

The Impact of Migrant Children in Glasgow Schools

Report by Stephen Dillon (2013)

Research conducted by the author in collaboration with COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership and Glasgow City Council EAL Service.

Executive Summary



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Introduction

This document provides a summary of a collaborative master's project conducted between a student from the University of Glasgow, COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership, and Glasgow City Council's English as an Additional Language (EAL) Service in association with Glasgow Refugee, Asylum and Migration Network (GRAMNet). The study examined migration in relation to education and questions regarding the impact of migrant children in Glasgow schools. In addition, the study was located within a wider context in which the topic of migration was used to explore thematic issues in relation to vulnerability, resilience, societal security and governance within Glasgow. The findings related to this aspect have been omitted from both the final report and this summary.

The central aim of the study was to contribute towards building an evidence base to support anecdotal evidence that migrants have had a positive impact in Glasgow's schools. This was achieved by comparatively examining two publicly funded secondary schools within the Glasgow City local authority area (chosen for their contrasting experience of migrant pupils), and considering the views of teaching staff across the city as to whether migrant or native children are more vulnerable in terms of their educational attainment. As such, the study explored the educational impact of migration on Scotland's future workforce found within Glasgow's secondary schools. The study (acknowledging that migrants are not a homogenous group) defined migrant children as new arrivals who did not have English as their first language, *vis-à-vis* native children defined as locally born with English as their first language. Therefore this was not a study based on ethnicity.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed methodology. For quantitative analysis, statistical data was obtained in relation to Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) awards, the destinations of school leavers, and the numbers of pupils with English as an additional language. The data for the period 2008-2012 was subjected to a correlation calculation to ascertain whether a relationship existed between SQA results and migrant (EAL) children; and likewise the destination of school leavers and migrant children. Whilst the quantitative analysis maintained a narrow focus on two schools (referred to as School A and B) the qualitative data gained from semi-structured interviews with EAL teachers, reflected their Glasgow wide experience and was not restricted solely to the two school comparison.

Key findings



Qualitative findings

- Migrant children:
- Enhance classroom discussion
- Impart a broader social and cultural awareness and world view on their peers, and on their mainstream teachers
- Facilitate a positive change in attitudes in native children and some mainstream teachers in relation to issues of acceptance and tolerance
- Are high achievers
- Bilingual children outperform monolingual children
- There is a growing appreciation of benefits migrant children bring to the classroom

- Issues for migrants:
- More vulnerable than native children
- Negative attitudes towards migrant children include racism, bullying and prejudice
- Celebration of diversity varies across the city
- EAL service mitigates migrant vulnerability; plays vital role in promoting positive attitudes; EAL staff uniquely positioned to understand problems faced by migrant children
- Language key to acceptance
- School ethos essential for migrant pupils
- Setting practice

Statistical analysis of the quantitative data for the two schools studied found there to be no relationship between the number of migrant (EAL) pupils and S4 pupil attainment during the period 2008 to 2012. This significantly underlines that there has been no negative impact on attainment as a result of migrant pupils in both selected schools.

Analysis of the destination of leavers data, found the example of School A showed that despite a sizable cohort of EAL pupils (relative to School B) positive destinations of leavers, in particular to Further and Higher education, were notably higher in comparison to Glasgow overall. There was no statistically significant relationship found as a result of a correlation calculation, which highlights a lack of evidence to suggest any negative influence as a result of migrant pupils.



Conclusion

Having explored the educational impact of migration on Scotland's future workforce, this study demonstrates that there is more than merely anecdotal evidence of migrants having a positive impact in Glasgow schools. Whilst statistically it cannot be said migrants have improved attainment within the two cases examined, conversely it cannot be said that migrants detrimentally impact on overall attainment. What is more, the qualitative research findings suggest that migrant children tend to enhance classroom discussion; impart a broader social awareness and world view not only on their native peers, but also on some mainstream teachers; and in turn, impact upon native children and teachers attitudes towards migrants more widely. Thus, there are significantly strong markers of a positive impact and a firm suggestion that migrant children should be celebrated as Glasgow's very own 'cosmopolitan intellectuals'.

Policy implications

- Given increasing numbers of EAL students in Glasgow, there is a resource consideration for Glasgow City Council if the EAL Service is to continue to fulfil its vital role in the educational experience of migrants.
- Migrant children's own languages should continue to be valued within educational settings.
- That new arrivals being supported to acquire English as an additional language are given opportunities to communicate in their mother tongue where possible. This will not only create opportunities for other pupils to learn about different languages, but also ease transition difficulties faced by some migrant pupils.
- Practice of setting and impact on EAL pupils should be reviewed.
- Recognition of a migrant pupil's existing language through academic credit. This may open up opportunities for them beyond school.
- Scotland will benefit from the linguistically diverse future workforce presently found within Glasgow's schools if the educational potential of migrant children is fulfilled.

Recommendations for further research

There is a need for comparative case studies at both local and national level to fully assess all dimensions of this important research area; including interviewing both EAL and mainstream teaching staff and senior management. The scope of the research could also be broadened to include study of attitudes towards migration and education expressed through social media.

Further information

The full report can be accessed online: <http://www.migrationscotland.org.uk/our-research/collaborative-masters-project>



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