

Research Report: Integration in Education of Third Country Nationals

Foundation for Educational Services (FES)

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Note from the CEO of the Foundation for Education Services (FES)

The role of the Foundation for Educational Services has widened considerably over the past three years with the introduction of a number of new programmes and services such as Klabb 3-16, Youth.Inc and Childcare. These have complemented our work around Parental Empowerment and basic skills acquisition.

Throughout this period of rapid expansion we have continued to seek to identify additional areas in which FES could build expertise and reach out to new target groups.

The level of awareness regarding the presence of migrants in schools is increasing and measures and services are being taken at a national and school level to ensure that their needs are being met. The target group covered by this research project are however often less visible and very little is known on the extent of their integration in school and within the community at large.

This project therefore sought to gather comprehensive data directly from the stakeholders, i.e. TCN's, their families, school administrators and teachers on whether integration is being achieved and any difficulties these students and their parents might be experiencing. It also makes recommendations as to specific programmes, services, support or campaigns that might be necessary for their effective integration.

It is hoped that this project will serve to increase the awareness of the education community as to the needs of these students/families and what schools can do to support their integration. It has certainly been useful to FES in identifying areas of intervention that can be addressed in future projects or in current service provision.

I would like to thank the DES and DQSE for their collaboration throughout the project. My thanks also go to aditus Foundation who have conducted the research and to the FES staff whose dedication and commitment make such projects possible.

Roderick Agius,
Chief Executive Officer

Executive Summary

“Because this is part of my faith and my principle that if we live we must contribute, we must be loyal and sincere to the country we live in and for that sincerity, because I’m grown up so I know what sincerity is, but the children, to teach them loyalty, sincerity and positive sense for the contribution to this country, they should be given equal opportunity, and they can at least say we are getting this so we are this. If they all feel sort of negative and inequality in their treatment then those loyalty and sincerity it is hard to bring in them.”

(Parent, State Primary School)

With a rich history stretching back thousands of years, Malta is no stranger to migration. Over the years migratory patterns have shifted according to national and international economic, political and social conditions, ensuring a dynamic and ever evolving Maltese context. More recently, Malta has experienced new migratory flows as globalisation processes ensure the creation of new and diverse migratory flows, evolving trajectories, and the on-going exchange of beliefs, knowledge, values and symbols. Change is the one constant.

Nowhere perhaps, is this change more apparent, than in the Maltese classroom. This research explores the experiences, and degree of integration of Third Country National (TCN) students within the Maltese education system, and considers the challenges and opportunities faced by educators, students and their families. Adopting a mixed methods approach, data was generated through questionnaires and interviews with parents and Heads and teaching staff of State, Church and Independent schools, and non-participant observation in State and Independent Schools.

The research findings are testimony to changing migratory patterns and flows in Malta; to how the Maltese classroom is becoming increasingly diverse in many ways, including *inter alia*, language, race, ethnicity and social class; and – despite numerous challenges – to innovation, mutual learning and a willingness to embrace change on the part of head/teachers and parents. Grounded in the critical pedagogy theoretical paradigm, the research explores a number of emerging themes, including migratory trajectories, institutional norms, curriculum, language, literacy, relationships and communication.

The research concludes by making a number of key recommendations towards informing policy development, programme development and advancing a critical reflective teaching practice that affirms the knowledge, beliefs and experiences of each individual student.

This report's original drafting language is English.

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We would also like to express our gratitude to the parents who participated in this study. Their enthusiasm and candour was much appreciated, ensuring a valuable contribution to the findings of this research.

We are thankful for the feedback of the FES staff who agreed to meet and share their experiences and thoughts with us.

We appreciate Ms. Josephine Vassallo's, Assistant Director, DQSE, willingness to meet with us and discuss issues of common concern.

We would also like to thank Professor Antoinette Camilleri Grima, Dr. Victor Martinelli, Mr. Vince Caruana, Mr. Colin Calleja for taking the time to meet with us and reflect on the research findings, sharing their experience and expertise on the topic.

A special thanks is also extended to our research team, their on-going enthusiasm was greatly appreciated.

Introduction

Malta's migration context

Migratory patterns survive as a mixture of voluntary movement and forced migration (Castles & Miller, 2003). Push and pull forces persist, and recent transformations in scale, reach and complexity have altered the status of the global migratory phenomenon. Whether under the effects of environmental change, new global political and economic dynamics, or fuelled by the technological revolution and an ever-diverging north-south divide, millions migrate leaving their country every year.

Over the past 25 years the number of international migrants has doubled, and notwithstanding the onset of the financial crisis, new waves of protectionism and a renewed anti-immigrant fervour, Camron and Golding (2011) estimate it will double again by 2030¹. Europe, the first borderless union of States, is a region of relative political stability, within which context the fluidity of borders has not only seen internal migratory dynamics in constant flux, but also a permeability of external borders (although somewhat restrictive) with which it has continued to coexist.

The predominant form of contemporary migration in Europe is not what many Maltese associate the phenomenon with; the most significant numbers are therefore not attributed to the bi-product of conflict or disaster, neither the global south, but are more closely associated with the increase in existing opportunities and economic migration in the region.

Migration has undergone a transformation, broadening in ethnic diversity and through its feminisation (Kofman, Phizacklea, Raghuram, & Sales, 2000). Elsewhere referred to as the 'maid trade', the increasing number of migrant women who fill labour gaps in the caring and domestic sector is merely one example of such migrant flows. The ageing population of Malta, like other European States, is placing great demands within the care sector, and represents just one type of labour shortage the EU continues to experience. Malta is included in the group of EU Member States that is expected to be most affected by the impact of ageing across Europe², which will continue to require an influx of primarily young men and women from so-called 'Third Countries', without whose supplement the Maltese society will suffer³.

Notwithstanding how ingrained in today's modern world the migratory phenomenon seems to be, there is still a general lack of skill and experience in how to 'manage' migration, and the resulting multicultural environments. Malta, up until recently has been predominantly a country of emigration, traditionally associated with countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada, but has always been a crossroad for travellers, colonisers, and traders. As Dr. Claire Spencer notes,

"Malta is the result of a migration of people way back in history. But somehow we forget this and prefer to look at societies as static because we feel safe in that familiarity."

*We always have. We have always lived in fluid societies."*⁴

¹ Camron, Golding; (11 July 2011) *Migration Makes Sense*, in The Times of Malta, from <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20110711/business-news/More-migration-makes-sense.374889>

² Manduca, Anthony; *The Clock is ticking away*, in The Times of Malta, 30 July 2009 - <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20090730/business-news/the-clock-is-ticking-away.267444>

³ Schembri, David; *Immigration 'might solve pensions problem'* in The Times of Malta, 16th November 2010, in <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20101116/local/immigration-might-solve-pensions-problem.336388>

⁴ Chetcuti, Kristina; *Historically, we are migrant societies*, in The Times of Malta, 11th May 2010. <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20100511/local/historically-we-are-migrant-societies.306725>

Curiously scepticism of the ‘other’ continues to prevail in the Maltese psyche and public opinion, perhaps due to historical fears of being colonised or engulfed by external influence, and possibly also due to a generally widespread ignorance, or lack of awareness of the phenomenon – not least the intensification of globalisation.

Contrary to public perception, and often in defiance of the standards delineated in public policies, Malta has long been home to a variety of cultures and diasporic communities. Sephardic Jews, Hindu Indian merchants, Christian Serbs and Croats among others, established themselves and integrated into the dominant catholic community. These groups have been perceived as not having affected social cohesion⁵.

A quick look at statistics collected by the Directorate for Citizenship and Expatriate Affairs brings to light the plethora of ethnic groups represented in Malta whose nationals hail from over one hundred countries. Despite the challenges for naturalisation in Malta, (MIPEX 2007) statistics fail to represent the diversity of Maltese citizens who for example form part of communities such as the Sindhi diaspora, and the Greek Orthodox community which trace back to the 1800s. More recent additions such as the Palestinian and Filipino groups⁶, who both moved to Malta for labour purposes during the 1970s, also appear to go unnoticed. The former, particularly in connection with employment within Libyan institutions, the latter (which saw an increase in the 1990s) more closely associated with the aforementioned increased demand for care-workers.

During 2008 and 2009 Malta granted more than 18%⁷ of all its new residence permits to non-EU citizens for employment purposes, with an increase of approximately 7% noted till the end of 2010. Until the 30th April 2012, the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) data⁸ showed that there were 2,715⁹ employment licences issued to TCNs highlighting a relatively constant number of licences issued over the past four years. According to the 2011 data collected by the Directorate of Citizenship and Expatriate Affairs around 8,000 individuals held residence permits in Malta (the number includes those issued to students and individuals visiting for temporary stay such as family visits or short-term study visits).

Zammit (2012) notes that, notwithstanding the desirable nature of migration as a source of innovation and dynamism and its contribution to the anthropological development of societies there is an absence of a “*positive vision of economic migrants ... paralleled by the absence of institutional structures which explicitly cater for the integration of TCNs*”. Zammit notes the absence of a “*national contact point on integration, or the lack of Ministry responsible for the integration of TCNs within Maltese society*” and a pervasive uncertainty and ambiguity within numerous aspects of daily and public life. Although national policies are absent, as is a centralised institutional infrastructure, this does not mean that actions affecting the integration of TCNs do not take place; rather one observes a plethora of ‘policies’ which have been developed at an administrative level in order to compensate for the absence of an overarching national vision.

⁵ Frenco, Henry; *National Report on the Implementation of the Directive on Reception Conditions for Asylum Seekers in Malta*, 2007, http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/doc_centre/asylum/docs/malta_2007_en.pdf

⁶ The population of Filipinos, renowned worldwide for domestic jobs, has risen rapidly in Malta in the past years particularly as home-helpers or family carers with young children or the elderly. In 2009 alone, 208 new permits were granted to Filipinos to work here. (Camilleri, The Times of Malta).

⁷ Camilleri, Ivan; *Economy adds to migration as pull for non-EU citizens*, in The Times of Malta, 6th September 2011, <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20110906/local/Economy-adds-to-migration-as-pull-for-non-EU-citizens.383468>.

⁸ Quoted in Zammit, David E; *Consultative Assessment on the Integration of Third Country Nationals*, International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

⁹ Ibid.

In light of the aforementioned statistics, and taking into consideration the number of Maltese citizens married to foreigners, the high number of EU citizens in Malta (approximately 5,000 employment licences issued in 2010 alone) and that of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of protection, it is safe to assume that the Maltese classroom will reflect these demographics. Maltese schools represent an increasingly multicultural and multilingual environment. 7,000 years of colonialism and a historically international diaspora in Malta are only two facets of the complex Maltese reality, and an intrinsic element of multiculturalism which to date is not reflected in national policies, particularly in education and therefore in the classroom.

According to the Migration Policy Index (MIPEX) Malta has only just started to adapt to this manifest diversity, stating that policies are among the least favourable in Europe for migrant students and do not target the specific needs of newcomers. MIPEX goes further in highlighting the clear absence of opportunities for teacher training: with particular emphasis on the study of migrant languages in State schools.

Aims and objectives

The research aimed to explore the experiences, and degree of integration of TCN students within the Maltese education system, to consider the challenges and opportunities faced by these students and their families. The project seeks to inform policy development, to highlight best practices and spaces for programme development where available, to inform capacity building (in particular, teacher training and support) and to raise awareness amongst the education and broader Maltese community as to the needs of this student cohort and their families.

Summarily, the data generated in this research aims to explore the following key considerations:

- What are the day-to-day experiences of TCN students within the Maltese compulsory school system?
- To what degree are they integrating into the school system and broader Maltese society?
- What challenges do they face? How do they cope?
- How are notions of TCN students and ‘integration’ understood by Heads, teachers, TCN students and their families? How does this impact the learning process and learning needs?
- To what extent do policy approaches and practices promote inclusive environments for TCN students?
- How are TCN students and their families being supported to meet the aims of the NCF, namely a “Quality Education for all”?
- To what extent do existing policy documents and teacher training relate to, and understand the lived realities of TCN students and their families? What further capacity building is required in this regard?
- What degree of interaction (and inclusion) is there between children, their families and professionals within the school context? What are the learning needs in this regard? What form of interaction do parents value? How can the relationship be enhanced?

The report begins with an – albeit selective – review, of the relevant literature. This will be followed by an outline of the methodology adopted for the purpose of this research; the subsequent section provides an analysis of the data collected. The findings are presented by highlighting the emerging themes. The study concludes with the presentation of recommendations for further research, teacher training and practice and policy development.

Literature Review

Introduction

To reach the aims of this study the researchers adopted an interdisciplinary stance that is historically and contextually grounded, but is also attentive to the broader social, political and economic context (see for example hooks, 2003; Borg & Mayo, 2006). No single theoretical approach can address issues such as education, migration, inclusion, or ethnicity, nor indeed explain the day-to-day experiences of TCN students within the Maltese education system.

The key theoretical agenda informing the study is provided by the critical pedagogy paradigm. Critical pedagogy refers to an array of philosophical principles informing a heterogeneous set of ideas that can collectively be referred to as:

“fundamentally committed to the development and enactment of a culture of schooling that supports the empowerment of culturally marginalised and economically disenfranchised students. By so doing, this pedagogical perspective seeks to help transform those classroom structures and practices that perpetuate undemocratic life.” (Darder et al, 2009:9)

As such, this research draws on multiple interpretive projects including theories of critical pedagogy, poststructuralist, feminist and post/neo-colonial theories in order to engage with the complex relationships between power and knowledge and the politics of representation, and the intersections of gender, ethnicity, race, class and legal status, amongst others (hooks, 1989, 2003; Giroux & McLaren, 1994; Hall, 1997; Darder et al, 2009).

Proponents of critical pedagogy critically interrogate dominant classroom structures and practices that maintain processes of exclusion (see for example Giroux & McLaren, 1994; hooks, 2003; Darder et al, 2009). A commonly held conviction of this pedagogical perspective is associated with the transformative and emancipatory potential of education and pedagogy and the commitment to the ideal and practice of social justice.

A note on terminology

Over the past few years there has been an increased interest in migrant children in Maltese schools. However, to our knowledge, this is the first piece of research focusing specifically on the TCN student cohort. A review of the local literature is challenging since research on immigration, in particular that focussing specifically on education, is limited. Furthermore, migratory status is rarely considered as a defining characteristic. Rather, ‘ethnicity’ has become synonymous with ‘migrant’ and the term migrant is used to refer, almost exclusively to African asylum-seekers¹⁰, thus reflecting the dominant political and public discourse. The following passage illustrates this point:

“Immigrant children are mainly included in Government schools although some immigrant children do attend Church schools (which are heavily subsidised by Government). They are expected to follow the curriculum like Maltese children. It is generally quite difficult to cater for their specific needs, particularly as regards to their language and culture since they are often children of ‘illegal / irregular’ immigrants, staying in Malta for an indefinite period, and coming from countries that generally are not represented diplomatically in Malta.” (Eurydice, 2007)

¹⁰ The term ‘asylum seeker’ is used in a collective manner to refer to all migrants that have requested asylum in Malta, regardless of outcome.

Indeed, the passage may also suggest that the ‘burden of blame’ for the absence of specialised services is placed squarely on this student cohort as a result of their ‘illegal/irregular’ status. A number of researchers have attempted to address the misconception that migration to Malta is limited to African asylum flows, and to illustrate the diversity characterising the migrant student population in Maltese schools (see for example Calleja et al, 2010; Galea et al, 2011).

Adopting the term ‘ethnic minority’ to refer specifically to the migrant student cohort in Malta (see for example Calleja et al, 2010) may also be problematic since, on the one hand it may reinforce the (false) notion that the ‘national’ is homogeneous and ‘white’, thus negating the ethnic diversity that exists amongst the Maltese student population. Indeed, teachers may even inadvertently label ‘darker’ skinned Maltese students as migrants (see Calleja et al, 2010). On the other hand, a ‘white’ TCN may not necessarily be considered as having a different ‘ethnicity’, since ‘whiteness’ is often perceived as existing outside of culture, whilst ‘ethnicity’ is often perceived of as exotic, dark, problematic and not white (read superior and western) (Giroux & McLaren, 1994).

This is not to suggest that concepts such as ‘ethnic minority’ or indeed ‘race’¹¹ should be excluded from the analysis¹². Rather, it points to the need to interrogate such concepts and consider their pedagogical implications.

¹¹ The notion of racial types as biologically determined has been discredited, however, critical theorists have maintained that ideas about ‘race’ continue to have social meaning, and as such, should be retained (Darder et al, 2009:147)

¹² Indeed, research conducted in Maltese schools has not adequately considered the diversity of the student cohort; the categorisation of data collection is generally limited to locality and gender (see Pisani, et al. 2010). Calleja et al (2010) also noted that professionals working in Maltese schools lacked the basic cultural and heuristic tools required to work with a multicultural/multi-ethnic classroom.

In the absence of such critical examination the migrant/Maltese student cohort will be constructed as dichotomous and homogenised. Such characterisation can lead to the adoption of stereotypes, and a way of thinking about students as essentially defined, their subjectivity determined by their association with a specific cultural or ethnic group (Grillo, 2000). Indeed, the notion of intersectionality adopted in this research recognises that a student’s experiences of education will be influenced both positively and negatively by a number of factors that interact in different ways, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability and migration status among others (see hooks, 2003; Pisani, 2012).

For the purpose of this research, the term TCN refers to persons who are not citizens of the Union, and who are legally residing in Malta. Asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of inter/national protection will not be included in this research.

With this in mind, what follows is an overview of the national legal and policy context, a look at service provision for TCN students in Malta, and examples of best practice highlighted in local research.

Policy context

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) essentially established ‘inclusion’ as the appropriate policy direction of the European Union and member States. That said, there is no specific policy regarding the education of migrant students in Malta, nor is there any specific policy or set of guidelines on the inclusion and integration process for migrant students or their families (TCN or otherwise).

At the time of drafting the present report the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) (1999) was the key document setting out the core elements of primary and secondary education in Malta. The opening lines of the NMC describe 'Education' as 'being the womb in which our society reproduces itself and re-creates itself for the future' wherein the belief in social justice guides the educational project. This commitment to social justice is reiterated in the NMCs specific reference to the increased cultural diversity of the Maltese classroom. The document expresses a commitment to fostering a democratic environment where all children in Malta have equal access to the education system:

"In a democratic society, all voices are not only heard but also respected. The educational community must ensure equality of access to the educational system without discrimination on the grounds of ability, gender, religion, race or socio-cultural and economic background. The educational process should cultivate within students a sense of social justice and solidarity. The educational community should actively oppose all forms of discrimination by promoting the corresponding attitudes and readiness to act."

The NMC is not a stand-alone document, indeed, this commitment to social justice and inclusion is also evident in a number of key policy documents and education reforms in Malta, including *For All Children to Succeed* (2005), *Early Childhood Education and Care* (2006), *Further and Higher Education Strategy 2020* (2009). Each of these documents can be seen, at least at a policy level, to express a commitment to the provision of a quality education for all migrant students in Malta (see also Bartolo, 2010; Galea et al. 2011).

At the time of writing, Malta was engaged in a national consultation process in adoption of the new National Curriculum Framework (NCF). Interestingly, the key focus of the new NCF seems to have shifted away from that of social justice, towards a neo-liberal thrust that is geared towards meeting the needs of the labour market:

"Employability, quality of life and lifelong learning are at the heart of the new draft National Curriculum Framework that aims at equipping young people with the key competences needed to meet the challenges of Malta's future labour market." (MEEF, 2011:8)

Elsewhere it has been argued that this trend towards education as an accessory to the work place will have implications for inclusion, running the risk of reproducing inequity (Giroux, 2004). Nevertheless, the NCF draws on a number of national policy documents and EU directives in the formulation of six general principles that form the foundation of the framework, namely:

- Entitlement
- Diversity
- Continuation of Achievement
- Learner Centred Learning
- Quality Assurance
- Teacher Support

Together, these six principles provide the foundation for a somewhat broad approach towards inclusive educational practices. These principles are grounded in equality, wherein each child is entitled to a quality education:

"The inclusive school should cater for every child irrespective of gender, religion, race, ability and beliefs, but should also set as one of its aims the promotion of the potential of each learner through individualised attention and support. The school ethos and practices, in the primary and secondary years, will transmit this value to all learners, who will achieve the aim specifically through the learning areas, through cross-curricular themes such as multicultural education and education for sustainable development, and through alternative curricula, depending on the aptitudes and abilities of the student population." (MEEF, 2011: 31)

The NCF recognises the development of social justice and democratic principles as a crucial aspect of learning and seeks to embrace democratic practices in schools as a way to pursue this aim. An inclusive approach is also seen as promoting social justice for all. In this regard, intercultural education¹³ has been categorised as a cross-curricular theme, and identified as essential for realising the aims of the curriculum framework. As such, it has been accorded importance within the NCF:

"Intercultural Education challenges various educational processes, such as decision-making within the school, languages of instruction, methodologies used, student interactions and learning resources. Intercultural Education ensures the inclusion of multiple perspectives and voices within the learning environment, provides spaces for learning about the languages, histories, traditions and cultures of non-dominant groups in a society, encourages team work and cooperative learning in multicultural contexts, combines traditional and local knowledge and know-how with advanced science and technology, and values the practice of multilingualism. In doing so it encourages an understanding of global issues and the need for living together with different cultures and values." (MEEF, 2011:46)

Inclusive education and social justice

Research conducted within multicultural classrooms consistently indicate that indigenous students, and indeed, those reflecting the dominant ethnic group, will experience school differently to migrant children and those students representing a minority ethnic group, with the latter more likely to be disadvantaged within the school setting (Nieto, 2009; OECD, 2010). The concept of 'equity in education' then, compels us to consider whether or not the notion of equality and 'inclusion', on their own, provide for the possibility for social justice. A review of the local literature points to some contradictions in the NMC vis-à-vis social inclusion and social difference.

¹³ In line with (2006/962/EC).

Perhaps the strongest critique levelled against present policy is that the notion of inclusive education appears to be synonymous with the education of students with a disability and special education needs (such views have been expressed elsewhere, see for example Goodley, 2011; Bezzina & Grima, 2008). As Galea et al (2011) note, the upshot of this is that the learning needs of migrant students are framed within a ‘deficit’ discourse characterised by learning and teaching difficulties. Migrant students are provided with (perhaps needed) support in literacy, numeracy and social skills, in order to fit into existing school processes and structures, suggesting that the latter need not be transformed.

Likewise, and as noted above, a generic approach to inclusion also fails to recognise the intersectionality, and how race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and other socially constructed categories, interact, influence and affect the individual experiences of TCN students.

In shifting our attention to the curriculum, the NCF adopts a somewhat exclusive approach in addressing the respect and promotion of Maltese culture and heritage. The text is written in such a way that assumes that the national and cultural heritage is common to all students in Maltese schools and fails to recognise the national diversity within the student cohort, including TCNs:

“During the Early Years and Primary years children should explore and experience the wealth of their cultural and national heritage through visits, exhibitions and other first-hand opportunities. Inquiry-based and active learning and viewing artefacts in context, as well as the study of documents and multi-media texts, enable pupils to form a solid understanding of who they are and where they come from. Children should actively engage in projects that assist in the conservation of their regional and national heritage.

In the later years of the Primary cycle and into the Secondary cycle, young people should continue to experience Malta’s national culture and heritage, helping them to appreciate their own national identity and to strengthen their capacity as responsible citizens... Through the Expressive arts (art, music, dance and drama), combined with environmental studies, history, and geography, young people need to develop understanding of the importance of our culture and the arts for our national identity and of Malta’s place in Europe and in the World.” (MEEF, 2011:32)

Perhaps it is the issue related to the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church in Malta, and in particular within education, that has raised the most uncomfortable questions vis-à-vis inclusive education, wherein the teaching of the Roman Catholic Religion is equated with the last word on religious knowledge (see for example, Borg & Mayo, 2006; Pisani et al, 2010). The NMC states that whilst no student can be ‘compelled to receive teaching and education in the Catholic Religion’ the NMC ‘guarantees the teaching and education in the Catholic Religion in all State schools, of all types and levels... in the context of the school’s aims and as an integral part of its work’ (Ministry of Education, 1999: 60).

The NCF reiterates that within the Maltese context, religious education is understood as Catholic Religious Education (CRE)¹⁴. However, the NCF recognises the increasing diversity of the student cohort and of those who do not want to receive an education in the Catholic Religion as a ‘challenge’ (MEEF, 2011:15). In this regard, the NCF provides an ‘opt out’ and states that:

“For young people opting out of Catholic Religious Education, it is recommended that the Religious Education learning area will consist of an Ethical Education programme, which is preferred over a Comparative Religious Education programme. It is anticipated that following the endorsement of the NCF, this will be one of the programmes to be developed following discussion with stakeholders.” (MEEF, 2011:43)

Given that the NCF is still in its consultation stage, it is too early to comment on the development of an Ethical Education programme. However, in the meantime, it would appear that the curriculum, and indeed, the hidden curriculum, largely reflects the norms and values of the dominant ideology within Maltese society – read Roman Catholic. This raises serious questions regarding the truly inclusive nature of the curriculum and the broader educational institution, wherein the situated and experiential knowledge of the ‘other’ is subjugated to the dominant norm, reproducing societal inequities (see also Calleja et al, 2010; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Elsewhere, Maltese courses and content have also been criticised for their ‘Eurocentric’ content and for failing to reflect the multi-ethnic and multiracial contemporary Maltese context (Borg & Mayo, 2006:155). In this regard, it is also worth considering Malta’s colonial history. It was not that long ago that Malta was associated and constructed as part of the ‘rest’ rather than with the ‘West’ and as such, associated with images and texts relating to an inferior people, culture and society (Hall, 1992; Pisani, 2011). This colonial legacy continues to influence how the Maltese perceive and position themselves and the ‘other’ within, not only the hierarchy of ‘race’, but also the hierarchy of ‘whiteness’. For example, in their study on the experiences of young migrant women in Maltese secondary schools, Galea et al (2011) described a ‘sense of rivalry’ between the young women, with the Maltese perhaps expressing a sense of inferiority to the perceived beauty of the ‘Nordic’ women (p.101).

Service provision

Calleja et al (2011) note that very little has been done in setting up the operational framework for the implementation of measures envisaged in the legislation (Legal Notice 259 of 2002). Evaluating the present situation of TCN students is further hampered by a lack of disaggregated data (data on nationality, race/ethnicity, religious affiliation and other socially constructed categories is not collected) and data on service provision and educational attainment (Calleja et al, 2010; Galea et al 2011).

¹⁴ The NCF States, “CRE leads learners to read, understand, interpret and communicate the Religious Language; connect to, respond to, and express their Spiritual Dimension; comprehend, analyse, and evaluate the Word of God as it finds expression in the Sacred Scriptures and in the Sacred Tradition of the Roman Catholic Church; and engage with and form a Personal Catholic Worldview that enables them to analyse and evaluate personal, local and global issues and apply the Christian message to different situations.” (MEEF, 2011)

In practice, a review of the literature suggests that the support available to migrant students varies from college to college and appears to be marked by a lack of funds and support from Education Directorates (Calleja et al, 2011). Provision would appear to be arbitrary and left very much up to the individual efforts and motivation of college principles, Heads of school and individual teachers (Eurydice, 2007; Galea et al, 2010; Eurydice, 2009; Calleja et al, 2010). Special provisions for migrant students (which appear to be the exception rather than the rule) include language support in the mother tongue, language support in English and/or Maltese, cultural mediators and Learning Support Assistants.

Indeed, the multi-cultural, multi-lingual classroom increasingly characterises the contemporary classroom, and clearly, Malta is no exception. The choice of language of instruction is often politically charged, linked to questions of identity, nationhood and power (see Borg & Mayo, 2006; UNESCO, 2003). The challenge for policy makers is in ensuring a normative educational experience for the student population, and protecting the right to be different: this includes those belonging to specific linguistic and ethnic populations, amongst them, TCNs.

That said, measures adopted elsewhere within the EU, for example the provision of interpreters for students and their families have not been systematically introduced in Malta (Eurydice, 2009). It is perhaps worrying to note that the NCF does make reference to learning the mother tongue, however, given the lack of provision for migrant students noted in the literature¹⁵ - a provision that is envisaged in Legal Notice 259 (presented below) - there appears to be an assumption, once again, that the mother tongue pertains to Maltese:

“The EU’s recommendation of learning one’s mother tongue plus two others has been a reality for a long time in our educational system, which supports multilingualism.” (MEEF, 2011:28)

The literature also notes a lack of adequate training and preparation for teachers in Malta in working with a multicultural/multinational classroom (see Calleja et al, 2010). In this regard, there is a need to interrogate how teaching practice and personal bias and beliefs may be guiding pedagogical practice and perpetuating exclusion (Giroux, 2009).

European Union policy on the integration of Third Country Nationals

At this stage it is also relevant to provide a summary overview of relevant policies and measures adopted at the European Union level. Clearly, an analysis of the comprehensive range of instruments is not required for the purposes of this research, yet reference is here made to those instruments of direct relevance to the integration of TCN students.

The EU’s fundamental perspective on integration is positive. In its Communication for Integration of Migrants the EU Commission calls for a positive perception of integration, saying that:

“Europe needs a positive attitude towards diversity and strong guarantees for fundamental rights and equal treatment, building on the mutual respect of different cultures and traditions.” (Com (2011) 455, p.3)

As the EU does not have the mandate to determine national integration strategies, it seems to have adopted the role of creating and monitoring a framework within which the Members are required to manage integration issues.

¹⁵ Although the Education Directorates have liaised with a number of embassies to provide mother-tongue classes on Saturdays (see Galea et al., 2011:107)

According to the EU Commission one of the main integration challenges is the extent of gaps in educational achievement faced by TCN students.¹⁶ With an increasing share of non-EU-nationals of age 6-17¹⁷ and higher dropout-rates, the Commission has identified as a focal point the need for school systems to *“adapt to the increasing diversity of the student body to deliver high-quality education for all”* (Com (2011) 455, p.6), starting as early as pre-school. Among its recommendations to the Member States (MS), the Commission proposes that school staff require increased capacity in managing diversity, and that staff should include teachers with migrant backgrounds.

Recommendations are also made regarding language classes for parents of TCN students, in order to ensure that parents are more equipped to be involved in their children’s schooling.¹⁸ The Commission also suggests that national curricula reflect diversity in order to secure general active participation in society.¹⁹

At the implementation level, the EU has established the *European Integration Fund for Third Country Nationals*, and with a budget of EUR 825 million (2007-13) it supports various concrete initiatives taken by governments, civil society and other stakeholders.²⁰ Another EU initiative is the website on integration.²¹ On the site it is possible to access a wide range of informative material on the efforts the EU and the MS have taken to promote the integration of legally residing non-EU-nationals. It includes an online library, consultation forums, country information and examples of integration best practices.

As part of its attempts to promote a concrete approach to TCN integration, the European Commission has also published the third edition of the Handbook on Integration (2010). The Handbook presents a large number of best practices on how to deal with integration, and more specifically how to model the school system in order to ensure that TCN pupils are able to experience inclusion in their everyday school environment. As examples, it is possible to cite mother tongue tuition, accessibility of education, parental involvement and resource allocation schemes.

Through the *Common Basic Principles for immigrant integration policy*²², agreed upon in 2004²³, the Commission sets out non-binding suggestions on how MS may establish their own integration policies.

¹⁶ Com(2011) 455 p.3

¹⁷ 5.7 % at the moment (Com(2011) 455, p.6)

¹⁸ Com(2011) 455, p.6)

¹⁹ Com(2005) 389, p.8

²⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/funding/integration/funding_integration_en.htm

²¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/ewsi/en/index.cfm>

²² See http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/jha/82745.pdf#zoom=100

²³ 14615/04 (Presse 321)

Methodology

The aims of the research were achieved primarily through the use of qualitative research since this method is essentially exploratory research that aims to describe, understand and interpret a social and cultural context. Qualitative research on education rejects assumptions and essentialising, opting instead for a 'critical' orientation that acknowledges individual experiences and that seeks to explore what happens within the classroom setting, the school building and beyond, from the perspective of the participants.

Exploratory research therefore included an in-depth look at policy, the exploration of patterns of classroom interaction processes and outcomes, pedagogical practices (and their ability to respond to diversity within the classroom, including, cultural, religious, linguistic and gender differences, amongst others), teacher coping strategies, students' behaviour in class and adjustment to the local educational processes, the relationship between school and home and inclusion of parents/legal guardians, support from the wider community and degree of integration, teacher training, policy awareness, among others.

The purposes of this chapter are to:

- describe the procedure used in designing the instrument, selecting the research participants, and collecting the data; and
- provide an explanation of the procedures used to analyse the data.

Research participants

The participants identified include:

- Educators/Programmers:
 - Heads of School;
 - School Teachers;
 - Learning Support Assistants;
 - Complementary teachers;
- TCN Parents/Legal Guardians.

The rationale was to approach those involved in the day-to-day experience of the TCN children. Different research populations (i.e. LSAs, parents etc.) required different considerations in terms of identification. Given the focus of the research, identifying TCN children attending school in Malta was the first step. Research participants were recruited following the collection of TCN data, through collaboration and support from the relevant competent authorities (FES, Directorate for Education) and the schools. Independent schools were approached individually with specific requests for basic details of their TCN population. The first effort regarded the mapping out of the TCN student population.

Since the number of Independent schools is relatively high but comprises various small schools it was decided to move ahead with the 5 largest Independent schools that could therefore have a significant number of TCNs within the student body namely:

- San Anton School;
- San Andrea School;
- Chiswick House School / St Martin's;
- St. Michael's Foundation;
- St. Edward's College.

The Archdiocese was contacted as an access point to the Church schools. This required a separate authorisation request to that already acquired for access to State schools. For this matter the process was lengthy in terms of receiving a response. The data was received well into the research and for that matter, although the student population was mapped we were too late to explore the possibility of carrying out Non-Participant Observations (NPO) or Interviews with any counterpart within the Church schools themselves.

Data required included:

- Number of TCNs in schools;
- Countries of origin;
- Spoken languages;
- Distribution according to area/public or private education;
- Migratory trajectories;
- Gender and other variable considerations;
- Contact details.

Full details were only received from State schools. Two out of the five Independent schools responded, and Church schools provided breakdowns which contained very little information, possibly due to concerns related to privacy and data protection.

Secondly, as previously mentioned, it was felt that to evaluate the level of integration of TCN children, it was important to take into consideration a broad context and thus analyse and compare the perspective of the various stakeholders directly involved in the day-to-day experiences of TCN children. The school staff component of participants was thus contacted with what was aimed to be a blanket approach, and therefore did not require mapping.

Considerations on data collection

A component of desk research was also necessary to explore and analyse findings. Secondary data included academic literature, national unpublished reports, legal standards, inter/national legal frameworks, and policy documents. Desk research was also vital to gather data on the existing formal educational systems to provide the operational context for the research and for the final analysis. The researchers also identified the need to have an overview of existing programmes (e.g. student support services, etc.).

Quantitative data was gathered through structured questionnaires which were carried out online through self-administered questionnaires and through telephone interviews, whilst qualitative data was collected through the former two in addition to non-participant observation in school settings, and in-depth interviews with Heads, Teachers, Complementary Teachers, LSAs and parents of TCN children.

Work developed in two tracks from the mapping stage onwards, focusing on the school and the parent perspective respectively.

Overview of research framework

Data collection consisted of questionnaires, non-participant classroom observations and in-depth semi-structured interviews. The first phase of work saw the administration of the research instrument to a broad spectrum of participants, namely educators and parents of TCN children. Subsequently, a purposeful sample was identified to participate in a second round of data collection through in-depth interviews.

A structured observation protocol (NPO Guidelines) was developed to aid in field note collection and an interview protocol rooted in the literature was developed to act as a guide for the semi-structured in-depth interviews.

In addition to the aforementioned participants, it became necessary for the team to acquire a broader understanding of the context, i.e. education system, current changes, past research, and teacher preparation. Hence, meetings with University academics, Ministry of Education staff and Foundation for Educational Services staff were also carried out.

Online questionnaires

A blanket approach was adopted to reach Heads of school, teachers, LSAs and complementary teachers. An email was sent out to all State schools and identified Independent schools providing information on the research and the questionnaires. The research team opted for online questionnaires to aid distribution, whilst print versions were also made available to schools. One limitation of this approach was that the researchers could not be sure that the information was passed on to all prospective staff members. Furthermore, by being online the questionnaires were also accessible to other staff not contacted directly by the research team. Additionally one can also assume that the respondents could have gone beyond the lists specifically identified, and in the case of the scholastic context, responses may have been received from Independent and Church schools not directly contacted.

A total of 133 questionnaires were completed. These can be broken down as follows:

- Heads of School – 14;
- Teachers – 74;
- LSAs – 45.

Parents questionnaires

Questionnaires for parents were initially to be disseminated through schools, directly to the children identified as TCNs. Due to a combination of factors, namely time restrictions, the complexity and length of the parent questionnaire, and the possible need for translation into numerous languages, new considerations surfaced. Through printing questionnaires, the language for the questionnaire distributed would have needed to be decided a priori, thus risking to both lengthen the process where a different language was spoken by the specific family, or risk sending a questionnaire in the wrong language to certain families. So as to be effective in collection terms, and include all language groups, telephone interviews were selected.

By personally administering questionnaires the researcher compiled the online tool during the call, thus facilitating the process. First attempts for interviewing would therefore be in English or Maltese. Where language issues would be encountered an interpreter would be brought in to carry out the interview. It is important to note that all the questionnaires that were compiled did not require interpretation and English and Maltese were the languages used.

The decision to carry out telephone interviews also called for the need to identify a purposeful sample. With a combined list of almost 300 children it was unrealistic to hope to interview all parents within the time constraints of the project. Furthermore, the data collected presented a high number of TCNs from which a significant sample was to be selected.

Since it was noted that the data provided by the Independent schools left little scope for contact since the details provided only included a basic profile of the TCN population within the school, the research team, with the approval of FES, decided to move ahead and interview only the families of children in State schools. The data was streamlined so that every family unit was only represented once. To interview a purposeful sample the families were then divided according to the UN definition of geographic regions.²⁴ Groups with less than 10 people were all chosen, while 50% of the people in groups of 11 or more were chosen. This work led to a new data document whereby a list of 141 families were called for interviews, a figure which is representative of 56.6% of the total starting sample, and is representative of all the regions present within the starting sample. Up to 4 telephone attempts were made with every family. In total 58 families were interviewed, therefore 41% of the total sample.

In-depth interviews

A total of 24 in-depth interviews have been conducted. These can be broken down as follows:

- Heads of School – 5 (4 State, 1 Independent);
- Teachers – 9 (7 State, 2 Independent);
- LSAs – 2 (2 State);
- Complementary Teachers – 2 (1 State, 1 Church);
- 5 Parents (3 State, 1 Church, 1 Independent).

Teachers, Heads, college principals and parents were interviewed in order to check and cross check findings and compare data, follow up on emerging themes and get a first-hand experience of the multicultural classroom in Malta. Such an approach was valuable here in highlighting the particularities and the different perceptions of research participants. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

Non-participant observation

Non-participant observation within a classroom setting was carried out in both primary and secondary school contexts. The aim of non-participant observation within this research was to produce a ‘thick description’ of social interaction within the day-to-day classroom setting. This mode of inquiry allowed the researchers to observe and understand processes that may not be obtained from alternative research tools. Non-participant observation provided a more nuanced understanding of the complex social context of students’ experiences.

Observation was conducted in two State schools (one primary and one secondary and one Independent school in both primary and secondary sections). Although approximately 5 hours of classroom observation in each school were envisaged, in actuality sessions extended over a day so as to observe in a variety of classroom settings.

In the initial proposal the research team planned to carry out Focus groups with children in classroom groups to discuss issues of identity. Following the figures received, the feasibility of organising such an activity was re-evaluated due to:

²⁴ See - Composition of macro geographical (continental) regions, geographical sub-regions, and selected economic and other groupings - <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>

- the difficulty of bringing children of similar age groups together;
- the worry of intimidation and thus corruption of results;
- the fear of creating a situation in which the concept of difference would be emphasised, possibly causing issues if connected with the need to pull children out of classroom hours;
- in the case of organisation of focus groups outside of school hours;
- ethical concerns connected with interviewing children.

The decision was therefore to collect the children's experiences through non-participant observation and through the combination of input received from all other participants. One limitation of this research then, is the absence of the TCN student voice.

Other interviews

In addition to the in-depth interviews, so as to give more background and context to the preliminary findings, the team decided to interview numerous stakeholder representatives so as to orient itself better within the national education framework, receive feedback and share reflections on the initial findings. Meetings were thus carried out as follows:

- Assistant Director of Education;
- Working group of lecturers and academics within the faculty of education at the University of Malta within the Education department currently or previously involved in relevant activity;
- Expert on code-switching;
- Workshop with FES staff.

Through the triangulation of different methodologies, our approach sought to collect and analyse both qualitative and quantitative data so as to provide recommendations that take into consideration the issues at hand from an all-round perspective. In an effort to cover diverse perspectives and capture the multifaceted dimensions of the school experience, triangulation compensated for the strengths and weaknesses of each source.

The analysis adopted a number of qualitative approaches. These included critical policy analysis and discourse analysis as a grounded theory approach recognised as complementing social justice inquiry and, as such, well suited to the aims of this study. This approach, developed to help researchers understand complex social processes, views empirical 'reality' as an on-going interpretation of meaning produced by the individuals, engaged in a common project of observation' (Suddaby, 2006). Grounded theory evolves during the research process, inductively derived from the study in a continuous interplay between data collection and analysis, a process of constant comparison understood as reciprocally informing and shaping each other through an emerging process.

This constant interplay between data collection and analysis (the comparative method) allowed the researchers to move beyond observation to critical evaluation, looking for interrelationships and developing conceptual categories. The process provided the space to explore the experiences of the research participants, to highlight the challenges experienced by individuals, to provide examples of best practice and to identify areas of intervention and spaces for the development of specific programmes, services, support or campaigns that may be necessary for the inclusion of TCN students within the Maltese education system.

Ethical concerns

The key ethical issues that arose are detailed below.

Access to schools

All bureaucratic procedures were carried out so as to receive DQSE approval for access to state schools, access to Church schools was not requested due to the lengthy duration of acquisition of demographic information.

Informed consent

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study through consent forms, preface to the online interviews and in person for in-depth interviews. All individuals gave written consent for the use of the data provided during interviews and questionnaires.

Anonymity, confidentiality and safeguarding

Fear of identification was recognised as a possible risk that may limit or hinder adults participating in the study. Participants' personal information has been kept anonymous. Recorded conversations were held in a secure location and will be destroyed at the end of the project.



Findings and Analysis

Terminology and data

The focus of this research was limited to TCNs, however it was clear that the research participants were not familiar with the terminology and found it difficult to focus on the very specific aims of the research²⁵. For example, the following short transcript demonstrates how the definition TCN as a construct fails to capture the complex and dynamic reality the research participants face on a daily basis with regard to ‘characterisation’, both within the TCN student population, the broader migrant population, and the Maltese student school population²⁶. The researcher asked, “*how many TCN students do you have in the school?*”

Assistant Head: *We have an Egyptian – ara [look] – totally we have 14 children that do not attend regular Catholic practices. So that will give you an example of who is not mainstream. Two of them are Bulgarian, but that would be EU.*

Researcher: *It’s interesting, you seem to be taking Maltese and non-Maltese, and characterising them by who attends mass? Is this how it is?*

Assistant Head: *No, I don’t really characterise as that, but it’s a good indication.*

Researcher: *So Maltese children would all attend mass?*

Assistant Head: *Normally yes, although sometimes there are children who are Maltese who may be non-Catholic, like Jehovah Witnesses or something like that – but mostly – no, they would be all foreigners.*

This interaction provides some insight into the homogenisation of TCNs, other migrant students, and Maltese students. Such an approach not only negates the heterogeneity and complexity within these groups (for example, with regard to the latter, adoptions from abroad, nationalisations and mixed marriages, added to the confusion vis-à-vis the classification of TCN), but may also lead to poor policy/programme development. On the other hand, the passage also illustrates how a narrow focus on a singular characteristic, namely ‘TCN’ in isolation, fails to capture the complex relationships between other defining characteristics, such as race, class, gender, religion and migratory status (Pisani, 2012). The same can be said for religious identity. The following passage refers to children of the Muslim faith attending the same school:

“Yes, fifteen families. So, we’ll meet all and definitely, they are from different countries, different backgrounds. So whatever we will be...I mean from Pakistan...there’s one friend he’s from Sudan, there are others from different countries, so it will be different identities.” (Parent, Primary School)

Certainly, the research findings suggest that students who are not Roman Catholic and do not participate in religious activities are perceived as ‘problematic as a group’ (an issue discussed below). And yet, as noted above, this student cohort may include Maltese students, asylum-seekers, EU nationals and TCNs.

²⁵ One Head informed us that the school was asked to undergo an exercise to identify the TCN students attending the school as the number of TCN parents paying for their child’s education did not tally with the number of students classified collectively as ‘foreign’.

²⁶ The Maltese student population in itself is becoming increasingly diverse, any essentialist description in this regard should be rendered defunct (Gauci & Pisani, forthcoming).

Data must also be contextualised. For example, whilst the findings collected from Independent and State schools were largely consistent, some differences may be explained by considering socio-economic status and class based dimensions of student experiences. That said, the findings also remind us of the social levelling often associated with migration, and the risks associated with generalisations:

“I mean I once had, I remember last year, that a girl, her mother had some kind of PhD. But in Malta she only found a job – and she was quite sad about this – and rightly so! As a waitress. And she owned it to me in a very secretive way. You know? It was confidential. And this is a common experience. So they might have, you know, in their own country, a certain standing, but unfortunately here they don’t. And I think this is very job related. Because the length of time that they stay here. The academic in motivation. It affects the schooling, the attitude, the approach of the girl.” (Head, State Secondary School)

Clearly, the example above demonstrates how one cannot privilege migrant status over class, ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender, nation State, legal status or any other demarcation of difference. Each category can be seen to be fluid, so that socially constructed groups such as ‘waitress’ forms part of the social being but is also seen to include much diversity (see also Zontini, 2010). Characteristics such as religious identity or social class do not function discretely, producing advantage or disadvantage. Such characteristics cannot be explored in isolation or analysed from a cumulative perspective. Rather, the findings demonstrate how such characteristics intersect with other characteristics and are also mediated by the school context and beyond.

Given the national context and the way migration is discussed in the political and public realm, it came as no surprise to the researchers that a number of Heads/teachers automatically assumed that the research focused on sub-Saharan African asylum-seekers and refugees, rather than on TCNs, reinforcing the notion that the latter are characterised as the only migrants in Maltese schools. For example, one Head we spoke to assumed the term ‘TCN’ referred to ‘Third World Countries’, whilst other research participants repeatedly used terms such as ‘illegal immigrants’, ‘klandestini’, ‘third world students’. Indeed, they appeared to be unaware of how their use of words may not only reflect their own assumptions and beliefs, but also, how certain discourse serves to reproduce social injustice and exclusion (Nieto, 2009).

Certainly, the specific focus on TCN students allowed the researchers the opportunity to redirect the conversation and remind interviewees of the broader – and by far larger – migrant student population. And yet, the findings of this research appear to demonstrate how no ‘category’ of student can be essentialised, and how social constructions can intersect, shaping the student’s experience in school and beyond (see hooks, 2003).

Migration trajectories

The notion of migration trajectories, and more specifically, short-term – perhaps erratic – migration, is a recurrent theme throughout this analysis. The findings suggest that the presence of a number of TCN children in Malta – specifically in State schools – is characterised as temporary (largely determined by temporary labour migration patterns). This would appear to reflect trends elsewhere in the EU wherein the ‘permanent settlement migration paradigm’ (wherein migration is understood as a one-time, permanent move crossing an international border) has shifted towards circular and temporary migration patterns (EMNa, 2010: 7). Preliminary research conducted in Malta characterises temporary migrants in Malta as:

- Third-country nationals moving temporarily to Malta and thus to the European Union for short-term employment, seasonal work, study or research;
- Or settled migrants living in the EU moving temporarily to their countries of origin (EMNb, 2010:5).

The former category is relevant to the present research. The purpose of temporary migration in Malta appears clear:

“Given the demographic and economic situations particular to Malta, legal migration is linked to addressing the mismatches that arise from time to time in the national labour market. In this context most economic migration is considered as temporary until such labour shortages are addressed through the mobility of EU nationals and an upgrade of the Maltese population’s skills through the education and vocational systems.” (EMNb, 2010:7)

Given this emphasis on meeting the labour gaps of the national economy, wherein temporary migration is essentially encouraged to serve the interests of the host country, it comes as no surprise that concerns have been raised with regard to migrants’ rights, integration prospects and the risk of marginalisation of migrants (EMNa, 2010: 8). In this regard, research conducted on the characterisation of temporary labour migration in Malta is limited to the economic and labour market perspective (EMNb, 2010). The impact of temporary labour migration on migrant children’s educational experience in Malta, including institutional practices, the curriculum and relationships, clearly requires further research.

The findings of this research make some interesting – albeit preliminary – observations in this regard. A number of teachers noted that often, parents and students do not discuss their future migratory plans with the school. Rather, their presence is characterised by an arrival ‘out of the blue’, followed by a quick departure with no prior notice:

“The coming and going [is a problem], yes. We might have 6, 8 foreign students in a class? And suddenly they decide to go back...we have only had a few who have been here a long time. I mean, coming to think of Eastern European, they don’t seem to stay here for long – it also depends on their parents.” (Teacher, State Secondary School).

This appears to have generated a belief that any intervention or investment in the education of TCN students will essentially be a waste of time: they are not expected to remain in the school. On the other hand, some teachers did express concern with how some students’ education is thus disrupted, particularly when such students arrive and leave mid-way through the scholastic year. Certainly, the situation is part of a larger sense of how many teachers are struggling with the ‘unknown’. In the case of Independent schools, the situation appears to be a little more constant, an issue that may be attributed to the socio-economic status – and hence job stability – of the parents:

“In my case, most of the students I have in class have been in Malta for several years or have been here all their life. They have integrated quite well and have friends; they have adapted to the system and participate in class just like the others.” (Independent Secondary School Teacher).

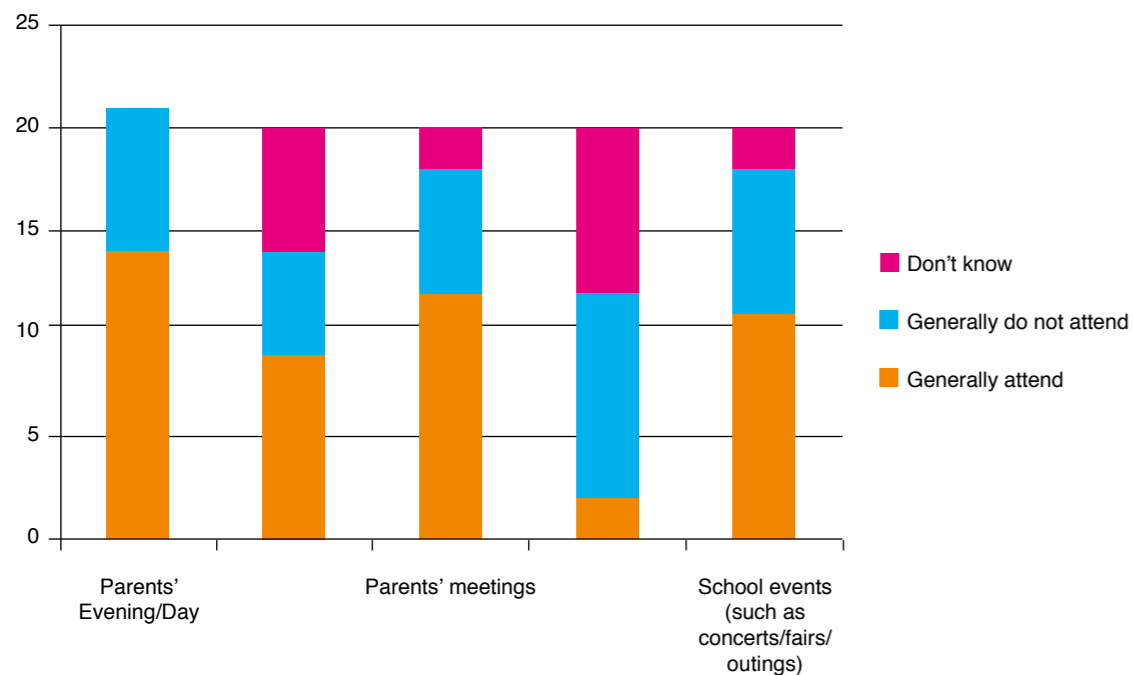
Some respondents also expressed concern with regard to the relevance of the school curriculum for TCN students in Malta on a temporary basis:

“I don’t know how relevant it would be to them. For example, let us say religion, if they are non-Catholic, it is irrelevant, there is no moral education at primary at least...At primary level it is not on yet so if they don’t take up religion, they can’t practice their own religion at school, or they can’t have a talk about whatever interests them, so it is completely irrelevant for them. Then they have social studies, which is Maltese history – again if they are not meant to stay in Malta maybe it is not relevant for them.” (Assistant Head, State Primary School)

However, these findings are somewhat contradicted. A number of Heads/teachers (in both State schools and Independent schools) spoke of the high level of involvement of migrant parents in schools activities, suggesting a degree of integration in Malta, and involvement in their children’s education. Yet a marked distinction is observed. Whereas the level of participation of parents is seen by Heads and teachers as being of a generally high level in relation to more personal activities such as parents’ evenings and meetings, this participation is seen to be far lower than that of Maltese parents when observing group activities such as school councils, school events, PTAs, etc. Interestingly, in none of the activities was the participation of TCN parents seen to be higher than that of Maltese parents. With regard to student participation, both Heads and teachers also noted high levels of interaction of TCN children in various settings, including with classmates within the class setting, in recreation time and in terms of their contribution to class activities.

In their response, teachers seemed to present a similar trend, emphasising the extremely low TCN parent participation in school council/PTA meetings, as seen in the chart below:

Parents/Guardians Attendance



Whilst parents also highlighted the importance of a long term strategy for TCN children and expressed concern that their needs were not being taken into consideration:

“So I think there is need of change, for the better. That will be for the better. Because, one thing should be clear that the migrant students who are living and studying and going to school. They are not something, if we are just thinking that they have living here and that one day they will be leaving so whatever the policies are made no matter, but if they are living here or if they are going to live here throughout their life or if parents like me, we are not giving our children the upbringing that we are here for a short period of time just for some...no that is not our case.”

We are giving them upbringing that they are part of this country, this nation and they have to serve, when they grow up they have to become something very beneficial for this country. So, when we are giving them this upbringing and I'm sure many other parents would have the same mentality and so definitely they should be given this opportunity, of the same, equal basis the Maltese children are given. Because in my opinion, these children are also asset of Malta. So if they are going to be the asset of Malta, they should be considered as equal as other children, Maltese nationals are.” (TCN parent)

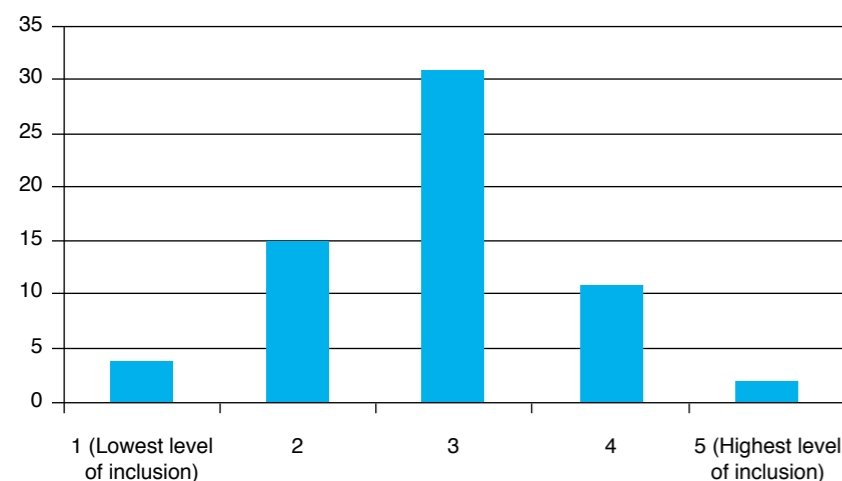
Multilingual and multicultural classrooms

The findings illustrate in no uncertain way that the Maltese classroom is an increasingly diverse classroom. Whilst certain schools and localities in Malta appear to be experiencing more migration than others, the general trend suggests that Maltese classrooms will become progressively more multicultural and multilingual over time and that this phenomenon will not be limited to specific locations. A snapshot of the present situation would appear to suggest that there is a higher density of TCN students (and other migrant students) in urban settings located close to the sea.

For example, in their questionnaire responses, 50% of teachers confirmed the need to change their approach in the classroom. They also provided interesting information on the changes they felt they needed to implement in order to effectively deal with the presence of TCN students in their classrooms:

- Increased code-switching;
- Varied, non-traditional means of communication with parents;
- Use of visual aids;
- Production of bi-lingual hand-outs for students;
- Revisiting time- and curriculum-management;
- Immediate translation of sentences spoken in Maltese;
- Revising topics, particularly when the student is new to the class.

Yet despite the above, it seems like teachers feel positively about the national situation. Teachers were asked the extent to which they feel policy approaches and practices promote inclusive environments for TCN students:



Migrant prevalence and the development of practice

The researchers were able to recognise a significant difference between Independent and State schools, in approach, experience, and ability to address the needs of TCN students. In the case of the latter, this also varied according to the prevalence of migrant children within a given school. Such differences were noted by teachers with experience in different settings, for example, in the following passage, a secondary school teacher compares her experiences of working in an Independent school and a State school (rural catchment area) and points to how the presence of ‘foreigners’ may be less welcome within the rural setting:

“here for foreigners...they all have a group of friends...[In the State school] for any foreigner really it was difficult for the students to integrate, it was also the mentality of the children and the families, with regards to foreigners not accepting foreigners. It was different.” (Teacher, Independent Secondary School)

In the absence of any strategy or policy that deals specifically with the multicultural, multilingual classroom, it would appear that different schools are developing their own practice to varying degrees, depending on the prevalence of migrant children within the respective schools. The upshot of this appears to be that best practice is not being shared:

“So when it comes to the multicultural aspect, although some people in some schools are living it on a daily basis, what that school does, how that school copes and what that school learns belongs to that school. It’s not something that has been mainstreamed within the whole system. But again, when we were in [different school] and seeing how we could address this issue, we were alone, we didn’t have anything from the education authorities or whatever. We had to come up with it. And it’s good that you get good practice coming from the grass roots, but then again, you need to have direction. You need to have support. Like for example, we needed support to provide these children with activities while the rest of the school was in Church... there wasn’t any.” (Head, State Primary School)

The researchers start from the premise that multicultural education, that is attentive to difference and power, benefits all students. As such, schools need not wait for the arrival of TCN or other migrant students before critically reflecting on, and taking responsibility for how their school – be it in policy, curriculum, practices or ethos – is truly inclusive. The findings would appear to suggest that, rather than take a proactive approach, schools are reacting to change.

For example, the following passage (worth citing at length) describes how a school provides for bilingualism only when they are approached by a parent, and that upon this request – and on the assumption that no other parent is or will be struggling, the school reacted with an ad hoc proviso that is dependent on the good will of the teacher, and fails to address the underlying structural inequities. The teacher (State Primary School) goes on to compare her experiences in a school with a higher prevalence of TCN and other migrant students, suggesting that only in the case of the latter, the practice of translating from Maltese to English is necessary:

Teacher: *However we had an arrangement this year with a mother who if I’m not mistaken is from Slovakia or Slovenia...and she came to speak to us about this issue, because she told us her husband, comes home late, at 8 o’clock in the evening and she can’t afford to wait till that time, and we asked the teacher to gently write it in English for her. So whenever we give a circular or a note to the parents, the teacher herself writes the main points in English.*

Researcher: *So for this particular parent any correspondence is adapted for her by the teacher?*

Teacher: *Yes*

Researcher: *And you were made aware of this particular case because the parent herself approached the school?*

Teacher: *Yes, she approached us...I was before teaching in [a school with a relatively high prevalence of TCN and other migrant students] and since there were many foreigners we had circulars in English and Maltese. At the time I was teaching there. But there it was necessary.*

Researcher: *So you would decide if it’s worth the time and if it is necessary?*

Teacher: Yes. It is not an easy thing to do because we issue the circulars. I myself sometimes write notes to parents and staff and we are so tied with work that it is almost impossible to do it in Maltese and in English. We hardly have time to do it in Maltese...If the teacher is willing to help, as in the case I mentioned, then we would be shifting the responsibility and the weight.

Parent/teacher communication and community development

As noted above then, language may be a source of exclusion for the parents of TCN children. This in particular in rural settings where school communication (as noted above) is in Maltese:

“We have many meetings for parents during the year; we have formation meetings and I remember this particular lady, she was asking the Head of school to speak in English, during such meetings... but it is very difficult to do, it is just her and the rest are Maltese, and the Maltese do not understand English.” (Assistant Head, State Primary School)

This scenario was further confirmed in responses provided by Heads in the questionnaires. In the absence of translators and a lingua franca, innovation and working with other parents would appear to be the rule of thumb:

“One of the problems is the language... not just with the children, but the language that the parents speak. Or that the mother speaks...because we have more contact with the mother... we speak in Maltese, the teachers speak in Maltese and with gestures. Then we use the [school] community like, because some of the parents understand her a little bit more.” (Head, State Primary School)

“U biex nikkomunikaw mal-mama tagħha nitlob ħafna l-għajnuna ta’ parents oħra... huma jkunu hemm barra jistennew it-tfal ġejjin sa’ hdejja, joqogħdu fejn xulxin u l-mama ta’ [another child] tghidx kemm tghinna...Nitlob l-għajnuna tagħha, peress jkunu ħafna flimkien u jikkomunikaw...”²⁷ (Teacher, State Primary School)

Solutions such as these may provide a space for developing relationships with the broader school community and including the parents of TCN children. However, at times it may also raise issues related to confidentiality, pointing to the need for alternative long-term solutions. Communication problems may not be limited to the issue of language. As the following passage highlights, the transcultural context is marked by its own histories and power relations, and this interface may give rise to different meanings and understandings, wherein the ‘other’ may also be essentialised and constructed as problematic (hooks, 2003):

“So that’s complete breakdown. Why this happened, I don’t know, but I think it’s a matter of national pride as well. I think this was an Eastern European country where I think it’s not good to accept that you might have a problem. There’s complete refusal, ‘no my daughter has no problem, you’re imagining things!’ and we had quite good grounds to – on which to base our assessment. But the reaction was complete shutdown.” (Head, Secondary State School)

²⁷ “To communicate with her mother we ask other parents for assistance... they’ll be out there waiting for the kids to join me...and the mother of [another child] really helps her...I ask her for help because they spend time together and communicate...”

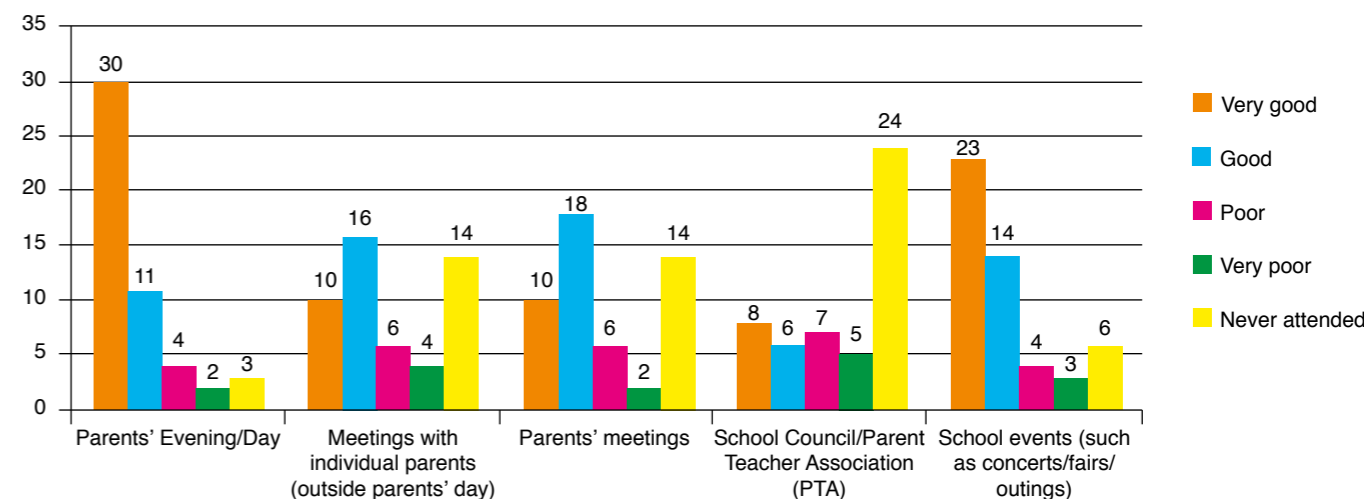
In general, and as noted above, the findings suggest that the parents of TCN children take an active role in the education of their children. This involvement includes parents’ day, school activities, and perhaps to a lesser degree, in decision-making processes, such as the Parent and Teachers Association, or perhaps – as indicated above – in integrating the school and home lives:

“I can honestly say that I have had parents that are so committed. For example, when we have an international day, they were the first to offer, you know, to cook, for example, national dishes and – well very proactive. Very proactive. They are keen to show their product and proud of their country. When you give them an opportunity to show what their country stands for, they’re the first. The students and the parents, ok? The whole package.” (Head, State Secondary School)

“Yes, today I have an activity for example, I’m organising a pottery class for parents, and I would say that 30% of them are Muslim, not Maltese, so there is integration outside the school. The parents – the mothers – participate. Like, there will be 16 parents, this is just the parents of the kinder classes, so that’s like 50 pupils, so it’s a very good response.” (Assistant Head, State Primary School).

“Yes I have, we have good relationship with school. We go whenever there’s a meeting for the parents, we even discuss with them after an event. We know them, any help. Yes we have a good relationship, good contact.” (Parent, State Primary School).

When asked about their participation in school activities, parents answered as follows:



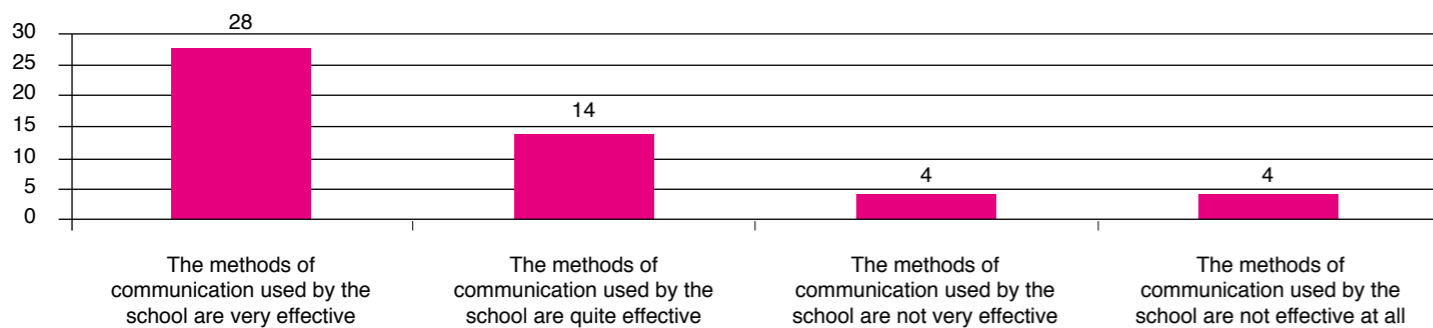
In response to a request for suggestions to increase participation in the above activities reference was repeatedly made to the school's chosen language of communication, which hindered the attendance of many respondents because all communication tended to be in Maltese.

"Most activities are in Maltese, we don't understand and it's important that we do." (Parent, State School)

Some parents pointed out the need to take an interpreter along to meetings, which sometimes also happened to be their child. The researchers observe that this approach is far from ideal due to ethical and other considerations. Parents also recommended that there ought to be more consideration for non-Maltese speaking families.

In one instance, a parent invited to deliver a presentation during a PTA meeting did so in English, only to be faced with an audience discussing in Maltese.

Parents also repeatedly made reference to the absence of translated, written information. This point is closely connected with the responses received from parents in relation to the effectiveness of school communication:



The findings also appear to demonstrate the important role the school can play in the integration of TCN families; the school offers a unique community setting that provides the space and opportunity to develop relationships and ties with the broader community.

"The school experience is a positive one, the school makes everyone feel welcome, even when organising Christmas plays and parties during the year, and other activities...the best way to integrate into a society is to make an effort on your part to learn the language of that country. You cannot expect the school to come to you but rather you must speak up, communicate with the school and whenever there is a problem, ask. Whenever we asked for help it was given. The school is doing its utmost to inform and help everyone. In government school you learn Maltese which helps you integrate further outside schools. I really praise the government schools, and think that in order to integrate into Maltese society it is better to go to a government school than to a private school." (Parent, State School)

Yet despite this understanding, it is noted that 85.7% of Heads have never had any contact with groups representing the cultural and/or religious diversity of their students, with 100% of these respondents saying they are unaware of these groups.

Researcher: *What is the relationship with the Serbian community like?*

Parent: *It isn't there. They don't see us as a group!* (Parent, Church and Independent School)

Whilst the State primary school in particular appears to form an integral part of the locality and the community setting, the findings also appear to illustrate how the strong and well-established link to the parish may also be a source of exclusion at times: out of sync with the evolving and increasingly diverse Maltese classroom, and a source of logistical problems:

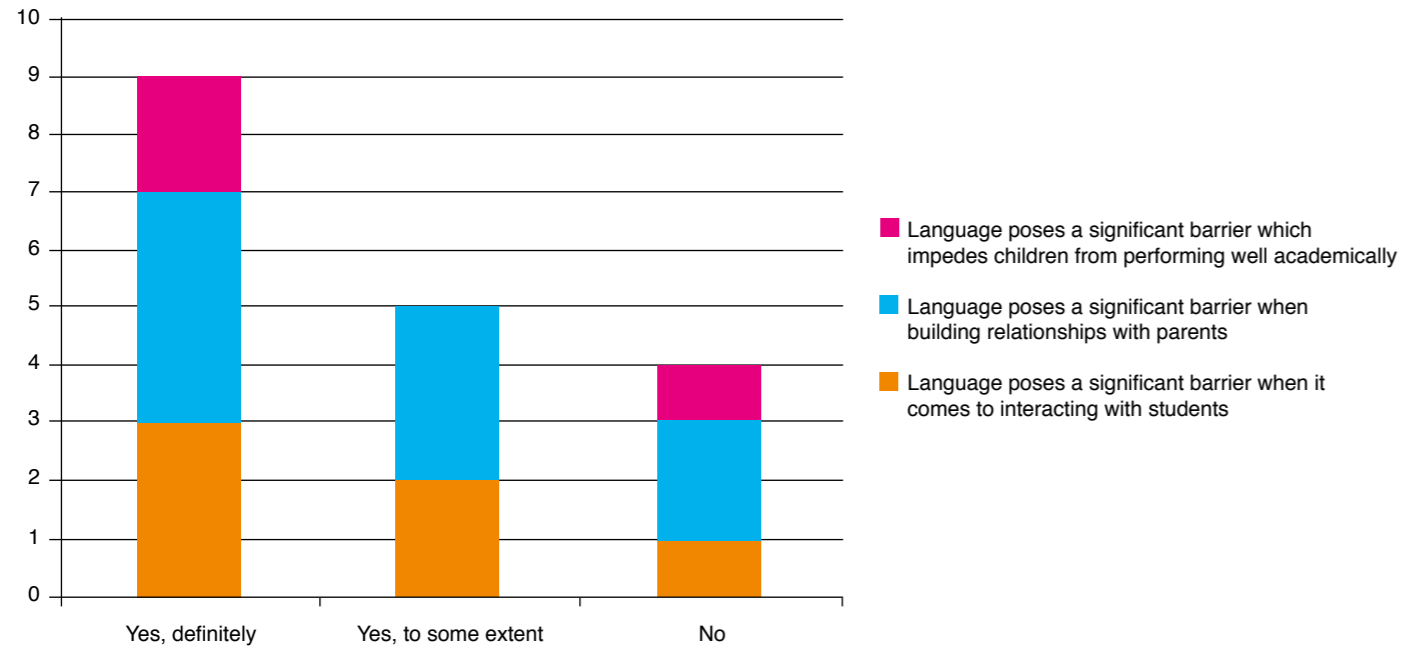
"There is one class in Year One, where there are more than 5 out of some 15 children who are foreign, who don't attend mass and so on... so right now, there is going to be an activity of the Holy Communion. And there is going to be a mass for that. Because you know, having the parish church in the locality and the school, it's like a joint venture. For example, there will be some announcements that, before the beginning of school, that are made during mass on Sunday. You see the link?"

So those are the good things about – so this situation in year 1, being as five of the children from one class are foreign and not Catholic – well, they are not doing their Holy Communion right now, and they are not attending the mass. It's a classic example of what is happening, this class is nearly 50/50. So this is the reality that is cropping up right now." (Assistant Head, State Primary School)

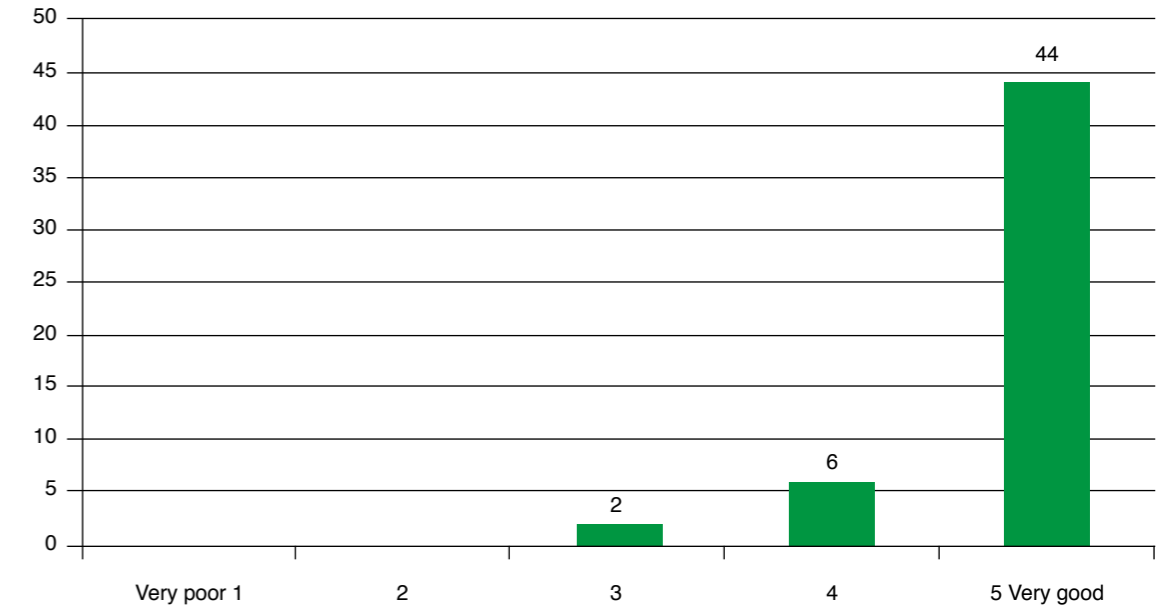
Language and literacy

Communication obstacles

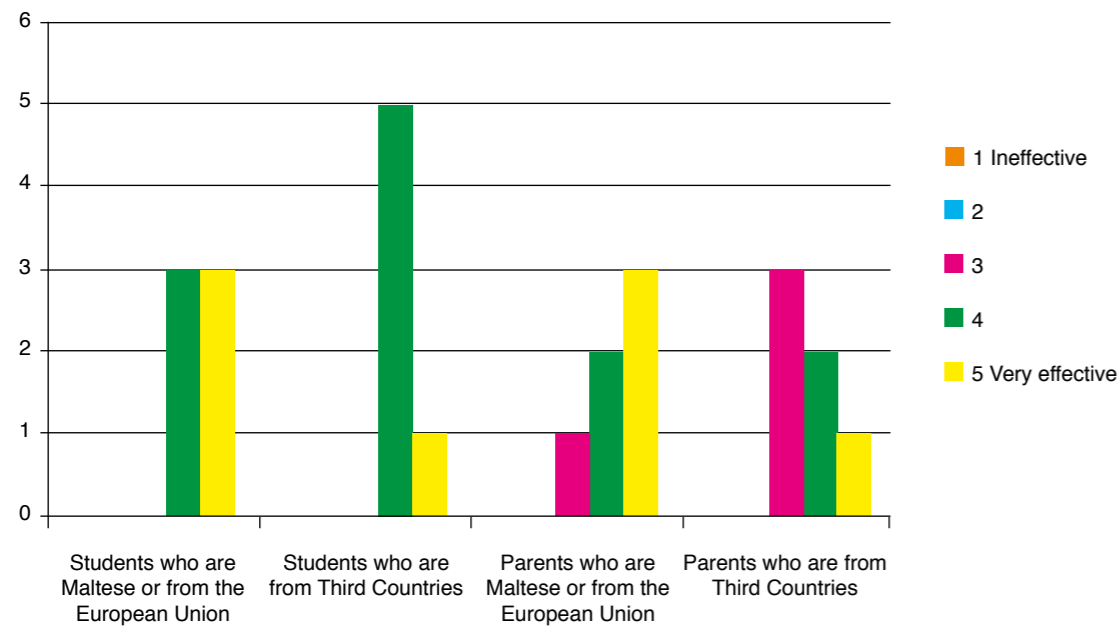
Heads were asked to comment on their communication with TCN students and parents:



In a similar vein, parents also commented that their children's communication at school was effective:



As mentioned above, from the data it also emerged that whereas communication with students was deemed to be effective by Heads, there seem to be some communication obstacles with parents. Although obstacles were also referred to with regard to communication with Maltese and European Union parents, the last green bar is indicative of difficulties faced by schools in communicating with TCN parents.



As highlighted in the Literature Review, above, in 2009 the DQSE launched the *National Policy and Strategy for the Attainment of Core Competences in Primary Education*. The policy and strategy aims to “ensure the universal mastery in the first years of compulsory schooling of three Core Competences: *bilingual Literacy*²⁸, *eLiteracy and Numeracy*” (DQSE, 2009: 7). The policy document is clear in that it “does not critically review the issue of bilingualism or indeed multilingualism since there is a Curriculum Review under way. The definition of literacy is therefore provisionally limited to the basic competences required to ensure effective access to the full curriculum in Malta today by a Maltese native language speaker.” (DQSE, 2009: 17).

In this regard, the findings confirm that at present, the key focus and priority for complementary teachers is working with Maltese students to attain the specific Core Competences:

“...we do have a complementary teacher, comes in and teaches them language skills in Maltese - with the foreigners. But that's not really a priority for the Education division because those children don't fall within the checklist.

The college provides a complementary teacher for every school so that...they come and work with those children who do not speak Maltese. So she would help them with Maltese, and so that is a measure of integration. This is not her main duty; she does it over and above her main duties. Her duties - she needs to focus on the checklists.” (Assistant Head, State Primary School)

Maltese is not a compulsory subject for TCN students, and parents are provided with the choice as to whether or not they would like their children to learn Maltese:

²⁸ The policy document defines literacy as “as the ability to express oneself confidently in Maltese and/or English, to read meaningfully and to use the written word for the purposes of communication so as to access the full curriculum and thus lead to the mastery of the key competences for lifelong learning” (DQSE, 2009:17)

“First of all we ask the parents whether they want their children to learn Maltese, we can't force them to learn Maltese, so if the parents tell us don't bother and to teach him English, we respect their decision...we had a parent that told the teacher not to bother with Maltese, we respect it, and it is their choice.” (Assistant Head, State Primary School)

As the following passage indicates, a lack of knowledge of Maltese will necessarily negatively impact the student's participation and attainment:

“Since the introduction of the check lists, the teacher will go through this checklist and see if the student has achieved the scales targeted on the checklist. Those that aren't achieving will then be included in the complementary teachers...now the issue of language comes out immediately. If the subject - social studies, religion, maths etc. - is dependent on the language, spoken or written, then you're not tapping into these children at all.” (Head, State Primary School)

In the event that a parent of a TCN student does opt for Maltese (and this appears to be the rule, rather than the exception), the findings suggest that complementary teachers do try to make time, albeit limited and haphazard, to provide some form of support to TCN and other non-Maltese native speakers:

“In the case of foreign children we don't do the checklist. Because they are not Maltese speaking, and maybe not even English speaking. What I do in this case, for example, I take a group of foreigners - I have a foreigners group - which consists of seven children if I'm not wrong. Now, three of them... they don't know a word in Maltese, but being with Maltese children, they have to learn Maltese. So they are doing very well, so what we are doing is, I teach them basic vocabulary Maltese. So for example, I take a topic, and through this week I talk about the weather.” (Complementary Teacher, State Primary School)

There would appear to be a discrepancy in the allocation of complementary teachers. The research participants suggested that a permanent complementary teacher assigned to one specific school allows for a degree of continuity and stability. However, the findings also suggest that priority is not given to TCN students on the assumption that many of these children will not remain in Malta and as such, competency in English and/or Maltese is deemed as not that necessary (in this regard, refer also to Migration Trajectories, above):

“...Because it's useless keeping them here, because you don't know what is going to happen, if they are going to stay in Malta, or - some of them, they might change school or go abroad again.” (Complementary Teacher, State Primary School)

Parents interviewed highlighted issues with support in the study of the Maltese language:

“Maltese, for example, was a big problem. It almost became a trauma...so she didn’t want to do it. There was no proper support. In her current school, they have organised support for foreigners learning Maltese, so private schools seem to have acknowledged that Maltese as language could be a problem.” (Parent, Church and Independent School)

Another parent pointed out how Maltese tends to be taught to all as a foreign language, commenting on the marked difference in the curriculum studied today by his younger child and that studied by his eldest child, due to the increased depth required in Maltese lessons.

When commenting on the teaching of Maltese, another parent stated that:

“there was no support for Maltese or possibility for extra lessons. No assistant could say this or that, the lessons would be fully in Maltese without understanding that she could not follow. She would come home with homework and I couldn’t help her, so she would get punished for not doing her homework. There are simple things to do, without incurring extra costs, they could have just organised themselves a bit around it, but they didn’t feel the need.” (Parent, Church School)

The absence of clear policy, and appropriate provision and support for TCN and other minority language students represents a structural barrier and institutional bias within the present system. Nieto’s (2002) metaphor of the ‘basement’ would appear to be an apt description of the present status of language acquisition for minority language students within the local context; a situation that does not lend itself to a socially just education for all students.

The situation may be further complicated by the fact that many of the TCN students in Maltese schools cannot speak either Maltese or English, as such, they are expected to learn a second and third language. The Maltese context has been described as bilingual, grounded in both Maltese and English (see also the core competences on bilingual literacy). Furthermore, the practice of ‘code-switching’ is a common feature of classroom communication in Maltese State schools (Farrugia, 2003); the situation with regard to Independent schools (generally representing a student cohort of higher socio-economic background) appears to be different in as much as English is taken on as the language of instruction (Caruana, 2007).

Indeed, much of the literature on minority language students assumes the use of one native language within the classroom. The degree to which the use of code switching affects language acquisition for minority language students requires further research. The findings suggest a discrepancy between primary and secondary schools. For example, as the following passage highlights, a primary school teacher describes the benefits of code switching on both native tongue and minority language students:

“I find it, even as a teacher myself; it was beneficial for the class to have these children. I had to continuously switch between Maltese and English, and it serves the others as an opportunity to learn English. While I am interacting with these children in English, the others were listening, they were trying to copy me, and so I was always very fond of having these children in class.” (Assistant Head, State Primary School)

On the other hand, secondary school teachers described their experiences in negative terms and expressed a sense of frustration. Indeed, during the course of the research we observed teachers’ efforts to adapt to the multi-lingual classroom. Often this entailed translating each complete sentence from Maltese to English; in the case of a French lesson, the teacher was translating complete sentences in three languages, namely, English, French and Maltese. Beyond the issue of time constraints, this practice also draws attention to the power dynamics within the classroom setting:

“I mean, that is a problem, why should I be teaching geography – I should be teaching geography in Maltese, because the majority of the students are Maltese, and the Maltese would understand Maltese better. Why should I speak in English? And then you get the Maltese children saying ‘Miss! Please speak in Maltese because I can’t understand English!’ And then, some teachers, you know, they find themselves at a cross road, they don’t know what to do, and they waste a lot of time.” (Teacher, State Secondary School)

“...well, I think that it’s very important that you have to accept them. First and foremost. You know, they have a right? Because, you know, some people don’t accept them. I mean, one thing that teachers face, that came up, for example is that they didn’t enjoy speaking in English. Because of them you have to keep on switching, you know?” (Teacher, State Secondary School)

The passages above suggest minority language students may be perceived as a problem rather than an asset within the classroom, and that their presence is perceived as a source of conflict. It is interesting to note that the language of the host society, namely Maltese, is considered to be ‘inferior’ and as such, resisted by migrant students. The upshot of this would appear to be an element of contention between the native Maltese speakers and migrant students. Galea et al, (2011) make a similar observation, pointing to a sense of inferiority amongst the Maltese students towards the ‘other’, and indeed, in this case, the language of choice of the ‘other’. Certainly, context (be it historical, socio-economic, political and cultural) has a bearing on language attitude, and indeed policy development.

The rivalry described above can be positioned within the post-colonial context, wherein proficiency in English is also recognised as a social marker and means of hierarchised differentiation (see also Borg & Mayo, 2006). Understandably, many of the TCN students regard the English language as the *de facto* language of international communication and recognise the benefits of English proficiency within an increasingly globalised world: knowledge of the English language has the potential to translate into material gain and increased cultural capital.

This could explain why the findings suggest that although children were evaluated by their parents as having very good language skills in both English and Maltese, they generally agreed that competence in English exceeded that in Maltese.

“How would you describe your child’s language skills in English and Maltese, respectively?”²⁹

Chart 1

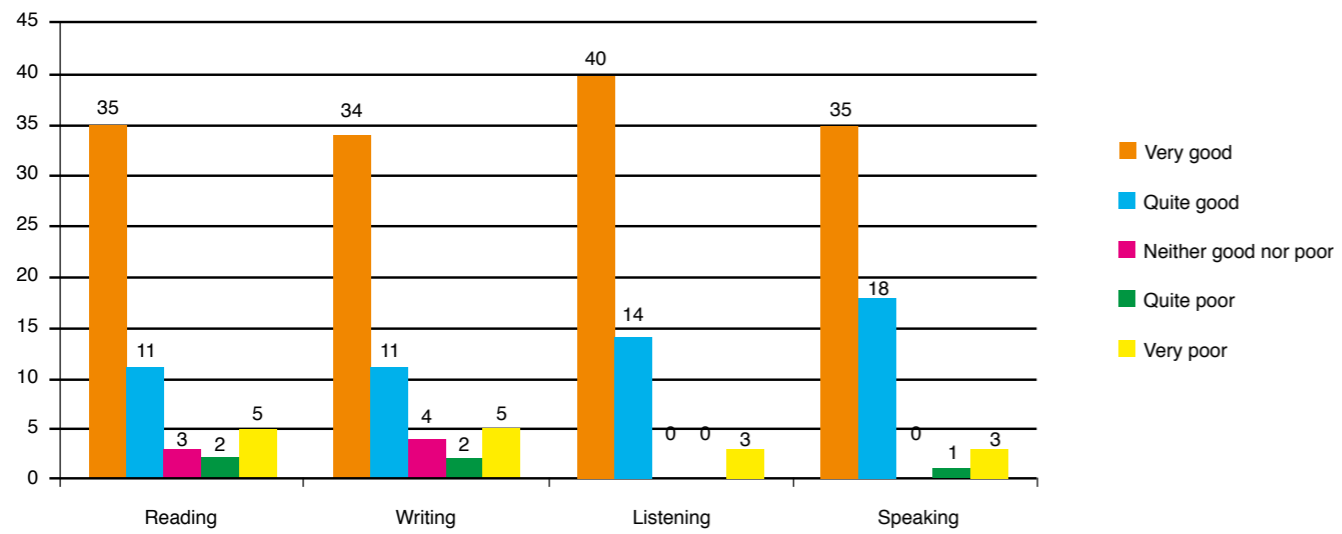
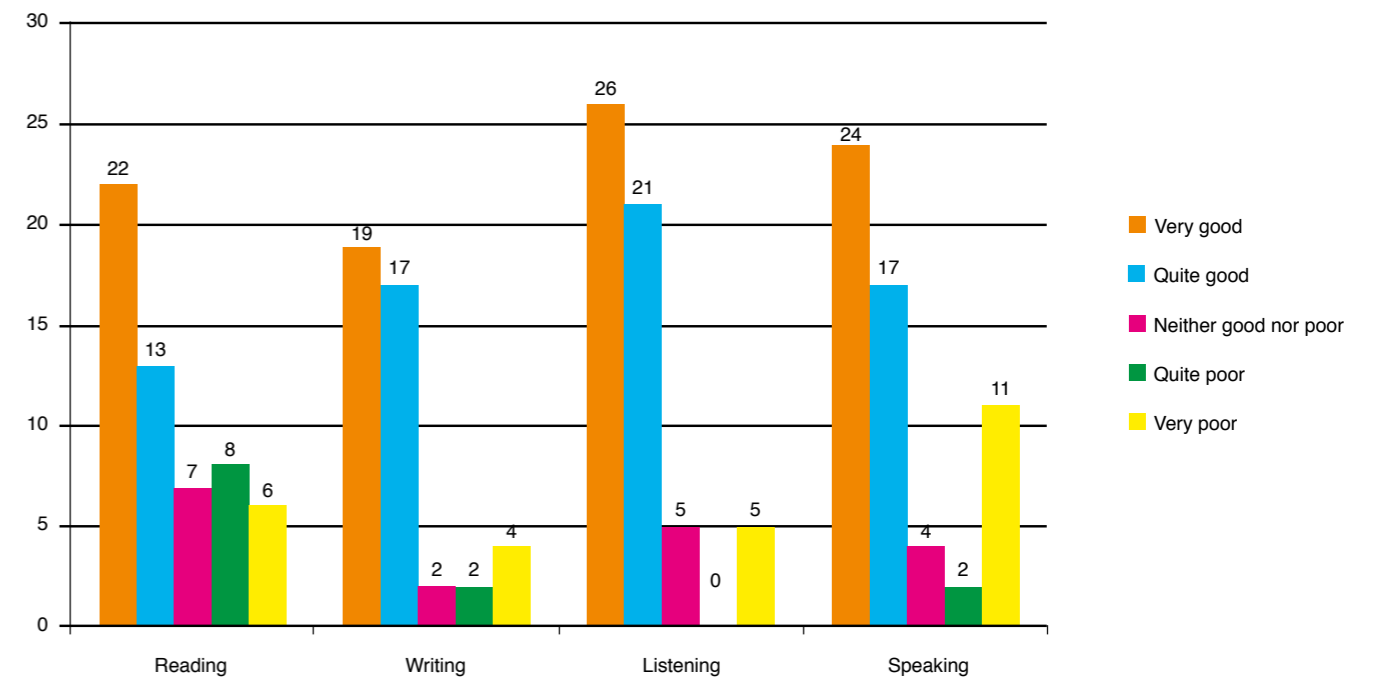


Chart 2



²⁹ Chart 1 refers to English, Chart 2 refers to Maltese.

Certainly, this is a point that is often reflected amongst the Maltese population, wherein the English language is recognised for its utilitarian purposes, whilst the Maltese language is preferred for its integrative purposes: a way of identifying with, and belonging to the Maltese culture (Caruana, 2007). This latter point has important implications for the degree to which TCN students in Malta wish to integrate, and feel a part of, Maltese society:

“...but you see, I think we really need to remember that they can get by with - they really want to learn English very badly, and they do pick it up eh. They don't need the Maltese strictly speaking, and we have to look at that too. They would say, 'what am I going to use Maltese for?' they know they are going to leave the island. And if I may point out, many of the students come here with no English knowledge at all, in the sense that, for example, we have people coming here from China, somehow, within a year, they all pick up the language...” (State Secondary School Teacher)

In this regard, one parent noted the possible problem arising with the opt-out from Maltese lessons due to the absence of structured activities during this 'free' time. However some parents also indicated a preference to not opting out of Maltese lessons due to the importance they attach to these lessons with regard to integration into Maltese society.

Some Independent schools are considering the importance of the Maltese language for TCN and other migrant students, and may be providing alternatives in the future:

“...at the moment I teach French and next year we are discussing the possibility of having a French class for foreign students So French for foreigners, so not for Maltese having French as a foreign language but for those students who want to drop Maltese and take French instead. We're thinking of this as something to offer, to be more relevant for future studies.” (Teacher, Independent Secondary School)

However, not all TCN students prioritise the English language. The researchers observed one classroom interaction wherein the teachers were speaking in Maltese for the benefit of North African students who were reasonably fluent in Maltese but could not converse in English, and in English for the European/Western students. In the absence of a clear policy and appropriate training, the present situation does not appear to lend itself to the development of plurilingual (and indeed pluricultural) competence (see Coste, Moore, & Zarate, 2009; Camilleri Grima, forthcoming). Rather, the present scenario not only highlights the hierarchal divisions, be they linguistic, cultural, ethnic, class-based, and so on, amongst the TCN student population in Malta, but also, how the absence of a lingua franca may lend itself to the reproduction of inequality and divisions within the classroom context.

Furthermore, the findings appear to suggest that some students may be struggling to negotiate the relationship between school and home, wherein language and knowledge remain allocated to a specific domain rather than integrated. Language awareness can be understood as a means to integrate the curriculum, life at home, the individual and the social context. The following passage illustrates a parent's concern in this regard:

“Up till now he's better in English mostly but we are wishing him to be better in Maltese as well. At school he speaks and reads in Maltese but at home he doesn't speak in Maltese...but I know he speaks Maltese because he sometimes speaks Maltese words, thinking that he's speaking in English for example. So that shows that he knows Maltese...So, it is taking us hard time, to make them realise as well that no, you can speak with us in Maltese too. But he's thinking that my, that look my parents are not Maltese so they don't know Maltese and so you cannot speak.” (Parent, State Primary School)

Teaching a Foreign Language – a critical approach

At the time of writing, complementary teachers were not provided with specialised training in teaching English and/or Maltese as a foreign language³⁰. This point was also noted in our discussions with academics at the University of Malta. There was a strong sense that the undergraduate courses do not sufficiently prepare prospective teachers to teach in a multicultural, multilingual school – be it ideologically, or pedagogically. In the absence of qualified teachers, complementary teachers and English and Maltese language teachers in secondary schools have been tasked with teaching English and/or Maltese to foreign students. Clearly, the findings suggest that all teachers should be provided with specialised training in sociolinguistics and critical pedagogical strategies, since the multilingual classroom is a reality increasingly faced by teachers in Malta. In this regard, the absence of formal training was more than evident. At times, this lack of training may contribute to the lack of recognition of the rich and diverse experiences and knowledge base of the migrant student, possibly leading to a deficit approach to language acquisition for language minority students:

“yes... sometimes I am asked to translate for them, to make them understand more, I go down their levels, even if they don't have an LSA, other foreigners, they needs more explanations.” (LSA, State Secondary School)

“We have a support teacher, she comes here and works with the college, and the first thing I told her was 'what am I going to do with these foreigners group, what am I going to teach them?' she said, 'they have to learn basic Maltese' and that's where I started from, as I told you, to sentences so that they can write...” (Complementary teacher, State Primary School)

“...to be honest, no one prepared me for it ... I had a boy from the Philippines, another one from Yugoslavia at the time. The one from Yugoslavia had no idea of both English or Maltese, so it was very difficult for me. The other one knew English, so it wasn't a problem.”

You just go along day by day and you see where you can help them, if they don't know any English, luckily there was this boy who was older who was teaching him some words in English, we also had the mother who prepared him, and we got along day by day, and by the end of the year he spoke Maltese and English. This was a year 1 class, he was only 5.” (Assistant Head, State Primary School)

“...hemmhekk [there] I use a book 'teaching Maltese to foreigners' by Antoinette Camilleri, and I have another one 'let's talk Maltese, why not?' so I try to get some information from this, some information from there – sometimes I find really basic things from Primary school books, and I say 'ahh, this is good for the foreigners' so I take a photocopy and I arrange it for them like this.” (Teacher, State Secondary School)

³⁰ The authors are led to understand that there are plans to introduce training in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) to complementary teachers working in State Schools.

That said, it was also clear that some teachers go beyond teaching basic vocabulary, and adapt classroom curriculum and activities that invite dialogue and as such affirm the linguistic and experiential diversity of the students, as well as their knowledge (see also Giroux, 1996). Such initiatives which may include EU funded transnational projects that are taken on thanks to the motivation and initiative of individual teachers, or simple events or actions that form part of the day-to-day activities of the classroom, such as ‘circle time’, provide an opportunity to move beyond an essentialist – and often deficit – construction of migrant students:

“We do a video conference with other children in another country for example, so that they see them...so like we had three schools this year, in three counties, Spain, Polish and Malta. And we did this videoconference, the three of us. And it was an experience for them, they were seeing students from another country, sometimes they speak in their language, Spanish, for example, we speak some Maltese, you know?” (Teacher, State Primary School)

“...sometimes, like when we are walking outside, I say, how do you say ‘stairs’ in your language? And things like goodbye and hello, they like this, they love using their own language.” (Teacher, State Primary School)

“Now you know what I like? I like to ask them about their own. I ask them, ‘can you come out and explain what you do in these activities? And personally I find it very interesting...and they enjoy it a lot. It strikes me all the time how proud they are to speak about their own traditions and things.” (Teacher, State Secondary School)

This affirmation of language and cultural diversity has also been taken out of the schoolroom, and in some cases, includes whole school activities and part of the school ethos. For example, on one occasion the researcher observed a Head adopt the traditional ‘wai’ gesture to say thank you to a Thai student. Other examples include:

“...some teachers take the initiative and use it to, you know, colour life at school. For example, on Mother’s Day, two kindergartens did a tree with love hearts and ‘I love you’ written in all the different languages spoken in the school.

There was another day, at the beginning of the year I think, it was ‘Language Awareness Day’ I think, and we asked the children to do a chart of their language and their culture and to display it.” (Assistant Head, State Primary School)

Religion

A number of teachers and Heads expressed concern as a growing number of students do not identify themselves as Roman Catholic (estimates suggest that in some State schools this may be as high as 10-15% of the student population). The shift appears to include a growing number of atheists, Christians of different denominations, Muslims and Buddhists amongst others³¹. Reflecting research findings elsewhere, the key concerns expressed by teachers appear to relate to how to occupy such students during religion lessons and other activities that revolve around Roman Catholicism (for example celebrating Mass, the First Holy Communion).

³¹ It is also worth noting that a significant number of students of the Muslim faith attend the Mariam Al Batool School. Up until the end of 2011 scholastic year, the school was attended by 300 students of different nationalities, including Maltese. The students are taught the local curriculum as well as Arabic and Islamic education. In the past, and in the absence of State funding, the school has always relied on donations from parents and private benefactors. However, since the Libyan revolution funds from Libya have been scarce and a number of parents cannot make up the short fall and pay for their children’s education. As such, a number of these children may have to move to Maltese State schools, suggesting that the number of Muslim students in Maltese State Schools may increase significantly in the immediate future (see Gauci & Pisani, forthcoming).

Findings also suggest that some teachers are unsure as to how to deal with religious diversity – in particular Islam – in the classroom, and approach the subject and issues that arise with a sense of trepidation. Finally, a number of respondents expressed a concern with broader issues related to exclusion and the devaluing of different belief systems and ways of life (see also Borg & Mayo, 2006; Calleja, Cauchi, & Grech, 2010). Each of these issues will be addressed in turn.

Religion lessons and providing alternatives

As noted in the NCF (2012) religious education in Malta is currently understood as being Roman Catholic. Parents of children and young people do have the option to pull their children out of the religion classes. Whilst alternative classes (for example an ‘Ethical Education Programme’) may be made available in the future (op. cit., 2012), at present, no alternative activities appear to be organised for the increasing number of students who do not participate in the class. In the absence of planned alternatives, teachers are expected to find their own way of coping with the situation. Some find solutions on their own, whilst others work with colleagues in order not to waste time and human resources. Strategies include asking the children to sit at the back of the class and read, or to accompany other children as they walk up and down the corridor in order to kill time and boredom:

“We have, for example, five of them, or six of them [in the same class] they don’t do religion. Because they are Muslims, or – but it’s not an issue... I have Muslims, and I have one Jehovah, but it’s not an issue, they are used to it now, so when we have religion, they have their own activities, they draw, they read. They know.” (Teacher, State Primary School)

The following passage refers to this same practice of marginalisation within the classroom. When asked for her opinion on the practice, the respondent did not appear to consider the practice exclusionary in any way, but rather, somewhat paradoxically, referred to the procedure as “democratic”:

Head: *...well we don’t speak about Islam, but, but, they are allowed to leave the class. Usually for logistical reasons they sit at the back and do something else. We cannot force them to do religion. But for logistical reasons, so we don’t have 5 or 6 girls roaming around the school, we tell them to stay at the back of the class and do something else. We used to, but it depends on teachers who are available...*

Researcher: *How do you think that works, for the students who choose to leave and for those who stay in?*

Head: *I think it’s a very democratic approach. I mean, everyone accepts it. It’s very democratic.*

In the following passage, and perhaps in retort to the above, a parent expresses his own opinion on the present practice and how he feels it affects his child:

“So if somebody would like to send his child for certain education, that should be available on those schools, church, school should teach Christianity or Catholicism, Muslim school if they want, there should be Islamic teachings. But on the Government basis there should be equality because State is for all. It’s not for, State is not for certain criteria, of people or certain nationalities or religious grounds. State is like mother, as I always think that it should give equal opportunities and facilities to all...”

So why focuses on that point and then only one religion, it means that it's not equal opportunities for all...So they feel sort of isolation, not integrated, that we do not want. People want their children, should be very well integrated in such school so that they will learn more and that they will set self children's and brotherhood and harmony will develop and that is very important I think, from the very early age, otherwise if they develop those sort of negative points in the mind they will remain there forever." (Parent, State Primary School).

The researchers were able to observe how this practice of exclusion is not limited to the Religious Education Classes, but rather, Roman Catholicism appears to extend to all school activities, including assembly, art lessons, lunch time and prayers said in class, among others. This hidden curriculum serves a hegemonic function (Giroux, 2009) that appears to maintain the dominance of Roman Catholicism within the school, marginalising and silencing the voice of the 'other' in the process:

"The lack of integration is usually felt with the practices of the Roman Catholic Church, teaching of religion, mass...so for example, in the kinder class there is a parent of a Muslim child who has asked for his child to be out of class during the initial prayers in the morning and the singing, and – you know? So one of the LSAs takes him around the corridors...for walks." (Head, State Primary School).

One respondent described an opposing experience on how although their family is of a different faith, they opted to keep both children in their religion classes:

"Well both girls went to religion classes, it is important to know about the identity of people, for language the same way as religion. They go to Mass, they obviously don't take Holy Communion. It is interesting because the children ask them questions, even trying to convince them to take Holy Communion. I think it clarifies their religious identity. I mean, they don't participate in mass, but it is a sign of respect. While the other children tried to take her to take the Host, the youngest talks to her friends about our faith so they discuss different possibilities. It is very healthy for them." (Parent, Independent Primary School)

This provides a stark contrast with another experience where a parent withdrew her child from a Church School in connection with what she labels as a "dictatorial approach". She recounted an interesting anecdote from her youngest daughter:

"In one incident there were some children in the courtyard with my daughter. They told my daughter 'You know Jesus is the only God?' and she said 'No, there is also Venus and Apollo', and the children said 'No, it's not true. You have to come to the religion teacher with us.' The religion teacher said, 'Can you ask your mother to write a note about your religious beliefs?' I mean, what does it mean, that my child cannot read about Greek mythology." (Parent, Church and Independent School)

Engaging the 'other': a culture of fear?

A number of respondents (Heads/teachers) suggested that a number of their staff and colleagues at work, and also parents of Maltese Roman Catholic students, have expressed a sense of resistance and Islamophobic and racist sentiments towards non-Catholic students:

"The language, and even religions sometimes. If somebody, sometimes is not too comfortable teaching someone from a different religious background, there might be an issue." (Assistant Head, State Primary School)

"Maltese people believe that – ok. This is our religion, you know? And this is what we believe, and we are not going to change because of them. And 'them' they don't realise are Maltese citizens. Many of the – some are not – but... You know some of them are paying students, you know? Some foreigners are paying students and you know? They have to pay, and you know? They are out of class. If both parents are foreigners, they would have to pay – as long as they're not asylum-seekers." (Assistant Head, State Primary School)

Whilst the NMC advocates the need to understand and learn about different religions of Europe, and the NCF argues that a "deeper knowledge of the different religious traditions should provide a valid contribution to the social and civic formation of the young people" (MEEF, 2012: 44), the findings also appear to demonstrate a sense of hesitation, and at times fear, in engaging – or indeed acknowledging – the 'other' within the classroom. For example, one Head recounted how a teacher asked if it was 'ok' if a child brought the Koran into class. It is pertinent to note that the Head responded in the affirmative. Nevertheless, the fact that the question was asked, also raises pertinent questions.

The following extract from an interview is with a Primary School Teacher whose class includes students of different faiths. The passage suggests that the teacher had never thought of engaging the 'other'. In this regard, religious identity – and indeed ethnicity – appears to be a signifier, a sign of difference and differentiation, rather than a tool for engaging in dialogue, learning and mutual understanding (Spivak, 1993):

Researcher: *Do you ever speak about Islam, or Jehovah witnesses and their beliefs, have you ever included this in your lesson?*

Teacher: *No, no, I've never done – I'd like to try that ta. I'd like to try that. It's one of my targets, I'd like to try that. Because I think it's interesting that they have – that they know that there are people that have different religions, you know? But it's one of my targets.*

Researcher: *Why haven't you done it so far?*

Teacher: *I don't know why. Maybe, there wasn't enough push from – ? I don't know. I never considered – I don't know why. But it's something, we consider it, eh?*

In the following passage the researchers are able to observe the challenges of working in a multicultural and diverse classroom. Two processes may be seen: the first appears to be a demonstration of resistance on the part of the students, the second is the teachers response:

"At Easter we explain to them the Holy Week for example...but now I prefer to skip it għax the girls they [moaning sounds] so I just mention Good Friday, Christ died and rose again on Easter Sunday, but I don't go in detail explaining the Holy Week" (Teacher, State Secondary School)

It would appear that the teacher is concerned that the curriculum is of little interest to the students and has reacted with avoidance. On the other hand, some respondents did express the need to affirm difference and recognise the different beliefs, experiences, knowledge bases, and ways of knowing the world that are present in the classroom and have incorporated this into their practice. Such critical awareness does not assume universally shared concepts, but rather, is attentive to, and respectful of the knowledge and epistemological claims of historically disenfranchised groups (see Weedon, 1997). That said, the reference to Christmas may suggest that alternative identities and knowledge may still be discussed in relation to the dominant norm:

“There I have to be careful because of the Christian – nowadays I am more aware of these things. Like for example, write 250 words – we brainstorm on the board – ‘what Christmas means to you’. So we brainstorm on the board, and if an Anglican or a non-Christian or whatever wants to say something, whatever, I would put that on the board as well.

So for example, if they celebrate New Year in China in January, well she wrote about the year of the dragon, or something like that, I can’t remember now. You know today you can’t – I remember we used to say, ‘we celebrate Christmas, Jesus was born...’ I mean I would still write that on the board if that is what they want to say, but, we have to respect the different religions, for example, where before I would say ‘thank God’ now I say, ‘to whom you believe’. So we have to be sensitive. We should be, but I know teachers who are not.” (Teacher, State Secondary School).

The degree to which the educator is able to critically engage – rather than avoid or ignore – such issues, and encourage students to interrogate whose knowledge and whose voices are being privileged (keeping in mind the complexity of the self and the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, ability, and so on), and to provide the space and opportunity (and recognise the value of) each student’s voice, will influence the transformative potential of education. As hooks (2003) reminds us, the classroom may not always be harmonious, but dialogue and conflict may provide different ways of knowing the world, and may inspire change.

Towards change – curriculum and institutional norms

A recurring theme throughout this research is the degree to which the curriculum, practices and institutional norms may serve to exclude non-Catholic students. Educators have also provided examples of how their practice as inclusive educators is transforming, albeit in a slow and cautious manner, and generally thanks to the initiative of individuals rather than as a result of policy decisions:

“Some children come late to avoid assembly, because there will be some prayers in assembly... this is my school’s prayer, and it is quite – with some alteration I think it could be more generic – it would exclude atheists, but you know it could be, like a prayer to God, and that is what I would want to do in the near future... No I can do it, but this prayer has been the prayer of the school for quite some time, I’ve made several changes this year, so I am limiting my changes – in time I will do it, you see? Because, so for example, this last line [Marija omm Ġesu, itlob ghalina³²], this I would remove, it can be omitted, to make it more generic.” (Assistant Head, State Primary School)

³² “Mary mother of Jesus, pray for us.”

Parents also expressed an interest in engaging in dialogue with educators and policy makers, a process that affirms and values different beliefs and cultural norms and that may transform the educational experience for all children:

“So that is, I think, if the government brings all stakeholders, all denomination and as far as my community is concerned, we are always ready to help and assist the government in certain areas for example, to, if the government want Muslims to bring a curriculum for which is acceptable to all, for the Muslims to listen. So we can help in that matter. So we will try to visit to bring those communities with accepted to all...it would be better if all of the stakeholders sits them together, all religious denominations and for the common good. Yes, that my point was, that I was going to mention, that we should focus on commonalities.

Because there’s vast values which we have common in all the religions. So why shouldn’t we, why should we not focus on those? I think this is a point we should focus on those points, rather than giving one thing. So this year, we are one only education of one religion or one denomination. It means we are promoting in a visible way that and it means that everybody, if you accept this you are accepted, otherwise you are, you have to be isolated from others.” (Parent, State Primary School).

Recognising age and related different needs

Whilst ‘age’ is not the single factor influencing second language acquisition³³, research suggests that, given appropriate teaching and conditions for learning, younger children may have an advantage over older learners (Johnstone, 2002). The findings of this research indicate a clear difference in the language acquisition of Primary School Children, when compared with students in Secondary School. The following two passages, addressing primary and secondary school students respectively, highlight this point:

“Now for example in year one I have two foreign children and I am still going to do the checklist with them, because I know that on some points I can work with them. I don’t take them with the foreigners group because they are still young and I know that they can do well in class so I take them with their group. Because they [the older children] can’t do the checklist, if they come here and they can’t speak a word of Maltese or English, how can I do a checklist? It’s too difficult for them.” (Complementary Teacher, State Primary School).

“The younger ones are more willing. Last year I had Form ones. I had Chinese, a Spanish girl, a ‘Yugoslavia’ and a Bulgarian I think. At the beginning of the year we even had an Italian girl. All of them, they were so keen ‘oh we have the Maltese lesson’ they were keen! This year I had form 4s and form 5s and they gave me a hard time eh.” (Teacher, State Secondary School)

³³ Other factors include cognitive skills, motivation, personality, exposure and opportunities to use the new language (Müller, 2006)

Cognitive differences between children of primary school age and older children would appear to account – to some degree – for younger children’s comparative ease in learning a new language (Müller, 2006). The findings also appear to indicate the need to look beyond cognitive development and to consider other factors that may impact the learning process. For example, research has demonstrated how self-motivation, self-esteem and the possibility and/or willingness to engage with the immediate environment may impact the learning process.

Many young migrants will have had little control over the decision to migrate and will have been forced into new environments. Their liminality is defined, not only by their migratory status, but also as adolescents: betwixt and between, neither adult nor child, their degree of autonomy is ambiguous (Pisani & Azzopardi, 2008). The following passage appears to highlight how age intersects with migratory status, race, ethnicity, gender and so on, impacting how the young person experiences the migratory process and engages with her new environment:

“However, we still get the head-strong ones, who refuse to integrate. And I think this issue – do they really want to be here? Or is it a question of, their parents got them here because of jobs? So they are unemployed in their own country, they come here for work and they stay in Malta. And it tells on the children. You know?” (Teacher, State Secondary School)

“...and they all tell you ‘no I didn’t want to come to Malta, it’s my parents who decided. And after three years they still miss their friends, and they still miss their schools, and I tell them, ‘what do you miss?’” (Teacher, State Secondary School)

Diversity celebration

Research findings indicate that, on the whole, teachers, LSAs and complementary teachers demonstrate an eagerness to learn and include migrant students in the classroom. The researchers observed considerable effort on the part of a number of schools to include diverse images of students representing different ethnicities. Teachers also described different organised activities that aimed to celebrate the diversity within their classroom and the broader school context: clearly, ‘diversity’ events are given priority and attention within the school calendar. However, it was interesting to note that the multicultural approach adopted in the schools appears to be devoid of religious identities or symbols.

Furthermore, multi-ethnic/multi-national celebrations and activities appear to largely revolve around language, food, dress or international symbols such as flags, and appear to be ‘one off events’ rather than integrated into the school environment. There is the risk that such well-meaning attempts to ‘celebrate diversity’ may simply result in exoticising and trivialising the ‘other’. Described elsewhere as the ‘Four Fs approach: Food, Fashion, Festival and Folklore’ (Diaz-Greenberg and Nevin, 2004:50), this characterisation of difference provides a superficial understanding of culture that may serve to maintain the dominant culture as ‘normal’ and reinforce stereotypes:

“Per eżempju jekk nagħmlu attività u għandna bżonn għal open day għandna bżonn insemmu lilhom intihom importanza nlibbishom il-kostum tagħhom...il-ġenituri...libbisnihom il-kostum tagħhom biex it-tfal l-oħra u t-tfal tiegħi jafu...li għandhom miegħi...jiġifieri dik...titkellem għax ġiet minn post l-bogħod...” (Teacher, State Primary School)³⁴

³⁴ “For example if we’re organising an activity and for open day we need to mention them, I give them importance, I make them wear their costume...the parents...we made them wear their costume so the other children and my children would know...that I have with me...that one...she speaks because she came from a far away place...”

“More foreigners are a contribution rather than a burden to schools. People should learn from each others’ cultures. I think parents would be happy to share their food and culture. [] school was good, and was much better than [] because of networks with other parents...but I want to teach kids as a volunteer...to teach basic Chinese maybe, and share our culture through a cultural exchange programme, or martial arts. Schools should organise more cultural activities.” (Parent, State Primary School)

“It would be interesting if schools addressed the question of culture through helping the development of that culture. If there is a group of Italians, it would be good if there would be Italian literacy, history, etc...whichever groups you have you could expand the curriculum to encompass their language and history and way of thinking. You’re not looking at a small group of children, in my children’s school you have over 20 or 30 Serbians. They would obviously still speak Serbian and have their own cultural influence but could spend some time on expanding that knowledge. Parents would be delighted and you could actually have some cultural exchange going.” (Parent, Independent School)

Furthermore, the researchers noted that whilst multicultural activities were organised on a regular basis in all of the schools, the dominance of the Roman Catholic religion remained throughout – alternative religions are consistently silenced. The teachers appear to be oblivious as to how the dominant norm is reproduced in subtle ways. Where an effort has been made to represent children of different ethnicities, images are devoid of non-Christian symbols: for example, not one of the schools visited included an image of a young girl wearing a hijab. On the other hand, Roman Catholic imagery and symbols are ubiquitous.

A number of teachers also demonstrated a lack of knowledge of non-Western cultures and tended to demonstrate a ‘multi-centric’/euro-centric view of the world. For example, texts that claim *“like most people in the world, in Malta we celebrate Christmas”*³⁵ not only reflect a crude knowledge base, but also suggests that some teachers are unaware of how such discourse and related practices serve to exclude students who do not fall within the dominant ‘norm’, or indeed, how such discourse may devalue migrant children’s cultural capital, or reproduce racist beliefs and oppression. The researchers were able to observe examples – to varying degrees – of how student histories, at one multi-faceted and complex, are given importance and treated on a par with the dominant norm.

For example, the researchers were able to observe a difference between classrooms that used typically Eurocentric images, for example, classrooms used for French lessons were decorated with French national symbols, essentially excluding francophone nations located in the global south (see also Pisani, et al 2010) with others that appeared to make a concerted effort to reflect a broader world view within the classroom environment and the curriculum. With regard to the latter, once again the researchers observe how some teachers support the student’s varied experiences by encouraging dialogue, and ensure their representation by shaping the curriculum accordingly:

“Well in my case I teach English and French. You tend to draw on differences, for e.g. in French culture, in literature we draw on different cultures – it lends itself to it, for example, discussing different religions... or cultures, it’s very interesting for the students not just having the students say this or that but have the students give their opinion on their own experiences. I try and encourage it.” (Teacher, Independent Secondary School)

³⁵ A Statement included in a project on diversity in a State Primary School.

“...we have to adapt [the curriculum]. I believe this. For an education system to work you have to look at the students in front of you. Keep in mind the curriculum, Ok yes, but your main aim is for the person in front of you to find the talent – to get the best – to help her get her best! You know?” (Head, State Secondary School)

The ‘celebration of diversity’ alone does not encourage teachers to dig a little deeper, to deconstruct their own assumptions or beliefs, and to reflect on how these beliefs may influence not only the production of new knowledge but also how different cultures are essentialised and positioned, and how their own classroom interaction may reproduce inequalities in the classroom. For example, the following two passages may reflect a sense of resistance on the part of teachers – teachers who paradoxically also expressed an interest in celebrating the diversity within the classroom:

“I think they look down on us. Surprisingly enough, they look down at us. And I mean, considering their social status – you know? Their standards of their country, we are better off than them, you know, even salary wise, you know, and yet, they look down on us.” (Teacher, State Secondary School)

“...but I think we need to be clear here, they are visitors in our country, and our religion is important to us. We don’t expect them to change eh? So they shouldn’t expect us to change either.” (Teacher, State Primary School)

The findings may demonstrate the need for critical and self-reflexive practice, a recurrent theme throughout this research. A number of teachers felt that more information on the countries of origin, also with regard to education systems, would prepare them better for working with migrant students, and the findings would certainly reflect this point³⁶. On the one hand, the researchers were able to observe how some teachers go out of their way to learn more about the country of origin of their students:

“It’s something new for me, but I go for the challenge. Once I had a child from Ethiopia, and I started to research about key words, and how you pronounce it in English, because she didn’t know anything. She came in the middle of the year, so to tell her for example, to go to the bathroom, well she didn’t know anything, so I had to communicate with her in her language.

So I started to do some research, ‘Google’ it and see the correct translation and pronunciation, she kept laughing because I’m not saying it right – but, started to communicate like that, you know? So I tried. It’s not my language, and it’s difficult, but I found the English translation – aha, we try.” (Teacher, State Primary School).

This willingness on behalf of the teacher, to engage with new learning needs can be contrasted with how other teaching staff appeared to demonstrate a basic lack of knowledge that does not sit comfortably in an increasingly globalised world, or indeed classroom. For example, use of the term ‘Arab’ to denote any child of North African or Middle-Eastern origin. As noted by Calleja et al (2009), “professionals working with minority students may need the most basic cultural and heuristic tools to come to terms with a multicultural/multi-ethnic reality” (p.21). However, the findings would also appear to suggest that no amount of knowledge on the country of origin would provide for sensitivity.

As such, self-reflexive practice must go beyond the ‘banking’ of information on countries of origin, and cultural trivia. Certainly, one-off opportunities for training have been made available to some teachers, including transnational EU funded projects that address themes such as human rights, democracy and intercultural dialogue. However, the findings suggest that more training opportunities need to be created for teachers to reflect on their racial, linguistic, gender and social class privilege, to interrogate their own beliefs about culture, and to move beyond ethnocentric perspectives that serve to marginalise, essentialise, and silence the other, thus reproducing inequalities.

In this sense, the teacher must perceive himself/herself as a cultural being, interacting with other world-views (Nieto, 2009), and as a learner, in interaction with students (Freire, 2001). The following passage provides a small example of dialogical interaction that transformed the teachers’ knowledge and perceptions of the ‘other’:

“Little things, for example, there was this girl ‘Antonia’ and on that day it was her birthday. And I knew also that on that day it was the feast day of Saint Anthony, and I said to her, ‘did you know that we Christians, we Catholics, that we celebrate the day of Saint Anthony today?’ and she said ‘yes Miss, even in our country, that’s why I am called Antonia’. So her parents, she is called Antonia for a girl.

Her parents called her Antonia because she was born on St. Anthony’s day...I was surprised by this! Because nowadays, not even we, when a baby is born, we don’t look at the calendar to see the feast day of – I was surprised by that, I said, ‘how keen they are!’” (Teacher, Secondary School)

Legal context

Research was also conducted into the current legal framework providing for the integration of migrants within the Maltese education system. Whilst a legal analysis of this framework is not provided in this report, it is nonetheless pertinent to present it as being indicative of the policy appreciation of the relevant matters.

Together with the national legal context, this section provides a brief overview of the fundamental human right to education in its application to migrants. The aim of this research is primarily to identify the international, rights-based targets towards which national policy and legal efforts ought to be directed.

³⁶ The need for such information was also noted during our discussions with academic staff at the University of Malta.

The universal right to education

The right to education is often viewed as especially fundamental for it is not only a right in itself but also an enabling right. Education “creates the ‘voice’ through which rights can be claimed and protected”, and without education people lack the capacity to “achieve valuable functioning as part of the living”.³⁷ The European Court of Human Rights reaffirmed that the right to education is one of the “most fundamental values of...democratic societies”.³⁸

As a right, it has been universally recognised since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, though also referred to by the International Labour Organisation as early as the 1920s), and has since been enshrined in various international conventions, national constitutions and development plans.

UDHR Article 26 can be seen as a universal model for defining the right to education. It establishes that:

“Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory...education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among racial or religious groups...”

The United Nations Committees monitoring the implementation of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*³⁹, the *Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*⁴⁰, the *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination*⁴¹ and the *Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families* all stress that the principle of non-discrimination also applies with respect to the right to education. Hence all non-nationals living in the territory of or within the jurisdiction of States Parties, such as refugees, asylum-seekers, migrants in both regular and irregular situations should not be discriminated against in their enjoyment of the right to education. The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education reaffirms that the right to education should be granted to all.

³⁷ San Millian David, *Action Aid – Defining the Right to Education*, <http://www.right-to-education.org/node/233>.

³⁸ *Timishev v. Russia*, European Court of Human Rights Applications Nos. 55762/00 and 55974/00, Judgment of 13 December 2005, para. 64.

³⁹ CRC, *General Comment No. 6* (2005).

⁴⁰ CESCR, *General Comment No. 20, Non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights (art. 2, para. 2, of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)*, E/C.12/GC/20, 2 July 2009, para. 30

⁴¹ CERD, *Report of the Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination to the General Assembly, 57th Session* (2000).

⁴² Tomasevski Katarina, UN Special Rapporteur, <http://www.right-to-education.org/>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 29*

⁴⁷ CRC/GC/2001/1.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Further understanding of what the right to education consists of may be obtained by appreciating the four A’s established by UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Katarina Tomasevski. Tomasevski established that for education to be a meaningful right it must be:

- Available – education is free and government funded, and there is adequate infrastructure and trained teachers able to support education delivery⁴²;
- Accessible – the system is non-discriminatory and accessible to all, and positive steps are taken to include the most marginalised⁴³;
- Acceptable – the content of education is relevant, non-discriminatory and culturally appropriate, and of quality; the school itself is safe and teachers are professional⁴⁴;
- Adaptable – education can evolve with the changing needs of society and contribute to challenging inequalities, such as racial discrimination and that it can be adapted locally to suit specific contexts⁴⁵.

The Committee for the Rights of the Child in its *General Comment No. 1* of 2001⁴⁶, regarding Article 29, establishes that the right of education has as its ultimate aim the protection of human dignity innate in every child and thus must take into account the child’s special developmental needs and diverse evolving capacities.

Furthermore, the right to education ought to go far beyond formal schooling: life skills are an integral part of education. Life skills are defined as “the ability to make well-balanced decisions; to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner, and to develop a healthy lifestyle, wholesome social relationships and responsibility, critical thinking, creative talents, and other abilities, which give children the tools, needed to pursue their options in life.” Education should aid a child’s ability and opportunity to participate fully and responsibly in a free society⁴⁷.

The Committee also sees education as a means of combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Education ought to promote tolerance and understanding. Such an attitude should not only be seen in the curriculum but also in the school environment itself. The Committee indeed establishes that the school environment must reflect: “the freedom and the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.”⁴⁸

UNICEF's recommendations with regards to non-discrimination and migrant children's right to education further clarify how the right to education ought to be formulated in relation to migrants. UNICEF urges States to provide as much aid as possible to parents/guardians when they enrol a child in school at whatever level such child may enter and with whatever documents such child may or may not have. UNICEF also stresses that non-discrimination ought to be effectively ensured by States. Furthermore, States must ensure that all children are able to gain full academic credit for their school attendance⁴⁹. States must also adopt measures to reduce dropout rates, to ensure the right to education for all children living on their territory, and strengthen educational and vocational programs, particularly for children who do not attend regular school, especially migrant children⁵⁰.

One must also consider that all human rights are interdependent and hence the right to education cannot be viewed in isolation from other rights. By enjoying the right to education and passing through the school gates one does not lose the other human rights. Furthermore education should not be limited to formal human rights education but should also be couched within the active promotion of respect for such rights within the broader community at large⁵¹.

Subsidiary Legislation 327.220 – Migrant Workers (Child Education) Regulations

Beyond generic provisions on non-discrimination found, *inter alia*, in the Constitution of Malta and other equality legislation, national legislation relating directly to the education of migrant children is rather scarce offering a minimum policy and operational structure. The Migrant Workers (Child Education) Regulations are the most relevant legal elements in this context.

These Regulations are applicable to any child of a migrant worker who is between the ages of five years and has not attained the age of sixteen years⁵², namely a child of compulsory school age. Indeed the law defines such children as anyone who is a dependent of a migrant worker, and national legislation obliges them to attend school.

A 'migrant worker' is any person who carries out or has carried out an activity in Malta as an employed or self-employed person, who is a citizen of an Agreement State. An Agreement State is further defined as a State or a group of States with which Malta has an agreement with establishing that the citizens of such a State and their dependents have the right to enter, remain and reside in and leave Malta, to move freely within Malta for such period as may be established in the agreement and to work or establish, provide or receive therein.

The Regulations establish that it is the duty of the State to ensure that children of migrant workers are granted free tuition in State schools. This is required in order to facilitate integration into the Maltese school system and educational environment. Such a duty includes the obligation to adapt teaching to the specific needs of such children and using either Maltese or English as best suited. Furthermore, the minister is to ensure that teachers providing tuition to children of migrant workers receive all the adequate training necessary.

It is further stipulated that the State should also take measures, within reasonable limits, to facilitate the eventual re-integration of the children of migrant workers into their Agreement States of origin, by promoting the teaching of both the mother tongue and the culture of the country of origin of such children in cooperation with such country of origin⁵³.

⁴⁹ UNICEF, Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights of Migrant Children and Children born to migrant parents: Challenges, Good Practices and Recommendations, National University of Lanus, Draft - March 2010

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ CRC/GC/2001/1.

⁵² Laws of Malta, Chap. 327, Education Act, Article 2.

⁵³ Subsidiary Legislation 327.220, Migrant Workers (Child Education) Regulations.

⁵⁴ "Meaning with her I wouldn't know if...if she's backwards academically or...I cannot get in, I cannot understand her, I've been tringy for the whole year...For example I feel that when we're going to have these children they should organise a sort of...for example when I had a deaf child, let's start there, when I had a deaf child in my class in summer they had sent me on a course, and that was very useful and I had notes, I learnt some sign language so for that year I could communicate with that boy."

⁵⁵ "I was more helpful, a lot. But these come with a girl with a language that is not comprehensible and the girl is suffering. I wouldn't say she suffered, but for me I don't take pleasure in the fact that this girl is not understanding me and it annoys me that I could help her more, much more..."

Learning disabilities

A lack of cross-cultural competence combined with a lack of multicultural resources may also create problems in addressing individual student learning needs. This may be increasingly problematic in the case of children with learning disabilities. For example, one teacher referred to a case of a migrant child who was struggling to learn how to write. The teacher was unsure as to whether this was a result of the child's language development, or symptomatic of a learning disability, and also expressed concern since she was not provided with adequate support, training and resources to deal with her new learning need. The passage also reminds us of the complexity of disability, when it interacts with other markers of identity (see also, Goodley, 2011):

*"...she's not the only one, I've got three that you cannot speak to them a lot...Jigifieri lilha jien ma nkunx naf jekk... jekk hux qegħda lura academically jew...ma nistax nidhol, ma nistax nifimha, ili nipprova tul is-sena kollha...Jien per eżempju nħoss li meta ħa jkollna dawn it-tfal lilna għandhom jaqgħmlulna sort of...per eżempju għandhom jien meta kelli a deaf ejja ha nibdew minn hemm, jiena meta kelli a deaf child in my class kienu fis-sajf kienu baġhtuni kors, u dak kien ta' għajjnuna u kelli notes, tgħallimt ftit sign language biex lil dak it-tifel f'dik is-sena jien stajt nikkomunika miegħu."*⁵⁴

Kont iktar ta' għajjnuna, ħafna. Imma dawn jiġuk b-tifla bil-lingwa li ma tifthiemx u qed tbatu t-tifla, mhux ħa ngħid li batiet, imma jien għalija mhux soddisfazzjon li din it-tifla mhux qed tifhimni qed tkiddni lili għax jiena nista' t-tifla ngħinha aktar, u ħafn'akt..." (Teacher, State Primary School Teacher)⁵⁵

A parent expressed the same concern, suggesting that the school did not recognise her daughter's needs, nor provide appropriate and individual attention:

"However when it came to the elder girl I had a lot of problems. I was very disappointed, from around year one or two the school realised she was dyslexic, there were kids who were better than her and got a facilitator and they denied my daughter the same help. When I went before the board, they didn't provide denied us a facilitator. Due to this she continued to struggle in school." (Parent, State Secondary School)

In the following passage, a Head expresses her concerns in providing an inclusive education for all. At present it would appear that services (and assessments) for students with a learning disability do not integrate, or provide for students, with a different linguistic and cultural background. The child's academic 'failure' then, may be attributed to deficiencies in the educational context (including a lack of appropriate assessment tools, a lack of trained professionals able to conduct linguistically and culturally appropriate assessments) rather than in the individual:

"My concern is, for such children, when we have such difficulties, language and understanding and so on – when they have learning difficulties – and maybe it's not a clear cut case of learning disability you know?...the teachers speak to the girls in Maltese...the thing is, the whole process [assessment of learning disability] already takes a lot of time, even for an assessment with other children, but in this case it is difficult to assess her because of the communication difficulty. It's difficult, I wouldn't be able to say where it's coming from." (Head, State Primary School).

Institutional perspectives

Foundation for Educational Services

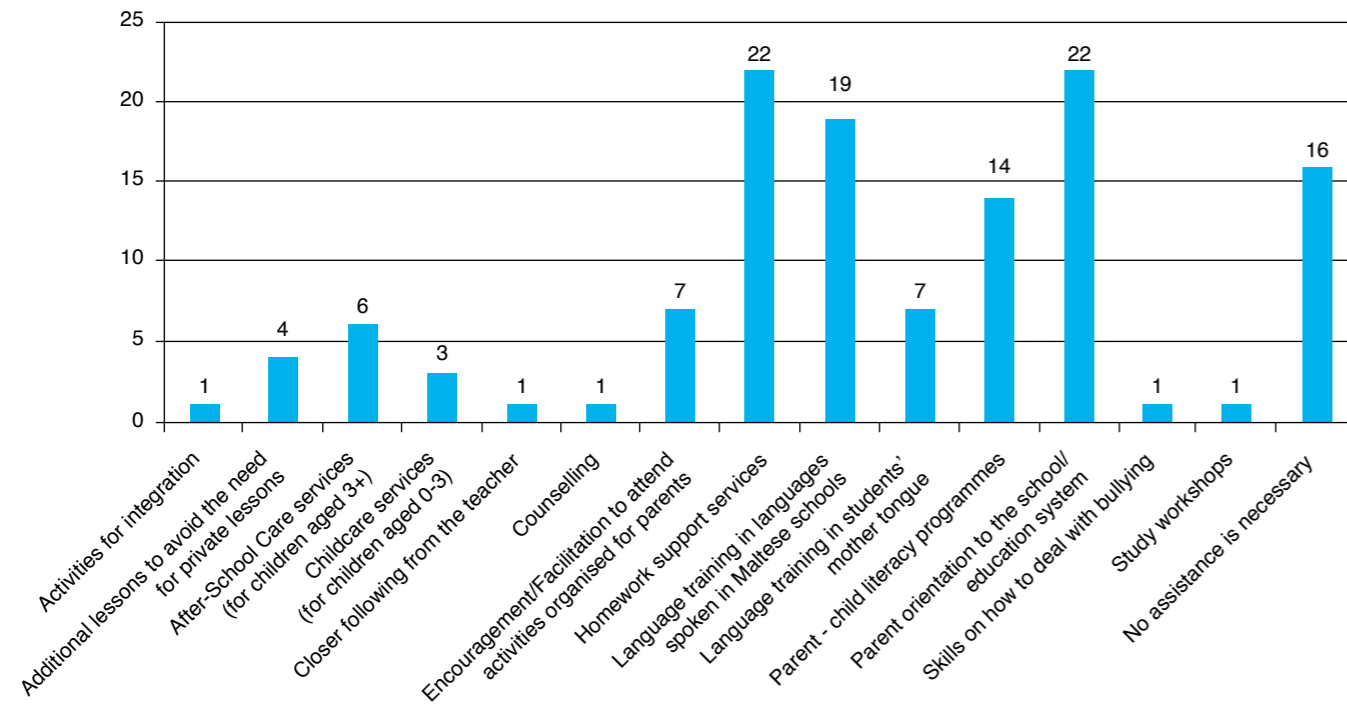
57.9% of Heads responded that they are 'quite familiar with activities organised by FES, with 42.1% giving 'not very familiar' as their response. Yet on a practical level, 82.4% of teachers said they have never referred students to after-school support activities. Teachers who responded positively to this question (17.4%), mentioned the following activities to which students were referred:

- Home tutoring due to language issues;
- FES, generally and also Klabb Naħla, NWAR.

When asked whether their children could benefit from a list of services reflecting those provided by FES, homework support services and parent orientation to the school/education were two services deemed to be the most beneficial for children, closely followed by language lessons in Maltese and English.

"It would be good to know about services and orientation visits, they tell us a bit but not 100%."
(Parent, State School)

"Support for some homework especially that in Maltese as we don't speak well. For information you have to ask sometimes, otherwise they won't provide. How Maths is taught in Malta is different."
(Parent, State School)

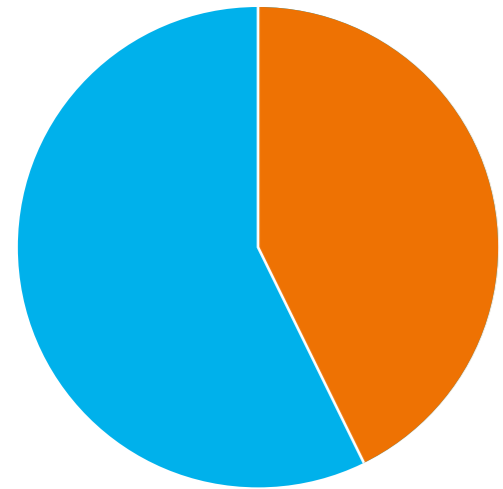


Orientation

When parents were asked whether the schools conducted a needs assessment or orientation activities for their children, they answered as followed:

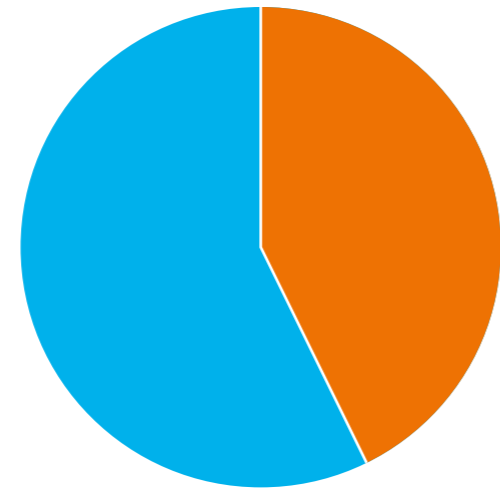
Does the school conduct a needs assessment of students from Third Countries following their enrolment into the school?

■ Yes: 43%
■ No: 57%



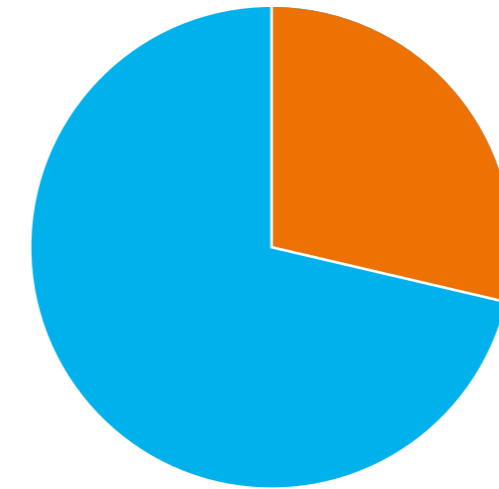
Does the school conduct orientation session/s for students from Third Countries following their enrolment into the school?

■ Yes : 43%
■ No: 57%



Does the school conduct orientation session/s for parents of students from Third Countries following their enrolment into the school?

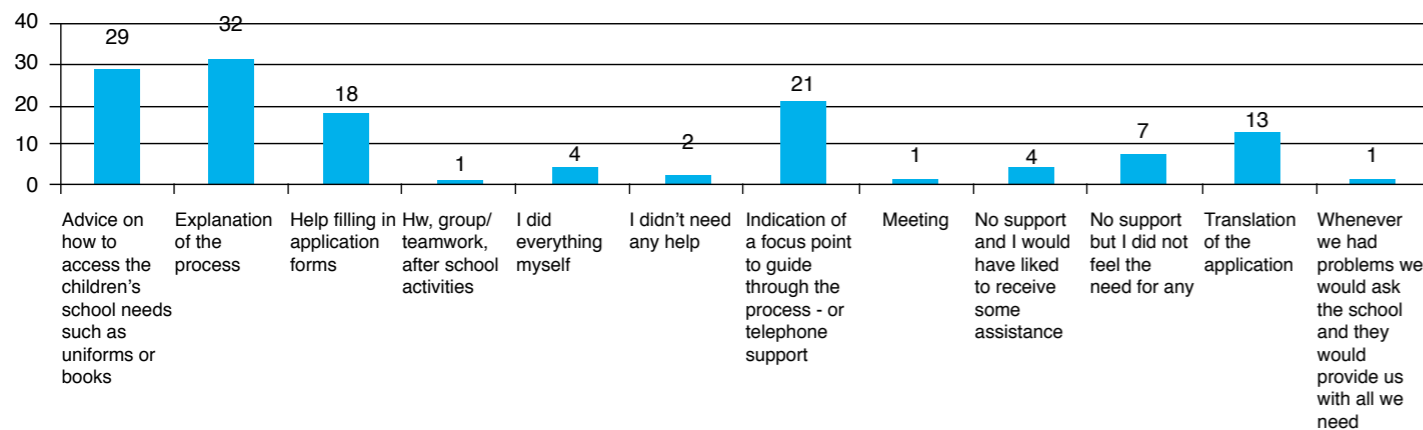
■ Yes: 29%
■ No: 71%



With regards to orientation in Church schools a parent raised a similar situation:

“You don’t hear or see a lot, there is no school website or there is no such thing as visiting the school before application. Since locally there is a reputation about Church schools, positively amongst the Maltese, so locals don’t ask, so you get no preview and just have to trust.” (Parent, Church and Independent School)

When asked about the type of support received when enrolling children in school, parents listed the following:



Although general information on processes, uniforms, books, etc. are provided, less than half of the respondents were directed to a school focal point. In-depth interviews identified other issues in connection with payment for education:

“There were problems with enrolment in the government school, because we are long term residents we were supposed to be treated as Maltese but this didn’t happen. It doesn’t happen in many departments, it’s an issue that’s not really followed. I’m not sure if it’s because people don’t know about it or if it’s policy wherever you are faced with any service...when I showed the Long Term Residence Directive the whole phoning 16 people starts till it reaches a lawyer...when payment is in question, so long term residents are asked to pay.”

So they are discouraged to exercise this right and the Department do not inform people about our rights...on top of it all there is no go-to person with whom an individual can follow-up and complain that their rights are not being respected, that EU Directives are not being respected. You shouldn’t have to open a court case but just have someone who can send them a letter.” (Parent, Independent School)

Despite being suggested by Heads and teachers as one of the main tool to fulfil the needs of TCN students, to date it would appear that schools do not provide any form of structured needs assessment and orientation/information package to newly arrived TCN parents/students. In the absence of any coordinated and/or structured provision, individual schools are introducing their own initiatives to help in facilitating the students’ inclusion and integration. Early arrivals tend to be provided with three key provisions.

The first is a meeting between the Head of School, the parents and the student. The practice, including the provision of information, appears to vary – quite considerably - from school to school. Such introductory meetings may include some form of assessment (to assist in class placement), information on uniform, school hours, and any specific issues the parent may bring to the table.

The second is the introduction of a ‘buddy’ system, whereby new students are introduced to current students who are given the responsibility of looking after, and supporting the new student in the early days, whilst the third is an ‘open door’ policy, wherein the parents are invited to bring any of their concerns to the school/teacher, when and as they come up. 71% of Heads listed buddy systems (mentoring programmes) as efforts carried out by the school to include TCN students⁵⁶:

“[in the absence of an induction program] it’s is up to us, and we provide a buddy system in the sense that we make sure that the child has someone with her as much as possible. We do our own thing, and the teacher...” (Head, State Secondary School)

“They usually have a meeting with Head of school, they bring in results if they have any, academic stuff and papers, from previous schools and then they decide with the Head of school and the parents in which class to put the child.” (Teacher, Primary State School)

“Not really, the same thing happens with Maltese, they have a buddy, another student who shows them how things work... students volunteer to be buddies for lower grades. Counsellors follow their progress. They are assessed before they join school. They have various assessment types, if they choose a subject they are given a past paper to assess their level...” (Teacher, Independent Secondary School)

⁵⁶ Other main efforts include: language support (43%), homework assistance and pastoral support (29% each). Teachers proposed the following main efforts: language training (90.2%), parent orientation (85.2) and parent/child literacy programmes (77%).

There was a general sense amongst the educators that a lot of work needs to be done to develop standard induction programmes that may assist in the inclusion of TCN students and developing relations between the students, their families and school:

“Our school is the kind of school that can provide induction courses for example. I feel that it’s very unfair on these students, to come out of the blue, placed in an environment that they are not familiar with. There is a need for a sort of fitting in session, where they are exposed and then placed in mainstream. And there’s got to be a time, you can’t just take someone and, as they used to do before, if you want to make them swim, just throw him in the sea. You can’t! I mean, ok, most people swam, but I would rather have an induction programme where these needs are seen to.” (Teacher, State Secondary School)

Two key issues arise here. The first is the provision of information. What kind of information do the parents and the students need? Secondly, is the information accessible and user-friendly?

With regard to the former, this may include admission processes, the structure of the school day (and here time and space for worship and other faith-based activities could be included) school holidays, uniform, homework, and perhaps moving beyond the obvious, for example, the teacher/student relationship and discipline:

“...but I think we also need to say, maybe we try to hide it, but I think it – we are not disciplined. As a Maltese, we are not disciplined as much as they are. That is the draw back for us, they see that we are a little bit laid back, and that...I spoke to some parents, and the parents told me ‘you spoil your children’ and, you see? That’s their attitude. ‘Our daughters are getting spoilt here, they’re getting ruined!’ you know? She was shouting, literally shouting.” (Teacher, State Secondary School).

Certainly, the findings of this research illustrate the heterogeneity of TCN students and their parents, and their expectations of the Maltese education system and learning needs. Within this group, it is clear that some parents and students may face particular obstacles and challenges, for example language barriers. In this regard, findings of this research have also illustrated the valuable role friends and acquaintances (from within the school community and beyond, for example, other parents, faith groups and migrants groups) can play in the provision of information about the school and the educational process.

As also mentioned in the context of parent and teacher participation in school activities, the divergence between group and individual contexts is also seen with regard to the responses provided by Heads on the academic performance of TCN students, yet in reverse. In group settings such as classroom activities and group projects, all Heads rated TCN students at par with Maltese and European Union students, whereas in academic activities based on individual and possibly solitary efforts 42.8% of Heads rated TCN students as faring worse than other students in exams and tests, and 28.5% rated them as faring worse in homework. It is also interesting to note that the same trend was presented in the teachers’ questionnaire responses.

In making information accessible, be it, in the provision of written text in the language of the TCN, or translations from one language to another, we are reminded that language is never neutral, but rather, conveys bias and value systems; universally shared understanding, meanings and belief systems cannot be assumed, or indeed, imposed (see also Weedon, 1997). Certainly, TCN students and parents are best placed to contribute to the development of coordinated induction programmes that address the needs of the newcomer.

Teacher training and support

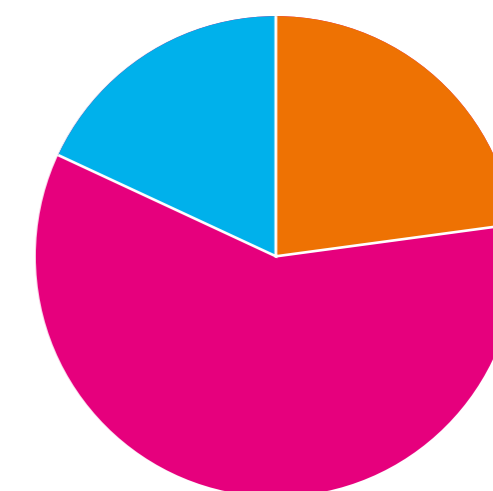
71.4% of Heads felt that they can benefit from sufficient support mechanisms for them to adequately deal with TCN students in their schools, with 28.6% responding in the negative. When asked what these support mechanisms actually were Heads provided the following:

- Staff-based systems that include counsellors, guidance teachers and prefects of discipline;
- External mechanisms such as non-governmental organisations liaising closely with PSD teachers.

Yet a slight shift in responses was noticed when Heads were asked whether they felt that their staff members are provided with sufficient support mechanisms, with only 57.1% responding ‘yes’ and the remaining 42.9% ‘no’. This shift seems to be related to the fact that Heads perceive the classroom environment as possibly more challenging than the broader school context, commenting that their staff members’ needs would be more effectively met with increased cultural awareness, inter alia through the use of cultural mediators, and also with the availability of Maltese and English teachers to help TCN students in their home environments. Whereas 71.4% of Heads responded that they feel they can benefit from support mechanisms, 86.4% of teachers responded in the negative, highlighting a major perspective divergence between Head and teacher perspectives and experiences. Also, the following chart:

Do you feel adequately prepared to teach Third Country Nationals?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, to some extent
- No



Yet although the majority of teachers feel relatively prepared to teach TCN students, a vast majority also responded that they had not received any academic training (63.6%), nor pursued any further professional development in this regard (63.6%). Asked what skills and/or tools they feel they require in terms of professional training, the teachers' responses were as follows (grouped):

- Knowing, understanding and tackling cultural and religious differences;
- Identification and avoidance of social exclusion, bullying and other threatening behaviour;
- Making effective use of code-switching;
- Teacher exchanges for the purposes of sharing best practices and lessons learnt.

When discussing issues of curriculum and teacher training with parents, there were numerous reactions. Various parents indicated that the children are bored in school and that the educational system in itself provides challenges in its rigidity and inflexibility. Teaching is conducted in a compartmentalised fashion, and high importance is given to marks and exams, even at a very early age. Criticism connected to this was directed to schools that, seemingly under pressure to deliver the syllabus, are seen as paying more attention to imparting what they are supposed to rather than fulfilling the students' learning needs.

"In Europe, Serbian and German education systems also Scandinavian, which is familiar to me, we have different systems which leave the kids alone till 7. Here, they really start doing something early at 5 and 6. Coming from that system I was expecting more drama, music and sports, sitting and writing numbers wasn't something that I and they were looking forward to. When they are young the curriculum should have more left-brain activity. It's important for teachers to know art and music is important. They skip music to do maths because it's more important. As long as they allowed they will believe maths is more important. The youngest got a teacher who is trying really hard to get them get the things right. She's not doing it because she has no wish or inspiration but because they are worried they won't do their job." (Parent, Church and Independent School)

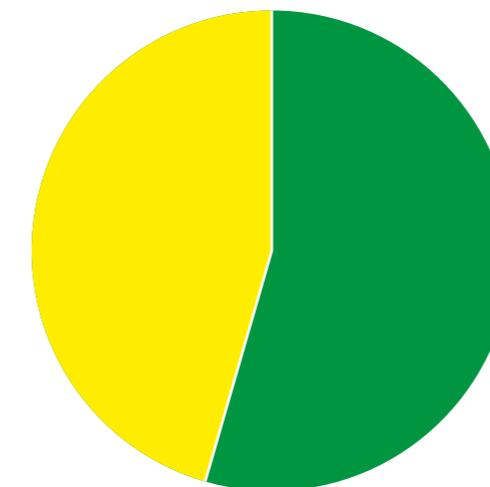
Social interactions

The findings suggest contradictory results. At the outset it ought to be noted that Heads and teachers are equally divided as to the likelihood of TCN students facing social challenges, such as bullying or exclusion, to a degree comparable to that related to Maltese students. In order to understand the experiences of TCN students, the results highlight the need to consider the intersections of inter alia class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion in relation to student interactions (see also Ball, Rollock, Vincent, & Cilborn, 2011).

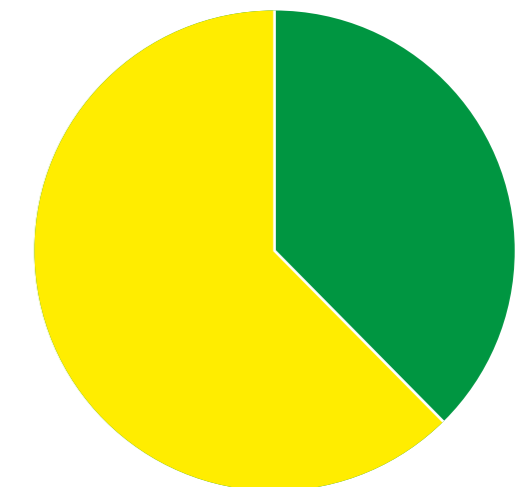
"No, I would see it – in order to see what degree of effect it has, I would need to see it to this. Because we have children who have a darker skin colour, and they have nothing to do with – they are Maltese and have darker skin, and they get teased because of that. For example in [different school] we had a Maltese boy who would scratch his skin to make it lighter."

There was another boy who had dark skin. His mother is Maltese and is darker than the father who is Egyptian. But everyone knew that this father was not Maltese and from North Africa, so he was bullied. But then there are other things, you have to see the child's personality too, what comes from within... so skin colour and the language that you speak seems to be a bigger issue, because these are more apparent." (Head, State Primary School)

Teacher Responses

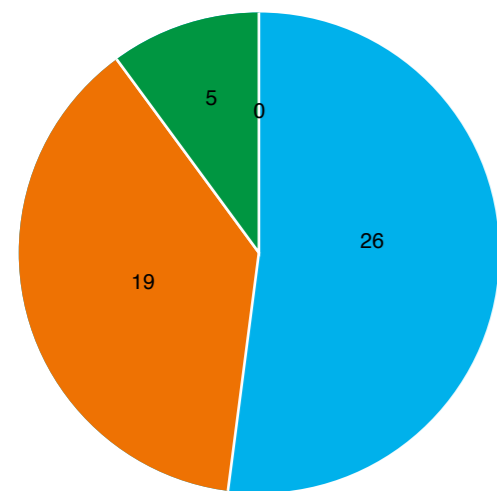


Head Responses



- More likely than Maltese
- Less likely than Maltese
- Same as Maltese

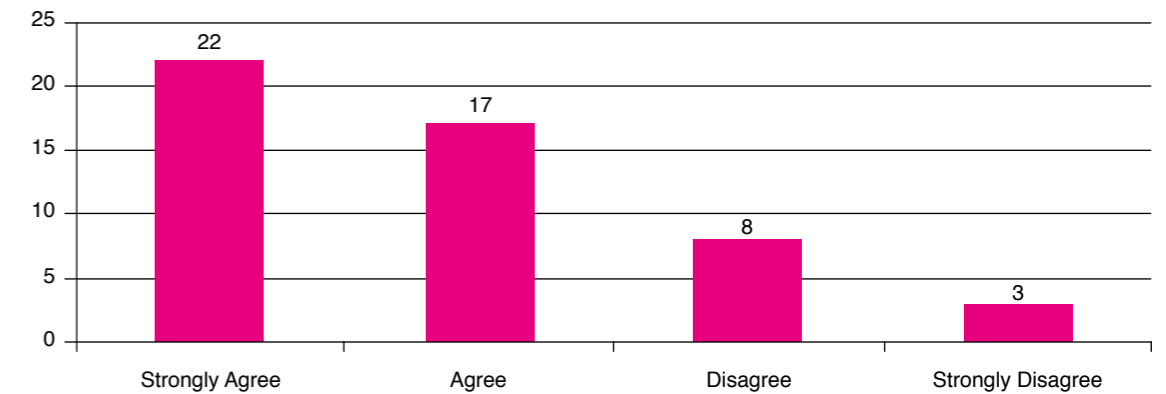
In general, parents expressed satisfaction, suggesting that their children are well integrated in class. When asked the extent to which parents felt that their children are treated in the same manner as Maltese children, they responded as follows:



■ Strongly agree
■ Agree
■ Disagree
■ Strongly Disagree

The day-to-day experience of children was also observed from the point of view of social interactions both within and outside the school context. With regards to the experience inside schools, parents highlighted the fact that different treatment generally comes from other children at school, rather than from the teachers. Name-calling, based on nationality or appearance was mentioned repeatedly by these parents as something which children from Third Countries face.

The following graph illustrates the extent to which parents agreed/disagreed as to whether or not their children had ever been bullied due to the fact that they are not Maltese:



It is interesting to note how parents interpret their children's experience of bullying and how it is often connected to age and the child's awareness of his or her difference. Parents responding about younger children seemed to consider bullying part and parcel of growing up, the 'migratory experience' and the transition to a new school (particularly in the early days) and also being 'different':

"When she was younger, they used to call her 'barranija' [foreigner] but now it's ok, she's treated the same as them. Her friends are always at our place and she's always at theirs. Not everyone's the same, but her friends are ok." (Parent, State School)

"Because she doesn't go to religious events because she's Muslim. They are usually joking. It's nothing major." (Parent, State School)

"Children misunderstand them. The school has now offered more support to my son (who's having some problems). In a new place, you expect to be bullied." (Parent, State School)

The experience of children in Independent and State schools seems to be in line with the large percentage that didn't think their children were bullied. In the case of the parents interviewed, one child previously in a Church school was said to have felt more lonely rather than bullied, simply because she was probably the only evidently foreign child in the school.

"She is treated different but doesn't really know why, maybe because of different tradition." (Parent, State School)

"The youngest was complaining that they were teasing her for a foreigner, but it wasn't an age where it mattered, but at the time it affected her." (Parent, Independent Primary School)

On the other hand, parents have reported specific incidents which seem more severe. There seems to be a connection between bullying and Islamophobia, an issue addressed above. Once again it may be useful to reflect upon the social construction of Islam within the school and beyond in order to understand how it underlies the nature and extent of bullying and exclusion in schools (Giroux, 2009):

“The children tease mostly my son, they call him ‘Arab’. This affects him. They call him ‘mahmug’ [dirty], ‘gharbi’ [Arab]. We only knew later when he told us. He isn’t happy at school. It would be good if parents teach their kids respect, before they send them to school. Teachers are fine, they are treated the same now.” (Parent, State School)

“My younger child has not been bullied as far as I know, but we had to change schools for our older kid [girl]. We took her out of government school in Bormla and transferred her to the Mosque school, but now she is back in government school and she does not have problems. She was bullied because she was not Maltese; they used to tell her to go back to her country, that she doesn’t have a family etc.” (Parent, State School)

The following passages appear to illustrate how language acquisition (particularly in Maltese) is positively related to inclusion, cultural acculturation, and positive student relationships:

“Child was bullied, picked on and called names when we got here because he did not speak Maltese. Eventually however he picked up on Maltese and other children grew more accepting...they got used to each other...” (Parent, State School)

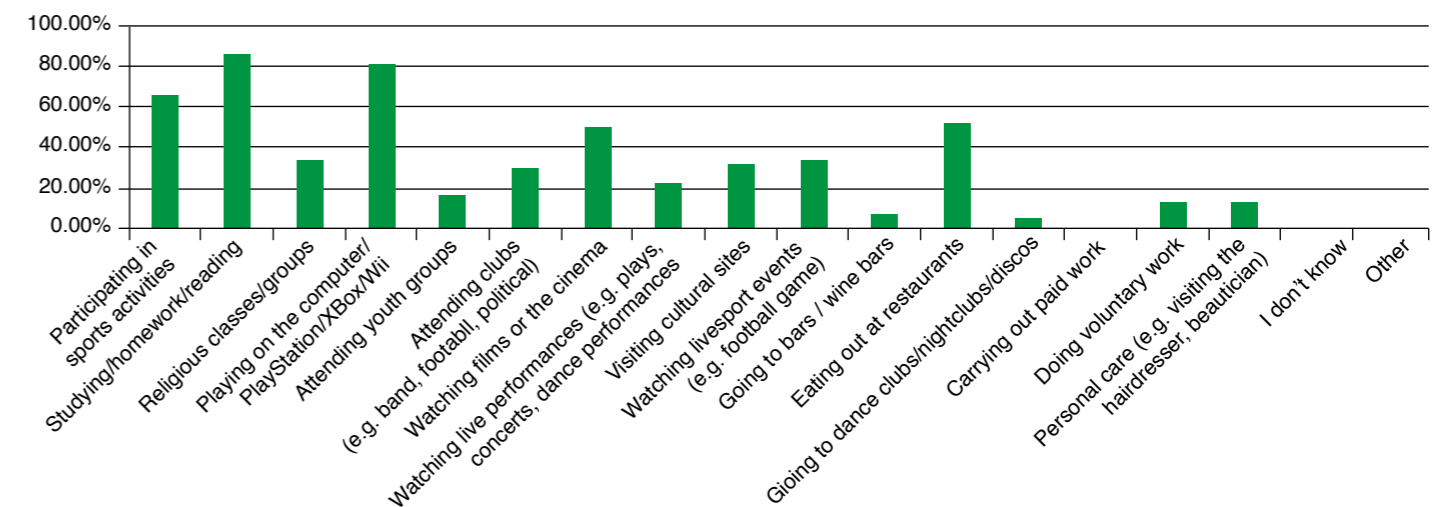
“The child knows how to defend herself. Doesn’t happen so often. Had problems 2 years ago but it got better now. They used to tell her to leave.” (Foster Parent, State School)

Exclusionary practices grounded in ‘difference’ may also generate feelings of exclusion within the school setting. Echoing Nieto’s metaphor of the ‘basement’ (2009), in the following passage a parent reflects on how a ‘foreigners’ class generated a sense of the ‘other’:

“...you see...before they used to keep all the foreigners in the same class - more than foreigners there are a lot of mixed families – and sometimes these kids feel more foreign sometimes even though they are half and half.”

With regards to the children’s interactions outside school When asked how their children spend their free time parents noted that:

Outside School Activities



Furthermore questionnaires enquired on the socialisation of TCN families with Maltese families and children. Some children clearly do not meet their school friends outside the scholastic context but socialise with other migrant children, even in connection with the parents’ social circles. Children that speak Maltese seem to have less or no problems with socialisation. The crosscutting trend is that families indicated a good relationship with both Maltese and migrant families.

“Daniel was born in Malta so he is treated like a Maltese child, he speaks Maltese too, the only difference is that he is blonde!” (Parent, State School)

“It took my child a while to get used to the system in Malta but now she is well integrated, the Maltese language is just like her mother tongue.” (Parent, State School)

Parents also indicated their relationship within the Maltese context, leading us to note how the parents’ social life conditions that of the children and how generally there seem to be positive relations with other Maltese and non-Maltese families even in terms of mutual support:

“Because of religion she did have some problems with children. We speak like Maltese and even our culture and traditions helps us to integrate. My relationship is quite good with both Maltese and non-Maltese. She can’t go out a lot, neither my husband nor me drive. Maltese people are friendly.” (Parent, State School)

“He is very communicative with classmates and is well integrated. He’s forcing us to go with him. His friends like him. The school staff is friendly. They aren’t treated differently. He likes his Maltese school friends, changing groups now. He takes part in their activities including birthday parties.” (Parent, State School)

“I have a lot of Maltese friends so I invite them home or they invite me. In the evening we take my child to the garden and they play.” (Parent, State School)

Overall one can observe how the school environment and the relationships it creates illustrate its role as a catalyst for integration. Relationships may be established on an empathetic level due to connections among parents, created for example during parents’ meetings, or for the purpose of mutual support of their children’s education. They may also be simply connected to their children’s friendships, as various parents clearly state.

Although a large part of the literature emphasises the inter-relations between migrant groups, the research highlighted the relation between migrants and the host society. Therefore the active role of the school is crucial as it acts as one of the main vehicles supporting the integration process, particularly that of families. In practical terms this can be achieved on various fronts for example through the co-creation of social activities, or organising community events within the school itself so as to enforce its strength as an aggregator in the broader context. The role of the school should therefore be underscored and invested in as an educational institution but also as an instrument for community-building.



Recommendations

School-based

1. Parent communication:
 - a. Schools should make every effort to ensure that information (be it written or oral) is provided in a language that parents will understand. At the very least, schools should ensure that all written information is provided in both English and Maltese. Independent schools have seen an improvement in communication with migrant parents thanks to the direct connection established via email communication. This could be replicated where parents opt for such preference; the use of children as translators must be avoided at all costs.
 - b. Schools may wish to explore the possibility of carrying out Parent Days/PTA meetings outside regular school hours. The participation of parents of TCN students in PTA meetings/School Council and other school activities should be actively sought and encouraged. Their participation will enhance the development and review of school curriculum, practices, policies and procedures, and also provide the space for parents to advocate on behalf of their children.
2. Schools may also explore the possibility of establishing a buddy system for parents, whereby TCN parents would be allocated a parent from within the school so as to provide on-going support with orientation beyond the provision of information and extending to issues related to integration within the broader community.
3. All schools should be encouraged to actively participate in cross-cultural programmes involving student and teacher physical/virtual exchanges. Schools already participating in such programmes should be encouraged to share their knowledge and experiences with other schools.
4. Schools should reach out to relevant communities, either through formalised structures such as migrant organisations, embassies, and faith groups or through migrant families themselves. Such initiatives may promote inclusion and contribute to the development of positive relationships among diverse migrant groups, overcoming stereotypes.
5. All student data ought to be disaggregated, *inter alia*, by gender, age, nationality, religion. Parents ought to be explained the utility of this information in their child's educational process to ensure an informed consent that is based on confidentiality of sensitive use of data.
6. The 'opt-out' system for religion classes is inherently exclusionary. Time spent out of the class should be structured and constructive. Furthermore, policy discussions should not revolve around introducing ethical education for opting out students, but rather around revising the current content of religion classes to include other beliefs.

Policy

7. Policy development should include the establishment of a formal, comprehensive national procedure for school entry that would include a thorough needs assessment (academic and non-), appropriate provision of comprehensible information to students and parents on all relevant elements, and a school orientation session. This ought to be based on a collaborative approach with TCN students.
8. All student data ought to be disaggregated, *inter alia*, by gender, age, nationality, religion. Parents ought to be explained the utility of this information in their child's educational process to ensure an informed consent that is based on confidentiality of sensitive use of data.
9. The national curriculum ought to address and affirm the multicultural diversity of Maltese history and contemporary culture.
10. Whilst intercultural education is being given importance in the NCF, the findings suggest much needs to be done in relation to practice. This would include the language of instruction and methodologies of teaching, learning resources and decision-making within the school that includes the population.
11. Schools should not presume that all parents are able to communicate in Maltese. Standardised procedures for ensuring school/parent communication ought to be established, with reasonable due consideration to the varying needs of the parents. Individual teacher/parent communication should be encouraged.
12. In all national reporting exercises conducted by the authorities, to institutions such as the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations on issues related to the national educational system, migrant students should be included in terms of statistics, performance indicators, etc.
13. Policy should encourage the active involvement of TCN parents/families in their children's educational process, through traditional (parents day, PTA, school activities, etc.) and non-traditional (parent volunteering, presentations by parents to students, teachers, etc.) means.
14. TCN students should be provided with the opportunity and facilities to study their own native languages. These possibilities may include school-based activities, external educators or FES.
15. The academic curriculum requires a paradigm shift. Diversification should not only relate to teaching practice but also to content, moving away from rigidity towards a critical approach that affirms the knowledge, beliefs and experiences of each and every child.
16. Policy should contextualise TCN integration in schools within a broader migrant integration framework and as an integral part thereof. This requires a critical examination of the school culture, organisation and structures that ensures access for all. This understanding would view schools as beneficiaries and also catalysts of migration integration on a local and national level.

17. The emphasis on the Roman Catholic religion raises serious questions on the truly inclusive nature of the national curriculum and beyond. A discussion at national policy level needs to be undertaken on the impact and role of related symbols and practices in State schools, with a view towards ensuring a more inclusive approach.
 18. Teachers ought to receive initial and on-going training in inter-cultural competence.
 19. Teacher training ought to include, on a compulsory level, appropriate exposure to code-switching techniques.
 20. A national resource bank ought to be established that includes multicultural classroom resources, in English and Maltese, e.g. teaching tools, literature, visual aids, etc.
 21. Appropriate and comprehensible information on the national educational system ought to be provided to newly arrived TCNs. Resources for this may be sought from relevant EU funding programmes.
 22. A national focal point should be established with the responsibility of ensuring an inter-cultural approach to the national educational system.
 23. It is not enough to ask teachers and others working in the school context to be aware of their own cultural perceptions and how such perceptions may influence their classroom interactions. There can be no tolerance for racist and Islamophobic sentiment or practice in a context that aspires to provide a quality education for all. The need for anti-racist education for all educators, training that provides a nuanced understanding of the insidious nature of racism, combined with self-reflexive practice is paramount in confronting racism and other such beliefs in the classroom and beyond.
 24. The notion of inclusive education needs to be extended beyond disability, to include, acknowledge and affirm the diversity within schools. Furthermore, teaching practice should address the specific learning needs of migrant students, moving away from the deficit approach. In this regard, the checklist system needs to be revised.
 25. Further research should be conducted into the institutional context, on specific issues such as curriculum, checklists, fee systems, school/college administration and recruitment, etc.
 26. Teacher training ought to include the imparting of knowledge on various teaching methodologies in order to facilitate teacher adaptability to various classroom needs.
- Directed to FES**
27. Detailed research ought to be conducted to evaluate all FES programmes in terms of their accessibility and relevance for TCNs. Such research should analyse all information dissemination, programme content and delivery, and effectiveness. The research should be conducted in a comprehensive manner that includes TCN perspectives.
 28. Language classes for parents, through a programme for the teaching of Maltese and/or English to foreign parents possibly replicable from those already delivered by other educational institutions such as the Lifelong Learning Programme. This could be diversified to be tailored to the specific communication needs of parents.
 29. The provision of homework support to TCN children.
 30. Specific research that is primarily student-oriented is strongly encouraged to ensure the visibility of the students' voices.
 31. All student data ought to be disaggregated, *inter alia*, by gender, age, nationality, religion. Parents ought to be explained the utility of this information in their child's educational process to ensure an informed consent that is based on confidentiality of sensitive use of data.
 32. Consider establishing a Maltese adult literacy programme for non-Maltese speakers.
 33. Communication with schools on programmes ought to be strengthened, possibly through the use of focal points.
 34. National information campaigns that are accessible and comprehensible to TCN parents should be conducted to ensure effective accessibility of TCNs to FES programmes. FES could consider making use of community and faith groups within the community.

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