
- Mobile: (089) 419 6363
 - Email: claire.connaughton@micstudent.mic.ul.ie

What's the Benefit?

- Currently little is known about the parent-school relationship among migrant parents in Ireland.
- The findings of this study could help inform school policy in the future and help make schools more inclusive of all parents.

Appendix I – Interview Schedule (Parents)

Immigration Experiences and Social Networks (Chaumba 2016)

1. What made you decide to raise a family in Ireland?
3. Tell me about the relationships you have developed with your neighbours and/or other members of the community.
4. Tell me about the groups or organizations that you participate in.
5. Do you have other family members here? If so, are they a support to you? If not, are there are disadvantages to this?
6. Do you have much contact with other members of your ethnic community living in Ireland? If so, has this been a support to you?
7. Have your personal contacts helped you in any way with your child's schooling? Have they given you advice?

Personal Experiences of Education (Crozier 2000; Perreira *et al.* 2006)

1. What were your experiences of education as a student?
3. Do you notice many similarities or differences between the education system you grew up in and the education system your child is currently experiencing?
4. Which system do you think is "better" and why?
5. What advice would you give to somebody educated outside of Ireland whose child was about to start junior infants?

Knowledge of the Irish School System and Sources of School Related Information (Crozier 2000)

1. If you wanted to find out more information about the Irish Education System, how would you look for such information?
2. If you felt your child was struggling in school, what steps would you take?

3. Do you know how to access extra learning support for your child?
4. Do you know how your child's is assessed in school?
5. What are your aspirations for your child?

Attitudes towards Parental Involvement in School (Crozier 2000; Perreira *et al.* 2006; Turney and Kao 2009; Perreira and Spees 2015)

1. Tell me about your child's experience of the primary school so far.
2. Who do you think is responsible for your child's learning: you, the school or both?
3. What did you do to help your child succeed in school?
4. Did the school do anything to help you become more involved in your child's learning?
5. Were there any barriers which prevented you from becoming more involved in your child's school, such as transportation problems, work commitment or time constraints?

Closing Question (Chaumba 2016)

1. Thank-you very much for your time and you have been very helpful. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share in order to help me understand the experiences of non-Irish parents in the Irish education system?

Appendix J – Demographic Questionnaire (Parents)

****This questionnaire was initially administered verbally but, in the interest of time saving, was switched to an online Google form and completed by the participant in advance of the telephone interview (see appendix I).*

Identification Number	
Gender (please circle)	Male Female
Marital Status (please circle)	Single Married Cohabiting Separated/divorced
Country of Origin	
Please circle the highest level of education you have received	Primary school education Some secondary education Completed secondary education Bachelor Degree Masters Degree PhD Degree
What language do you speak to your children at home	
How many years have you been resident in Ireland?	
What was your primary motivation for relocation to Ireland? (please circle the correct response)	Primarily for work Primarily to reunify with family Primarily for study Primarily to seek a better life Primarily to seek asylum
How many children do you have?	
How many of your children attend primary school?	

How many of your children attend secondary school?	
Type of housing (please circle the correct response)	Owner occupier Rented accommodation Local authority housing Other
Are you in receipt of a medical card? (please circle the correct response)	Yes No
What is your current employment status? (please circle the correct response)	Employed full time Employed part-time Unemployed Employed but on leave
If you have a partner, what is their current employment status? (please circle the correct response)	Employed full time Employed part-time Unemployed Employed but on leave
If employed, or on leave, please state your current occupation	
If you have a partner, please state their current occupation	
Did your child attend any other school prior to their present school? (please circle the correct response)	Yes No
Does your child attend a DEIS school?	Yes No I'm not sure
Does your child attend a Gaelscoil?	Yes No I'm not sure
Does your child have any special educational needs or learning difficulties?	Yes No I'm not sure
Does your child receive any additional learning support in school?	Yes No I'm not sure
How often do you read to your child at home?	Every night Most nights Sometimes Never
If you do read books, what language are the books written in?	
Do you take your child to the local library?	Every week Most weeks Sometimes Never
Do you think that your child's school is a good school?	Yes No I'm not sure
Do you think your child's school is preparing your child for the future?	Yes No I'm not sure
Do you have confidence that the staff in your child's school are doing a good job?	Yes No I'm not sure
Do you attend parent-teacher meetings?	Always Never Sometimes

Do you help your child with their homework?	Always	Never	Sometimes
	I did in the past but not anymore		
Do you ever phone the school to speak with the class teacher?	Regularly	Never	Sometimes
Do you ever stop to speak to the teacher after school?	Regularly Sometimes	Never	
Do you enjoy speaking to the class teacher?	Yes	No	It depends
Does the class teacher pay attention to your concerns or suggestions?	Always	Never	Sometimes
Do you think the teacher is interested in knowing you?	Yes	No	I'm not sure
Do you think the teacher cares about your child?	Yes	No	I'm not sure
How often do you attend special events at school such as school exhibitions or school concerts?	Always	Never	Sometimes
How often do you volunteer at the school?	Always	Never	Sometimes

Appendix K – Participant Consent Form



Research Study on Non-Irish Parents Experiences of the Irish Primary School

Participant Consent Form

Dear Participant,

The current study will examine the experiences of immigrant parents with the Irish Primary School System.

Details of what each task in the experiment involves are contained in the **participant instruction sheets**. The participant information sheet and instruction sheets should be read fully and carefully before consenting to take part in this research.

Your anonymity is assured and you are free to withdraw from the experiment at any time. All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all participant data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years at which time it will be destroyed.

Please read the following statements before signing the consent form.

- I have read and understood the **participant information sheet** and **participant instruction sheets**.
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I am fully aware of **all** of the procedures involving myself, and of any **risks and benefits** associated with the study.
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.
- I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.

Name (PRINTED):

Name (Signature):

Date:

Appendix L – Follow-Up Email to Participants

Subject: Transcript

Dear _____,

Thank you once again for participating in my research study.

I am following up on our interview by attaching the interview transcript to this email.

Please let me know if you want anything removed or changed.

I have changed your name to protect your anonymity.

Many thanks again for your co-operation and time,

Claire

Attachments: interview transcript