



## Report

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The University of Manchester

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**Societal Multilingualism: School Language Survey**  
**‘Does an Educational setting affect language choice in**  
**Heald Place Primary School?’**

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## **1 Introduction: What is the school language survey?**

The school language survey is an initiative put forward by Multilingual Manchester - a university linguistic collective that strives to understand multilingualism across the Manchester area. The main aim of the school language survey is to recognise incoming trends in the youngest speakers of Manchester and to measure the number of speakers of various languages, which can result in a better understanding of the vitality of that language within the city.

## **2 Methodology**

In order to obtain our data we went to Heald Place Primary School, Moss Side (a well-known multilingual hub) in Manchester. We were provided a template of suitable questions from Multilingual Manchester to which we added three questions of our own; 'What is your favourite language?', 'What language do you speak the majority of the time on the playground?' and 'Which language do you speak the majority of the time in the classroom?' (cf. Appendix for full questionnaire). The survey provided for us included questions such as, the influence of family members on language choice, the impact of the media, and how well they could read, write and understand English and their native or additional language(s).

Two of our group went to the school with the aim of interviewing every pupil in Year 4 (age's eight to nine) over a two day period. Before conducting each interview, the interviewers would introduce themselves, explain the process of the interview and why they were conducting the interview so that the pupils felt at ease and therefore provided the most natural answers. All interviews were face to face, and all were completed within the two day period. Each interview took an average of 10 minutes. Once all interviews had been completed the data was compiled onto spreadsheet by the remaining members of the group, and analysed.

### **2.1 Issues while conducting the study**

Some of the children were unable to speak to the interviewer as their grasp of English was either non-existent or very minimal. When this was the case we either asked one of the other pupils to translate for us, or in a couple of cases a support staff teacher translated for us. This was an issue predominantly with the Arabic community within the school.

Due to timing issues and school holidays coming up the week after we were in the school, we were unable to go ahead with our original plan to speak to the teachers about their feelings about multilingualism within the school.

In some cases the children were incapable to provide us with a definitive answer to the question 'Which countries have you previously lived in?' This could be a result of various co-factors; the student's young age, confusion over the correct name of their home country (e.g. Africa instead of Nigeria), or not wanting to share the name of their home country for fear of prejudice against either their country or their language. Similar to this, a few pupils struggled in naming their other languages. Many confused their native country for their language (e.g. 'I speak Pakistan').

Due to confidence in their heritage language a few children were reluctant, or refused to speak their language in the proficiency test section of the interview. This could impact our results as they may well have been fluent in their language, and speak it confidently at home or with peers, but due to the observers paradox we will be unable to find that out. One pupil in particular did not want to speak his heritage language (Somali) as he thought it was 'shameful'. This represents much of the prejudice these children can find as a result of not having English as their first language.

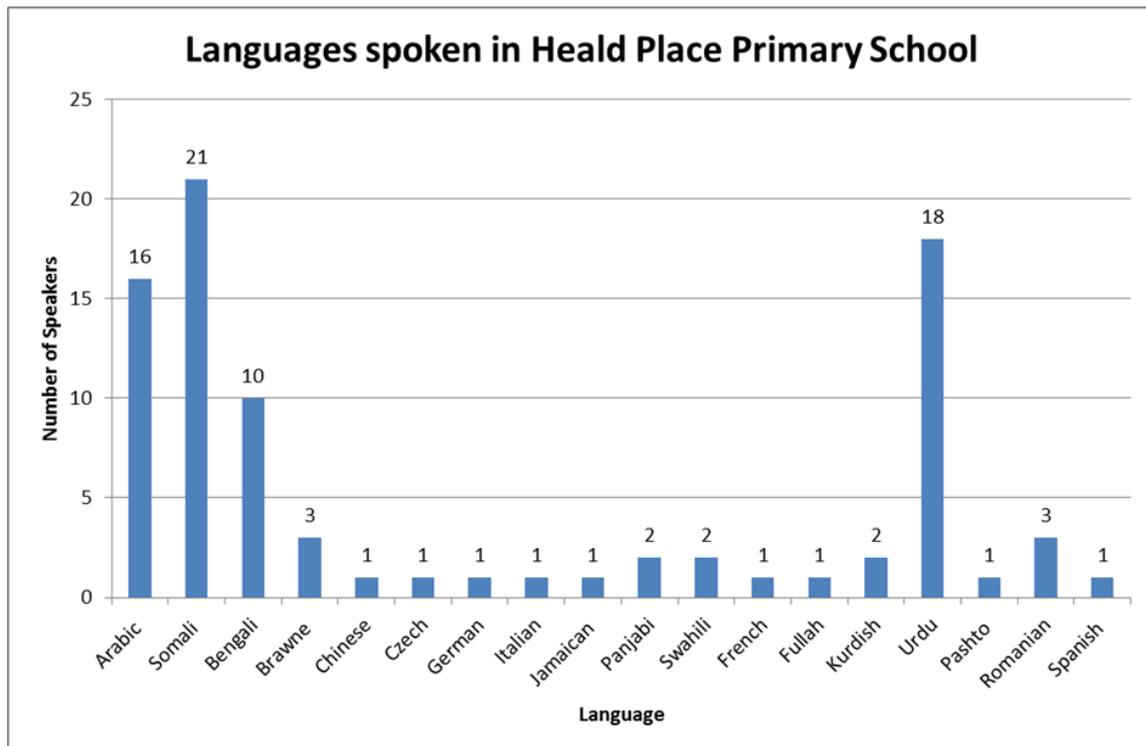
## **2.2 Issues post-study**

Due to data protection all the inputting of the questionnaires onto spreadsheets had to be done in the multilingual Manchester office, restricting our access to the data and affecting the speed at which we could analyse the results. Although this was a small issue, due to the Easter break and other factors it did have an impact on our study.

# **3 Main findings from the School Language Survey**

## **3.1 Languages spoken in the school:**

The results show that all students apart from a small number (less than 5) spoke English alongside another language. We will come back to this when assessing the proficiency tests to measure the ability and competence in this language. The high number of children able to speak English is expected as classes are delivered in English. In light of this there was a clear linguistic diversity in other students and this is shown in the graph below (1):

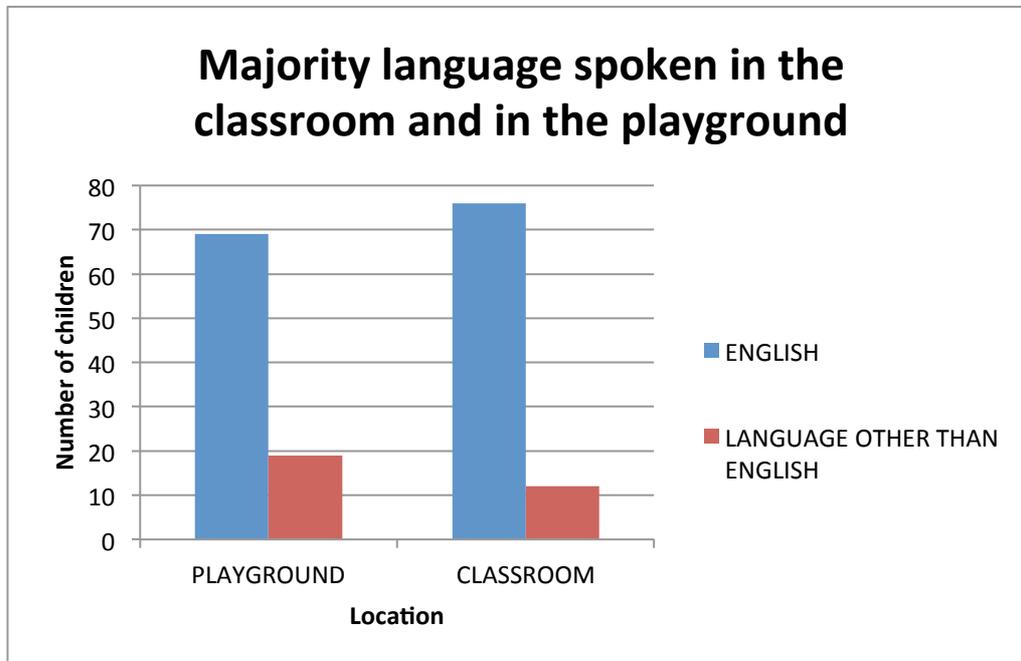


In our study, the top three languages after English were Somali (21 speakers), Urdu (18 speakers) and Arabic (16 speakers). To put this into context we can compare our results to the demographic studies already completed in Rusholme. According to Qpzm LocalStats UK (2014), the top three languages spoken in Rusholme after English (71%) were Urdu (5.7%), Bengali (4.8%) and Arabic (2.5%). There are ties between both results; Urdu being the second most spoken language in the area is reflected by being third (after English) in the school. This leads us to the question about Somali speakers, and the reason for the large number of speakers found in Heald Place. In contrast to Qpzm LocalStats UK (2014) who said there are only 1.10% of Somali speakers in Rusholme this seems a minimal amount. An argument for the high number of Somali speakers present in Heald Place could be its location. Being on Claremont Road could have had an effect due to the high proportion of Somalian people known to be living there.

### 3.2 Educational setting and language choice

Our findings indicate that an educational setting does affect language choice; however this is alongside other influential factors. (2) shows the results of the question ‘Which language do you speak in the playground?’ and ‘Which language do you speak in the classroom?’

(2).



English is spoken as the majority language in the playground and the classroom, with the classroom boasting 86% of the students using English as their priority language to communicate. Whilst in school, the pupils adhere to predominantly communicating in English. There is an indefinite number of reasons as to why this could be, but we feel that the most important factor could be that is the easiest option. They are taught in English, and as a result speak English to one another. English is a common language for the vast majority of the pupils and so speaking consistently in English allows for easy conversation change, and does not exclude any one.

We also asked the children for their favourite language, was it their native or home language or English?

(3). ‘What is your favourite language?’

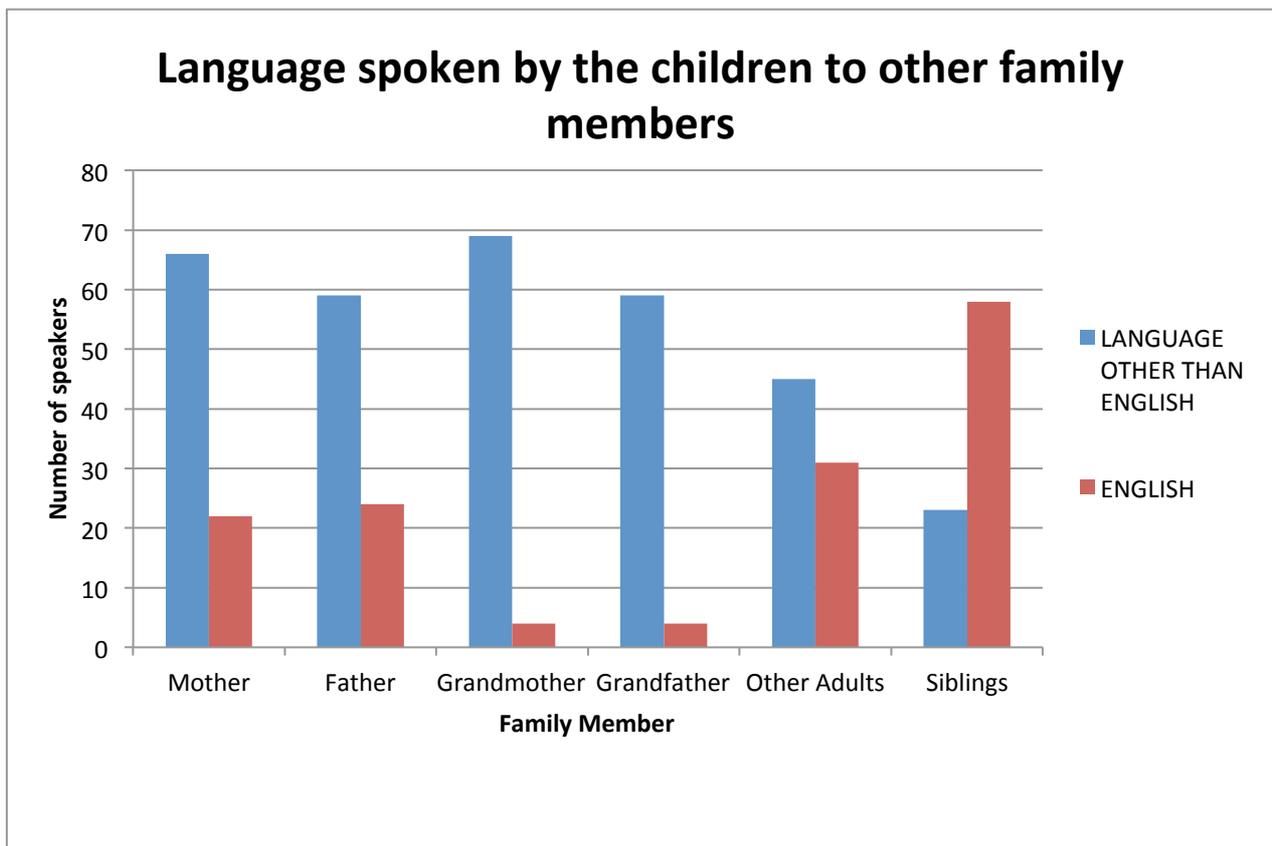
Favourite Language	Number of Children
English	44
Language other than English	42

Results show that when it came to the ‘favoured language’ question on our questionnaire, English was favoured, although not by much. From these results we deduced several possible reasons they appear so. Firstly, the fact that English is the most favoured language could potentially mean that the children view English as a higher prestige language. This could be because they are living in England

and feel the need to take part in English life, or it could be because children find English new and exciting in comparison to their native language which their parents and grandparents may speak to them. This was evident when one Somalian child stated that their favourite language was English as opposed to Somali and their reasoning was that speaking Somali was 'shameful'. This particular example of viewing a language as 'shameful' was unique however, and despite English being the most common favoured language, 42 children, the majority also fluent English speakers, all chose another language. This figure could suggest that these children have a sense of pride in their native language and a desire to communicate in that language despite being surrounded by English speakers. It is a determination that comes with the want for cultural identity, clearly displayed by children as young as year 4 pupils. An example of this pride for their native language was evident in a couple of Somalian children. They stated that they would often teach non-Somali speakers some Somali so that they could play with them in the playground.

### 3.3 Influence of family on language choice

(4). Graph showing preferred language spoken to family members by children.



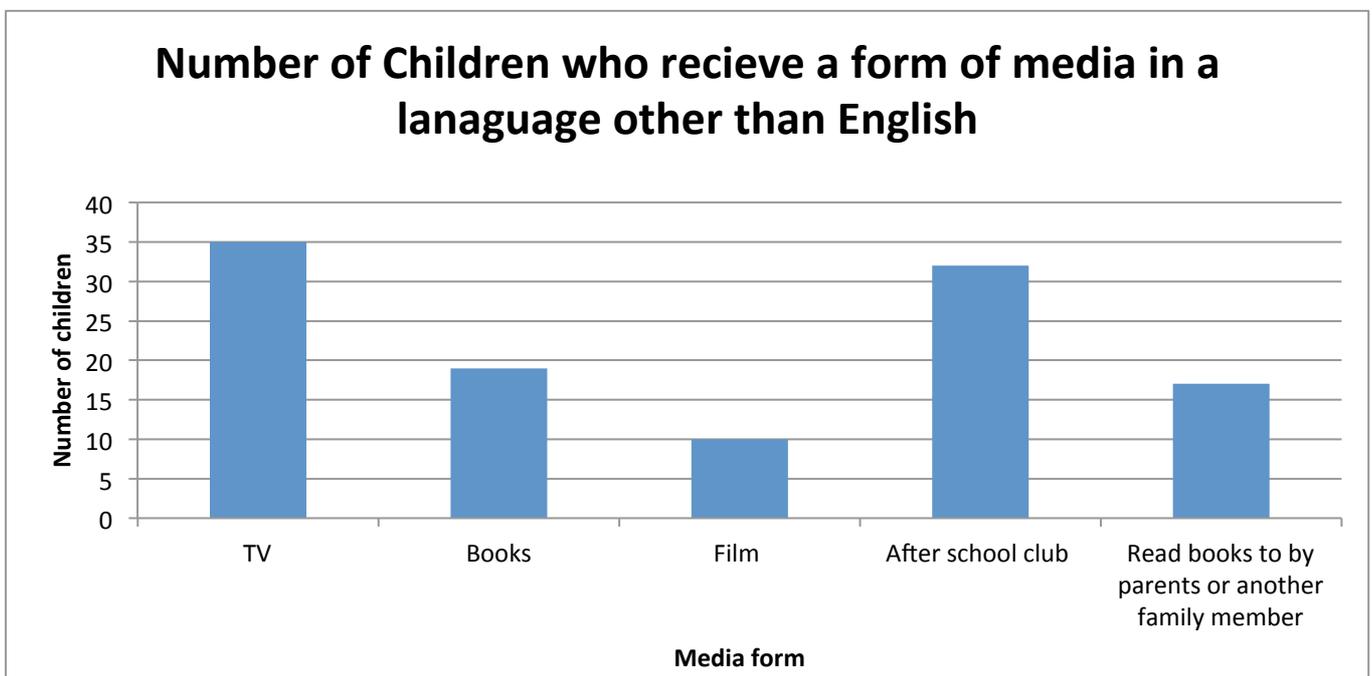
This graph highlights how outside of the educational setting, the home languages prevail as the majority language spoken to family members by the children, apart from when speaking to their siblings. Arguably, it could be obvious for the children to speak to their grandparents in their home language as we found from our survey, a large number of pupils (64%) were born outside of England.

This could suggest that their grandparents are still living in their places of birth, so communicating with them in the home language would be the most ideal, as well as the norm.

It seems that there is an aspect of generational trending within language in the family. It would appear that the younger generations of the family tend to favour speaking in English, whereas the elder members communicate in their home language. This could be for a number of reasons; not knowing English that well, tradition, its routine/normal, and simply that it could be easier for them to talk in their home language. It also indicates potential code switching within the home as children move between English and their native language depending on who they are speaking to.

Why siblings communicate more in English than their home language is something of particular interest. One reason could be because they all go to school where they are conditioned to speak English on a regular basis, and this continues on at home with their siblings. Another reason could be because sometimes they might want to have 'secret' conversations, which some pupils have stated as the reason why they speak in certain languages at particular time. Also, many topics of conversation they hold with their siblings will be different to the conversations they have with adults. New toys, games or television programmes they may only know the name for in English and so must use English to talk about them.

### 3.4 Influence of the media upon language choice



(5.) Graph depicting media usage amongst the children, in languages other than English

Our data reveals that 43% of the pupils read in their home language. This could correlate with our scores of how well the students can speak their native language as reading can enhance both vocabulary and confidence.

88% of pupils watch television in their own language, highlighting the fact that even though they are not living in the country of their language they are able to access secondary sources of that language with relative ease.

### **3.5 Influence of external institutions**

A substantial number of pupils told us that they attend special schools which are focused on their home language; be it specific language schools such as "Arabic School", or "Urdu School", or they attend places of worship like the Mosque, where everything is conducted in their home language. This would have a great influence on language choice as it encourages them to speak that language outside of the home setting.

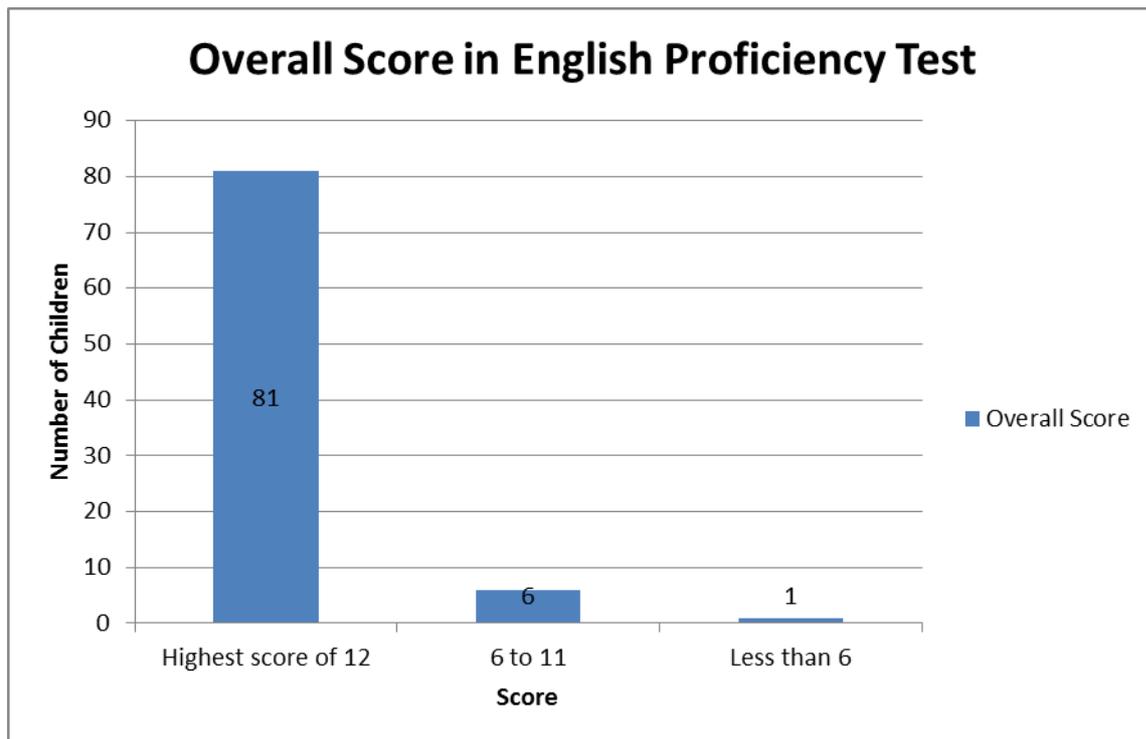
## **4 Results of the Proficiency test**

In addition to the investigation of what languages were spoken in Heald Place across year 4 students, we also wanted to find out the capability these students had in the extra language(s). The proficiency test was constructed with different elements, assessing both their ability to write and speak. The first part was a text box where the students were encouraged to write a small amount in their second language. The second part was to speak about everyday things and simple, conventional tasks to check their basic understanding of their language. This was done in English and then in their other language(s). The topics were: body parts, family members, numbers and a brief description of their daily routine. To assess their response we used three ranking categories which placed their capability in corresponding tiers, numbered one to three. Number (3) represented an immediate and fluent response to the question, number (2) shows a slow and hesitant response and number (1) showed no understanding and no overall response.

### **4.1 English Proficiency Test**

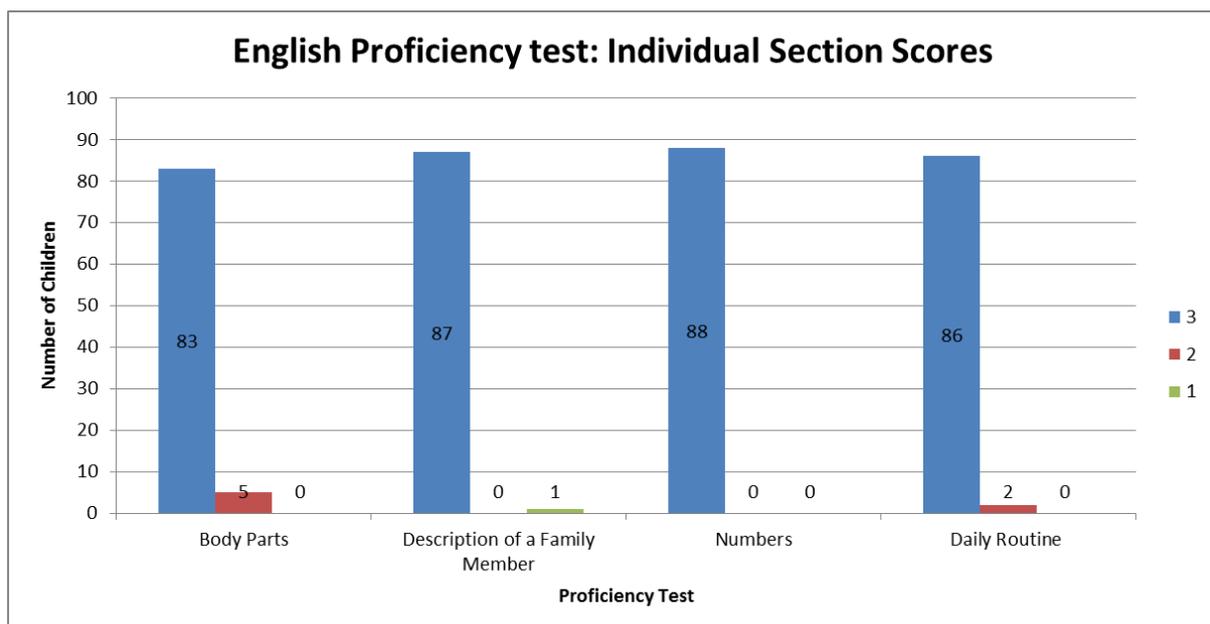
This graph shows the overall proficiency test results in English. If the student reached the highest score of 12 they answered all the questions in a fluent manner. A score of 6 -11 means a slow and hesitant response to the questions and a score less than 6 indicates no understanding of the English questions we asked.

(6). Proficiency in English amongst Year 4



To magnify these results we will show a graph that highlights the different components of the proficiency test, which raises the question whether there is a trend in the different parts of the students understanding of basic language understanding.

(7.) Individual section scores for English

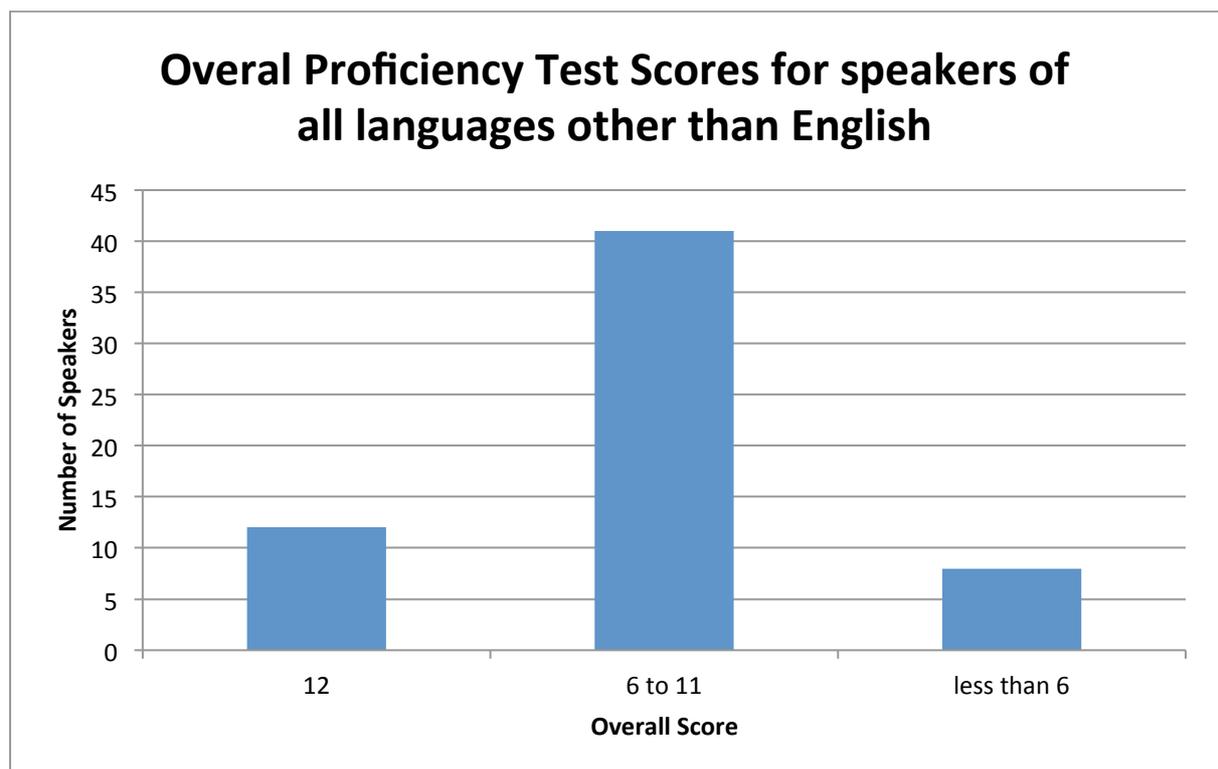


Looking at these results it becomes clear that the vast majority of students have a clear understanding of the different sections of the proficiency test. The outcome that all students had no problems with naming the numbers could be supported by the Ofsted report compiled in 2013 on Heald Place which states that 88% of Key Stage 4 students gained a level 4 in the mathematics test. Another reason could be that learning the numbers is a universal initial stage of a language acquisition process. Body parts and daily routine however are features of the curriculum in earlier years in the school, something many of the pupils may have missed. This could explain that the few students who struggled in the proficiency test had issues with these sections.

#### 4.2 Proficiency test results for all other languages

We also assessed the pupil's competence in their other languages. We will focus on the overall collective results which show ability in all languages spoken across the pupils of Year 4 in Heald Place.

(8.) Proficiency in languages other than English



As the graph shows the results are not as one-sided as the overall English proficiency test. In most cases the students were marked in the slow and hesitantly category for their language(s). This could be as they do not practice speaking their home language as much as they do English. There was also the underlying force of the 'observers paradox'; the students may have not been as confident in front of the interviewers as if they were talking to someone they know well. This could have had an effect on their performance. 8 students were marked in category 3 which meant they showed no ability in

responding to the questions in their home language. The reason for this may be due to a lack of understanding of what is meant by 'can you speak any other languages'? We accounted several times when interviewing that a student will say I can speak certain languages even if they knew only a handful of words. There was also a cultural and linguistic confusion in places; if you are born in another country it doesn't mean you know how to speak the language.

## **5 Literature Review**

We based several ideas for our survey on The Multilingual Cities Project (Extra & Yagmur 2011), In their study, Extra and Yagmur split the measuring of Language preference and Vitality into four sections, Proficiency, Dominance, Choice and Preference. Proficiency is a key tenant of our survey, alongside language choice. Dominance and Preference consider what language is spoken best and which language is preferred.

Extra and Yagmur chose dimensions that concentrated on oral skills at home in order to give Immigrant Minority languages a fair chance of emerging in societal contexts where cultural identity could be displayed. With regard to Proficiency, we decided to test this using a score out of 3. Understanding language is considered the least demanding part of the four language skills involved in Extra and Yagmur's study. We tested every child on spoken and written language in an attempt to determine proficiency.

Choice of language in regards to which language is spoken to certain family members or friends highlighted the crucial role mothers play in the language vitality of immigrant minority languages, a point which Extra and Yagmur also highlight. They label mothers as 'major gatekeeper's for the intergenerational' meaning they help determine the use of the minority language and the sustenance of them. Language dominance and preference appear as if they should go hand in hand, but we saw a couple of examples of pupils speaking their native language, viewed as a minority language, better than any other language. However, they didn't deem their native language as their preferred language. This could be linked to an element language prestige or external influences such as friends and family.

## **6 Conclusion**

In regard to our original question 'Does an educational setting affect language choice?' we feel that yes, it does. Our results show that children speak English for the majority of the time during the school day but this is not the case while at home. It could be that English holds a common ground between the groups of multi-lingual students, but many of the languages have large numbers of pupils speaking the same language (Somali, Urdu etc), and they do not appear to speak to each other in those languages on a regular basis. The influence of the media, and what they have access to in school could be impacting this also, as resources in their home language may be minimal and as a result utilise English media resources more often. The predominantly English school setting also has affected the proficiency test results. The majority scored better in the English section than their first, second and third languages section, indicating they are improving rapidly in their abilities in English, but their primary source to learn more of their secondary languages is at home, limiting their

opportunities to extend their vocabulary. In conclusion, we feel as a result of our study that an educational setting does affect language choice, as children use English predominantly within school, whereas their home language may take priority if it were able to.

## **7 Bibliography**

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Extra G and Yagmur K (2011) Urban Multilingualism in Europe: Mapping linguistic diversity in multicultural cities. *Journal of Pragmatics* 43, pp. 1173-1184. University of Tilburg.

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## 8 Appendix

### (i). Main Questionnaire

#### SCHOOL LANGUAGE SURVEY

NAME OF SCHOOL:		
PUPIL NAME:		
DATE OF BIRTH:	YEAR GROUP:	CLASS:
ETHNICITY:	COUNTRIES PREVIOUSLY LIVED IN (IF KNOWN BY CHILD):	
NAME OF INTERVIEWER:		DATE OF SURVEY:

##### Question 1

1a	What language do you speak to your mother?	
1b	What language do you speak to your father?	
1c	What language do you speak to your grandmother?	
1d	What language do you speak to your grandfather?	
1e	Do you speak a different language with any other adults?	
1f	What language do you speak to your sibling(s)?	

##### Question 2

2a	What language does your mother speak to you?	
2b	What language does your father speak to you?	
2c	What language does your grandmother speak to you?	
2d	What language does your grandfather speak to you?	
2e	Do any other adults speak a different language to you?	
2f	What language does your sibling speak to you?	

##### Question 3

3a	Do you read at home? In what language(s)?	
3b	Does someone read to you at home? In what language(s)?	
3c	Do you watch TV at home? In what language(s)?	
3d	Do you go to the cinema? Which languages are the films in?	
3e	Do you go to another school in the evenings or weekend? What language(s) are you taught in?	
3f	Can you write in any of the other languages you speak? (List the languages)	
3g	When did you last go to another country?	
	What language(s) did you speak?	

##### Question 4

4	Can the pupil read or write in their first language? (Specify)	
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##### Question 5

5	Can the pupil read or write in English?	
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(ii) Language Proficiency test

### LANGUAGE COMPETENCE EVALUATION

<b>NAME OF SCHOOL:</b>			
<b>PUPIL (GIVEN NAME):</b>		<b>DATE OF SURVEY:</b>	

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH	IMMEDIATELY & FLUENTLY	SLOWLY & HESITANTLY	NOT AT ALL	COMMENTS
Can child name body parts?				
Can child count from 1-10?				
Can child describe members of their family, how old they are, how they dress and what they like to do?				
Can child describe their normal daily routine, from when get they up?				

HOME LANGUAGE 1:	IMMEDIATELY & FLUENTLY	SLOWLY & HESITANTLY	NOT AT ALL	COMMENTS
Can child name body parts?				
Can child count from 1-10?				
Can child describe members of their family, how old they are, how they dress and what they like to do?				
Can child describe their normal daily routine, from when get they up?				

### YEAR GROUP OVERVIEW

<b>NAME OF SCHOOL:</b>							
<b>YEAR GROUP:</b>		<b>CLASSES:</b>		<b>NUMBER OF CHILDREN SURVEYED:</b>			
<b>PUPIL NAME</b>	<b>English score</b>	<b>Language 2</b>	<b>Language 2 score</b>	<b>Language 3</b>	<b>Language 3 score</b>	<b>Language 4</b>	<b>Language 4 score</b>