National College of Ireland

Project Submission Sheet

Student Name: Manjula Sathiyanarayanan……………………………………………………………

Student ID: X22247611……………………………………………………………………

Programme: Master of Arts in Educational Pratice   **Year:**   2025…………

Module: Dissertation Module………………………………………………………………

Lecturer: Dr. Conor Mellon……………………………………………………………
**Submission Due
Date:**   01/08/2025…………………………………………………………………

Project Title: Bridging Language and Learning: A case study exploring the inclusion
of multilingual EAL learners in an Irish primary school……………

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I hereby certify that the information contained in this (my submission) is information pertaining to research I conducted for this project. All information other than my own contribution will be fully referenced and listed in the relevant bibliography section at the rear of the project.
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Signature: **Manjula Sathiyanarayanan**……………………………………………

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AI Acknowledgement Supplement

Dissertation Module

Bridging Language and Learning: A case study exploring the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners in an Irish primary school

Your Name/Student Number	Course	Date
Manjula Sathiyanarayanan/x22247611	Master of Arts in Educational Practice	01/08/2025

This section is a supplement to the main assignment, to be used if AI was used in any capacity in the creation of your assignment; if you have queries about how to do this, please contact your lecturer. For an example of how to fill these sections out, please click here.

AI Acknowledgment

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Tool Name	Brief Description	Link to tool
Grammarly	Used for checking syntax, punctuation and grammar	https://www.grammarly.com/

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This section provides a more detailed description of how the AI tools were used in the assignment. It includes information about the prompts given to the AI tool, the responses received, and how these responses were utilized or modified in the assignment. **One table should be used for each tool used**.

Grammarly	
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This study will attempt to contribute insights about inclusive techniques, social inclusion approaches and curriculum supports for EAL learners in an Irish primary school.	Correctness. Correct the punctuation …approaches, and curriculum…

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Additional Evidence:

This study will attempt to contribute insights about inclusive techniques, social inclusion approaches and curriculum supports for EAL learners in an Irish primary school.

Additional Evidence:

[Place evidence here]

Bridging Language and Learning:

A case study exploring the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners in an Irish primary school

Manjula Sathiyanarayanan

22247611

Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning

Master of Arts in Educational Practice

2025

National College of Ireland

Research Students Declaration Form

National College of Ireland
(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

Name: Manjula Sathiyanarayanan

Student Number: 22247611

Degree for which thesis is submitted: Master of Arts in Educational Practice

Title of Thesis: Bridging Language and Learning:

A case study exploring the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners in an Irish primary school

Date: 31.07.25

Material submitted for award

A. I declare that this work submitted has been composed by myself. ☑

B. I declare that all verbatim extracts contained in the thesis have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged. ☑

C. I agree to my thesis being deposited in the NCI Library online open access repository NORMA. ☑

D. I declare that some material contained in *Chapter 2: Literature Review* was previously submitted as part of a submission for the award of Master of Arts in Educational Practice (Module: Contextual Studies; Assessment: Assignment 3). ☑

Signature of research student: *Manjula Sathiyanarayanan*

Date: 31.07.2025

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I would like to express my profound gratitude to my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Conor Mellon. He had given me on-time feedback, constant guidance and encouragement throughout my research that helped me stay focused and confident at all times. Dr. Conor's perception and compassion when I am having a hard time helped me to carry out my research steadily. I am privileged to have such a dedicated mentor who has supported me throughout this research process.

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Abstract

Ireland has become increasingly diverse over the past two decades, with a significant influx of migration of students moving in for educational opportunities, skilled professional employees in search of job opportunities and refugees escaping war who want to live in peace. Given this increased diversity, a major challenge now is providing equitable educational opportunities for all children. This research focuses on the inclusion of multilingual English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners in an Irish primary school. Although national policies have been amended to promote inclusion, the challenges in implementing these policies in the classroom prevail for EAL learners. This institutional case study explores how teachers include multilingual EAL learners, identifies the challenges to inclusion and analyses both school-level and national polices on teaching. There is a lack of research in Ireland to show what teachers and EAL learners experience in classrooms and that is the main rationale for this study. To gain comprehensive knowledge, a qualitative multi-method case study was implemented. Three data collection methods were used: document analysis (of school polices and curriculum plans), a detailed qualitative questionnaire (completed by 25 teachers) and classroom observations (in Junior Infants, Senior Infants, First Class and Second Class) across literacy, numeracy, arts and SPHE subjects. Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-step process. The findings show that Inclusive practices are being implemented through multimodal teaching, differentiated instruction, translanguaging practices, and peer learning. Teachers exhibited a strong commitment to inclusion despite limited school support. No formal training or differentiated assessment tools are evident. This study concludes that while teachers strive to implement inclusion, professional training, policy amendments, and resources/support staff are needed. These results provide insights that are valuable to policymakers and teachers aiming to enhance inclusion in an Irish primary school.

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List of Acronyms

BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DDG	Duck, Duck, Goose
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
EAL	English as an Additional Language
IEF	Inclusive Education Framework
MFL	Modern Foreign Languages
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
PE	Physical Education
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SET	Society for Education and Training
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces this study that explores the inclusion of multilingual EAL (English as an Additional Language) learners in an Irish primary school. This chapter begins with an overview of the background and rationale of the study, followed by the research aims. The chapter also explains the methodological framework underpinning the study, followed by the expected outcomes. Finally, the dissertation's structure is explained, providing a brief outline of each chapter in the research.

1.2 Background & Rationale

Ireland has faced increased immigration over the past two decades, which has resulted in multilingual classrooms in most primary schools (Devine, 2005; Darmody, 2011). According to Murtagh & Francis (2012), during the peak of the Celtic Tiger, there was a sharp increase in student intake with English as an additional language (EAL) in educational institutions. According to the Central Statistics Office (2022), more than 63000 other nationals (Including 28,000 Ukrainians) immigrated to Ireland during 2022, making it the highest number of people who immigrated to Ireland since 2007. This is a significant shift and the implications are important for the Irish education system, where many children entering primary schools are multilingual EAL learners. These learners often present schools with both opportunities and challenges since the schools aim to offer equitable education to everyone.

UNICEF (1989) states that every child has a right to receive education without any discrimination and children from minority communities have the right to inclusion within education systems. Many national policies in Ireland, such as the Education Act 1988, the Primary School Curriculum 1999, and the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, are designed to protect the rights of children to equitable education. Other polices, such as the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011–

2020), aim to improve the literacy and numeracy of all children, including EAL learners. The Inclusive Education Framework (2020), a special framework formed for children with diverse and special educational needs, supports multilingual EAL learners. The Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2021 was launched by the Irish Government to cater to the needs of migrants and their children. This strategy recommends several supports in various areas for multilingual learners, including language support, admission support and training for teachers in cultural awareness. There is a gap between policies and practices, despite Ireland's commitment to inclusion. According to Zhang (2022), despite these policies being in place, their implementation is fragmented due to inconsistencies and a lack of support.

According to Rodríguez-Izquierdo & Darmody (2017), EAL learners face linguistic, curriculum and social barriers in education in Ireland. Most schools try to implement inclusive practices, but it is not consistent due to the shortage of resources and a lack of CPD to address the needs of EAL learners (Lucas et al., 2008). Cummins (2021) suggest that curriculum structures and summative assessments are too rigid for multilingual EAL learners who are trying to develop a new language.

Another challenge can arise when schools concentrate on EAL learners, helping them to learn English, where there is a chance that, unintentionally, it may lead these learners to lose their mother tongue and cultural identity (Ó Laoire, 2012). According to Unsworth (2016), EAL learners' home languages are often undervalued or not taken into account in classroom practices due to a lack of time and resources. Lucas et al. (2018) suggest that multilingual learners possess valuable language fluency, but it is challenging for teachers to harness this in the learning process. This raises the question of how far the current pedagogies support the cultural inclusion of EAL learners.

As a multilingual individual and a teacher of EAL in an Irish primary school, I had a significant interest in this research topic for professional and personal reasons. There has been a sudden surge of multilingual EAL learners in my institution, where students in need of EAL support constitute nearly

40 percent of the school population. As an EAL teacher working with various multilingual learners, I observed them having difficulties participating fully in activities, even in small groups. Anecdotally, the main hindrance appeared to be around oral expression of their feelings and thoughts, caused by a lack of knowledge of English. Parents' involvement is also limited due to language barriers. I had, however, noticed that teachers use impactful, inclusive techniques such as visual cues, collaborative teaching, scaffolding and translanguaging to support their students' participation in classrooms. These factors kindled my interest in a deeper inquiry into what inclusion in practice truly means for multilingual EAL learners and how far it has been effectively implemented.

Regarding inclusive pedagogy, greater concentration is often given to learners with special educational needs, with less attention given to EAL learners (Kitching, 2011). The real-life experiences of EAL learners and the techniques used by teachers to support them are not documented adequately in the Irish context. According to Kitching (2011), EAL learners are often treated as a homogeneous group, but in reality, they possess different levels of English, they speak different languages and bring unique experiences to school.

1.3 Purpose of the Research Study

Cultural diversity in Ireland has increased significantly (Murphy & Sheridan, 2023), and inclusive pedagogy is a must for EAL learners (Ainscow, 2020). This research focuses on how teachers enhance inclusion in classrooms and how school helps to create an inclusive environment for these learners. According to Conteh (2015), the teacher's role is vital in making the classroom environment inclusive and imparting equitable education to everyone. Teachers' thoughts and perceptions are therefore pivotal for this research. According to Kitching (2011), research relating to the classroom experiences of teachers and multilingual EAL learners is limited. With the help of the knowledge of the teachers, this research will help us to better understand how EAL learners are included in classrooms. This research study focused on one Irish primary school with a high number of

multilingual EAL learners. It examines how policies are enacted into practice and how teachers try to implement inclusive pedagogies, as well as the challenges they face. This research will support teachers, policymakers and researchers by giving practical insights for inclusion in the whole school. With the growing number of multilingual EAL learners, inclusion should not be viewed as an option; it should be treated as a centralised approach in planning and designing the curriculum.

The fundamental aim of this study is to uncover the strategies and the challenges that teachers face in implementing inclusion for multilingual EAL Learners.

The research question I posed was:

How does an Irish primary school effectively support the inclusion of multilingual EAL Learners?

Some key concepts and sub-questions arose from the literature:

Q. No. 1. What strategies and resources do teachers employ to support the linguistic and social development of multilingual learners?

Q. No. 2. What challenges do teachers and multilingual learners face and how do they address these?

Q. No. 3. How does the wider school community effectively support the inclusion of multilingual learners?

Q. No. 4. How do local and national policy developments impact a school in effectively including multilingual learners?

1.4 Methodology

This research study uses a multi-method institutional case study approach. According to Yin (2018), case study designs are suitable for examining complex problems related to real-life scenarios and for gaining an in-depth knowledge of practices and perceptions. This institutional case study enables us to examine the inclusion of EAL learners in an Irish primary school, focusing on policies, pedagogies, and teachers' experiences. This study involved three data collection methods: document analysis, qualitative questionnaires and classroom observations.

Document analysis provides us with details relating to the school's policies and procedures on inclusion, thus enabling comparison between policies and practices (Asdal & Reinertsen, 2021). A qualitative questionnaire was administered to 25 teachers who responded to questions on various categories such as experiences, perceptions, techniques, challenges and policy frameworks relating to EAL inclusion. Classroom observations were carried out across all four classes (Junior Infants, Senior Infants, First Class and Second Class) during varied curriculum subject sessions. For inclusion to be beneficial, teachers' voices need to be heard and their practices seen. The observations help the researcher observe how differentiated and multimodal teaching techniques are applied in classrooms.

1.5 Outcomes

This study offers an opportunity to gain insights into the lived experiences of teachers and other factors that influence inclusion for multilingual EAL learners. This study will attempt to contribute insights about inclusive techniques, social inclusion approaches and curriculum supports for EAL learners in an Irish primary school. These results may help to improve teacher practices, policies of the school and CPD for instructors who work in culturally diverse classrooms.

Overall, this research will attempt to provide us with contextual information in relation to inclusion techniques used in an Irish primary school. It will help to connect teachers' practices and theoretical frameworks in regard to cultural and linguistic aspects of inclusion. The research will attempt to illuminate how teachers' thoughts and support impact the learning experiences of multilingual learners. These outcomes will help to bridge the gap between policies and practices and maintain the educational values, promoting equity in education for all learners.

1.6 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organised into six chapters that are interconnected with one another. Each chapter contributes to the analysis of how multilingual EAL learners are effectively included in an Irish primary school. The structure of the dissertation is illuminated by best practices in qualitative research reporting (Creswell & Poth, 2018), reflecting an explicit development from context to evaluation and implementation.

The first chapter introduces the research question, explains the background and rationale for the study. It also presents the main research question and sub-questions, together with a summary of the methodological approach. It also narrates the possible outcomes of the research's contribution to inclusive education.

The second chapter offers a critical review of literature relevant to the research study. This chapter explores the theoretical and conceptual meaning of inclusion and multilingualism. It also explores the national and international policies in relation to inclusion and presents empirical studies on teaching practices for inclusion of multilingual EAL learners. Finally, it highlights the significant research gaps relating to this study.

The third chapter narrates the methodological structure of the research. It explains the interpretivist paradigm, the reason for choosing a qualitative case study approach. It also describes the three data collection methods used, which are document analysis, qualitative questionnaire and classroom observations and discusses the thematic analysis completed with the help of Braun and Clarke's (2006) model. It includes reflections on trustworthiness, ethics and researcher positionality.

The fourth chapter presents the findings and discussions of the research across the six major themes derived from data analysis. All the themes are supported by evidence drawn from the document analysis of school policies and plans, qualitative questionnaires completed by teachers and classroom observations. These themes are also discussed in light of the literature review. The

discussion aspect analyses theoretical perspectives, past research and policy frameworks. This chapter is designed to interpret how inclusive pedagogies are manifested within the school and how these align with respective broader policy intentions.

The final chapter concludes the dissertation. It revisits the research questions, summarises key results and implications regarding policy, practice and future research. Recommendations are offered for schools, educators and policymakers who strive to enhance EAL inclusion.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the basis for exploring the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners in an Irish primary school. Irish primary schools are increasingly diversified due to a rise in multilingual EAL learners in classrooms. This research was prompted by the growing population of multilingual learners in classrooms across Ireland. The rationale for the study explained the cultural diversity in Irish primary schools and the importance of inclusive practices in classrooms. National and international policies commit to equitable access and participation for everyone, but it is difficult to implement in real-life scenarios. This chapter also included an outline of the methodological approach, possible outcomes of the study and structure of the dissertation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a critical analysis is presented of the literature relating to the inclusion of multilingual English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners. This literature review will examine both theoretical and contextual frameworks, concentrating on critical themes and discussions in this field. The literature review conceptualises inclusion and inclusive pedagogy, outlining various scholarly articles to comprehend how inclusion is implemented in present educational scenarios (Florian et al., 2016). The next concept is the theories underpinning inclusion for EAL. This chapter also explores language acquisition in multilingual EAL learners, followed by inclusive teaching strategies and challenges faced by teachers. It explores international and national policy frameworks that shape the inclusion of EAL learners. It reviews research on EAL and inclusion in Irish primary schools. Finally, the chapter concludes by identifying gaps in current literature.

2.2 Conceptualising Inclusion and Inclusive Pedagogy

Despite its widespread use in educational policy and practice, the concept of inclusion remains debatable (Winter & O'Raw, 2010). Booth & Ainscow (2000) suggest that inclusion has expanded from a limited focus on integrating children with additional needs to a broader aspect of embracing diverse learners across language, cultural, and social contexts. According to Florian et al. (2016), inclusion plays a pivotal role in promoting equity in education by addressing the diverse needs of multilingual students through the adoption of flexible and responsive teaching methods. Inclusion is the process by which all learners, regardless of their ability, language or cultural background, are given equal opportunities to participate in classrooms as opposed to integration, which is limited to diverse learners (UNESCO, 2009; Florian, 2015). From the above, we can infer that inclusion is a broader term where active involvement and meaningful participation are needed for multilingual EAL learners, or else they may be marginalised in one-size-fits-all classrooms. Inclusion is not simply

placing learners physically in a classroom, but creating an equitable learning environment that helps them achieve both academically and socially (Ainscow, 2020; Florian et al., 2016). According to Arnot et al. (2014), educators should change their mindset from thinking of diversity as a challenge to acknowledging it as a source for learning and teaching. According to Wei and Garcia (2022), successful inclusion requires that educational institutions create a warm classroom environment with various resources that help to meet the linguistic diversity needs.

In Ireland, the National Council for Special Education defines inclusion as a process of:

"addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners through enabling participation in learning, cultures, and communities; and removing barriers within and from education through the accommodation and provision of appropriate structures and arrangements to enable each learner to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her attendance at school" (Winter & O'Raw. 2010, p.39).

According to Florian (2015), inclusive pedagogy is a teaching technique that can be tailored for multilingual EAL learners, who may be excluded because of linguistic and cultural barriers. Inclusive pedagogy tries to overcome barriers to participation and helps to achieve progress for all learners (Florian & Spratt, 2013). Multilingual EAL learners have potential for rich language fluency and cultural diversity that should be acknowledged and respected (Cummins, 2000; García & Kleyn, 2016), but according to Conteh &Meier (2014), dominant monolingual classroom impedes this acceptance. Wei & Garcia (2022), suggest that the concept of translanguaging, where the students are encouraged to use their mother tongue in the classroom to support their academic achievement and language fluency is also one of the important inclusive pedagogy. Moonsamy et al. (2024) also mention that the inclusive approach concentrates on creating a classroom that caters to different skills and language needs instead of pointing to individual drawbacks.

Teachers' planning and perspectives significantly impact successful inclusive techniques in

classrooms (Gitschthaler et al., 2021; Swargiary, 2024). To make inclusive pedagogy effective, teachers' perceptions and expectations play a crucial role. While educators acknowledge linguistic diversity as an asset, they expand inclusive techniques that encourage language progress across the classroom environment (Devine, 2003; Lucas & Villegas, 2013), but Smyth et al (2012) indicate that many educators are not prepared to teach multilingual EAL learners due to a lack of training in inclusive pedagogies. Romero et al. (2024) narrates that insufficient institutional support for teachers to enhance their professional growth poses a significant challenge in implementing institutional practices for multilingual students. For inclusive pedagogy to be effective, educators play a pivotal role and teachers who have specific training will implement more effective teaching practices when it comes to multilingual children (Schleicher, 2016; Volknant & Ulla Licandro, 2024).

The research on inclusive pedagogy shows how differentiated and collaborative education is more important to create a sense of belonging among multilingual students in primary school classrooms (Mulyawati et al., 2022). According to Tomlinson (2022), teachers use differentiated instruction, another crucial element of inclusive pedagogy, to support multilingual learners in classrooms. Inclusive education is relational as well. Peer cooperation, scaffolding, and multimodal instructional materials that promote comprehension and participation among EAL students can all help to achieve differentiation (Lindner & Schwab, 2020; Thomas & Collier, 2002) and according to Halder & Squires (2023), to make inclusion more effective, partnerships with parents and society play an important role in enhancing the holistic learning of students.

Language acquisition is one of the important techniques in inclusive pedagogy. Acquisition of language is not a straightforward process and it differs significantly depending on an individual's background, social and emotional factors and prior knowledge (Cummins, 2000; Conteh, 2015). Leung (2006), suggests in his research that inclusion is unique and educators must know how to promote proficiency in the English language and support overall learning in diverse classrooms. It can

be achieved by a proper understanding of how a second language is acquired.

According to Banks (2019), the main aim of inclusion is to merge culturally responsive teaching techniques that acknowledge and influence students' language and cultural framework. Gay (2018) suggests that culturally responsive teaching technique helps educators move from surface-level inclusion to include learners' home language and cultural experiences in the curriculum to enhance learning practices to be more effective for multilingual EAL learners. Garcia & Kleyn (2016) argue techniques such as multilingual resources, translanguaging and creating lessons that carry cultural contexts of learners will promote inclusion. Lucas and Villegas (2013) also suggest that encouraging cultural contexts will help to create an equitable learning opportunity where all learners feel respected and there will be meaningful engagement with the curriculum.

Summarising, to include multilingual EAL learners in an Irish primary school requires an in-depth understanding of inclusive pedagogy that plays a crucial role in order to achieve an equitable classroom. Inclusive pedagogy respects cultural and linguistic diversity, enhances valuable participation, and overcomes structural challenges. Inclusive pedagogy helps educators to develop practices that are culturally responsive and enhance academic and social participation. Throughout the research, it is clear that inclusion is not merely placing the multilingual EAL learners into prevailing systems, but transforming educational practices so that diversified learners can adapt to the environment.

2.3 Theories Underpinning Inclusion for EAL

Certain important theories relating to EAL underpin effective teaching practices and inclusive teaching strategies. Vygotsky's work advocates the importance of sociocultural theory, which promotes social interaction and linguistic development (Vygotsky, 1978). His theory shows the importance of interactions among children, promoting language development in culturally diverse environments. In contemporary classrooms, educators employ scaffolding strategies, as advocated

by Vygotsky, by encouraging peer interaction and guidance from teachers to enhance language fluency (Duff, 2022). For this research, Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory plays a crucial part in analysing how multilingual EAL learners are included with the help of social interactions and cultural diversity in a classroom. This theory enables us to see how educator-learner and peer relationships promote language development and inclusion in a classroom.

Cummins's (1981) theory of language acquisition contains two important aspects, Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Both are crucial for multilingual EAL learners to understand and acquire a new language. According to Cummins (1981), EAL students should be proficient in both CALP and BICS, where BICS denotes everyday conversations that can be acquired quickly within 1-2 years and CALP denotes the usage of language in an academic context that will take a minimum of 5-7 years to develop. Usually, in a classroom, educators fail to differentiate between BICS and CALP, which leads to the notion that multilingual EAL learners are proficient in English. This assumption can make educators withdraw their support and it can become a hindrance for the learning process (Gibbons, 2015). According to Creese and Blackledge (2010), to implement effective inclusion that will enhance the development of CALP, as well as support learners' social interactions, BICS is needed. Educators should plan additional tasks that can integrate BICS and CALP. It can be achieved through group projects and visual aids. Educators can use language acquisition with the help of Cummins' framework to achieve an inclusive and equitable educational environment. In this project, this theory supports the research by emphasising the importance of development of both normal day-to-day communication (BICS) and deeper linguistic skills (CALP) to enhance multilingual learners participate in classrooms.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory is also useful in this research study. It shows the importance of the relationships between the child, school, family, and society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In his theory, five types of systems explain the relationship between the child and other

factors surrounding the child. The five systems are Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem and Chronosystem. This theory facilitates the schools' inclusion of families in children's learning, fostering communication between their school and home (Anderson et al., 2014). For our research study, we will particularly concentrate on the Mesosystem to analyse relationships between multilingual EAL learners' microsystem of school, teachers, friends and their close environment that will influence inclusion in classrooms.

Finally, the Inclusive Education Framework (IEF) is an important document providing both a theoretical and practical guideline that helps schools in enhancing inclusive educational environments in spite of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Black-Hawkins et al., 2022). According to Bourke & Mentis (2014), the main aim of IEF is to remove hurdles and encourage belonging among EAL students with their peers and Ainscow (2020) narrates that IEF perceives inclusion as a practice rather than a result, encouraging more flexible techniques that will help learners. Kefallinou et al. (2020) suggest that the key elements of IEF are customized teaching, joint teaching techniques among other staff and using materials relating to their own culture. According to Rose & Shevlin (2021), IEF also states the importance of a holistic approach in encouraging inclusive practices. IEF offers a flexible and practical guide that enables teachers to shape an inclusive environment that will acknowledge the needs of all learners, encouraging social inclusion and academic achievements as well. This is a broader framework that guides this research that displays a transparent structure to assess how supportive and equitable environments can be created for the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners.

2.4 Language Acquisition for Multilingual EAL Children

For multilingual children learning English is a complex process due to various cognitive, linguistic and social factors (Bialystok, 2017). Cummins (1979) framed the language acquisition theory, which explains that children who speak their mother tongue will find it easier to learn

another language. According to Genesee et al. (2021), multilingual children have a substantial advantage because they can differentiate the linguistic information between two language systems. Research studies show that multilingual children proficient in their home language will find learning English easier rather than treating it as a hindrance (Krashen, 1985; De Houwer, 2009). Thomas and Collier completed research from 1996 to 2001 in the USA, with children from kindergarten to twelfth grade and confirmed that bilingual children who are strong in their languages had achieved superior academic success in English (Thomas & Collier, 2002). Also, exposure to the English language in a classroom environment influences cognitive academic language proficiency in due time (Cummins, 2000). Learning a new language requires a significant cognitive mechanism that needs good memory function. Research studies exhibit that multilingual children have good cognitive ability, helping them to solve problems and acquire new languages easily (Bialystok & Barac, 2012; Koda, 2007). According to August & Shanahan (2010), there are certain advantages of being multilingual, but still, those children face certain challenges in acquiring the language due to the availability of exposure to English all the time and other social/linguistic barriers.

Social interactions influence language acquisition and scaffolding improves language development provided by peers, teachers and caregivers for multilingual children (Swain & Lapkin, 2005). Research studies show that the quality and quantity of input significantly impact linguistic learning for multilingual EAL students. According to Unsworth (2016), students who are influenced by rich language environments in educational institutions and at home acquire English knowledge more effectively. Language acquisition for multilingual children can be improved if parents participate in their linguistic fluency. Research studies show that parents should respect their home language and those multilingual children will positively impact acquiring fluency in English (Schwartz & Verschik, 2013).

2.5 The Role of Teachers and Inclusive Teaching Strategies

According to Cummins (2017) and Gibbons (2015), teachers should use feasible strategies such as vocabulary enhancement, comprehension, dialogue deliveries and other culturally responsive curricula to encourage multilingual children to learn English. Multilingual EAL children learn a new language using their cognitive, language and social factors. Teachers must recognise and support these children in all possible ways to enhance inclusion in classrooms. The research offers a range of effective teaching techniques that can enhance students' language fluency, peer integration and academic success in the school (Duff, 2022). A multifaceted approach is needed to incorporate inclusion in multilingual classrooms for the students to encourage participation, language fluency and academic achievements (Cummins, 2000; Wei & García, 2022). According to Conteh (2015) and Hammond (2001), research studies emphasize the importance of an inclusive framework that supports multilingual students while promoting equitable learning opportunities.

Differentiated instruction is a key component to achieving inclusion in classrooms. The literature demonstrates that it helps to modify the curriculum, methods and final process to meet the requirements of multilingual students (Tomlinson, 2014). In achieving success in a diversified classroom, differentiation in education is considered an important tool (Eikeland & Ohna, 2022). According to Linder and Schwab (2020), differentiated design stimulates the teaching and learning process with a comprehensive approach, and it provides fair educational practice for the participants. Similarly it was accepted in another research study, "In differentiated classrooms, teachers ensure that students compete against themselves as they grow and develop more than they compete against one another, always moving toward – and often beyond – designated content goals" (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 4).

Another typical strategy, as per the literature, is language scaffolding (Gibbons, 2015). Language scaffolding involves language support for multilingual students using visual aids and

technology devices (Luciana & Westerlund, 2022). The teachers can execute scaffolding by using flashcards, PowerPoint presentations and sentence starters to improve comprehension. Some other strategies are simple directions, conversations, storytelling, group projects, buddy pairing and peer mentoring. These strategies help the students to build their vocabulary gradually. The sociocultural theory of Vygotsky emphasises the importance of scaffolding as well, which helps students to achieve their understanding with correct supervision (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Gillies (2022), technology devices, such as language learning apps, play an important role in language scaffolding, and they will give students opportunities to practice oral communication.

Translanguaging allows students to exhibit their comprehension skills and create meaningful conversations by mixing multiple languages. It will help the brain work faster, making teaching much more manageable (Wei & García, 2022). Cummins (2019) states that translanguaging can be enhanced through peer help, dual-language materials and multicultural classroom displays. According to Cenoz and Gorter (2020), using their mother tongue will help students achieve the desired results fairly, improve their identity and enhance their flexible thinking ability.

Another important teaching strategy is the cooperative learning strategy, which is efficient in enhancing inclusion by recommending peer interaction and mutual critical thinking (Klang et al., 2020). Muñoz-Martínez et al. (2020) states that research emphasises that cooperative learning increases multilingual students' participation and morale in mainstream classrooms and Sharan (2023) also states that cooperative learning is a further technique espoused in the literature. Multilingual students can be encouraged to do more group-based games like puzzles, small science experiments, and social group projects to learn amicably and calmly, which will improve their language fluency and social skills (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Romero et al. (2024) also acknowledge that peer mentoring and classroom group projects to help multilingual students attain language fluency and social inclusion. The research demonstrates that it helps to obtain a meaningful

friendship among their classmates.

Another strategy, explicit language teaching, is important for inclusion and it gives systematic support to enhance vocabulary attainment, grammar and comprehension (Matthews, 2024). Aski et al. (2023) state that research studies emphasise the significance of both relevant context and explicit language instruction to enhance linguistic development among multilingual learners. Archer and Hughes (2011) argue that explicit language instruction will be attained through specific vocabulary lessons, sentence modelling and a linguistically rich environment in the classrooms. Another important teaching strategy for inclusion is culturally responsive teaching, which addresses inclusion for multilingual students by acknowledging cultural background in their learning process (Hammond, 2015; Howard, 2021; Guberina, 2023). Educators can create an inclusive educational environment in their classrooms by displaying culturally appropriate pictures in the classrooms, acknowledging different customs and combining multicultural resources (Dympna Devine, 2011; Foley et al., 2024).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) helps multilingual students achieve language fluency through flexible teaching techniques that address their language and cultural needs (Gordon et al., 2016). According to Rao et al. (2023), it has various techniques, such as scaffolding, different assessment options and multimodal teaching and communication that help multilingual students express their thoughts. Finally, technology-enhanced learning helps to enhance inclusion to a greater extent (Liu et al., 2017). There are numerous new technologies, such as interactive whiteboards and hi-tech projectors, which allow children to participate in learning with interest (Shadiev & Yang, 2020). Most Irish primary schools have started using these technologies in their classrooms that promote inclusion for all learners.

2.6 Challenges faced by teachers

Numerous studies mention the challenges faced by teachers in schools in supporting multilingual EAL learners in mainstream classroom environments (Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2006;

Lyons, 2010; Smyth et al., 2009; Murtagh and Francis, 2011). According to Loreman et al. (2010), despite many techniques available to educators, the literature claims that teachers face particular challenges in including multilingual students in mainstream classrooms. Garcia and Kleyn (2016) states that the main challenge comes from a language barrier, which stops these students from accessing the lessons and joining the classroom activities. Multilingual students have limited language fluency, which affects their comprehension and participation in the classroom, and teachers find it hard to communicate effectively with them due to their limited proficiency (Cummins, 2009).

The lack of training among teachers also poses problems in addressing the language needs of EAL students (Zhang, 2022). According to Arnaiz-Sánchez et al. (2023), "we can define barriers as all those contextual factors that hinder or limit full access to education and learning opportunities for children and young people. They appear concerning their interaction within different contexts: social, political, economic, institutional and cultural." (p. 2). Véliz et al. (2023) states that various difficulties educators face in mainstream classrooms when including multilingual children include understanding of language, adaptability of curriculum, and lack of training and institutional support.

A further challenge arises as primary schools follow a uniform curriculum and teachers may not be able to tailor it to suit multilingual learners due to inadequate resources (Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Schleppegrell, 2018). Therefore, educators find it difficult to balance the inclusion of students in the classroom and recognize their language and cultural identity. When teachers focus too much on language (English) fluency, it can decrease children's positivity, morale, and identity (Zhang, 2022). According to Markey et al. (2021), instructors can find it hard to devise culturally needed teaching techniques that recognize and influence classroom diversity. Limited resources and insufficient access to technological devices may exacerbate the challenges. Irish schools face limitations of resources that further heighten the inclusion of multilingual students in the mainstream classroom. Coleman (2022) states that due to a lack of support from schools, teachers handle the inclusion

challenges on their own. According to the Department of Education (2024), the forecast for the 2025 budget highlights that the Department of Education has made new provisions for an extra 768 special teachers and an extra 1600 special needs assistants (SNA) to help children in regular and special schools, and it may help multilingual students as well.

Finally, multilingual children often face difficulties due to standardized tests, which pose significant challenges to teachers (Solano-Flores, 2008). Leung and Lewkowicz (2006) state that educators may find it difficult to create substitute assessments that will help assess multilingual students' academic achievements and meet the educational requirements implemented by schools due to a lack of time and resources.

2.7 International and national policies regarding inclusion

Policies impact the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child drafts all the important policies regarding children.

According to United Nations (1989), Article 28 states, "Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and to achieve this right progressively and based on an equal opportunity, they shall, in particular, make primary education compulsory and available free to all" (p. 8).

According to United Nations (1989), Article 30 states "in those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her religion, or to use his or her language" (p. 9).

UNESCO, another international organization, also advocates inclusive education through its new Education 2030 Framework, where SDG 4 states: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UNESCO, 2016). From the above statements, we can see how UNESCO advocates inclusive education for everyone. UNESCO also

released a statement in 1994 called Salamanca, which advocates that all schools provide equal education to children irrespective of their physical, linguistic, cultural, or ethnic background (UNESCO, 1994).

In Ireland, many agencies have authored policies and procedures regarding inclusive education, including the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), National Council for Special Education (NCSE), OIDE, Department of Education, National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), and Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS). The Department of Education, in their Statement of Strategy (2023–2025), mentions in one of their clauses, "that schools continue to provide access to a high quality and inclusive education for children and young people arriving into Ireland, including those arriving from Ukraine and through international protection processes" (p. 14). Another policy document, *An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society – Policy Advice Paper on Special Schools and Classes,* concentrates mainly on inclusive practices. Even though it does not apply specifically to multilingual children, it states that inclusion in schools encourages diversity and provides a variety of curriculum needs for all learners (National Council for Special Education, 2024). This policy document stresses the importance of inclusive education for all children, despite their varied needs. It also advocates a Universal Design for learning approach that, in turn, helps EAL students through alternative teaching modes. It also encourages teachers to access continuous training programmes that will help them support students with various needs (National Council for Special Education, 2024).

The Department of Education released the Intercultural Educational Strategy 2010–2015, stating that all children who study in Ireland should "respect the diversity of values, beliefs, languages, and traditions in Irish society" (DES, 2010), which demonstrates an appreciation of diversity in schools. Another clause from the above document encourages students to be fluent in English or Irish. The NCCA plays a crucial role in designing the curriculum and ensure it inclusive and

satisfies the needs of multilingual children. The NCCA is streamlining the Primary Language Curriculum to embrace Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) for senior classes so that a balanced approach will build on children's prevailing communication and social perceptions (Assessment (NCCA), n.d.). NCCA has introduced this initiative because it is also a part of more considerable technique called *Languages Connect*, which will expand the radius of non-native languages taught in Irish schools (Special Educational Needs, 2023). Hopefully, the altered curriculum will be concluded by 2025, and they plan to implement it in schools starting September 2026, which will encourage a diversified mode of teaching in primary schools in Ireland.

2.8 Research on EAL and Inclusion in Irish Schools

Ireland's cultural and linguistic diversity in recent years has made Irish primary school classrooms more diverse and more multilingual learners are enrolled in schools. There are only a few articles on inclusion in Irish primary schools for multilingual EAL children, especially targeting students' and teachers' perspectives. There have been larger research studies, but most of the research concentrates on the broader themes of diversity, inclusion, and not the real-life scenarios of multilingual EAL learners (Smyth et al., 2009). Dhiorbháin (2020) mentions in his article how multilingual students performed well in Irish primary schools despite managing languages and cultural identity. According to Kitching (2011), classrooms have increased numbers of multilingual learners, but the institutions struggle to implement appropriate inclusive pedagogies. James and Carthy (2012) emphasise that more research is needed regarding cultural changes in Ireland and inclusive education.

There are adequate policies for inclusion in Ireland, but there is a lack of empirical studies (NCSE, 2009). The Department of Education's 2010 -2015 Intercultural Education strategy promotes diversity and encourages educators to create an inclusive environment, but the gap between policy and practices still prevails for multilingual EAL learners. Ireland follows the UN Convention on the

Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but there are still repeated concerns about inclusive education regarding admission policies, funds and school options (Murphy et al., 2022). According to Devine (2013), research emphasises that while national and international policies and frameworks support inclusive education, practical implementation in schools remains under-researched.

Although not focused on EAL learners, Doody (2015) focused on challenges and barriers to inclusive education for students with intellectual disabilities in Ireland. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) states that a lack of research on educators' challenges when implementing inclusive education, but recent research studies highlight several challenges that are pertinent for implementing inclusive education in Ireland. According to Little (2020), limited professional development and a lack of cultural materials present a major challenge for inclusion.

While there is research on the aspect of translanguaging and peer collaboration strategies regarding EAL (Garcia & Kleyn, 2016; Gibbons, 2015), these studies are limited in scope and national-level research is still needed. Finally, the research on EAL and inclusion is increasing, but it is not sufficient compared to the increased number of diverse learners. Empirical studies are needed to enhance inclusion and to meet the growing needs of multilingual learners.

2.9 Conclusion and Research Gaps

The literature review shows the importance of inclusive education and how this addresses the needs of multilingual children with linguistic and cultural requirements. Primary schools in Ireland have implemented policies and procedures from organisations such as NCCA, OIDE and NCSE. The review has discussed strategies like translanguaging, language scaffolding, cooperative teaching, differentiated instruction and UDL to implement equity in education. There are many strategies, but research on inclusion in Ireland is still limited in terms of teachers' and students' points of view. All research articles target the implementation of policies, but they do not explore the day-to-day challenges instructors and students face. Some frameworks give guidelines for inclusion, but there is

no proper evidence to manage challenges faced by teachers, such as curriculum implementation and larger class sizes. Only a few studies explore the cultural and linguistic aspects of multilingual students. How educators implement inclusion in multilingual classrooms remains a significant challenge because their perspectives, attitudes, and experiences are not taken into account. Finally, Irish primary schools strive to meet the needs of multilingual students. However, there is a lack of research on teachers' and students' perspectives, which poses a significant gap in inclusion. Future studies or research should concentrate on how inclusion can be implemented in multilingual classrooms by helping instructors overcome the barriers.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology that facilitated the exploration of the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners in an Irish primary school. This chapter explains the research paradigm, research design, participant selection, data collection methods, analysis process, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, positionality and limitations. All these components are articulated to ensure the credibility of the research study, its depth, alignment and achievement of the research aims.

3.2 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm philosophical assumptions that underpin the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Paradigms shape a researcher's knowledge, values and reality. The epistemological, ontological and axiological perspectives of researchers are shaped by paradigms (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Mertens (2010) suggest in his research that some common paradigms are interpretivism, positivism, constructivism, and critical theory.

The research paradigm in this study is the interpretivist paradigm, which views reality as subjective and socially constructed (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Bevir & Rhodes, 2012; Schwandt, 2014). The interpretivist paradigm facilitates research in exploring an awareness of individuals' knowledge and experiences. According to Cohen et al. (2018), the main aim of interpretivism is not searching for one truth; it accepts multiple truths based on culture, language, and discourse. It is suitable for exploring complex problems and it is best suited to educational research. The interpretivist paradigm draws on a constructivist epistemology, which holds that knowledge is generated through social connections and shared experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). A constructivist epistemology enables researchers to understand how teachers perceive and implement inclusive education practices for multilingual EAL learners in Irish primary

schools. This epistemology is complemented with a relativist ontology that accepts the existence of various realities created by human standpoints and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The relativist perspective enriches the research's investigation regarding inclusion by accepting that every participant's idea of inclusion is shaped by their personal and professional context. Finally, incorporating an interpretivist paradigm with a constructivist epistemology and relativist ontology gives a rich framework for analysing the structure and important features of inclusion for multilingual EAL learners in an Irish primary school.

3.3 Research Design

This research study implemented a case study method to analyse the complex and specific aspects of approaches to inclusion for multilingual EAL learners in an Irish primary school. The case study approach is commonly implemented when analysing real-world scenarios where numerous factors interact (Hancock & Algozzine, 2021). The case study approach allowed me to complete a deeper exploration of inclusive practices, which acknowledges the cultural, linguistic and institutional factors that affect experiences and techniques of education (Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2013). Studying complex phenomena in real-life scenarios can be done appropriately with the help of a case study, where it is hard to differentiate between the context and the phenomenon (Rashid et al., 2019; Burkholder et al., 2020).

A multi-method case study involves various qualitative data collection methods to obtain a picture of a complicated phenomenon within a single context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A multi-method case study helps researchers to analyse a problem from different angles, providing a clear and holistic picture of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006). My research design was designed in a sequential multi-method approach by starting with document analysis, followed by qualitative questionnaires and concluded with classroom observations. Document analysis was carried out first, which allowed me to identify the school policies, inclusion and curriculum frameworks and EAL

strategies (Bowen, 2009; Okoko et al., 2023; Scott, 2009). I gave questionnaires to teachers, which helped me to capture their insights, knowledge and beliefs that enhanced the interpretation of document analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Concluding with classroom observations helped me to triangulate findings and analyse how the policies and knowledge of teachers were combined in their actual practice (Cohen et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This sequential order of these data collection methods allowed me to carry out reflection and adaptation in my research process as well.

3.4 The School, Participants and Selection Criteria

The school in this study is a junior primary school that was established over 30 years ago, with approximately 600 students ranging from Junior Infants to Second Class. Nearly 40 percent of the students are multilingual EAL learners. The school has 25 mainstream teachers, 15 support teachers, 15 SNAs and 3 administrative staff. There is one special class that supports five children with two SNAs and one teacher. This school also has two indoor PE halls, two nurture rooms, and one resource and sensory room. Support teachers in the schools are timetabled across in-class and withdrawal support flexibly, concentrating on literacy, numeracy and linguistic fluency for EAL learners. The mainstream teachers and support teachers collaborate with regular oral meetings and emails. There is plenty of yard space that can support all learners to be involved socially.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants in this study, as they had adequate experience and knowledge in implementing inclusion techniques for multilingual EAL learners. This type of sampling method is used when a researcher has to choose the participants based on specific criteria, e.g., qualifications, knowledge, experiences and characteristics essential for the research (Etikan et al., 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015). Criteria should be used to ensure that the research can offer a deeper insight into the realities and to maintain authenticity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). According to Barada (2013), careful selection of participants enhances the validity and richness of the

results.

Participants were invited to take part via a letter detailing the study. In total, 25 teachers agreed to complete the questionnaire, while five agreed to the narrative classroom observations. All participants were required to have at least one year of teaching experience and be fully qualified and registered teachers. Most of the teachers have some sort of training in inclusive education.

Table 1: Number of teachers and their experiences

Years of Experience	Number of Teachers
0 – 5 Years	6
6 – 10 Years	9
11 – 15 Years	2
16+ Years	8

3.5 Data Collection Methods

I chose a multi-method case study approach to explore the methods and approaches adopted by teachers in an Irish primary school to enhance inclusion for multilingual EAL learners. Document Analysis, Qualitative Questionnaires and Classroom Observations were chosen to obtain a complete picture of inclusive techniques and challenges faced by teachers.

3.5.1 Document Analysis

Document analysis can form an integral part of qualitative research projects. It serves as a strong foundation, enabling us to examine the current materials that reflect the school's policies and procedures. By implementing document analysis, we can review the documents comprehensively and obtain useful information appropriate to the research study. Document analysis is a useful tool because it can show an actual picture of an educational institution's perspective and actions without the influence of the researcher's perceptions or ideas (Altheide & Schneider, 2013; Bowen, 2009). Document analysis in educational research consists of policies and procedures, curricular frameworks

and school plans (Altheide & Schneider, 2013; Bohnsack et al., 2010). Document analysis in inclusion studies illustrates how multilingual EAL learners are positioned in classrooms and throughout larger educational systems (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Document analysis of school polices, curriculum and students' work assisted me in gathering additional aspects of the school's approaches to inclusion. It is crucial to note that policies and procedures will not depict the actual enactments and may occasionally represent a portrait just on paper and not in actual reality (Karppinen & Moe, 2012; Morgan, 2022). The drawbacks of document analysis can be complemented by using other data collection methods to triangulate data and authenticate the results. For this study, the following policies and plans were analysed:

- *Admission Policy*

- *Anti-Bullying Policy*

- *Attendance Strategy Policy*

- *Child Safeguarding Policy*

- *Code of Behaviour Policy*

- *Critical Incident Policy*

- *Data Protection Policy*

- *Guidelines for Parent/Teacher Email Use*

- *Health and Safety Policy*

- *Inclusive and Special Education Support Policy*

- *Information and Communications Technology Policy*

- *Internet Acceptable Use Policy*

- *Substance Abuse Policy*

- *English Plan*

- *Gaeilge Plan*

- *Mathematics Plan*

- *Geography Plan*

- *History Plan*

- *Science Plan*

- *Music/Drama/Visual Arts Plan*

- *Physical Education Plan*

- *Social, Personal and Health Education Plan*

- *School Well-being Plan*

- *Digital Learning Plan*

3.5.2 Qualitative Questionnaires

The next method I used was qualitative questionnaires, where data were collected with open-ended questions from the teachers who work directly with multilingual EAL learners. A qualitative questionnaire was used instead of semi-structured interviews due to time constraints. The participants had the opportunity to convey their experiences, perceptions, ideas, techniques and viewpoints regarding inclusive practices implemented for multilingual EAL learners in their classrooms. This method is particularly convenient for acquiring various opinions and uncovering themes that may not be obtained from conventional quantitative surveys (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). There is no doubt that qualitative questionnaires give us valuable data, but responses are from individual participants' abilities and knowledge that vary between each one of them (Patton, 2015). The questionnaire was designed to obtain data regarding teaching techniques, barriers, resources and supports for teachers in fostering the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners. The questions were greatly influenced by a comprehensive exploration of the literature.

3.5.3 Classroom Observations

As a research method, observations allow researchers to comprehensively document the behaviours and actual actions within the environment, giving us a picture of the practices followed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Non-participant narrative observations were carried out to avoid disturbance in the classroom and to maintain the dynamics and originality (Cohen et al., 2018). Observations were open to capturing teachers' ideas, practices, interactions, techniques and overall classroom atmosphere. It is vital to evaluate the chances of the researcher's bias and the Hawthorne effect, where people's attitudes can be changed due to the presence of an observer (Simpson & Tuson, 2003). This behaviour can be avoided if the observations were completed in different sessions and timings to avoid these impacts.

Table 2: Detailed Table Regarding Classroom Observations

Number of Days	Class Level	Subjects	Minutes
Day 1	Junior Infants	Literacy	30 minutes
Day 2	Junior Infants	Numeracy	30 minutes
Day 3	Junior Infants	Art	30 minutes
Day 1	Senior Infants	Art	30 minutes
Day 2	Senior Infants	Numeracy	30 minutes
Day 3	Senior Infants	Literacy	30 minutes
Day 1	First Class	Literacy	30 minutes
Day 2	First Class	Numeracy	30 minutes
Day 3	First Class	SPHE	30 minutes

Day 1	Second Class	Art	45 minutes
Day 2	Second Class	Literacy	45 minutes
Day 3	Second Class	Numeracy	45 minutes

3.5.4 Integration and Triangulation

Qualitative questionnaires, document analysis and classroom observations can be combined to achieve data triangulation. This can enrich the validity of the results by combining data from various sources (Denzin, 2012). Any commonalities and differences between policies, actual practices and questionnaires can give us a complete picture of EAL inclusion practices in classrooms at the case study school.

3.6 Data Analysis

The process of examining, cleaning, converting and modelling data to obtain appropriate knowledge, draw judgements and arrive at decisions systematically is known as data analysis (Bernhardt, 2017; Ravitch & Nicole Mittenfelner Carl, 2019). According to Naeem et al. (2023), thematic analysis, content analysis and grounded theory techniques are used to analyse raw data and derive meaningful results in qualitative research. Flick (2022) and Tracy (2020) mentions that to obtain high-quality data analysis, trustworthiness plays a crucial part. Researchers adopt member-checking, triangulation and audit trails to boost the trustworthiness of data analysis. I used thematic analysis as a primary method for data analysis. I chose this method as it is flexible and suitable for recognising, examining and summarising the patterns of qualitative data gathered from educational contexts.

3.6.1 Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) explain a six-phase framework for thematic analysis - i.e., familiarisation with the data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define and

name themes and produce the report. Thematic analysis helps researchers to go beyond data interpretation, making it useful for studies undertaken to recognise participants' experiences and perceptions.
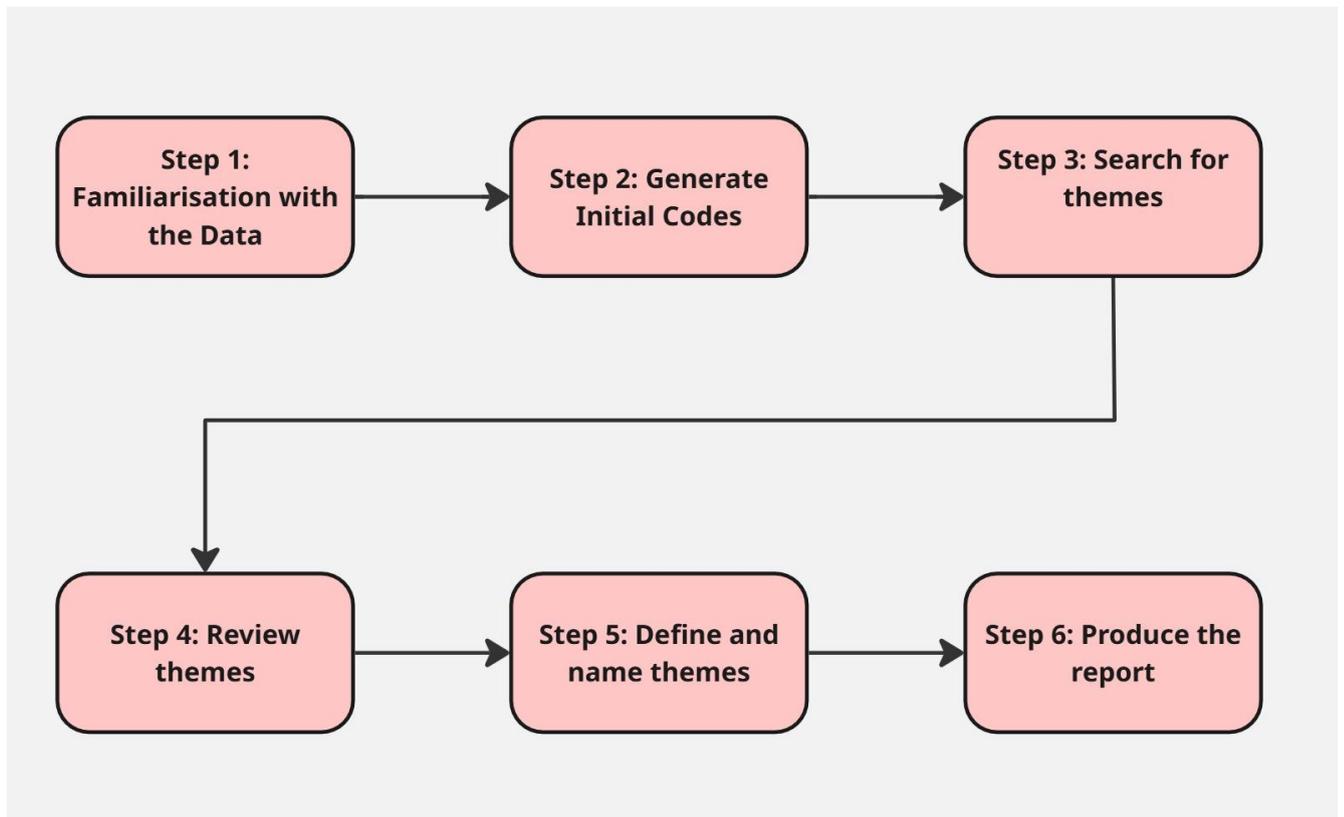

Figure 1- Braun & Clarke's (2006) Six Steps of Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis applied in this project was used to investigate the practices of teachers and learners about inclusive educational practices (Nowell et al., 2017; Bavdaz et al., 2019). I carried out some preliminary document analysis to support the design of the questionnaire and the observations and then analysed the entire body of data using thematic analysis.

Document analysis provides in-depth details of policies or procedures of any organization (Bowen, 2009; Karppinen & Moe, 2012; Morgan, 2022). School policies, procedures, curriculum documents, and language support plans were analysed to identify the official frameworks that regulate inclusion for multilingual EAL learners. Qualitative questionnaires were thematically

examined to document teachers' knowledge and practices on inclusion (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). The questionnaires were open-ended and enabled the participants to express their views in detail. The data collected through classroom observations were analysed to find patterns in teachers' interactions, attitudes, strategies and classroom environment. The thematic analysis of classroom observations helps us to uncover whether the teachers are following the practices in classrooms for real or whether they remain only on paper. In this project, I analysed the data corpus—documents (school policies and plans), qualitative questionnaire (responded by 25 teachers) and classroom observations (Junior Infants, Senior Infants, First Class and Second Class). This approach was appropriate for analysing how inclusive practices for multilingual EAL learners were accepted, established and executed. Thematic analysis also allows flexibility to illuminate differences between written policies and actual practices (Terry et al., 2017) and supports triangulation for authenticity (Nowell et al., 2017). In short, thematic analysis provides a comprehensive framework for combining complex multi-modal data to illuminate practical realities (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006)

I transcribed the data derived from document analysis (Policies and Plans from the school), responses received from qualitative questionnaires (from 25 teachers) and classroom observations (Junior Infants to Second Class). In the first step I familiarised myself with the data and noted down initial insights. I took preliminary points from all three data collection methods. This deep analysis helped me build a comprehensive understanding of data (Nowell et al., 2017). In the second step, I manually generated initial codes from the body of the data. This step allowed me to capture the participants' thoughts, who worked closely with EAL learners. In the third step, I combined all the initial codes and formed potential themes. At this stage, the data was no longer in smaller fragments but had been converted into broader patterns that highlighted important factors that affected inclusion, such as policy implementation, classroom techniques and cooperative teaching. In the

fourth step, the themes were reviewed and refined based on initial codes across the data collection set. This step was vital to ensure that themes were coherent and reflected actual views and practices of participants (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). It also helped me to remove any repetitive codes and themes. In the fifth step, I defined and named themes with the support of data extracts and explanations. This step gave me analytical clarity and allowed me to link the themes to my research question. The last step was to produce the report based on the themes considering them in light of existing literature on EAL inclusion while maintaining clarity and coherence in the analysis.

3.7 Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness plays an important role in qualitative research to ensure the results are accurate, depicting participants' knowledge and perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Little & Kirwan, 2019; Nowell et al., 2018). Credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability are widely used in qualitative research to establish trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These four components serve as a foundational base to ensure rigour (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

The term credibility refers to a belief in the truthfulness of data and analysis. Triangulation was implemented to enhance credibility and integrate information (Carter et al., 2014; Denzin, 1978; Fusch et al., 2018) from documents, questionnaires and observations. Credibility was also addressed by extended engagement, continuous observation and member checking (Connelly, 2016; Given, 2008; Shenton, 2004).

The researcher should curb bias and accept participants' answers to ensure confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexivity helps to ensure confirmability throughout the research process. One method of addressing confirmability is reflexive journaling (Berger, 2015; Lemon & Hayes, 2020). I used a reflexive journal throughout this study to note my opinions, assumptions and responses.

Dependability relates to the validity of data over different times and conditions. Dependability can be established with the help of an audit trail that documents all steps of the research process,

including conclusions made during data collection and analysis (Shenton, 2004; Tobin & Begley, 2004). In this project, I ensured dependability by following appropriate procedures on all three data collection methods (document analysis, questionnaire and observations), exhibiting transparency. This helped me to track the results and ensure the stability of my findings across various scenarios.

To ensure transferability in research, detailed descriptions about the background of the study, participants, and data collection processes were captured (Tracy, 2020). Obtaining rich narrations enables readers to assess the relevance of the results to their educational settings (Geertz, 1973). Detailed explanations assist readers in making appropriate judgments on the generalisation of results in diverse scenarios (Connelly, 2016). In this project, transferability was implemented by giving detailed descriptions relating to participants and data collection that allowed readers to arrive at a judgment of similar environments as well.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are fundamental to any research process, especially when involving real-life participants. Researchers must protect the participants' identities at all costs, especially in an institutional case study. Ethical issues are especially crucial when working with human participants. The researcher must maintain confidentiality and analyse all results responsibly (Shenton, 2004; Wyse et al., 2025). My research study followed ethical guidelines to ensure the dignity, protection and rights of all participants (Gazibara et al., 2019). I obtained ethical approval from my college's ethics committee before the commencement of my research, assuring that the research design followed institutional guidelines (Mantzorou Marianna, 2011). All participants gave their informed consent to ensure they acknowledged the purpose of the research, procedures followed and any identifiable risks (Birt et al., 2016; Little & Kirwan, 2019; Zahle, 2017). All my participants received a clear and simple information sheet explaining the research's purpose, procedures, risks, rights and withdrawal rights (Manti & Licari, 2018; Mahnaz Sanjari et al., 2014) and no audio devices were used

in this research. I had sent a general informed consent by email to all the teachers (participants) in my school. During my research study, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained at all times. I removed any information that could identify participants' details and this was carefully executed as my research was in educational research involving real-life participants. Digital data collected was encrypted and stored on NCI's database and will be destroyed after 5 years. The researcher and academic supervisor maintain strict confidentiality about the data collected (Vainio, 2012). Strict privacy was maintained during classroom observations. There was no power imbalance between me and my participants, even though they are my fellow staff members. There was no emotional or psychological harm between me and my participants (BERA, 2018).

3.9 Positionality/My place in my Research

The researcher's background, beliefs, opinions and practices play a pivotal role when assessing their positionality in a research study (Holmes, 2020). To ensure transparency, ethical awareness and reflexivity in research where human participants are involved, recognising positionality is crucial (Meneau, 2024). It is my duty as a researcher to acknowledge my background and thoughts. I carry both insider and outsider perspectives (Merriam et al., 2001). As an insider (teacher at my school), I am more familiar with educational policies, classroom environments and teaching techniques. I should also maintain my outsider status as I am not a direct teaching staff member. This was especially important when observing practice so as to maintain balance and ensure the integrity of my research process (Sultana, 2007).

Reflexivity helps me to self-examine my assumptions in my research and positioning also affects the research framework, data analysis and interaction with participants. In addressing the insider nature of the research, I recorded my reflections in a research journal and discussed them with my Research Supervisor (Dodgson, 2019). Another important aspect of positionality in my study aligns with power dynamics. As a staff member of my school, I am aware of the position of authority

that may influence the responses of teachers and students towards me (Hellawell, 2006). To balance this, I ensured that participation was voluntary, maintained confidentiality, and adopted a non-participatory approach during my classroom observations. Given the nature of my research topic, I made sure to embrace cultural modesty throughout the process. A review of relevant multicultural education materials helped me to mitigate the cultural bias and ensure accuracy in my research framework. I ensured that the participants were given full priority and their voices were authenticated at all times to mitigate assumptions about their experiences (Babri, 2024). I acknowledged the emotional and personal nature of the data gathered by me and treated it with great sensitivity.

3.10 Limitations

There are certain limitations to this study, the first being the scope of the study. The study was conducted in one primary school, which restricts the generalisation of findings in a broader context (Stake 1995; Yin, 2018). I obtained rich data on their practices and culture of one primary school and did not have the opportunity to capture data across various schools (Simons, 2009). Secondly, I had a small number of participants (25 teachers), which posed constraints on various aspects (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tracy, 2020). The teachers had a significant number of years of experience, but the small sample size prohibits the transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

There are certain methodological limitations. Due to a lack of time, I was not able to conduct semi-structured interviews, which would have given me richer and more meaningful engagement (Tracy, 2020). I would have considered an alternate method like focus groups, which would have helped me to gain further clear insights (Morgan, 2022). These alternative methods may have provided a more meaningful experience.

The third limitation is in relation to document analysis. All the school policies, curriculum and plans displayed only general inclusion (Bowen, 2009) but not those specifically for multilingual EAL

learners. Document analysis of a single school prohibits transferability of the results (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018) and inclusion practices vary in each school (Simmons, 2009). As this is institutional case study I didn't had a chance to compare document analysis from various schools. If I would have compared with other schools more significant data would have been emerged. Document analysis of a single school, thus, is not sufficient to record the realities of inclusion of multilingual EAL learners.

Another key limitation is that I was not able to involve children's voices in my research due to ethical approvals and practical constraints. This research concentrated only on teachers and documents and I did not capture the lived experiences of multilingual EAL learners, who are crucial for inclusion.

3.11 Conclusion

The methodological approach used to investigate the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners in an Irish primary school has been detailed in this chapter. I first explained the research paradigm, research design and data collection methods, outlining in detail the three methods: which are documentary analysis, qualitative questionnaire and classroom observations. I also explained the selection of participants, discussed dependability, transferability and conformability. I explained in detail the ethical considerations, positionality and limitations of my research. We will see in detail how the data collected by using the above three methods is analysed and discussed in the next chapter, Findings and Discussion.

Chapter 4: Findings & Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises key findings that emerge from the data analysis collected through three methods: document analysis, qualitative questionnaires, and classroom observations. The main focus of this study is to analyse how inclusion is conceived and executed for multilingual EAL learners in an Irish primary School. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, which consists of a six-phase framework, was utilised to identify recurring themes and insights throughout the dataset. This discussion is based on a comprehensive understanding of inclusive pedagogy for multilingual EAL learners based on teachers' perspectives, classroom observations and document analysis of policies and curriculum. The themes that are evolved are critically examined with the help of literature and the theoretical framework of language acquisition theory by Cummins, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological system. It highlights the strength of inclusive practices and also identifies significant challenges and discrepancies. This discussion helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice and also offers a reflective space to examine current practices in classrooms and to improve in the future for the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners.

4.2 Thematic Analysis

The initial themes were derived from the thematic analysis. Data collected from the three methods were combined, and Initial codes were formed, which were then narrowed and a mind map was created (attached in the appendix), that helped to arrive at the following six themes and their relevant subthemes.

Table 3: Thematic Analysis Table based on Braun and Clarke	
1. Multimodal and Differentiated Teaching Techniques	• Multi-modal Learning • Differentiation Techniques • Linguistic-based Techniques
2. Cooperative Teaching and Learning	• Peer Learning • Cooperative and Collaborative Teaching
3. Classroom Management and Inclusiveness	• Spatial and Visual assistance • Classroom Design and Materials are reachable
4. Teachers' Perceptions and Professional Development	• Teacher Perceptions of Inclusion • Training and CPD needs • Challenges faced during Inclusion
5. Importance of Cultural and Linguistic Development	• Translanguaging and Use of Home Language • Parents and Community Involvement • Culturally appropriate materials
6. Policies and System-Level Assistance	• Inclusive Education Frameworks • Policies that support the Curriculum and Language • Flexible Assessment Arrangements

4.2.1. Theme 1: Multimodal and Differentiated Teaching Strategies

For the school in this study, an important component of inclusive pedagogy for multilingual EAL learners is the use of multimodal and differentiated teaching strategies. In addition to enhancing participation, understanding, and fair access to the curriculum, it also helps cater to the diverse needs of multilingual EAL learners in a classroom (Ainscow, 2020; Florian et al., 2024). Differentiated teaching strategies positively address diversity, rather than considering it as a problem that must be fixed (Florian et al., 2024). This technique is widely applied, as evidenced by the data collected during classroom observations and from the qualitative questionnaires.

Multimodal Learning (Visual, Audio, Songs and Hands-On Tools)

A strategy widely used in the classrooms, right from junior infants up to second class, is visual and audio aids. From the data collected through classroom observations and qualitative questionnaires, it has been observed that teachers frequently use pictures, flashcards, projectors, and images that prove helpful for multilingual EAL learners. In the questionnaire, several teachers referenced using such multimodal tools, where one teacher mentioned, "I always use visual cues and gestures to promote understanding among multilingual EAL learners". Another teacher explained that she used "songs and videos to help junior infant children learn and retain vocabulary." Some teachers mentioned they use Jolly Phonics, Canva, and Starfall, which make learning fun for multilingual EAL learners. These techniques enhance vocabulary building and also act as a bridge that addresses the gap between students' mother tongue and the language of instruction (Luciana & Westerlund, 2022). During the classroom observations, it was evident that teachers had been using concrete objects and I noted "one teacher used lollipops to teach alphabet songs and used Lego blocks to do numeracy tasks", which helps learners connect abstract ideas to concrete depictions. The usage of those multimodal tools aligns with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles that encourage various ways of participation and representation (Rao & Torres, 2017). UDL was frequently

mentioned in questionnaire responses, with one teacher mentioning, "Some activities she will do with pictures and words to help multilingual EAL learners to understand complex things more easily". The school's technological usage policy encourages similar techniques to support inclusive classroom environments underpinned by UDL. Frequent activities such as building blocks, drawing and other physical activities show that plenty of multisensory and hands-on learning takes place in classrooms. These opportunities allow multilingual EAL learners to be somewhat independent with tasks when adequate support is unavailable (Sadigzade & Alisoy, 2025).

During one observation at the art period, learning was scaffolded through repeated step-by-step demonstrations accompanied by explicit verbal support. Active engagement during classroom activities helps to enhance vocabulary and language development (Gillies et al., 2023). During that observation, I noted that the teacher used various UDL-based resources also to support the children, like PowerPoint slides, flash cards, visual cues and a projector. Learning literacy through songs and rhymes was another technique used in Junior Infants classrooms. These tools help to memorise phonics and vocabulary in a fun, playful way. I also observed in one of the classrooms that using songs to teach multilingual EAL learners boosted their self-esteem and sense of confidence. The literature demonstrates that rhythm and repetition in teaching enhance linguistic retention and make challenging learning more accessible (Bautista & Kim, 2025; Wei & Garcia, 2022).

Differentiation Techniques (Grouping, Scaffolding, and Pairing)

The data from the questionnaire reveals how flexible groups, buddy pairing and differentiated supports in the classroom help multilingual EAL learners to achieve greater success. Teachers paired and grouped EAL learners with those who are more proficient in English, which helped with language modelling. Differentiation involves modifying curriculum techniques to help learners increase in learning in the classrooms and this was evident during observations. This was evident in classroom practices where teachers give additional scaffolding for multilingual EAL learners, such as helping

them to write sentences and using visual prompts to support language enhancement. Teachers in the qualitative questionnaire reported they used differentiation: "We use a differentiated way of writing, reading and spelling to address the needs of multilingual EAL learners". One of the teachers also mentioned that she offered "alternative learning tasks based on their level". All of the above teaching techniques are aligned with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory that enforces social integration as an essential tool in learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's zone of proximal development was reflected in classrooms through the use of techniques such as scaffolding and peer interaction, which help multilingual EAL learners achieve their goals with increasing independence (Lantolf, 2023). Peer interaction in the learning process was observed in group reading, problem-solving and also aligns with wider cooperative learning techniques (Kalkanci et al., 2019).

Linguistic-based Techniques (Explicit Vocabulary Instruction and Simplified Language)

The data from the observations and questionnaires revealed that vocabulary learning was enhanced using Explicit Vocabulary Instruction. Teachers help learners to learn new terminologies with visual aids and support this with guided practice. Explicit vocabulary teaching can help to address the gap between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Gallagher et al., 2019; Lesaux et al., 2014; Lantolf, 2023).

Simple language and repetition are widely recommended for multilingual EAL learners (Lindner & Schwab, 2020). Teachers use simplified terminology, slow speech, and clear and concise instruction as these play a key role in understanding a language. The literature demonstrates how simple instruction without decreasing the content helps learners to access the curriculum (Wang, 2020). In the questionnaire, one of the teachers mentioned, "I always use a lot of repetitive instructions and simple vocabulary to help multilingual EAL learners". This technique aligns with observations where instructions to learners are usually visually enforced and physically modelled throughout. Simplified instructions to teach the curriculum are one of the key components for EAL

learners to achieve their goals (Lindner & Schwab, 2020).

In Summary, all the above multimodal and differentiated teaching techniques are essential in implementing inclusion for EAL learners across the school. This practice aligns with national policies such as the inclusive education framework. It supports linguistic learning, creating equity in classrooms, and building confidence.

4.2.2. Theme 2: Co-operative Teaching and Learning

The data revealed how peer interaction and collaborative learning contribute to the social inclusion of multilingual EAL learners in this primary school. The two subthemes derived from this theme, which are peer learning and cooperative and collaborative teaching, reveal how interactions and relationships promote language development, social inclusion and academic achievement.

Peer Learning

Peer interaction is a vital technique for inclusion because it encourages learning and helps in forming friendships with classmates. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory explains the need for interaction to develop cognitive and linguistic aspects through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners improve with the help of their peers (Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2019; Poehner et al., 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). This aspect was explicitly observed in classroom observations, where multilingual EAL learners performed excellently with peer support that helped them not only linguistically but also emotionally. It fosters friendships in the classroom and encourages social inclusion. This social inclusion is crucial for multilingual EAL learners as it plays a vital role in their learning in classrooms. Peer interaction aligns with the Inclusive Education Framework (IEF), which promotes such techniques to enhance inclusion (Black-Hawkins et al., 2022; Florian, 2015; Kefallinou et al., 2020).

Peer interaction supports culturally responsive teaching. According to Foley et al (2024) and Gay (2018), learners shared their languages and cultural backgrounds, enriching the classroom with diversity and mutual respect. Teachers responded in the questionnaire "Group projects about various

countries" and "Sharing Hello, goodbye, welcome in-home languages," showing how cultural inclusion is embedded in peer group projects. The teachers responded in the questionnaire that "peer interaction not only forms friendships among learners but also helps to implement structured techniques such as group projects, cooperative learning and encouraging conversational initiatives". These techniques are essential for enhancing inclusion for multilingual EAL learners, who often face challenges in learning the curriculum independently due to linguistic barriers, which were also observed during classroom observations.

Peer help facilitates vocabulary development, comprehension improvement and active participation in classroom activities (Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Conteh & Meier, 2014). Group activities enhance Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), enabling multilingual EAL learners to use English not only for communication between friends but also for learning the curriculum as well (Cummins, 1979; Devine, 2011; Gibbons, 2015). Teachers responded to the questionnaire that "EAL learners performed well in group projects such as problem-solving and storytelling, which enhances both language and social skills. Teachers also responded that they form mixed-ability groups, "High-ability and low-ability children are merged into a group, and they form mixed-ability groups where they will learn from one another". This was also evident during classroom observations, where the EAL learners worked with peers to read during literacy time and solve mathematical problems during numeracy stations.

Buddy pairing helps multilingual EAL learners learn daily classroom routines and improve their vocabulary skills (Dillon, 2011; Halder & Argyropoulos, 2019). Some teachers mentioned in the questionnaire that they use buddy pairing to enhance social inclusion. They responded, "We use buddy pairing especially when they join the class newly and it helps them not to be left out". Thus, buddy pairing supports language fluency, emotional support and inclusive pedagogy (Florian et al., 2016). Buddy interactions also boost confidence in multilingual EAL learners and enhance their Basic

Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) (Cummins, 2000; Duff, 2022).

Peer grouping plays a central role in inclusion, where teachers group multilingual EAL learners with strong peers who possess empathy. This enhances positivity and improvement in the classroom environment, which was evident during classroom observations. In the questionnaire, some teachers mentioned that they use structured friendship groups for Physical Education (PE). They responded that "PE games like hopscotch, ball games, tag and DDG (Duck, Duck, Goose) help to develop language and turn-taking among multilingual EAL learners". These practices highlight values of inclusion by accepting diversity as a positive thing and promote collective learning (Florian et al., 2016; Moonsamy et al., 2024).

Co-operative and Collaborative Teaching

The partnership between support teachers, EAL teachers, SNAs, and the wider school community improves inclusive practices, providing support for multilingual EAL learners. During classroom observations, support teachers helped EAL learners in solving mathematical problems and assisted in literacy stations by giving repeated instructions using simplified language to enhance vocabulary.

Collaboration between class teachers and support teachers (resource and EAL teachers) is crucial for successful inclusive education (Romero et al., 2024). According to Tomlinson (2022), Collaborative learning, supported by differentiation techniques, encouraged multilingual EAL learners to participate in various levels of activity with confidence. Cooperative teaching promotes continuous development in language skills and performance of tasks. Rose & Shelvin (2021) evidenced in their work that shared responsibility and cooperative teaching techniques help to address the needs of multilingual EAL learners through the Inclusive Education Framework (IEF) approach. Teachers responded in the qualitative questionnaire about collaboration with support teachers and SNAs. "We check with our EAL teacher and Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in regular intervals,"

and "We have regular informal chats and email conversations between EAL teachers and support teachers," and this was helpful to analyse reflective practices among teachers that will help them to examine and refine the approaches of cooperative teaching and peer interactions (Schleicher, 2016; Foley et al., 2024; Gitschthaler et al., 2021). Reflective practice helps to achieve inclusive practices for EAL learners based on their performance and feedback.

4.2.3. Theme 3: Classroom Management and Inclusivity

The analysis revealed that multilingual EAL learners need effective classroom management to promote inclusiveness. Effective classroom management includes the actual layout, structural arrangements for accessing learning materials, visual aids and a well-framed inclusive policy of the school. This theme was derived from classroom observations and questionnaire responses, where visual and structural strategies, together with the school's inclusive policy, help to achieve equity in education for multilingual EAL learners.

Spatial and Visual Assistance

According to Adoniou (2013) and Wei & Garcia (2022), spatial and visual aids play a prominent role in guiding classroom routines for multilingual EAL learners. Visual aids form a bridge to close the gap between language and comprehension for EAL learners who are yet to achieve fluency in English. During classroom observations, teachers used various visual scaffolds. In one of the literacy periods for First Class, the teacher used visual images on the projector and explained the images using simple vocabulary to help learners write a sensory poem. This was evidenced in the work of Landsman & Lewis (2012) and Tomlinson (2017), where they mentioned that visual scaffolding is crucial for cognitive, vocabulary and comprehension development.

In another observation, the teacher used concrete materials such as abacus boards and colour-coded Legos, implementing spatial assistance to teach place value. The materials not only helped learners engage in learning but were also visually accessible, making complex concepts easy

to understand (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Bakker et al., 2015). Many teachers responded in the questionnaire that they use lots of spatial and visual aids. One teacher mentioned, "She uses lots of pictures, visual cues and modelling to support multilingual learners across the curriculum". They also mentioned using Starfall and Jolly Phonics for literacy, enforcing inclusiveness in classrooms with the help of multimodal instruction (Smith et al., 2019)

Classroom Design and Materials Are Reachable

The physical learning environment plays an important role in fostering inclusiveness of classrooms. Classroom observations across Junior Infants, Senior Infants, First Class and Second Class revealed that all of them were spatially well-organised with ample space for movement, easy access to resources and seating arrangements facing both the teacher and the projector. In all the observations, it was noted that there were "five tables with 5/6 children, decent space among tables and all materials were clearly labelled with pictures".

The classroom observations also revealed that all shelves were labelled with pictures, helping EAL learners who are table captains to independently get materials off the shelves. Overall, all the classroom layouts support peer interaction, which is crucial for EAL learners. Most of the teachers responded in the questionnaire that they form mixed-ability groups to promote communication and social inclusion. One teacher mentioned specifically, "She groups native speakers with EAL learners to promote healthy communication". This strategy aligns with the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky, where it was mentioned that social interaction is a pioneer for language development (Vygotsky, 1978).

4.2.4. Theme 4: Teachers' Perceptions and Professional Development

Analysis of the varying sources demonstrated that Theme 4 analyses how the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners depends on teachers' perceptions, professional development and their potential to deal with challenges faced in the classrooms. Teachers' thoughts, practices and

confidence significantly impact classroom dynamics. The data revealed that teachers do practice inclusion techniques in the classroom despite poor resources and a lack of support staff. The findings from the data indicate that CPD is crucial for implementing various inclusive pedagogical strategies. This will help teachers to cater to multilingual learners effectively.

Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusion

According to Gitschthaler et al (2021), teachers play a pivotal role in executing inclusive practices and form a warm learning environment for learners and their perspectives on inclusion will impact the learning of EAL learners. The data generated from the questionnaire shows that most of the teachers are positive and many of them use peer support and visual cues. One teacher responded, "I do whatever I can within my limitations," showing a positive way despite the drawbacks. The data collected from observations shows, teachers usually pair EAL and native speakers together and this was evidenced in the work by Duff (2022), where he mentioned that mixing EAL learners with others helps to promote healthy communication and it also aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). During a numeracy class in junior infants, the teacher counted using songs and gestures, encouraging peer support that fosters both intellectual and linguistic development. The teachers support inclusion, but it is hard for them to implement because of the high number of EAL learners present in the class. Most of the teachers responded in the questionnaire that more than 40 percent of the students in the class are EAL learners, making it tough for them to implement inclusion in the classroom. One teacher responded that "She does not have adequate knowledge as they did only one module as part of their course in college". With a higher percentage of EAL learners and inadequate knowledge on their part, it becomes harder to enhance inclusion in classrooms.

Training and CPD Needs

The findings reveal that more than 40 percent of learners in the school are multilingual EAL pupils, but the teachers have minimal training in inclusive pedagogy. From the questionnaire responses, it is evident that the teachers have completed only one or two relevant modules during their teacher training, and they do not have formal EAL training. One teacher responded, "I just had a one-hour webinar on EAL in the classroom, that's all". Another teacher responded, "Yes, I had a detailed inclusive education training for the whole day at school, but EAL was a little part in it". Research highlights that instructors who receive adequate training in inclusive techniques perform well in supporting multilingual learners (Schleicher, 2016; Volknant & Ulla Licandro, 2024). Continuous professional development (CPD) was recommended by the Inclusive Education Framework (IEF) to improve educators' knowledge and confidence (Florian et al., 2011; Rose & Shevlin, 2021). The data collected from qualitative questionnaires revealed that most of the teachers did not receive formal training in EAL but still use multimodal instructions so that they can include EAL learners in classrooms. In another observation of a first-class numeracy lesson, the teacher used transition boards and Legos to teach the counting of two-digit numbers to students, which shows her years of experience in teaching rather than training. The literature shows that teachers' confidence will be impacted due to a lack of CPD. Inclusive pedagogy practices can be put forth in real-life practices only when adequate support, training and resources are provided to the instructors (Krulatz et al., 2022; Portolés & Martí, 2018).

From the questionnaire, most of the teachers indicate they need more training, resources and support staff. One teacher responded, "We need more CPD programmes, more SET sessions and different assessment tools for children who do not speak English at all". Classroom observations highlight that without formal training and support, teachers implement inclusive teaching strategies due to their interest in inclusion. They are still in need of proper Continuous Professional

Development training in EAL and it has to be done at the earliest opportunity.

Challenges Faced During Inclusion

Most of the teachers report significant challenges when it comes to EAL inclusion. From the questionnaire, most of the teachers responded, "lack of time, support and resources". Some of the teachers also responded that a large class size is a significant concern and there is no EAL support for them. One teacher responded, "I have no EAL help this year despite having children in need". Another teacher responded, "We have to juggle so many needs in one classroom". Lack of communication with parents due to language barriers was also a significant concern, as the parents had little or no English. Language barriers in student comprehension also have a significant impact on teachers (Day & Prunty, 2015; Mistry & Sood, 2010), especially where a large number of the learners in the classroom are multilingual learners. Most of the teachers responded in the questionnaire that they use Google Translate to communicate with parents due to a lack of translators or interpreters. One teacher responded, "Written notes so that parents can translate at home in their own time". The alternate methods the teachers are adopting are commendable, but we can see a gap between policy and support. Some teachers responded in the questionnaire about implications of national policy, such as "curriculum reforms have a focus on language development, but the emphasis on Gaeilge is too high, along with English, making it hard for multilingual EAL learners".

4.2.5. Theme 5: Importance of Cultural and Linguistic Development

Data collected from the questionnaire revealed that to enhance social inclusion, cultural development plays a crucial role. These children may have entirely different cultural and life experience scenarios that must be taken into account in their learning to support inclusion. The broader theme offered a number of subthemes such as translanguaging and use of home language, parent and community involvement and culturally appropriate materials. These techniques are essential to improve equity in learning environments.

Translanguaging and Use of Home Language

According to Garcia & Kleyn (2016), teachers use translanguaging techniques in classrooms where they can use the EAL learners' home language to support their learning. Wei & Garcia (2022) and Vogel & Garcia (2017) also mentioned that using the translanguaging technique helps to develop fluency and comprehension for multilingual EAL learners in guiding them between their home and school languages. Several teachers who answered the questionnaire responded that they use home languages in classrooms. One of the teachers mentioned, "I don't leave the mother tongue and encourage students to share words like hello and goodbye with peers in their home language". Another teacher responded that she "makes projects about different countries and discusses their culture". The above practices align with the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky, where language and social interactions help to develop cognitive ability in children (Vygotsky, 1978). Classroom observations also show that peer interaction and buddy grouping help multilingual EAL learners to use their home language informally, and both native English speakers and EAL learners are mixed, which encourages bilingual interactions. Several teachers use translanguaging, but some of the teachers responded that they are not using it. These findings support the need for a professional training programme and explore the benefits of translanguaging for teachers.

Parents and Community Involvement

Parents and wider community involvement are necessary to promote inclusion for multilingual EAL learners. Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem supports that communication between the school and their home is crucial in promoting language development in children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Coady (2019) and Ragnarsdóttir (2016), a healthy partnership between school and parents promotes learning and enhances learners' identity and belonging. Several teachers responded in the questionnaire that they involve parents with the help of Google Translate, parent-teacher meetings, Aladdin and written notes. One teacher answered, "Parents take time to help

children when it comes to homework and they use Google Translate when needed". Another teacher responded that "we advise parents during meetings to use their first language at home". Several teachers mentioned in the questionnaire that they celebrate intercultural week and other cultural events in schools and classrooms. One teacher mentioned, "They celebrate intercultural week in the 3rd term of school and parents are invited to talk about their traditions". This aligns with the Inclusive Education Framework (IEF), which promotes flexibility and a sense of belonging (Florian et al., 2024). From the questionnaire, it is also evident that the challenges faced by teachers due to communication between multilingual EAL parents remain high. Some teachers also responded that proper communication tools and translators during parent-teacher meetings would be more helpful to engage parents in their children's learning.

Culturally Appropriate Materials

The data supports that teachers should include culturally relevant materials to promote inclusion for multilingual EAL learners. According to Banks (2019), culturally responsive material not only promotes inclusion but also helps learners to identify classroom materials, curriculum plans and communication with peers. It is evident from the above that culturally responsive materials increase participation in learning and the well-being of learners. Several teachers who participated in the questionnaire mentioned that they use culturally responsive materials like books from different countries and merge cultural resources into SPHE and literacy lessons. One teacher mentioned, "They talk about different celebrations in their class, read different countries' story books, discuss flags and greeting words from different countries". It is clear from the above that they work hard to promote cultural diversity in everyday learning. During classroom observations, it was evident that the teachers use culturally appropriate materials. During SPHE lessons, they merge different countries' terms and during literacy periods, they read books about different countries in reading stations. During the Junior Infant literacy period, the teacher sang rhyming songs matching with children's

names, helping to familiarise them peers' identities, which supports both language acquisition and social inclusion. Also, in the questionnaire, some teachers mentioned that they celebrate different festivals of EAL learners and organise an intercultural week every year. For example, one teacher mentioned that "She celebrates Chinese New Year for their Chinese learners so that other learners in the classroom learn about that particular festival". Another teacher responded that "She celebrates Eid for her learners, where students learn about that particular festival". It is clear from the questionnaire that even though teachers are trying hard to promote cultural diversity in the classrooms, they still mentioned that they need culturally diverse books, resources and support staff to cater to students' inclusion.

Also, the teachers mentioned having good practices of cultural diversity, but they still need support from the wider school community. More professional training and access to various resources are needed to include culturally inclusive materials in learning for multilingual learners to bridge the gap between theory and actual practice (Jones, 2016).

4.2.6. Theme 6: Policies and System-Level Assistance

This theme explores how, despite effective classroom practices, policy frameworks (national and school-level) play a crucial role in inclusion. It also analyses the importance of school polices and the broader system that supports the inclusion of EAL learners. Data from the document analysis revealed that the inclusive structures are fragmented and not consistent regarding EAL. Data from the questionnaire also revealed that there are no comprehensive guidelines for EAL inclusion. This last theme explores three areas: the impact of Inclusive Education Frameworks (IEF), policies that support curriculum and language, and flexible assessment arrangements.

Inclusive Education Frameworks

The Inclusive Education Framework (IEF) and the UNESCO Salamanca Statement 1994 play a major role in aligning policies with the Irish Educational system. IEF encourages cultural integrity,

differentiated teaching supports and cooperative/collaborative teaching (Florian et al., 2024; Brussino, 2021). In the questionnaire, one of the teachers mentioned, "Curricular reforms have an increasing focus on inclusion and language development, which is a very good thing". Chapman & Ainscow (2011), infer that inclusion is treated as a dynamic practice and there is a lot of awareness present. Any successful inclusive policy requires efficient leadership, adequate training, and consistent practices (Cummins, 2023; Hick et al., 2019). While most Irish primary schools follow the Inclusive Education Framework (IEF) guided by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), practical implementation is not always feasible.

The document analysis of the Inclusive and Special Education Support Policy of the school highlights that there is a general commitment to inclusion and states, "Interventions are in place to address additional needs, including English language development". However, there are no clear provisions or mentions of resources, training, or a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme. According to Holmqvist & Lelinge (2020), to implement inclusive pedagogy in schools effectively, institutional involvement plays a crucial role. The Health and Safety Policy does not mention anything in relation to multilingual communication techniques for EAL learners, showing a gap in measures relating to safeguarding for EAL learners.

Policies that Support the Curriculum and Language

The revised Primary curriculum Framework's main aim is to merge the development of language with subjects (NCCA, 2023). However, there are significant challenges in implementing this framework. One teacher responded to the questionnaire, "The focus on Gaeilge had increased, along with the presence of multilingual EAL learners, making it difficult to teach both English and Gaeilge simultaneously without adequate resources and support. Another teacher mentioned, "The new curriculum makes it hard with no additional EAL resources". Another teacher responded, "Curriculum that prioritises academic English and assumes high levels of language proficiency can disadvantage

EAL learners". These responses highlight the practical challenges of implementing the new Primary Language Curriculum.

The school's English Curriculum Plan promotes a "theme-based oral language approach" for EAL learners, but it has limited operations due to a lack of staff and resources. The Mathematics Curriculum Plan mentions oral development and cultural integrity, but no techniques are mentioned to support multilingual EAL learners with word problems that require strong language skills. Still, during classroom observations, it was noted that the inclusive practices were strong, such as the use of visual cues, buddy grouping and differentiated teaching techniques. One of the teachers responded in the questionnaire that "Education policy regarding SET provision impacts the most and one size does not fit at all". This shows the challenges of practical implementation for EAL learners.

Flexible Assessment Arrangements

All Irish primary schools use Drumcondra and SIGMA-T for summative assessments. One of the teachers mentioned in the questionnaire that "Drumcondra and SIGMA-T do not reflect the true abilities of EAL learners". Kefallinou et al (2020), state that inclusive assessment methods should be implemented in primary schools for multilingual EAL learners. Document analysis of the school does not reveal specific formative or summative evaluations for EAL learners. There are no separate techniques for dual-language assessments for EAL learners and it is not mentioned in any school policy. Several teachers mentioned in the questionnaire the need for different assessment options for EAL learners and expressed concern that EAL learners become upset due to the pressure of doing tests that they are not ready for, which impacts their confidence in learning. It is evident from the above responses from the data that flexible assessment will help the teachers to find out the actual abilities of EAL learners and to guide them in a correct way.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the key findings of the three data collection methods and revealed how multilingual learners are included in an Irish primary school. It used Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis method to identify effective practices and prevailing gaps. The strengths and challenges have been discussed in detail within the themes, and these findings, along with the literature and theoretical frameworks, provide valuable insight for the potential future inclusion of EAL learners.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter begins by addressing the research questions and contributions to the field of inclusive education in the Irish context, followed by an examination of the study's contributions and limitations. A detailed discussion pertaining to practices, policies and teacher CPD (Continuous Professional Development) is discussed. Recommendations for future research in this field are provided.

5.2 Summary of main findings and addressing the research questions

This research analysed how an Irish primary school enhances the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners. Data revealed that teachers use various differentiated teaching techniques to overcome the barriers to inclusion. Peer interaction and collaboration with other support staff and SNAs enhance social and linguistic inclusion. Challenges faced by educators include limited CPD, lack of time and resources. Despite all these challenges, teachers strive to demonstrate inclusion. National and local policies recommend the inclusion of EAL learners, but clear guidance and help are still needed to implement the inclusion.

This research was mainly focused on the overall research question:

How does an Irish primary school effectively support the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners?

To address this question more thoroughly, and based on a comprehensive exploration of the literature, four sub-questions were crafted. These questions help us arrive at a holistic view of how inclusion is implemented in classrooms and across the whole school. The questions were:

Q. No. 1. What strategies and resources do teachers employ to support the linguistic and social development of multilingual learners?

Q. No. 2. What challenges do teachers and multilingual learners face and how do they address these?

Q. No. 3. How does the wider school community effectively support the inclusion of multilingual learners?

Q. No. 4. How do local and national policy developments impact a school in effectively including multilingual learners?

Research Q. No. 1. What strategies and resources do teachers employ to support the linguistic and social development of multilingual learners?

In this study, it is clear that various pedagogical techniques are implemented by teachers and the predominant techniques are multimodal instruction, differentiated teaching and linguistic techniques. It is noted in the findings and discussion chapter that during classroom observations across all four classes from Junior to Second class level, teachers relied mostly on visual cues, gestures, songs, and translation apps to support vocabulary development for multilingual EAL learners. Teachers also used simplified language and scaffolding techniques combined with visual aids, which helped multilingual EAL learners to interact with their peers and to participate in the classroom activities. Some teachers use translanguaging practices in the classroom, supporting the use of the home language for greeting words and simple phrases that help boost the confidence of EAL learners. According to Cenoz and Gorter (2020), the usage of the mother tongue helps learners to have confidence in their identity and enhances their flexibility in learning. It is clear that inclusive techniques are implemented in various classrooms, but it is also evident that some teachers are not confident in using those approaches. There is an inconsistency that reflects how, even though pedagogical techniques are in place, it depends mostly on individual teachers 'approaches to include EAL learners in the classrooms and the institution does not have a systematic approach.

Research Q. No. 2. What challenges do teachers and multilingual learners face and how do they address these?

This research study identifies several challenges faced by teachers and EAL learners. It is

evident from the data that teachers responded that there is a lack of CPD in inclusive pedagogy for EAL learners. The data also revealed that the time and resource constraints hindered the implementation of inclusion. Accessing the curriculum due to limited language proficiency is the biggest challenge for the teachers, especially in older classes for literacy and numeracy. Social inclusion is also a significant challenge, where EAL learners have problems in forming friendship groups. Communication with parents is another challenge due to language barriers.

Despite these challenges, inclusion strategies were implemented by teachers. They used multimodal teaching techniques, peer learning, visual cues and simplified vocabulary. Translanguaging and cooperative teaching, together with SNAs and support staff, had been implemented in classrooms. Teachers demonstrated professional commitment to inclusion. Additional support and continuous CPD will enhance inclusion strategies for these EAL learners.

Research Q. No. 3. How does the wider school community effectively support the inclusion of multilingual learners?

The wider school community has an important contribution to enhancing the inclusion of EAL learners. The school uses policies where Inclusive education frameworks (IEF) have been given priority to support curriculum planning. The school also uses collaborative teaching. The overall data from the study revealed that in Junior Infants and other classes, there is a positive collaboration between Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and support teachers, which helps the class teachers during the literacy period. Teachers involve parents and other members of the wider community in classroom activities, enhancing social inclusion.   It also has its limitations, such as a lack of language stops parents from participating in those activities, but teachers try to use Google Translate, Aladdin and other translation apps to communicate with parents, trying to make inclusion feasible. Finally, the school uses culturally diverse materials. The data revealed that teachers are using culturally diverse books and materials for reading stations. It is evident from the data that they celebrate

intercultural week, grandparents' day and specific festival days (Eid, Diwali, Chinese New Year, etc.).

Research Q. No. 4. How do local and national policy developments impact a school in effectively including multilingual EAL learners?

Local and national policy developments impact schools and how they shape their inclusion policies. As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, national policies, such as the Education Act 1988, the Primary School Curriculum 1999 and the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, were all formed to protect the rights of children to avail of equitable education. According to Smyth et al. (2014), the Inclusive Education Framework (2020) and National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) guidelines form a strong base for inclusive education theoretically and practically. The above documents were designed to enable child-centered approaches as their voices are taken into account. These policies recommend flexibility in the curriculum and cultural pedagogies. They also recommend that schools see cultural and linguistic diversity as an asset, not a challenge.

The findings revealed that inclusion is mentioned in most of the policy documents, but references in regard to EAL learners are not specific. The data revealed that although the school does not have a specific EAL policy, the teachers put considerable thought into the strategies. National policies support EAL learners and options for varied assessment, but it solely depends on each school management team how they use them in framing their policies and curriculum planning. The policies may guide us to move in a positive direction, but the implementation of those policies depends on the availability of funding, resources and training. In short, policies will give us a scaffold but effectiveness depends on how schools interpret and enact the guidelines.

5.3 Contributions to the Field

This research study will be valuable due to the evolution in the field of inclusion, especially for multilingual EAL learners. The policies and frameworks support general inclusion, but there are limited policies and frameworks particularly for EAL learners and also, research in this field is often

underexplored (Jameson & Carthy, 2012; Murphy et al., 2022). The research addresses the gap by contributing to the research based on how inclusive techniques can be implemented for multilingual EAL learners in Irish primary schools.

Secondly, this research tried to represent the voices of teachers regarding the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners. Data revealed that despite teachers' efforts to implement inclusion, the challenges they face, like limited support, lack of resources, play a vital role in enhancing inclusion. According to Conteh (2015), education will be inclusive only if adequate support is given to the instructors.

Thirdly, this research explores the Irish policies on inclusion along with global literature on EAL inclusion. Various countries (UK, Australia, Canada, and the United States) have already analysed the cultural and linguistic diversity in education. As explored in the literature review, Ireland's growing immigration (Murphy & Sheridan, 2023) necessitates more research in regard to cultural diversity and inclusion. This study analysed how national frameworks, such as the Primary Language Curriculum and the Inclusive Education Framework (IEF), aligned with school-level policies. It supports the need for a systemic approach to inclusion by helping teachers' initiatives to produce a structured, specific policy for EAL that will give CPD to teachers, which in turn can support equitable education to multilingual EAL learners.

5.4 Limitations of the study

The study has been carefully structured and conducted, but certain limitations must be accepted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research was conducted at only one institution and therefore, cannot be generalized. It also focused on teachers' voices and experiences. Including the voices of learners and parents would no doubt be beneficial, but due to ethical issues in regard to age and vulnerability, they are not included in the research. While the data collection methods were appropriate, interviews had to be substituted with qualitative questionnaires due to a lack of time for

teachers. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), bias in the research is unavoidable and it can be counteracted through a reflexive journal. I maintained the reflexive journal from the start to the end of the research, which was very useful. Despite the above limitations, this research remains valuable, offering a credible and contextually rich account of experiences of EAL inclusion in an Irish primary school.

5.5 Implications, Recommendations and Future Research

The results of this research, the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners in an Irish primary school, suggest important insights that can be extended beyond the context of the case study. The implications can be classified into three main areas: implications for the wider field, implications for the school, and implications for my practice.

Implications for the Wider Field

This research raises important points regarding cultural diversity and linguistic pedagogies in enhancing the inclusion of multilingual learners. It highlights the importance of equity in education and encourages that more research should be carried out on imparting differentiated teaching and translanguaging techniques for EAL learners (Conteh, 2015; Garcia & Wei, 2018). Data revealed that teachers have limited access to EAL-based CPD, so concentrating on that area can support them in this field. These research findings indicate the need for systemic policy changes that can influence school policies for EAL inclusion.

Implications for the school:

The results present several implications for the school in implementing the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners. Firstly, continuous professional development is needed regarding EAL. All teachers responded to the need for training in translanguaging, culturally responsive techniques and inclusive pedagogy (Conteh, 2015; Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015). The school management should give importance to CPD that concentrates on language acquisition (Cummins, 2019) and cultural

competence (Gay, 2018). Secondly, the policies of schools should be referenced clearly regarding multilingual EAL learners so as to align with NCCA guidelines (NCCA, 2016) and the Inclusive Education Framework. The curriculum planning of the school should include specific techniques for EAL learners. Thirdly, a whole-school ethos can be fostered for inclusion where EAL teachers, support teachers, SNAs and mainstream teachers work cooperatively to implement inclusion. Parental involvement can be encouraged more to provide social inclusion and belonging (Banks, 2019). Finally, inclusion should be treated as a responsibility for the whole school rather than the classroom teachers, which requires reflective practice and commitment. The above measures will help the school in progressing towards a more equitable learning environment for everyone.

Implications for my Practice

This research has influenced my professional practice significantly by promoting my perceptions of inclusive strategies regarding multilingual EAL learners. Firstly, cultural responsive pedagogy plays a pivotal role that validates learners' cultural and language identities (Banks, 2019; Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015). I will try to merge translanguaging into my lesson plans that enable learners to enhance their linguistic repertoire (Garcia & Wei, 2018). Secondly, the multimodal and differentiated instruction significantly impacts the inclusion of EAL learners and I will aim to include consistently to make the curriculum more accessible (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). I will collaborate with other support staff and SNAs when planning curriculum for EAL learners. Finally, the research highlights the importance of reflective teaching and CPD and I will undergo CPD training regarding EAL techniques and inclusive pedagogies (Lucas et al., 2020). Finally, I will encourage peer interaction and parent involvement that will help to enhance inclusion (Ainscow, 2020). This research has made me commit further to equity and inclusion, where all learners will be supported and valued.

Recommendations

With the help of the findings, recommendations can be proposed regarding inclusive education for EAL learners. The first and important recommendation is to increase CPD. Teachers require specific training regarding inclusive pedagogy, training about cultural diversity and language acquisition strategies (Gay, 2015; Tomlinson, 2017). School management should prioritise this aspect regarding the whole school. All school policies should give importance to EAL learners and they should be consistent. The school should use differentiation and varied assessment techniques to support more inclusion. Regular review of the policies should be undertaken as well. Collaborative teaching among teachers, SNAs, EAL teachers, support staff and the wider school community should always be implemented. Peer interaction, buddy pairing and cooperative teaching should be supported to achieve classroom and social inclusion (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2019). Policymakers and school management should ensure that national policies and school polices align regarding inclusion and adequate funding for support and EAL teachers should be given at all times.

Translanguaging policies should be promoted continuously (Garcia & Kleyn, 2016). Parental and wider school community should be actively involved in promoting inclusion. Events promoting inclusion should be celebrated in school often, which will encourage multilingual parents to take part in the school's activities. More multilingual resources such as books, toys, visual aids and culturally relevant craft materials should be used in the classrooms. Differentiated assessment options or alternative assessment options can be provided to EAL learners. Student voices can be harnessed and the school should encourage EAL learners to participate in leadership or captaincy roles.

Future Research

Future research might include longitudinal studies that can be carried out to explore the impact of EAL learners to assess their curriculum and social inclusion, and it can be carried out across different age groups as well. This study concentrated on one school, so a comparative study across

various classes and schools would have given us a broader understanding of the practices, techniques and challenges. Student voices are not represented in this research due to ethical issues. Future studies can give priority to student voices and their real-life scenarios and experiences. Similar to the student voices, if parents' voices had been included in this research, it may have brought out more useful information. Finally, more policy-related research can be carried out to analyse the effectiveness of the implementation of national policies and frameworks regarding inclusion.

5.6 Conclusion

This research was carried out in one Irish primary school to support the inclusion of EAL learners. The results indicate the importance of training, collaboration across the whole school and culturally inclusive pedagogy in encouraging equitable classrooms. Barriers such as gaps in the policies and limited staff/resources prevail. This research offers valuable resources for teachers, school management and researchers. Overall, the main research question findings indicate that the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners in this Irish primary school solely depends on individual teachers' dynamism at present. The teachers are committed to the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners despite the limited support available and the absence of a structured policy for inclusion. Many teachers respond with empathy and self-responsibility regarding EAL inclusion. Despite applying various inclusive pedagogical strategies and showing eagerness to support these learners, they face numerous barriers due to a lack of CPD, resources, staff, and policies. It is vital that a whole-school approach in regard to inclusion be implemented, which merges policies, pedagogies and CPD to deliver equitable education to all learners.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Questionnaire on Inclusion of Multilingual EAL Learners

This questionnaire is part of a broader study exploring how an Irish primary school facilitates the inclusion of multilingual learners with English as an Additional Language (EAL). Your answers will help me to understand approaches to social inclusion, academic support for these students, and current teaching methods. There are three questions relating to biographical details that are not intended for analysis but to add context to the dissertation. Confidentiality will be maintained by keeping all responses anonymous. Your comments will advance knowledge of successful inclusion strategies in our school and contribute to my own study as part of my master of arts in educational practice with National College of Ireland. I appreciate your participation and time.

Please tick or fill in where appropriate:

1. Number of years of teaching experience:

    - 0–5 years ☐
    - 6–10 years ☐
    - 11–15 years ☐
    - 16+ years ☐

2. Current class level you are teaching:

    - Junior or Senior Infants ☐
    - 1st or 2nd Class ☐

3. Have you had formal training in EAL provision or inclusive education?

    - Yes   ☐
    - No   ☐

    If yes, please describe the training: _____
    _____

4. What teaching methods or techniques do you use to support multilingual EAL learners in your class?

5. How do you adapt your lesson materials to address multilingual EAL learners' linguistic and learning requirements?
6. How do you collaborate with other staff, such as SNAs, EAL teachers and support teachers to support the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners?

7. Are there opportunities for multilingual EAL learners to use their home languages in the classroom? If so, how do you support this in their learning?

8. What technological strategies do you employ in your classroom to help multilingual EAL learners? For example, what digital tools, apps, or websites have you found to be useful?

9. How do you use collaborative learning and group activities to support the inclusion of multilingual EAL learners?

10. How do you support multilingual EAL learners in being socially included among their peers? You might include details here on activities in-class and elsewhere around the school e.g., on the yard.

11. How does your classroom celebrate cultural and linguistic diversity?

12. How do you support multilingual EAL learners in achieving success across the whole curriculum? (E.g. in mathematics, SPHE, PE, arts subjects, etc.)

13. For the multilingual EAL learners in your class, how do their parents/guardians support their learning at home?

14. What barriers do you experience in supporting multilingual EAL learners' inclusion in the classroom?

15.   How do you currently overcome these barriers?

16.   What else do you need to address these barriers e.g. resources, materials, additional support, etc.?

17.   How do wider education policy and curriculum reforms impact your ability to effectively include multilingual EAL learners? These include, for example, the revised Primary Language Curriculum, the Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life Strategy, and the Continuum of Support.

18.   Do you have any additional experiences or insights you would like to share about supporting multilingual EAL learners?

Appendix II: Project Information Sheet for Participants

Research Project Information Sheet

Research Study Topic: Enhancing Inclusion: How does an Irish primary school effectively support the inclusion of multilingual EAL Learners?

Questionnaire Purpose: I invite you to complete my questionnaire as a part of my research study examining how Irish primary school support the inclusion of multilingual students. All the responses will help me to find the correct practices, barriers and strategies to overcome the barriers to have an effective inclusion.

Voluntary Participation: I assure you that participation is purely voluntary and by completing the questionnaire you are providing informed consent. There is no compulsion to finish the entire questionnaire and if you wish not to answer any question you can do so.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: All data collected will be anonymous and strictly confidential. No identity regarding name, position or school will be shared. All data collected will be used only for academic research and will be destroyed after the research is completed.

Data Usage: All the data gathered through the questionnaire will be examined to have a fair knowledge of the practices and policies which will enhance the inclusion of multilingual students. The final findings will help my research study and to give correct recommendations to improve the inclusive practices.

Benefits and Risks: There are no risks associated with this questionnaire and I assure you that your insights will help me to make better recommendations for the inclusion of the multilingual students in the school.

Contact Information: For any queries or questions please contact me (Manjula Sathiyanarayanan) at x22247611@student.ncirl.ie or my supervisor Dr. Conor Mellon at conor.mellon@ncirl.ie

Consent Statement: By participating in this questionnaire, you are acknowledging that
- Have read and understood the above details.

- Agree to participate voluntarily in my study.

- You may withdraw at any time without any consequences.

I wholeheartedly thank you for your cooperation and participation.

Manjula Sathiyanarayanan.

Appendix III: Research Information for Participants

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

My Research Study: Enhancing Inclusion: How does an Irish primary school effectively support the inclusion of multilingual EAL Learners?

Researcher Details: Manjula Sathiyanarayanan
Email ID: x22247611@student.ncirl.ie
College/University: National College of Ireland
Dissertation Supervisor: Dr. Conor Mellon, conor.mellon@ncirl.ie

Participation Invitation. I cordially invite you to take part in my research study which explores how Irish primary schools support the inclusion of multilingual students in the mainstream classrooms. My study aims to understand the current practices, challenges, and strategies to improve inclusion for the EAL children.

Purpose of my Study: My main aim of this research it to examine successful teaching techniques, analyse the challenges for inclusion, and assess the policies and procedures which supports the multilingual children in Irish primary schools. I hope the results from this research will help to improve the inclusive education practices.

The Reason for the Invitation: I chose you mainly because of your teaching position or a staff member involving supporting multilingual children. I hope that your knowledge and insights will be very much useful to my research.

Methods of Collection of Data:

- **Classroom Observations:** I am going to observe teaching strategies and peer interactions in your classroom to understand the techniques for inclusion.

- **Questionnaires:** I will give you a questionnaire and I ask you to share your knowledge and perspectives in regard to the inclusion of the EAL students.

- **Policy and Procedure Analysis:** I am planning to analyse the school policies and procedures regarding inclusion of the students.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: I will keep all the data confidential and store all the information collected securely and none of the teacher's identities or school name will be disclosed and it will be anonymous. I will use all the data collected only for the academic purpose and I will destroy the date after the publication.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: I assure you that your participation will be always voluntary and you can withdraw from the research at any time and you don't have to give any reason.

Future Benefits for my Study: My study will offer an opportunity to contribute to the development of effective practices for EAL inclusion, benefiting the whole institution. Also, the participants can see the research will be publically available in NCI's institutional research repository, NORMA

Potential Risks: The research involves no risk and classroom observations will be conducted without any obstruction or disturbance and I won't collect any data which is sensitive to anybody.

Contact Information: Always feel free to contact me at the following email address x22247611@student.ncirl.ie or you can contact my supervisor Dr. Conor Mellon at conor.mellon@ncirl.ie and also *: "If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: National College of Ireland Research Ethics Committee EthicsSubCommittee@ncirl.ie*

Consent: I request you to give your informed consent when filling up the questionnaire.

Finally, I would like to thank you for participating in my study.

Manjula Sathiyanarayanan.

Appendix IV: Information for Classroom Observations

Research Question:
Enhancing Inclusion: How does an Irish primary school effectively support the inclusion of multilingual EAL Learners?

Researcher and Institution Details:
- **Researcher**: Manjula Sathiyanarayanan

- **Institution**: National College of Ireland

- **Supervisor**: Dr. Conon Mellon, conor.mellon@ncirl.ie

Reason for the Study:
The main reason for this study is to examine how Irish primary schools support the inclusion of multilingual EAL students in mainstream classrooms. My main focus is to identify effective strategies and practices which promotes inclusion.

Reason for the invitation:
I selected your classroom as it provides valuable knowledge about the practices and techniques to promote inclusion. Teaching observations and peer interactions will give me a fair understanding.

Process of observation:
- I am going to observe your classroom for [duration, e.g., 30 minutes/session] on [number of occasions, e.g., 3 occasions] over the course of [time frame, e.g., a month].

- I am going to observe classroom interactions among students without disturbing them.

- There will be no interference with your regular teaching activities, and my role will strictly be as a non-participatory observer.

Confidentiality and Anonymity
- I won't disclose any names or identity about the school, classrooms, teachers, names and children names.

- I will take the notes anonymously and to make sure that all the identities will be kept confidential.

- All the information will be securely stored and destroyed after [retention period, e.g., 5 years].

Voluntary Participation
The participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you can decline or withdraw from the research at any time.

Potential Risks and Benefits
- **Risks**: I assure you that there are no direct risks to anyone participating in the study and all the observations are non-invasive.

- **Benefits**: My research will help to have a better understanding and any recommendations of inclusive practices for multilingual EAL students.

Data Usage
- All the data collected will be used only for my research and academic publications only.

- The data collected will be anonymous and non-identifiable.

Contact Information

You can contact me at any time

- **Researcher**: Manjula Sathiyanarayanan, x22247611@student.ncirl.ie

- **Supervisor**: Dr. Conor Mellon, conor.mellon@ncirl.ie

Ethical Approval

My Research study has been approved by the board of management.

Consent

By accepting to take part in the research, you give consent that you have read and understood this information sheet and to be observed in the classroom for my research.

I am really thankful to all the persons who consider to participate in this research and all your inputs are invaluable to my research.

Appendix V: Participant Consent Form

Research Study Title:

Enhancing Inclusion: How does an Irish primary school effectively support the inclusion of multilingual EAL Learners?

Researcher Details:

Student Name: Manjula Sathiyanarayanan

Supervisor: Dr. Conor Mellon Email ID: conor.mellon@ncirl.ie

College: National College of Ireland.

School/Centre Involved: XXX

Purpose of the Research

My main purpose pertaining to this research is to examine the practices, barriers and techniques used in the school to include multilingual students in the mainstream classrooms. I hope that my findings will help my educational practices. I will be collecting personal data relating to questionnaire and all the data will be used solely to the research and that will be destroyed after finishing the study according to the protocols of NCI.

Requirements of Participation:

By consenting and participating in the research you will be

- Filling up a questionnaire.

- Allow me to do class room Observations.

- Analyse the policies and procedures of the school if any.

All the Participant should be able to Circle Yes or No for each question:

- I have read the Plain Language Statement *(or had it read to me):*   Yes/No

- I understand the information provided: Yes/No

- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study: Yes/No

- I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions: Yes/No

- I am aware that my interview will be audiotaped (if applicable):   Yes/No

- I am aware that anonymized quotations from my interview may be used in the research: Yes/No

Participation is voluntary.
I know that my participation in this research is purely voluntary and I can withdraw at any time from the research without any issues.

Confidentiality
I know that any details I provide will be treated confidentially and subject to legal limitations.

Data retrieving and Destruction
I understand that whatever details gathered will be stored safely and will be destroyed after a period of five years, in accordance with institutional data management policies.

Future Studies
I agree that my data can be used anonymously for future studies within the limits explain in the in the Participant Information Sheet: Yes/No

Appendix VI: Qualitative Research Audit Trail

1. **Raw Data:**
   The main source of data for this qualitative research comprises:

   - Finished questionnaire from 25 teachers, each one of them, comprising answers to 18 questions.
   - Analysis of Documentation for nine school strategies, including Anti-Harassment, Admissions, Remote Education, and Education for All.
   - Classroom Observations of three 30-minute sittings for Junior, Senior, and First-Class students and three 40-minute sittings for Second Class students, focusing on reading, writing, and math.

2. **Data Reduction and Analysis Notes:**

   Data is further reduced with the help of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. The initial stage involved marking repeated statements and expressions. Then, descriptive codes were assigned to the data, and it was organized. The data extracted were then organized into groups based on respective themes.

Initial Coding for Classroom Observations

Initial Coding For Document Analysis

Initial Coding For Questionnaire

## 3. Data Reconstruction and Synthesis Products:

Themes were then prepared with the help of organized codes, which reveal key findings. The themes were then amended through repeated reading and looking for consistency across the different datasets, such as Questionnaire, Documents, and Observations. A mind map was then created to envision the association.

4. How the Codes Were Grouped Together:

Codes like "illustrations", "teamwork", "native language speech", and "peer collaboration" were put into groups like "Inclusive Teaching Strategies". Codes originated by looking at the policy, like "Lack of EAL Learning" and "Absence of Translated materials," were then categorized under "Policy Gaps".

5. Process Notes:

Reflective memos were aggregated after each coding and classroom observation session. Notes were taken on researcher bias, nascent insights, and follow-up queries. The procedure and timeframe for collecting data were documented.
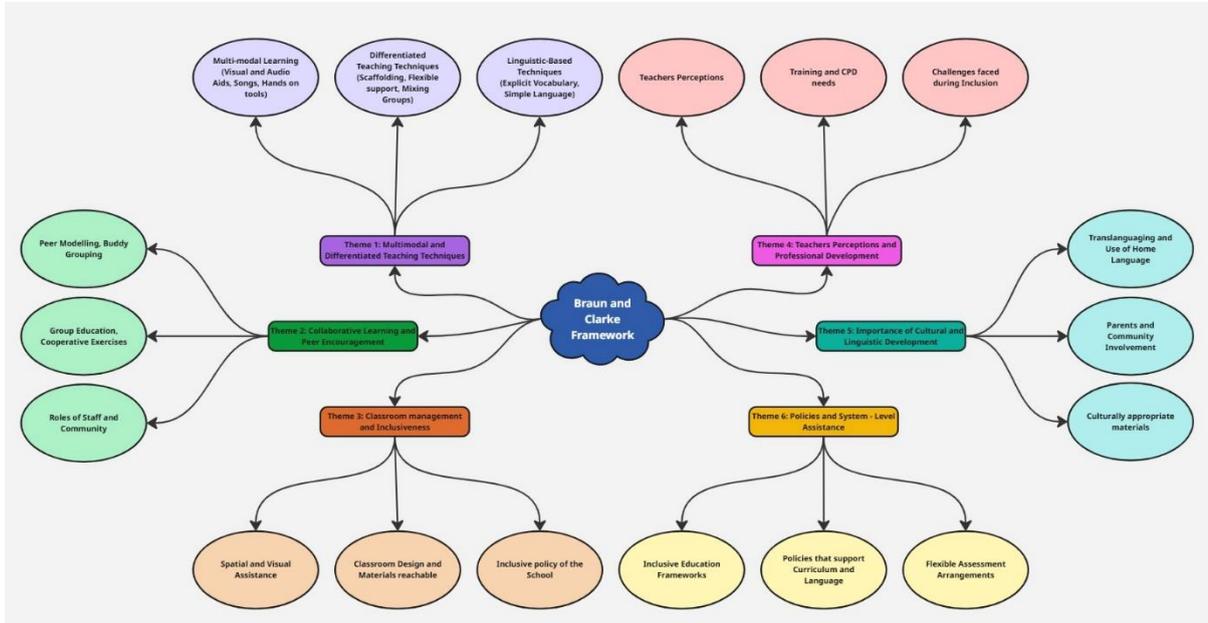
6. Materials Related to Intentions and Dispositions:

The reflective journal added below demonstrates, objective of the researcher, work as a support teacher, and how the perspective of inclusion has changed over time. Completed Questionnaire, Observation notes, and field notes are included.
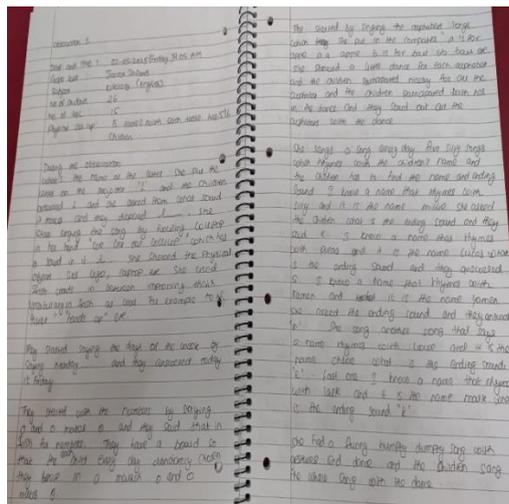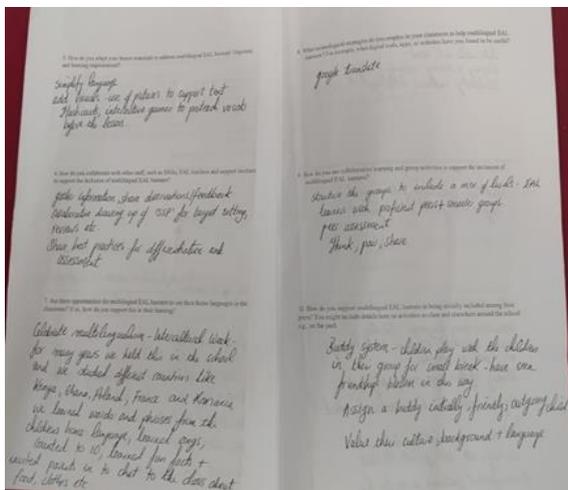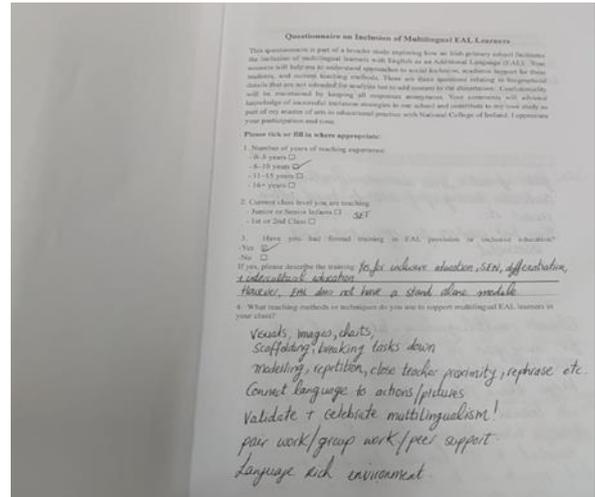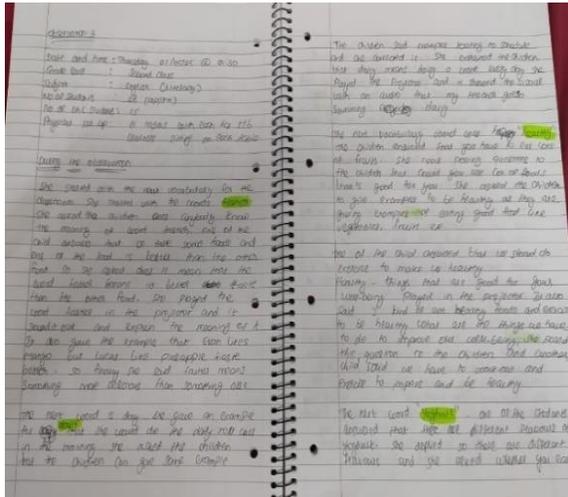
7. Preliminary Development Information:

The preliminary concept map and draft questionnaire are included. These aided in confining the research and ensured that the data gathered harmonized with research goals.

8. Key Themes Developed:

After careful analysis and integration of data from various sources, four key themes evolved:

1. Inclusive Teaching Strategies: Illustrations, Teamwork, Native Language speech, and peer collaboration.
2. Policy Gaps: School Policies refraining to mention distinct strategies for EAL student.
3. Collaboration and Support Structures: Responsibility of SNAs, SETs, and coordination among staff.
4. Barries and Solutions: Issues like lack of training and resource scarcity; teacher's coping skills.