# Strengthening Linguistic Bridges Between Home and School: Experiences of Immigrant Children and Parents in Iceland

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**Abstract**

Heritage language education (HLE) problematizes issues of second language studies and culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay. Culturally responsive teaching: theory, research, and practice. Teachers College Press, New York, 2000), as it provides some answers to the sensitive topic of quality education of students of foreign background in mainstream schools (Trifonas and Aravossitas. Rethinking heritage language education. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014). HLE and plurilingualism receive increased attention and recognition worldwide, especially in North America and in the European Union (Council of Europe. Plurilingual Education in Europe. 50 Years of International Cooperation. 2006 [cited 2016 Jun 18]. Available from http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/plurinlingaleducation_en.pdf; Cummins. Mainstreaming plurilingualism: restructuring heritage language in schools. In Trifonas and Aravossitas (eds) Rethinking heritage language education. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014; García and Wei. Translanguaging. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014). This qualitative research paper provides insights into experiences and views of parents of foreign origin and their children who attend Icelandic compulsory schools and study their HL in a nonformal system; it presents students' attitudes toward their developing linguistic repertoires and parents' experience of their participation in this process, including communication and cooperation with their children's schools. The information from the participants is situated within the context of national and local policies. The findings reveal discrepancies between official statements and parents' and students' needs, on the one hand, and the school practices, on the other hand. We argue that building on the resources of the students, their backgrounds, cultures, and especially languages promotes students' success and that school is missing out

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on considerable educational opportunities. Furthermore, considering how difficult it is for parents and students of foreign origin to take an extra initiative to build bridges between their original culture and the compulsory education, the lack of schools' active approach to culturally responsive pedagogies and promoting students' linguistic repertoires has significant influence on students' social and academic outcomes in the mainstream schools.

**Keywords**

Qualitative research • Heritage language • Parents' experience • Linguistic repertoires • Culturally responsive pedagogy

## Contents



## Introduction, Background

Heritage language education has received increased recognition worldwide (Cummins 2014; Trifonas and Aravossitas 2014), and plurilingualism is viewed as an asset for students' academic success by many scholars (Cummins 2004; García and Wei 2014). Parental involvement and active cooperation of educators and parents are considered a prerequisite for efficient schooling (Coelho 2012; Nieto 2010), and the cooperation of schools and parents is also described as desirable in the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið 2013). However, despite the policy implications, parents of foreign origin are frequently excluded from discussions about and the implementation of school reforms. Teachers' initiatives in reaching out toward these parents are limited, because schools are usually not organized to encourage involvement of these groups (Nieto 2010). In Iceland a parent-run NGO, *Móðurmál – the Association of Bilingualism*, provides nonformal instruction in 26 heritage languages, thus contributing to children's active bilingualism and creating the missing link between homes and schools (Móðurmál 2016). Many parents of plurilingual children choose to give their children the opportunity to maintain and learn their HL through Móðurmál, and some of them serve as volunteers and teach.

This chapter presents findings from an ongoing research project at the School of Education, University of Iceland, which explores plurilingual children's experiences in compulsory schools. The aim of the project is to discover how plurilingual

children who receive heritage language instruction in nonformal settings (Boeren 2011) think about their heritage languages (HL) and what attitudes they have toward keeping and developing them. The focus of this chapter is on the children's developing linguistic repertoires (Council of Europe 2006) and the role that parents play in the development. This paper looks for answers to these questions: How do plurilingual students develop their linguistic repertoires in compulsory schools and outside of them? How do parents of plurilingual students influence the development of their children's linguistic repertoires? How do students and their parents experience the stance of schools toward the linguistic repertoires of the students? This chapter argues that Icelandic schools do not respond to the needs of the plurilingual students, to the expectations of the parents, and to the national policies with regard to their heritage language education. Language repertoire of the participants is the lens through which students' experience is observed and interpreted, and it is here also understood as one of the chief factors in achieving social and academic success in schools.

The chapter starts by positioning heritage language instruction in the Nordic and international context and within international literature on heritage language instruction. It continues to describe how heritage language instruction is organized in Iceland. After theorizing the problematic features, especially with regard to plurilingual students in compulsory schools and their parents' involvement, the methodology of the study is outlined in detail. Ethical considerations of researching students of foreign origin and the limitations of the study are stated before the discussion of results and the conclusions of the research.

## Local Context

The term "heritage language" was coined in Canadian context, and it refers to mother tongues, home languages, native languages, languages of parents, and grandparents (Trifonas and Aravossitas 2014). In other words, heritage language is a language that the speaker has a personal connection to directly or through family roots. The terminology varies across regions and has changed over time, also reflecting political and regional situations.

In Nordic countries, heritage languages are usually referred to as mother tongues. There is a strong tradition in the region to provide HL instruction to minorities (i.e., Finnish minority in Sweden) and to students of foreign background. Individual countries have developed their own solutions, which are either under the auspices of national or local authorities or, in the case of Iceland, in the hand of nongovernmental organizations. Internationally, HL instruction is gaining more ground, as HL is found to be a human right and a strong prerequisite of academic success of students with foreign background (Cummins 2004; Thomas and Collier 1997; United Nations 1990). In some regions, heritage languages are being revived (Irish, Welsh), maintained (Basque, Catalan), and promoted for both democratic and educational purposes (Austria, Canada).

In Iceland, heritage language education reaches back to the 1990s when Móðurmál – the association on bilingualism – was established by parents. Since then, HL instruction has been in the hands of parents and NGOs. However, local communities and national policies have recognized the importance of active bilingualism (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið 2013; Skóla- og frístundasvið 2014) and thus provided the schools with the framework to work with the HL of the students. These measures were supported by Nordic and international research that refers to many versatile benefits of sound knowledge of HL and of active bilingualism. One of the proven benefits of structured instruction in academic HL is its connection with the learning of the second language and general academic achievement (Cummins 2014; Cummins and Early 2011; Thomas and Collier 2003).

The academic achievement of students of foreign origin in the compulsory schools in Reykjavík, the capital of Iceland, is not satisfactory. Icelandic vocabulary of 1400 students of foreign origin in compulsory schools was tested in 2013–2014, and the results showed that over 70% of the students who learned Icelandic as a second language needed extra support with their Icelandic (Leskopf et al. 2015). These results were also confirmed by the international PISA testing (OECD 2016). Students with insufficient vocabulary in Icelandic cannot fully understand the subject of study and do not achieve the same results in the schools as their monolingual counterparts (Ólafsdóttir 2015). According to these results, a serious achievement gap between local students and students of foreign origin is prevalent in Icelandic schools, which the local and national policies have already reacted to, but the schools still need to incorporate.

## Literature and Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study includes critical multiculturalism (Banks 2009; Gay 2000; May 2010; Nieto 2010), second language studies (Arnbjörnsdóttir 2006; Cummins 2000), and heritage language research (Trifonas and Aravossitas 2014). Inequality and social injustice in schools have been criticized since the second half of the twentieth century, and various disadvantaged groups, i.e., ethical and immigrant groups, have been identified as not having equal opportunities to quality education (Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukomaa 1976; Trần 2015). Critical multiculturalism has provided some answers to policy makers, schools, and teachers on how to approach students of all backgrounds. According to May (2010), schools in democratic, pluralistic societies must include equal opportunities to learn for all students. He believes that critical multiculturalism is constituted by theorizing ethnicity, acknowledging unequal power relations, critiquing constructions of culture, and maintaining critical reflexivity. Ragnarsdóttir (2007) defines critical multiculturalism as focusing on and identifying the position of various minorities within a society with the aim to understand what the factors are that cause and maintain the different positions of the groups and individuals. Teachers have to be constantly reflective and understand inherent inequalities in school settings and use their understanding to build on the strengths of all students, without forcing them to abandon their identities

(Gay 2000). One of the main goals of multicultural education is to empower students to achieve both personal and social growth, to achieve academically, as well as to develop social action skills (Nieto 2010).

Cummins (2001), as early as in 1986, offered a suggestion on how to lessen and close the vast achievement gap between minority and majority students. He claimed that in the classroom which maintained unequal power between groups, linguistically and culturally diverse students would not achieve a long-term success. The systematic devaluation of students' identities has to be reversed, for example, by allowing them to use and build on their linguistic repertoire in the schools and use their intellectual, imaginative, and cultural resources. Teachers always have the power to empower students to build on their funds of knowledge and to become fluently bilingual and bilateral, and they can encourage parents to take part in this process. García et al. (2011) suggest seven principles that support students' plurilingual abilities and plurilingual practices in education (heterogeneity, collaboration, learner-centeredness, language and content integration, language use from students up, experiential learning, and local autonomy and responsibility). These lead to increased academic success and proficiency in the school language but also give the students a dynamic tool for translanguaging and constant adaptation of their linguistic repertoires to the reality of multilingual classrooms.

HLE has a deep meaning for children – their development, studies, and successful participation in the society (Arnbjörnsdóttir 2006). Various studies have shown the positive influence of bilingualism on achievement in schools, particularly in language learning (Thomas and Collier 2003; Wozniczka and Berman 2011). Children who master two languages and gain cultural insight into both cultures can benefit from this knowledge professionally in the future (Bolten 2003; Müller 2003). On the contrary, insufficient competence in the HL can lead to negative bilingualism that has serious consequences for both the individual and the society in which they live (Baker 2011). HL instruction also affects the forming of the self-image of children because they experience themselves as part of more cultural and language groups (Butler and Hakuta 2006). Heritage language education, according to Trifonas and Aravossitas (2014), is a multidimensional, autonomous discipline that relates both to linguistics and pedagogical sciences, but it is also concerned with the identity negotiation and cultural inheritance. They believe that the field of HLE will change the traditional view of language education toward social justice and equity in education.

## Method

At the heart of the abovementioned theories, there is the voice of the individual who has the right to succeed academically without giving up her cultural, linguistic, or social identities. On the contrary, her multiple identities and resources serve as a springboard both in the school and in the multicultural society. In order to answer the research questions about experience of students and their parents of foreign origin in school settings in Reykjavík, Iceland, qualitative methodology was selected as the most appropriate. During the in-depth semi-structured interviews, the participants

answered questions about themselves, their language repertoires, their heritage countries and the country of residence (Iceland), their experience from the compulsory schools and with the communication with school representatives.

There were 19 participants, eight parents of foreign origin whose children are attending Icelandic compulsory school (in one case both a mother of foreign origin and her Icelandic partner took part in an interview) and ten students (seven boys, three girls) of foreign origin who attend compulsory schools in Greater Reykjavík Area. With two exceptions, all students were of European descent but of different language families. All students learned their HL in a nonformal setting (Boeren 2011), nine of them attend nonformal HL classes in language groups of Móðurmál on weekends and one of them studies at home in a structured way with his mother. Eight students were born in Iceland, they are the so-called second generation of immigrants, and they are all plurilingual, as they use two or more languages daily. All students have lived in Iceland for over 10 years, with one exception. They speak very good Icelandic and have good knowledge of Icelandic society (Table 1).

Two of the parents teach in a nonformal HL group, two mothers coordinate language groups, two parents joined parent associations in their children's schools, and all of them have throughout the years followed family language policies.

Five parents are university educated, one is a registered student at the University of Iceland, and two have plans to pursue further education in near future. The majority of the parents actively seek information about bilingualism, mother tongues, and education of their children, and all of them actively support their children to study their HL. The sample is very specific in that the motivation of parents to maintain and develop their children HL is very high and they actively create opportunities for their children to study and use their heritage languages. Students' interest and linguistic abilities are strongly supported by high motivation of their parents. Selection of the sample was purposive, through contact with group coordinators of Móðurmál. One of the researchers has an insider view of the HL groups through her volunteer and professional involvement with Móðurmál.

Six semi-structured interviews with children were taken in Icelandic, two in children's HL, and one partially in English and in Icelandic. Interviews with parents were taken in Icelandic (3), English (3), and heritage language of the parent (2), one of them with an interpreter. In one case, the interview was taken both with a mother and a stepfather of the student. Interviews with students and parents were taken in their homes in order to increase the interviewees' comfort and feeling of security. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in the original language, and they were not translated as a whole, since the translation may cause a loss or change of concepts and thoughts. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2013) and generic approach to coding (Lichtman 2013) were used to interpret the data. The process included two rounds of coding and search for themes that were further interpreted through the lens of theories of critical multiculturalism, second language studies, and HL education. The researcher's role in the interpretation of the data was active, in that the codes were both explicit, derived directly from the data, and implicit, derived both from underlying theories and researcher's knowledge framework. Braun and Clarke (2013) call such codes data derived and researcher derived (p. 207).

**Table 1** Overview of the students in the study

| | Female | Male | Born in Iceland | Speak very good Icelandic | Interview in Icelandic | Interview in English | Interview in HL | Both parents of foreign origin |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Erag | | x | x | x | x | | | x |
| Magnus | | x | x | x | x | | | |
| Teó | | x | x | x | x | | | |
| Tinni | | x | x | x | | | x | |
| Jackson | | x | | x | x | | | x |
| Oliver | | x | x | x | x | | | |
| Honza | | x | x | x | | | x | |
| Martina | x | | x | x | x | | | x |
| Safira | x | | x | | x | | x | x |
| Ilona | x | | | | x | x | | x |

The ethical issues of language, power, autonomy, and privacy were dealt with appropriately in interviews with students and parents (Kristinsson 2003; Tisdall et al. 2010). The consent form was written in understandable language and children cosigned the form with their parents. Interviews were taken in the students' homes in a friendly atmosphere. Most students and parents previously met the interviewer under other circumstances so the researcher role overlapped with an acquaintance and teacher role. In seven cases, parents were present during the interview with their children or within a hearing distance, which raised questions about securing students privacy. At the same time, parents' presence increased students' confidence. There were a few instances when students were confused or looked for the right word, but these issues were quickly solved. Two participants later verbalized their positive experience with the interview through their parents.

Information that could lead to identification of the students was removed, with the exception of their language. That, in Iceland, could be an issue if students belonged to very small language communities. Therefore, all participants were chosen with this aspect in mind and belonged to rather big minorities in Iceland. Some of them opted to choose their own pseudonyms, which led to some amusement during the interviews.

## Findings

This chapter presents findings from the current research. The research looked for answers to the following research questions: How do plurilingual students develop their linguistic repertoire in compulsory schools and outside of them? How do parents of plurilingual students influence the development of their children's linguistic repertoire? How do students and their parents experience the stance of schools toward the linguistic repertoires of the students?

The results confirm that students who attend nonformal heritage language classes are well aware of the importance of their knowledge of all languages and that the parents take an active role in building up those attitudes. However, schools seldom work with the cultural and language backgrounds of their students in order to promote their knowledge of HL, Icelandic and other languages, and their overall academic achievement. The results further cast light on strategies that the parents of foreign origin have to assume in order to supplement the role of schools in the area of HL education.

The findings reveal that the plurilingual children appreciate knowledge and literacy in all their languages. They are aware of the importance of their HL in their own lives and have a good connection with the countries of their parents. They are also aware of other benefits of having good knowledge of more than one language and have various motivations to study them. At the same time, the students believe that Icelandic is very important, as Iceland is their country of residence and schooling. They see little or no connection between their knowledge of HL and their formal study in school. Sometimes the students get praise for their language knowledge in the school, but the schools fail to use the linguistic repertoire of the students to further their studies.

The parents have a myriad of strong motivations for teaching HL to both their own children and HL groups. They actively find versatile ways to promote their children's bilingual literacy and language awareness. To a great extent, they trust schools with teaching their children Icelandic, the school language, but they are aware of the fact that the schools are not ready to promote bilingual literacy and that they as parents have to assume the initiative in teaching the HL on both the communicative and academic level.

Parents and children have good relationships and seem to agree on the importance of languages and education. However, some parents were aware of lacking language support in the schools, and they were critical of various aspects of their children's school study, in particular little demands, lack of consistency of the support, little communication of teachers with homes, and lack of knowledge about HL languages among class teachers.

## Students

The plurilingual children in this study appreciate knowledge and literacy in all their languages, their HL, the school language (Icelandic), English (compulsory from 3rd or 4th grade), Danish (compulsory from 7th grade), Spanish, French, Norwegian, German, Thai, Polish, Czech, Albanian, Portuguese, and Lithuanian. They learn languages actively both for school (grades) and personal (family, travel, future jobs) purposes. They learn from listening to TV, talking on Skype, and through contact with family members, using technology, such as ipads and language applications. They do not see language learning as a chore, but rather a pleasant activity, and traveling to home countries and on holiday sparks their interest in languages even more. Since parents, their role models, traveled to Iceland, the students find it feasible to move to other countries in the future to live and work there, even though only one of them seriously considers moving back to mother's home country in near future. Learning languages is further enhanced by belonging to the language communities in Iceland (HL class; during classes and outside-of-class activities) and by various connections with the country of origin and the feeling of belonging to families abroad (grandmother, step-sister, cousins). The students have both internal and external reasons for learning languages.

> I need to use it (Albanian – REP). Very much. I need to use it in the daily life and also when I go places where people speak Albanian, like now in summer when we go on holiday. (Erag)

The respondents are literate in both their HL and Icelandic; in one case, the HL is stronger than Icelandic, and in one case, literacy in the HL is much higher than in Icelandic. Half of the students estimate that their Icelandic knowledge is stronger than their HL, especially reading and writing.

The students see little or no connection between their knowledge of HL and their formal study in school. Some are never asked by teachers about their country of

origin and none of their class teachers work with HL languages systematically. However, there is one exception:

> Then there is the French teacher who speaks with me about Portuguese because French can be very similar to Portuguese. (Teó)

One class teacher is "very curious" about the country of origin, and all teachers are aware of the plurilingualism of their students. One plurilingual student attends HL classes organized by the authorities and recognized by the school system, but, his parents wonder, he cannot get the same recognition for such classes in another HL of his, even though it is taught by a professional language teacher. Some students would like to establish the link between their home and school languages.

> I would like to use them (my languages – REP) more in the school. (Oliver)

All students enjoy going to school. All students but one have good friends in the school and outside of the school; they socialize in sport activities outside of the school and in breaks. Four of them report, though, that they do not have Icelandic friends and that they would like to have more friends. Five of them do not have an opportunity to speak their HL in the school, as there is no other student who speaks their language. One student uses his HL with a student who speaks another Slavic language, but only in the breaks.

Although the academic Icelandic becomes increasingly problematic during the mid-level of compulsory school, the younger students (5th grade) report no lack of knowledge and skills in understanding, talking, reading, and writing.

> I find it much more fun to read in Icelandic than in Lithuanian. (Martina)

The older students say they "dislike" Icelandic, they have to choose lighter reading books, they do not understand difficult words in textbooks, and sometimes it is difficult to write Icelandic. Two students in the 5th grade are receiving extra classes in Icelandic as a second language at the time of the interview, and three in the 7th grade received such help in the beginning of their compulsory schooling, variously by being pulled out of the class or longer presence in a special department. They report that it helped them a lot to learn Icelandic and some stress that they enjoyed it. However, these same students have no or very few Icelandic-speaking friends.

> Sometimes nobody plays with me and I feel sad. (Ilona)

All of the students show metacognitive knowledge of languages, i.e., knowledge about languages. They can compare languages that they speak to some extent, for example, similarity of letter, words, grammatical categories, and humor. The student who has very strong knowledge of HL says that knowledge of his HL helps him study

Icelandic and that he understands better when his mother explains the learning material in Czech to him.

All participating students have positive self-image. They describe themselves as good students, good sportsmen, and good language learners. They see the linguistic repertoire as a strong point and are unafraid to ask for help in the school if they need it. They see bright futures ahead, and they want to become famous professionals (footballers, architects, teachers), surrounded by family and friends. They can imagine living in another country, moving for professional and other reasons.

## Parents

The majority of parents in the study were university educated, pursuing their further education, in one case planning to seek further education. One parent with elementary education had no plans to further her education. The parents trusted schools with teaching their children Icelandic, but through comparing schools and school systems in their countries of origin, they showed various degrees of criticism regarding the content and amount of study material, teaching methods, discipline, lacking presence of international languages in the schools, and communication with homes (Table 2).

> Here everybody goes at his own tempo, someone is on page 20 and someone else on page 50. Maybe they have done everything incorrectly but nobody goes over their work. Instead, they queue at the teacher's desk to ask individual questions. What waste of time! (Eva)

The parents supported children's learning in various ways, from moral support to regular hours spent with homework in the evenings. All of the parents in the study brought their children to study their HL in HL groups.

Communication with compulsory schools and the class teachers was criticized by most parents. It was too scarce, only when something negative happens or once in a semester at a short parent meeting. The communication was impersonal because it is only via email, and it was sometimes tense because teachers knew about dissatisfaction of the parents.

> It irritates me because the teacher wrote on a sheet of paper and I saw it 'Parents understand Icelandic poorly', period. . . . I never ever ask for interpreter. . . It really gets on my nerves. . . The old teacher was more open to us.

Parents felt lack of support and understanding of teachers about bilingualism and HL; in two cases, parents had negative experience with teachers' attitudes toward language use (heritage language and English) of the students. One parent was not allowed by the teacher to borrow and bring textbooks home when she wanted to go over the study material with her son in their HL, and other three parents reported explicitly negative experiences in communication with class teachers. However, one parent gave examples of explicitly positive communication about reading in HL.

All parents wanted to have positive relationships with their children's teachers, and they wrapped their deep-rooted criticism into politeness and positive

**Table 2** Overview of the parents in the study

| | Female | Male | Live in Iceland > 10 years | Speak good Icelandic | Language of interview | University education | In parent association | HL teachers | HL group coordinators |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Eva | x | | x | | HL | | | x | |
| Lucia | x | | x | x | English | | x | | x |
| Paula | x | | x | x | Icelandic | x | | | x |
| Valon | | x | x | x | English | x | x | x | |
| Edita | x | | x | x | Icelandic | | | | |
| Nisa | x | | x | | HL with an Interpreter | | | | |
| Filipina | x | | | x | Icelandic | x | | | |
| Helena | x | | | | English | x | | | |

communication. The parents all assumed the initiative in teaching the HL to their children, both on communicative and academic level. Some of them were aware of research which stipulated that academic skills could be transferred between languages or at least they had the knowledge that strong base in HL enabled their children to learn new languages faster and easier. Parents wanted to secure good education for their children; they were thinking about children's futures (in Iceland or elsewhere) and the quality of education of their children. Some of them made great effort to learn about how the school system works, to establish contact with teachers, join parent associations, and actively seek meetings with teachers and help from school.

> I always try to take part in Icelandic society and parents' society in school. I was in one year in you know foreldrafelag (parents' association – REP). And I try to be always when is something because of my kids of course.

Communication in HL with their children was the only thinkable way for parents. Their motivation was intrinsic, emotional, and also based on knowledge about languages. It was very strong and they made huge effort to secure children's access to their HL. They drove their children to HL classes on Saturdays, traveled with the children to their countries of origin, initiated communication with schools, and collected books in HL. In two cases, the parents taught the HL classes and two of them coordinated the HL programs.

## Conclusion and Discussion

The original purpose of the chapter was threefold. Firstly, the chapter was to cast light on the development of plurilingual students' development of their linguistic repertoires in the schools. Secondly, the paper explored how parents of plurilingual children influenced the development of their children's linguistic repertoire. Thirdly, the chapter researched the experience of students and their parents of foreign origin with communication with Icelandic teachers and schools and the level of cooperation in enhancing student's HL education and their linguistic repertoires.

The value of this research is in giving voice to children and parents and in showing their positive attitudes toward the schools, their children's education, and their HL. The research uncovered serious discrepancies between children's needs to develop their HL and the vague interest of school teachers in their backgrounds. In none of the observed cases, teachers and schools built systematically on the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students (Gay 2000), albeit they sometimes praised the knowledge of languages of their students. Discrepancies also appear between the research that states that bilingual literacy promotes academic success (Cummins 2000; Potowski 2013; Thomas and Collier 2003) and the minimal role that schools assume in this area. The parents' associations supplement schools' lacking policies to aim at active bilingualism, because they strongly believe that the children need realistic opportunities to benefit from their linguistic repertoire in the school settings.

The national and local policies stress the importance of homeschool cooperation (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið 2013), building on students' cultural heritage and achieving the ultimate goal of active bilingualism (Skóla- og frístundasvið 2014). However, even the highly motivated parents face difficulties in communicating their concerns to teachers and schools, and the students who attend heritage language classes outside of school experience a striking lack of connection between their language study in school and outside of school.

The ten students who have highly motivated parents and who attend nonformal HL classes appreciate their knowledge of languages, and they share this view with their parents. They feel fairly successful in schools and have strong self-image and bright future plans. However, their cultural and linguistic heritage is not being regarded as a resource and built upon in the schools. Parents refer to problematic communication with schools and little power in helping their children improve their academic achievement and achievement in the school language, which is Icelandic.

This research shows that there is a discrepancy between the school policies, research, and the expectations of parents toward the schools on one side and the school practices linked with previous knowledge and linguistic repertoire of the children on the other side. This discrepancy opens a window of opportunity, the educational potential of increased cooperation with parents and for improving students' academic success. Implications for general population of parents of foreign origin and their children are serious. The highly motivated, well-educated parents and the linguistically well-equipped children observe and experience little bridging and connection between their backgrounds and the school setting. Consequently, the question arises if general population of parents of foreign origin and children who do not receive any regular HL instruction do at all connect their cultural and language background within the school setting and if they have a chance of activating their backgrounds toward achieving better academic success. The sample of both children and parents was interested in education and aware of its importance for children's futures. The majority of parents had very good knowledge of languages and communication skills, and they could communicate with schools directly. The question remains, how parents and teachers can build bridges and have successful communication, if they do not share a common language and they do not actively seek new ways of communication. The implications suggest that there is a lot of space for improvement of the communication and pedagogical practice.

The limitations of the study are primarily in its scope and duration. However, the study will be further extended by the researchers within a larger project, and further research with students, parents, teachers, and HL teachers will be pursued. There is almost no research in the area of HL education in Iceland and it is much needed, with the improvement of the academic and social achievement of all students as a guiding light. A small study of this format can only point to some possibilities for the Icelandic school system, and it would clearly be worthwhile extending the study to cover more geographical areas, a greater variety of schools, other age groups, etc. However, the implications for teachers and school leaders need not wait for such evidence to be generated. This study highlights the need for improved

communication between parents and schools which would also lead to better use of linguistic resources of the students and their parents.

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