A Critical Discourse Analysis of Scholarly Representations of Irish-medium Education

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Abstract

Irish-medium education (IME) has been a feature of the educational landscape in the North of Ireland since 1971 yet its policy commitments have been delayed and often denied. In this article we use qualitative research synthesis to systematically identify peer-reviewed research in order to explore how IME is represented through both 'little d' discourse and 'big D' Discourse analysis in scholarly discourse. After applying exclusion and inclusion criteria 31 articles were analysed across three databases with results identifying 16 articles which included clear definitions of IME and 15 which did not. Our analysis found that scholarship that included clear definitions of IME tended to fall into two categories of IME as bilingual education or as a grassroots endeavour existing within a difficult political and educational climate. Moreover, we found that IME is mostly ignored in scholarship on the education system in the North of Ireland. Such omissions demonstrate the relationship between colonial ideologies and trajectories of scholarly investigation, highlighting the need for further research clarifying the social and educational features of IME.

Keywords: Irish-medium education; Northern Ireland education system; immersion education; academic discourse; colonial ideologies.

Introduction

Gaeloideachas, also referred to as Irish-medium education (IME), was established through language reclamation efforts in the North of Ireland in 1971 and largely driven by parental demand and community activism (Knipe & Ó Labhraí, 2004). At present, IME is the fastest growing sector within the education system (Jackson, 2022; McGonagle, 2022) with a 50% increase in enrolments between Academic Year (AY) 2004/2005 and AY 2023/2024 (Department of Education, 2023). This growth rate is particularly noteworthy when viewed against a political backdrop of hostility toward Irish and reports of institutional bias (Costello, 2022; Jackson, 2022; McVeigh, 2022; Sharma, 2021). However, the sector has generated relatively little attention in educational research with academic investigation tending to focus on the religious divide between English-medium Catholic maintained schools and Protestant controlled schools. We are eager to understand how IME can have such visibility in the political and social fabric while holding relatively little attention in academic publications. The present study aims to better understand this apparent representational dissonance in

academic scholarship by examining how IME is represented in the literature on education (both primary and post-primary) in the North of Ireland through both 'little d' discourse and 'big D' Discourse analysis (Gee, 2008; 2014) of empirical and conceptual papers.

IME: Community-Established Education

The education system in the North of Ireland is predominantly separated along religious lines, with Catholic Maintained and Protestant Controlled schools comprising 89% of schools, with IME and integrated education as the outliers in this system comprising 5% and 6% of schools respectively (Department of Education, 2024). While IME is the smallest sector within the education system, it is the fastest growing sector and represents a dynamic alternative to English-language and religiously dominated education system.

IME was established in 1971 initially to cater for the children of Gaeltacht Bhóthar Seoighe, which was established two years previously as part of language reclamation efforts by a small group of dedicated activists (Ó Baoill, 2007). This growth has largely been driven by parental demand in republican areas as part of language reclamation efforts (Nic Roibeaird, 2024) against the backdrop of a state that not only refused funding but also threatened legal action against this model of education (Mac Seáin, 2010; Ó Baoill, 2007).

For the purposes of this review which examines representations of IME, we rely on official definitions from practitioners of IME at both primary and post-primary level. In the Irish-medium School Leaders Working Group (2016, pp. 4–5) report IME is defined as a form of education which aims to nurture the educational and social needs of pupils while also fostering bilingualism in pupils. There has been a noted trend of young people passing through Gaeloideachas who have become impactful community activists (Mac Ionnrachtaigh, 2021; Nic Roibeaird, 2024, Ó Baoill, 2007). This strong community connection and how it relates to the educational model of IME is noted in this official definition which argues that

this "builds community confidence and capacity and raises levels of achievement" (School Leaders Working Group, 2016, pp.4–5).

The Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in 1998 signalled a shift for IME with commitments made toward the growth and provision of IME.[1] While Irish is associated with Irish nationalists whose rights and traditions are designed to be protected within the consociational political system as a dominant community, as a minoritised language Irish is arguably not a privileged right as indicated by the partial implementation of an Irish language act following a 15 year wait since the St. Andrews Agreement in 2007 where commitments for an Irish language act were made. This minoritised position has implications for IME. In 2011, Coláiste Feirste, the largest IME secondary school, won a court case against the Department of Education, highlighting ongoing failures in meeting its statutory duties to IME. The Sinn Féin Education Minister, John O'Dowd argued that the stated obligations were "aspirational" while Justice Treacy in his ruling against the Department refuted this and stated that the obligations must have "practical consequences and legislative significance" (in McVeigh, 2022, p. 3). McVeigh (2022) found that 11 years after this ruling the Department of Education continues to fail in implementing the statutory duty resulting in oversubscribed buildings and inadequate resources among other issues. Despite these issues, IME remains the fastest growing education sector in the North, yet its significance remains largely unexamined (and sometimes ignored) in education research (Jackson, 2022).

The present study emerged from conversations in which we sought to make sense of our experiences with this absence of attention to IME in literature. As academics working with Irish medium students, practitioners, and policymakers, we look to peer-reviewed research to contextualise reported conditions and lived realities. The academic project of

[1] At the time of writing, a newly established (2024) IME primary school is piloting an Integrated Education model. This is the first and only IME school to do so.

knowledge generation relies on accurate and comprehensive characterisations of, in the case of IME, the educational landscape. Hence our desire to understand whether our perceptions of IME as under/misrepresented in literature were grounded in reality and the implications for education research in Ireland and the UK. Our focus on the ways in which IME is described and discussed in academic literature makes this a "study of language-in-use" (Gee, 2011, p. 8), which is, for Gee, what discourse analysis is. Academic research develops from what Gee (2011) terms "Big C Conversations," broad societal discussions on key issues. These provide "an ever-present background you can bring to interpret things you hear and read or to formulate your own talk and writing" (Gee, 2011, p. 55). Gee's (2011) discourse analysis, which highlights the role of language-in-use in recognising or misrecognising social phenomena, is useful for examining how scholarly representations shape the framing and treatment of IME in education. This study focuses on representations in academic work as this is viewed as a privileged and reliable form of knowledge production, to explore the implications for its omission or misrecognition in scholarly discourse in policy design and implementation.

We ask:

1. How is IME in the North of Ireland represented in scholarly discourse?
2. How do scholarly representations relate to IME's position in the education system*?*
3. What ideologies are present in these representations?

Methods

The present study relied on two sequential methods to understand how IME is represented in scholarly discourse: a systematic qualitative research synthesis to identify texts describing or discussing IME, followed by discourse analysis of the identified texts to analyse the

relationships between textual representations, author positionality, and the big-C Conversations (Gee, 2005) that contribute to understandings of the world.

Research Synthesis

Following Chong and Plonsky's (2021) "primer" on research synthesis, we undertook a systematic and structured survey of research literature to identify articles relevant to our review. The search protocol was developed with the study's first research question in mind: How is Irish-medium education in the North of Ireland represented in scholarly discourse? In order to capture all possible mentions of IME in peer-reviewed journals we created a search string using Boolean operators (see Table 1).

Table 1

Search String and Databases

Database	Search String	Number of Results
Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC)	AB (educat* or school* or classroom or teach*) AND AB Irish AND AB ('northern Ireland' or 'NI' or 'North of Ireland') Limiters – Pub. Date: 1991; Pub. Type: Academic Journal	43
British Educational Index		33
Education Source		52

The search string was run in three separate databases known for their emphasis on education research: ERIC, The British Educational Index, and Education Source on 24 October 2022 (see Table 1). The search string was intentionally time delimited, only including articles published between the year 1991 and 24 October 2022 (when the search string was run). In 1991, IME was still in its infancy with a handful of recognised and funded schools, while other schools still sought this recognition and funding. This was also the year that the first

IME secondary school, Meánscoil Feirste, opened. As such, 1991 serves as a time boundary that not only signals the start of IME growth, but it also exemplifies the dynamism of the sector.

The initial search identified 128 articles which was reduced to 70 following the deletion of duplicates (see Figure 1), we then proceeded with screening the remaining 70 articles, applying inclusion and exclusion criteria that were developed specifically for this search (see Table 2). We focused on peer-reviewed journal articles due as such sources are positioned as superior forms of knowledge which encapsulate rationality, objective truth, and are therefore viewed as reliable (Hyland, 2016; Suri, 2020). This reliability and privileging of academic scholarship influences how a phenomenon is recognised, misrecognised, or perhaps ignored. Our critical discourse analysis aims to uncover the ideologies present within this form of knowledge to better investigate how it relates to IME's position within the education system.

Table 2

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria	
Inclusion	**Exclusion**
Papers that discuss education in NI and ROI	Papers that only discuss education in Republic of Ireland
Papers that examine the UK education system as a whole	Papers that only discuss education system in Wales, Scotland and England
Papers that examine the education system from specific perspective (e.g., integrated schools, grammar schools)	Papers that are not peer-reviewed
Papers from a variety of methodological perspectives (e.g., qualitative interviews, surveys)	Grey literature

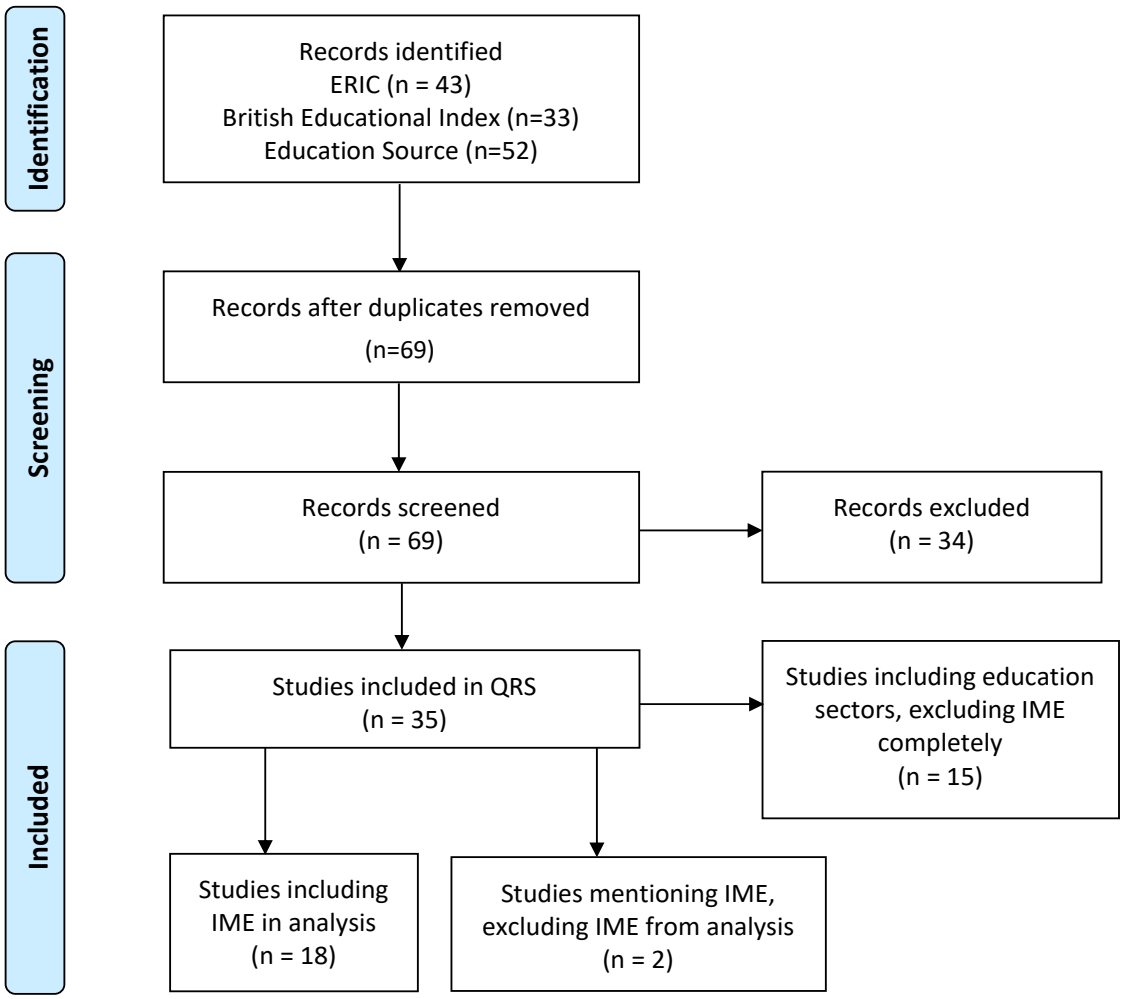
Our screening process was directed at peer-reviewed articles which were expected to include IME as part of any contextual description of educational sectors in the UK or Ireland as a whole and excluded papers that would not include such descriptions (see Table 2). After the screening process, 31 articles remained. We created an extraction form to collate data, completing a form for each article that consisted of direct quotes from the text and their locations in the article as outlined by Chong & Plonsky (2021).

Data Extraction

Following the screening process we began extracting data from the 31 articles and focused this extraction on definitions and descriptions of IME, while we also noted any absences of IME to allow us to critically analyse these omissions.

Figure 1

PRISMA flow diagram. Adapted from Moher et al., 2009.



Of the articles included, 16 included clear descriptions of IME, 15 excluded IME altogether, and 1 referenced IME without a definition or description.

Discourse Analysis

The discourses of the extracted text then became the centre of our focus as we sought to analyse descriptions of IME in scholarship. We drew on Gee's (2005; 2010; 2011) notions of small-d discourse and big-D Discourse. Gee (2011, p. 178) defines discourses as "ways of recognizing and being recognized as certain sorts of *whos* doing certain sorts of *whats*" (emphasis in original). In education research, dominant discourses shape what counts as

Educational, while models and practices outside them risk non- or misrecognition, with material consequences for those involved. With an interest in IME, we examine how contemporary discourse constructs IME for recognition or misrecognition among educationalists.

Gee's (2011) "big-D Discourse tool" highlights how language use is shaped by context and identity. We applied discourse analysis to peer-reviewed research to examine how language communicates ideas and reproduces identities and ideologies in big-C Conversations. As Gee (2011, p. 179) notes, "discourses are matters of enactment and recognition" and analysing representations of IME thus reveals how language enacts and recognises IME in the academy. In the Results section, we present shortened samples of extracts gathered from the 31 articles we analysed and illustrate the identification of three Big-D Discourses from analysis of small-d discourses that were captured.

Data Synthesis

Data analysis focused on extracts of IME-focused text from each screened article. The extracts served as data for the study and were coded thematically using Saldaña (2011) and Miles and Huberman (1994) for guidance to identify small-d discourses. From the 31 articles that met all inclusion criteria, IME was described, defined, or referred to in 46 instances in total across just 18 of the 31 articles. Our analysis captured omissions of IME in 15 articles which were identified as containing descriptions of the education system. These omissions were important to capture given Gee's (2011) emphasis on non-representations and their relationship to misrecognition. We assigned descriptive codes to each representation of IME to capture each "datum's primary content and essence" (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2009, p. 3). These codes were then synthesised into three big-D Discourses (i) IME as

invisible; (ii) IME as bilingual/immersion education; and (iii) IME as a grassroots activist endeavour.

Results

In answer to our first research question (How is Irish-medium education in the North of Ireland represented in scholarly discourse?), we describe the three dominant discourses that emerged from our analysis: IME as invisible, IME as bilingual education, IME as a grassroots activist endeavour. We discuss each of these discursive categories in terms of sociopolitical positioning and ideology to provide answers to the second and third research questions.

IME as invisible

One of the 31 articles included in our study referred to IME once but without a definition (Gardner, 2016), while fifteen articles omitted IME from representations of the education system entirely—failing to mention it within sometimes lengthy descriptions of the general educational landscape of the north (Armstrong, 2009; Barnes, 2002; Bates & McCully, 2017; Biggart et al., 2013; Carr & Beckett, 2016; Eaton et al., 2006; Ferguson & Cairns, 2002; Fitzpatrick, 2007; Furey et al., 2017; Long et al., McCully & Clarke, 2016; 2012; Smith, 2003; Smith et al., 2017; Terra, 2014). In many of these cases, the education system is characterised as being comprised of just two categories: 'controlled' (often linked to Protestant denominations) or 'maintained' schools (overseen by the Council for Catholic-Maintained Schools), without mention of specific sectors therein or alternative sectors.

Largely these missed opportunities to include IME in descriptions of the educational landscape boiled down to the education system being viewed through the lens of religion. This view reflects big-C conversations (Gee, 2011) that reduce political dynamics to a binary of sectarian relations. In these cases, IME is perhaps not mentioned because the authors have

mischaracterised it as Catholic education, with integrated education[2] painted as the only alternative. This was evident in Bates and McCully's article (2021, p. 130):

> … the NI state has largely educated Catholics and Protestants separately (…) Currently, despite the emergence of a small, Integrated school sector (Smith 2001), separation remains significant.

IME is not mentioned and not represented in this article, even though it is a part of the education system of "the NI state". To include it here would be to complicate how education is characterised as IME is not explicitly religious (i.e., most but not all IME schools have a secular curriculum). Indeed, the largest IME school, Coláiste Feirste, is listed as a Controlled school—a category that tends to be reduced to 'Protestant schools.' Inaccuracies by omission were found in just less than half of the articles identified by the search criteria, meaning the articles met all inclusion criteria and but failed to describe or, in some instances, mention IME. Further, in instances where integrated education was presented as the only alternative to religious segregation it tended to be coupled with consternation as the sector's rate of growth was perceived to be slow despite public support as demonstrated in Gardner's article (2016, pp. 350–351):

> Integrated education has been a feature of the education landscape since the opening of the first school, Lagan College, in 1981. For some time the prospects for a radical alternative to the bipartite system looked bright (...) Despite consistently strong public endorsement (…) this form of shared education has grown very slowly to its present 7% proportion of the national enrolment…

IME schools are mentioned in Gardner's (2016) article, but just once as part of a list of four kinds of post-primary schools, and without a description or definition. This academic inattention to the rapid growth of IME while concomitantly fretting over the lack of growth the integrated sector highlights the ideological tendency toward sectarian thinking in research examining education in the North of Ireland since the GFA.

[2] At the time of writing, a newly established (2024) IME primary school is piloting an Integrated Education model. This is the first and only IME school to do so.

Descriptions of the general educational terrain were not the only areas where IME was overlooked. Our inclusion criteria captured articles that reported on resourcing and staffing issues—some of which included IME (e.g., Knipe & Ó Labhraí, 2005; McKendry, 2007), and some that excluded it such as Eaton et al.'s investigation on teacher qualifications (2006). Focused on the possibility of an emerging teacher shortage, Eaton et al. (2006, p. 554) relied on a survey instrument that they 'adapted to take account of particular policies and concerns in Northern Ireland'. Yet, Eaton et al. (2006) failed to mention IME at all, omitting the sector even from contextual descriptions of the educational landscape. IME was also invisible in a few studies that focused on pupils, such as studies regarding youth identity or moral maturity (Ferguson and Cairns, 2002; Smith, 2003; Smith et al., 2017).

IME as Bilingual/Immersion Education

Seven articles represented IME as a bilingual/immersion education model (Nic Aindriú, 2020; Mac Corraidh, 2004; McAdory & Janmaat, 2015; McKendry, 2007; McVeigh et al., 2019; Mulgrew et al., 2020; Wright & Scullion, 2007). Four of these seven expanded upon their initial definitions of IME as an instructional model, to include additional, 'extra-curricular' features that contributed to a more holistic representation of IME (Mac Corraidh, 2004; McAdory and Janmaat, 2015; McKendry, 2007; Wright & Scullion, 2007). These findings highlight the importance of 'small d' discourse grain size to our analysis. Coding individual 'representations' of IME rather than whole articles allowed us to attend to understandings of the complexity of instructional models *in context;* provided that IME was mentioned in the first place. The representations of IME that described it in instructional terms ranged from locally situated definitions to global comparisons. For instance, Nic Aindriú's depiction of IME as immersion education discusses the different models on the island and relates back to the dominant language of English and the different timelines that pupils 'commence English as a curriculum subject' in different jurisdictions (2020, p. 102).

Mulgrew et al. (2020, p. 66) were keen to situate IME in a global context of immersion education and to connect this back to the local context:

> The immersion-education model used in IME (Gaelscoileanna, 2019) is common in many parts of the world, for example, Māori-medium education in New Zealand (…) On commencing IME, children will be listening to Irish, following class routines and building knowledge of the language therefore meeting the broad definition of bilingualism.

Research that highlights IME as part of a globally recognised model of immersion education moves beyond local sectarian ideologies by connecting it with similar efforts across a broad geographic range. Further, it provides an opportunity to consider possible commonalities across the colonial power dynamics abroad, and their relevance to the rationale for and implementation of the model.

IME as a grassroots activist endeavour

Among the articles that included IME, most representations were coded within the third discourse of grassroots activism with six articles referencing this aspect of IME (Knipe and Ó Labhraí, 2007; Mac Corraidh, 2004; McKendry, 2007; Scullion, 2007; Ó Baoill, 2007; Wright and Scullion, 2007; McAdory and Janmaat, 2015). In these extracts, IME is portrayed as an expanding sector, the product of collective desire and labour, emerging from community need in the face of political and ideological barriers. Knipe and Ó Labhraí (2005, pp. 191–2) provide one example of this:

> Since its inception, the Irish-medium sector has always been marked by a sense of dogged determination among parents and teachers who were always prepared to make personal sacrifices for the good of their school; past pupils of the sector display a great sense of loyalty.

The ‘dogged determination’ of adults supporting IME indexes the political struggles experienced by the sector and the involvement of families throughout. Ó Baoill (2007, pp. 419–420) notes this family involvement in his characterisation of IME which begins with by referencing the aims of ‘their social, emotional, aesthetic, spiritual and vocational

development' before situating parents 'as significant partners in their children's education and to encourage the use of Irish among families'.

Ascribing holistic aims to IME shows it is not merely a translation of other school curricula but a unique pedagogy embedding culturally sustaining ways of knowing in Irish. This reflects a broader community ideology of decolonization and social transformation, documented elsewhere but not within this study (see Zenker, 2013). This speaks to the definition provided previously by the IME school leaders working group.

Portrayals of IME success in the face of adversity contributed significantly to this discourse of IME as grassroots activism. In another study exploring symbolic violence against the Irish language due to colonisation, IME was portrayed as a sector battling against colonial legacies (MacKenzie et al., 2022, p. 492):

> IME (…) is still undermined by hostility to the language that stems from ideologies that have occupied the island of Ireland since the 1600s, when the architects of the 'plantation' of Ulster declared that successive generations would be English in 'tongue and heart'.

Discussion

We focus on peer-reviewed journal articles because of the role that academic texts play in the production and dissemination of knowledge in contemporary society. Empirical work published in peer-reviewed journals is viewed as "a privileged form of argument (…) offering a model of rationality and detached reasoning supported by empirical evidence or flawless logic" (Hyland, 2016, p. 3). The assumption of "truth" that accompanies academic scholarship links how a phenomenon is portrayed with how a phenomenon is perceived (or misperceived, or not perceived at all). Our critical discourse analysis illustrates the challenges of looking to research to represent reality — "truth" can be as elusive in academic texts as it is in the real world that such texts purport to be investigating.

Invisibility in the Educational Landscape

Wodak (2006, p. 604) highlights the need to think beyond the boundaries of what is produced in critical discourse analysis, noting that 'it is salient to investigate what is absent, what is not said, who has access to speak and to speech at all'. For this reason, we devoted significant attention to the 15 papers in our review that failed to include characterisations of IME. The absence of IME from studies examining national identity in different school settings (Furey et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017), additional learning needs (Long et al., 2006), citizenship education (Smith, 2003), and school resources and teacher training (Bates & McCully, 2021; Eaton et al., 2006; McCully & Clarke, 2016; Terra, 2014) not only erases the existence of an emerging educational alternative in the region, but also constructs an incomplete picture of the educational ecology relevant to each of these studies. Returning to Gee's (2011, p. 178) 'ways of recognizing and being recognized as certain sorts of *whos* doing certain sorts of *whats*', our analysis shows how the erasure of IME from scholarly discourse prevents practitioners, learners, and a growing Irish language community from being recognized as active participants in education.

Indeed, the failure to include IME in studies regarding identity and citizenship speaks to a wider discourse that diminishes the cultural and political benefits of Irish in northern Irish society. Elsewhere, Ó Baoill (2007) and Mac Ionnrachtaigh (2021) have illustrated the active political participation and social contribution of IME pupils to their communities. These contributions revolve around language, culture, and the social and material reality of their lives, inherently encompassing issues of identity and citizenship that are not monolithic. Erasing this form of education from scholarly investigation presents an inaccurate snapshot of the education system and minimises the significance of IME to pupils and their surrounding communities.

The exclusion of IME from articles that examined issues of resources and professional capacity over the last 18 years is particularly glaring given Knipe & Ó Labhraí's (2005) paper that outlined the Education Training Inspectorate's (ETI) report which found a glaring shortage of resources in IME. Further, Knipe & Ó Labhraí (2005) note a view felt among practitioners that IME does not receive the same attention as English-medium education from politicians and society, an impression that is mirrored in Education research. This perception of disregard toward the sector is not an invention of over-worked practitioners, but rather an accumulation of adverse experiences with statutory bodies which McVeigh (2022) makes reference to in his report on IME and the fulfilment of statutory duties.

Meanings are determined through negotiation between people and social groups with different interests, and '(p)ower plays an important role in these negotiations' (Gee, 2008: 12). Struggles for funding and recognition were a defining feature of IME in the first 25 years of its existence (Ó Baoill, 2007; McKendry, 2007; Knipe & Ó Labhraí, 2005). The curiously inconsistent treatment of IME in academic literature, in conjunction with more recent courtroom struggles for fair treatment demonstrate that what is meant by 'education' in the North of Ireland is still being negotiated in the subsequent 25 years.

Instructional Model or Something 'More'?

Articles that included IME in their analysis (in addition to context) tended to recognise this wider climate of hostility linking this back to colonialism and its attendant ideologies that position English as superior (MacKenzie et al., 2022; McAdory &Janmaat, 2015; McKendry, 2007). Though not all portrayals centred the sociopolitical history and instead focused on IME solely as part of the education system (McVeigh et al., 2019; Mulgrew et al., 2020; Wright & Scullion, 2007). Separating pedagogy from context reflects a tendency in education research to frame curricular models as apolitical, as if learning were unaffected by power relations in context. Such omissions, described as the "null curriculum" (Eisner, 1985;

Flinders et al., 1986), shape the "limitations and opportunities for curriculum implementation" (Flinders et al., 1986, p. 40). In IME, framing immersion as apolitical may strategically lighten the historical and cultural "weight" of Irish, rejecting big-C conversations that tie language to sectarian identity. Yet such discourses offer only a partial picture of IME, situated within a socio-politically complex ecology.

For the studies in our review that represented the social and cultural aspects of IME (alongside the cognitive benefits), we found a wide variety of factors that were identified as relevant to the sector's struggles and growth. IME is characterised in this literature as a sector in which student learning is entangled with historical violence, material deprivation, activism, family relationships, and community regeneration. Articles acknowledging this complexity illustrate how IME is not simply an Irish-language translation of an existing "maintained" or "controlled" curriculum. Rather, IME centres the ideological and pastoral as key components in the Irish immersion model. An emphasis on the "extra-linguistic" aspects of learning that index decolonising ideologies of language reclamation (Chew, 2015; Hermes et al., 2023; Leonard, 2019) resonate with a relational orientation to language (Henne-Ochoa et al., 2020). Irish is not solely viewed as a code to achieve identical outcomes. Instead, it is a cultural practice that holds its speakers in relation to place, to one another, to community pasts and to shared futures.

Conclusion

This study illustrates a lack of clarity concerning IME in Education research and highlights the relationship between discourse in scholarship and the large-C "Conversations" circulating in society. Academic research encourages deep dives and specialised knowledge, but it also "straightens" our orientation to various phenomena (Ahmed, 2006), and it makes certain things more or less recognizable as relevant, legitimate, and even real (Cushing-Leubner et al., 2021). In contexts shaped by centuries of rule and resistance, politicised sectors such as

IME are represented in divergent ways. Ideology and its cultural models shape sense-making in both everyday and academic contexts. As Gee (2008, p. 29) notes, "(w)e all live and communicate with and through 'ideology'. We cannot do otherwise, but we can seek to interrogate [it]." This synthesis highlights continuity between the substandard treatment of IME in relation to the GFA and its omission or misrecognition in academic research. Critical discourse analysis thus underscores the need for sustained attention to context in education research, particularly regarding challenges, practices, and innovations in minoritised sectors. Further work is needed on how community-driven models can be sustained. For IME, this means recognising it as more than a language intervention and as an educational innovation deserving greater inclusion.

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The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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