Multilingual Manchester

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The Benefit of Supplementary Schools in Maintaining Minority Languages in Manchester

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1.Introduction

The total population of Greater Manchester holds 2.55 million, with the city centre housing a population of 514,413 as of 2013. With such a large population, it is no surprise that this results in substantial ethnic diversity. Lynch (1986) comments that immigrants looking to move into the United Kingdom could do so quickly, and with relative ease - the nationality laws of the UK dictated that the immigration process would be rapid. Such diversity can eventually lead to third or fourth generation immigrants losing touch with the language and culture of their ancestral country. As language and culture play a vibrant role in shaping a person's identity, it seems logical to provide support in maintaining the knowledge of such cultures. It is therefore of interest to us to research how support provided in the form of supplementary language schools benefits the maintaining of minority languages in Manchester.

In previous research conducted into how supplementary schools are used to maintain minority languages, Walters (2011) conducted semi-structured interviews with a small sample of participants in a Bengali school in order to infer how parents and children of this centre expected that it should be organised. This method of data collection was similarly used in a study by Solaiman et al. (2014), as they found the questionnaire provided no scope for qualitative data and natural responses. Blackledge et al (2012), describing how there is little data to represent how multilingual speakers' language use in the UK and Europe, aimed to observe the frequency, context, and setting of students' and teachers' Panjabi language-use in a Birmingham-founded supplementary school. In this study, it was discovered that the multilingual students would frequently switch between languages, with them reporting that it was easy for them to do this.

2.Methodology and investigation issues

Our initial investigation plan was to use multiple data collection methods ranging from recorded and non-recorded interviews to questionnaires; however we felt multiple collection mediums were uneconomical in terms of time needed. Initially we planned to conduct two interviews, one recorded one not to remove observer's paradox, and two surveys: one tailored to adult, another to child, to provide a broad data spectrum of developed and capped answers, however our final method differed from this. When undertaking our research the participants preferred not to be recorded, but were happy to be quoted and to engage in a non-recorded interview, thus using a recorded interview was dismissed

instantly. The non-recorded interview consisted of a series of pre-prepared questions (see Appendix for list) which were presented informally through conversation, to accommodate the comfort of the participants. The interviews conducted were with two of the members of staff at the institution, both volunteers who were simultaneously undergoing A levels. Both had attended the school prior to volunteering from a young age, and had completed reading of the Qur'an. Modifications were made to our initial child questionnaire as it used complex lexis such as "siblings" and used the option "REF" instead of "I don't want to answer", which would have been too difficult for younger participants to comprehend. The final participants who completed the questionnaires consisted of seven girls, and twenty boys.

Our investigation faced multiple problems in terms of contact with schools, thus affecting our original research proposal. Initially we aimed to visit three schools that differed geographically, but were all Islamic, with the aim of comparing and contrasting the methods they used to maintain languages. Of the three, The Zainab Language School provided faulty contact details thus were ruled out immediately and The Shia Welfare School seemed reluctant to participate. The Shia Welfare School expressed interest, however provided an unrecognised email address, and when contacted regarding it, produced a second faulty email. This left us with the only option of the Shahjalal Mosque and Islamic Centre (SMIC), therefore a group representative physically met with one of the school's leaders, following which they accepted our request to use their school as our subject. On a follow up email however no response was given, thus we attempted calling the school multiple times, but had no luck. The result was that the provided number and email were both faulty, however when we found the correct details via the school's facebook page, we made contact and arranged visiting the school at ease. In regards to data collection we had a further problem with questionnaires, as confusion with the different types resulted in some children completing an adult questionnaire, which had some differing questions. By cross-reading the questionnaires however we were able to elicit information that was relevant to both samples, thus salvaged the data. This meant that our sample of fully correct questionnaires was thirteen out of twenty-seven with all male responses, however the data we did have across all was satisfactory enough to use as evidence.

3.Research questions - results and discussion

3.1 In which domains are the minority language spoken?

The data collected was taken from responses of both girls and boys aged between eight and eighteen years, where it was interesting to find that of the 27 respondents, 20 were boys and seven were girls. We have taken into consideration the language our participants use in contexts such as talking to friends, watching television, using their phone and reading a book (See Chart 1). 'Watching TV' yielded interesting results, where a large number of participants appeared to watch television in English, Bengali and Urdu. We can suggest that this result is due to the fact that watching the television could be said to be an activity that involves the family, thus explaining why television may be watched in other languages if older family members are present. Here it is evident that the English language is predominant in the responses to these questions, however in another question about other situations of language use, the respondents reported using Arabic to read or recite the Qur'an within the Mosque. From this, we can deduce that the participants interpret Arabic as a religious language and it does not take part in their daily life outside of the Mosque (See 'Other' in Chart 1).
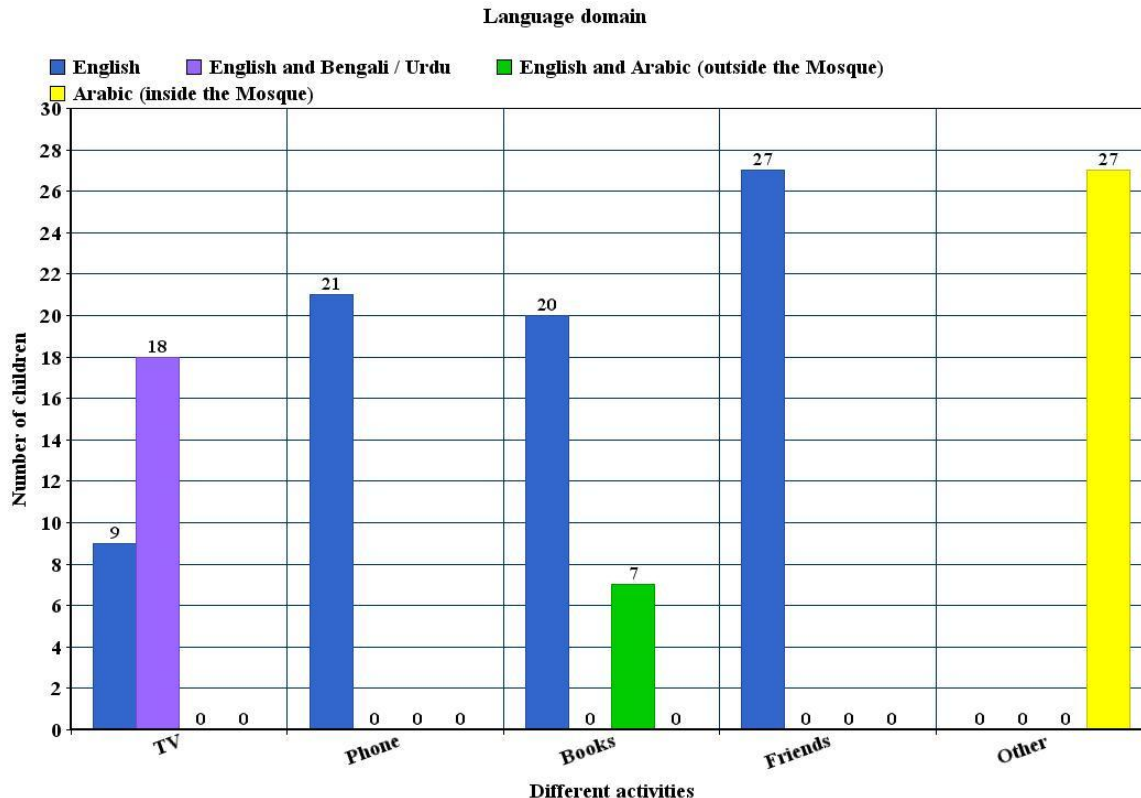

Chart 1: Bar chart plotting the responses to the questions 'What language do you watch TV/ use your phone/ read in?' and 'What language do you use to speak to your friends?'

3.2 How does time and money affect teaching?

In this research question, we aim to assess how much support is provided to the SMIC by the local council, the surrounding community and the parents of the students attending the centre. Walters (2011) claims that there is not enough financial support from the government to support supplementary schools. In support of this claim, it was found that though the SMIC was established in 1967, there the council have never provided funding, however despite this, Teaching Assistant 1 suggested that this lack of funding did not affect the teaching of the Qur'an in any way. The teaching assistant also informed us that the parents pay £5 per week, for five sessions that run from Wednesday to Sunday, covering their attendance for all five sessions. Note however that even if a session is missed the cost is still £5. We were informed the the £5 goes to maintaining the Mosque buildings and providing new materials, rather than paying the staff that run the school.

Walters in her study (2011) reported that the Bengali supplementary school had issues with finding a convenient time to run the language sessions. With regard to the SMIC, finding a time to run the Qur'an memorisation sessions did not seem to be problematic: the sessions are held five times per week, not including Monday and Tuesday, and are run at times which do not coincide with prayer.

In terms of time dedicated to the school by staff, it was interesting to discover that the two teaching assistants we were able to interview were in fact A-level student volunteers. Teaching Assistant 1 reported that he had been visiting the Mosque with his father and grandfather since the age of three, and when old enough, he was recruited by the headmaster of the SMIC to teach there. This participant volunteered three times per week, with Teaching Assistant 2 noting that he volunteered at every session. Further to the two teaching assistants we interviewed, we were able to provide two other teaching assistants with questionnaires, where one volunteer was a student of the University of Manchester. Though there is no money being funded to this supplementary school, the teaching of the Qur'an does not appear to be affected, as volunteers provide overwhelming support.

3.3 What is the relationship with mainstream schools in the area?

This research question aims to address the relationship between the SMIC supplementary school and regular mainstream schools. This insight allows us to understand the support of the community and to some extent the support of the council. The first teaching assistant

informed us during our interviews that the Mosque ran a scheme with local primary schools in the area, whereby the school children attend a prayer at the mosque once a month. Many of the students enrolled in the Qur'an school were also students at local primary schools and exhibited a strong sense of pride, when asked about these monthly visits. One child commented " I enjoy being able to show my friends where to go, when they visit ".

Walters (2011) supposed that teachers in supplementary schools wished to use similar practices that are executed in mainstream schools, in order to maintain a similar style of education. The teachers spoke of using similar methods for mainstream schools, as will be explained in greater detail in Section 3.4. Teaching Assistant 1 noted that the influence of the scheme in the school was incredibly important for community cohesion in the area.

Though mainstream school involvement is not directly related to language learning, the regular participation of the mainstream school in the everyday practises of the Mosque, highlights the presence of the language school, despite a lack of funding from Manchester City Council. It is clear from the attitudes of both the students and the teaching staff, that there is a significant level of support from the surrounding community, which enables the SMIC school to thrive as it does. However, it must be noted, that this support is not as a result of efforts from Manchester City Council, rather from the community and important institutions, such as the local primary schools who recognise the SMIC as an important institution within the community.

3.4 What are the resources used in the teaching? Are there any particular pedagogic methods used?

This research question aims to analyse the teaching similarities and differences between the SMIC supplementary school and mainstream schools in general, paying attention to how funding affects the teaching of, and resources available to supplementary schools.

Despite there being an absence of funding from the Manchester City Council, Teaching Assistant 1 seemed keen to emphasise that there were sufficient facilities available to the supplementary school in order to teach the Arabic script. According to this participant, the resources available for teaching included a whiteboard and a projector, however he reported that he does not often use the projector in light of the fact that he feels that when he writes on the board, it is a more personal teaching experience that helps the children to learn better. In terms of resources, it appears that due to a lack of council funding, the facilities

available to the supplementary school are limited in comparison with those you would expect to find at a mainstream school. In spite of this, it is clear to see that the teaching assistants do not feel hindered, and appear to be successful in teaching their classes.

In the class where children are aged eight to twelve years old, Teaching Assistant 1 told us that the aim of this class was to learn the Arabic script, where they 'learn how to conjugate the letters into words and sound', further expanding that the children would learn the meanings of the Arabic language later on. It is apparent that in the methods of teaching here, the input (of the phonetic sounds) comes before the learning of the meaning, as illustrated by Example 1. It seems that this method of teaching mirrors that used in a mainstream school, where it is typical that children are taught the phonetic sounds of the alphabet before they are taught the letter the sound corresponds with, and then how the letters can be used in written and spoken contexts.

> *"When I recited the Qur'an, I didn't know what I was speaking"*
> Example 1

One way in which this supplementary school could be seen to differ quite drastically from mainstream schools is that in addition to there being lessons on learning and memorising the Arabic script, the sessions also aim to teach the children skills that can be used in day-to-day life (See Example 2). From this, it is evident that these sessions are not solely focussed on language learning, but also on aspects related to religion and faith.

> *"We teach children practical skills about how to be a good Muslim, for example how to carry yourself in public, how to speak to those older than you, how to speak to those younger than you…"*
> Example 2

3.5 Why do parents want the children to learn the language?

This research question focuses on the reasons parents send their children to the supplementary school. Here it was observed that the learning of the Arabic script was exclusively for religious use: for reading and memorising the Qur'an. We can therefore conclude that the parents send their children to the supplementary school in order to uphold their Islamic faith.

3.6 What effect do supplementary schools have on the community?

The aim of this research question is to yield data which will provide an insight into how well supplementary schools are received by the surrounding community. From the results of the questionnaires distributed, it was apparent to see that there were bilingual speakers of various languages who attended this supplementary school. In spite of this, it was noted by Teaching Assistant 1 that though there are differences in language and heritage of the pupils here, everyone is in fact united by faith.

It could be suggested that due to the close-knit relationship of the community, this supplementary school is well-supported. We feel that this point is highlighted by the fact that the teaching assistants we came into contact with were former students themselves, and current students seemed keen to want to volunteer at this centre in the future. Overall, it appears that this supplementary has a positive effect on the community.

4.Conclusion

Taking into consideration the data recollected, we can conclude that the goal of the Supplementary school is achieved, given that the students learn Arabic effectively and with enjoyment for the purpose of prayer. Although Manchester City Council does not provide financial support, the children learn in an adequate environment that enables them to develop their knowledge of Arabic. As Blackledge et al (2012) noted, we found that students were capable of switching between English, Arabic and their home language, depending on domains. They were able to take advantage of their multilingual situation when communicating with parents and elders, but maintained English in everyday language due to it being a general preference. Therefore we can assert that Arabic is used for religious purposes, while their ethnic language is used much less frequently. As such, we may be able to deduce that future generations would lose the knowledge of Bengali or Urdu over time.

Furthermore, we can conclude from our research, that the support from Manchester City Council is limited, both financially and otherwise, in supporting the SMIC in continuing its teachings. We can further conclude that the pedagogic practices used when learning to read i.e. phonics, in both supplementary and mainstream schools is effective in providing a basis

for the use of any language. Even though the process for learning the phonics of Arabic is markedly different from that of English, the practice itself is similar and is actively taken from the examples of teaching in mainstream schools.

After this research, a question that may be interesting for further study is a question of whether it is worthy to develop one linguistic domain or to forget another? This may also be developed further, by looking at why languages like Bengali and Urdu are not supported by the council, taking in consideration that the religious domain will look after Arabic.

5.Bibliography

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6.Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRE 1 - STUDENTS

Number of Survey	
Gender (circle)	Male / Female
Ethnicity	
Have you ever lived in another country?	
In which part of Manchester do you live (Fallowfield, Rusholme…)?	
Which language do you speak at home?	
Are you learning any language? If so, Which one?	

Which language do you speak with your mother?	
Which language do you use speak with your father?	
Which language do you use speak with your grandmother?	
Which language do you speak with your grandfather?	
Which language do you speak with your brothers/sisters?	
Which language do you usually speak with adults (teachers, uncle/aunt, neighbour…)?	
Which language do you usually speak with your friends?	

How many languages do you speak?	
How many languages does your father speak?	
How many languages does your mother speak?	
How many languages does your grandfather speak?	
How many languages does your grandmother speak?	
How many languages do your brothers/sisters speak?	

In which language do you watch TV?	
In which language do you watch films at cinema?	
In which language do you use internet?	
In which language do you use your mobile phone?	
In which language do you usually read?	
Do you do any other activity in a different language? If so, Which one?	

QUESTIONNAIRE 2 - TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Language assistant's survey

Number of Survey	
Ethnicity	
Gender	
Which is your native language?	
How many languages do you speak?	

How many pupils do you have?	
How many hours per week do they go to lessons?	
How long have they been taking lessons?	
Do they have different groups differentiated by levels?	

Questions for proficiency on the second language	
Can the students count to 10? (Circle)	1. in a fluent way 2. with hesitate 3. not at all
Can the students name 10 different body parts? (Circle)	1. in a fluent way 2. with hesitate 3. not at all
Can the students describe simple situations (a landscape, a picture...)? (Circle)	1. in a fluent way 2. with hesitate 3. not at all
Can the students describe abstract things (feelings, mood...)? (Circle)	1. in a fluent way 2. with hesitate 3. not at all
Can the students talk about routine? (Circle)	1. in a fluent way 2. with hesitate 3. not at all
Can the students read? (Circle)	1. in a fluent way 2. with hesitate 3. not at all

Would you say our society is multicultural?	Yes / No / REF
Does the Government support the centre?	Yes / No / REF
Does the community support the centre?	Yes / No / REF
Do you think the centre helps the community?	Yes / No / REF
Do you think the centre improve a multicultural society?	Yes / No / REF

NOTE: This survey means to acquire information about integration of languages through culture from the assistant point of view. The option of refusal (REF) will mean that the person who makes this survey rejects to answer that question because of his/her own perception of it. As an anonymous survey this will exclusively help the University Of Manchester Societal Multilinguism project.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. In what domains do you speak Arabic?
2. Do the Manchester City Council fund this supplementary school?
    a. Do you feel that this (lack of) funding affects the teaching here?
3. What is the relationship of the supplementary school with mainstream schools in the area?
4. What are resources do you use when you teach?
    a. Do you employ any particular teaching methods?
5. Why do you think parents send their children to this supplementary school?
6. Do you think that the supplementary school affects the surrounding community?