

# **Home Language Literacy Learning as an Extracurricular Activity by Pupils and Parents: Do the Findings Warrant a Case for Introducing Home Language Policy for Primary Education in England?**

*Shackle a people, strip them bare, cover their mouths: they are still free. Deprive them of work, their passports, food and sleep: they are still rich. A people are poor and enslaved when they are robbed of the language inherited from their parents: it is lost forever.*

*(Baker, 2011, p.45, citing the Sicilian poet Buttitta, 1972)*

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## **Abstract**

Despite the fact that almost two million learners in state-funded schools in England learn English as an additional language (DfE (2020)), there is no official policy for developing home languages (HL), even though the use of HL in classrooms for academic purposes is linked to academic attainment (Smyth, 2012). Cummins' (1976) language interdependence hypotheses was employed as the analytical framework for the original study underpinning this chapter, as it showed the benefits of HL in the classroom. The study included thirteen Somali-origin pupils in a Key-Stage 2 class (8 boys and 5 girls- 10 -11 years) and their 7 parents. Parents and pupils were separately taught HL literacy once per week for 24 weeks as extra-curricular activities. HL literacy pre and post assessments, semi-structured interviews with pupils and parents and a researcher reflective diary were used for data collection (Abikar, 2020). The data from HL assessments when comparing the pre and post assessments, showed improvement in areas assessed, except for writing. The semi-structured interview data demonstrated that learning HL literacy was beneficial for: social and spiritual identity, cognitive skills needed in the classroom, and fostering communication between the family, relatives, and the wider community. Additionally, positive attitudes to learning HL were evident within the study findings. The study strongly highlighted that it would be beneficial for pupils if there were strategies which would help them to maintain their HL; thus, this chapter will argue the case for the introduction of a home language policy for primary education in England. Overall, the study made recommendations for policy makers to introduce HL literacy sessions for the benefit of pupils.

**Keywords:** Home language Policy, Language Interdependence Hypotheses, Academic Attainment, KS2 Class, Somali-Origin Pupils, Somali Parents.

## 1. Introduction

What is 5 ku-dar 4?

Assuming that you are an English monolingual, how would you confidently answer this question? It appears simple, straightforward even, yet you might not be in a position to provide answers confidently. This is because out of the 5 words, only one word, *ku-dar* (Somali language), is unfamiliar. You should potentially be capable of solving the above problem if told that ‘ku-dar’ means ‘add.’

Now, if the process of correctly answering this simple question requires knowing a language, other than English, and its concept - can you imagine the challenges faced by learners of English as an additional language (EAL) in English schools where the medium of instruction is English? This chapter will explore research conducted for an educational doctorate, where acquisition of English was explored for Somali learners in a primary school in Bristol. This was considered in relation to how support for the learners’ heritage language might benefit them in acquiring stronger skills in English language and literacy. The research was conducted through extra-curricular teaching and activities with a small group of Somali Children and their families. The aims of this research were a) enhancing the English literacy attainment of the children through learning Somali heritage language literacy; b) developing Somali heritage language literacy among the children’s parents to inculcate them with the confidence to support their children’s literacy skills (grammar) at home in both Somali and English languages.

In this chapter, the term *home language* is used to mean the language used by the learners’ parents in their origin home country (Riagáin, 2018) - in this case Somalia language; *the study* refers to the doctoral dissertation undertaken by the first author; and the terms *child*, *children*, *pupil* and, *learner* will be used interchangeably (except where explicitly indicated) to mean the participants of the study. Likewise, *home language (HL) literacy* means the reading, comprehension, writing and speaking skills of HL. The following section will explore the EAL learners and HL issues, in particular to advance arguments for HL policy in England. Moreover, by using Cummins’ (1976) language interdependence hypotheses as a framework, the chapter will advance the argument about the importance of HL in academic attainment. The chapter was co-authored by the second author, Helen Bovill and third author Jane

Andrews who have been the Director of Studies and Doctoral Supervisor respectively for the first author. Finally, as the focus of the chapter is the centrality of HL policy for classroom activities, only the children's data from the study, rather than parents, will be the focal point.

### *1.1 Setting the scene: EAL & Home Language*

At the time of this study there were 8.1 million pupils in state-funded schools in England in 2018, of which 1.6 million were identified as English as additional language learners EAL (DfE, 2020). To understand English proficiency of pupils with EAL, in the spring of 2018 information concerning EAL pupils' first language was generated by consulting school census data submitted by schools to the Department for Education. This data indicates that 36% of pupils with EAL were assessed as being fluent in English and a further 25% as competent (DfE, 2020). To determine the English proficiency, one of the characteristics used by the census was the length of time in an English school. Furthermore, the census claimed that 87% of EAL learners in years 7 to 11 who had attended an English school since the reception class were recorded as competent or fluent in English. It would have been meaningful to report on pupils' proficiency in their HL as well. However, this fact was overlooked by the census in its '*First Language*' section which focused, instead, on listing first languages only and providing data on proficiency in English according to those first languages.

The term EAL may sometimes be conflated with the term 'bilingual learner'. Slabakova (2016) defined bilingualism as the skill of mastering two languages with minimal proficiency. EAL is often used as a broad term and may mean learners whose language and culture differ from majority students in a country (Conteh, 2015). The DfE (2020, p.4) define EAL through the following:

A pupil is recorded as having English as an additional language if she/he is exposed to a language at home that is known or believed to be other than English.

The definition above seems to paint a picture of a child living in two worlds: home where they use HL, and school where they use English. HL can be regarded as a pre-

condition for belonging to a particular group as Tajfel (1978) noted that it relates to sharing cultural values and emotional significance with that group. If the community aspect of the group is disrupted, negative consequences may ensue. Montrul (2010) emphasised that disadvantages can be associated with children losing their HL up to the age of 4, as this stage is when a child's metalinguistic ability is developing. Thus, losing HL at an early age can negatively impact the emergent literacy learning in classrooms.

During his career at primary schools, the first author, as a practitioner fluent in Somali and English, regularly observed how the Somali origin pupils quickly lost their HL proficiency when they began school. For instance, in 2015–2016 academic year, he met a Year 1 pupil who started school late in her Reception Class before that year. Prior to school, she was fluent in HL and how she used to express herself was above average for a Somali child of her age. During the Muslim festival 'Eid', the first author greeted her '*ciid wanaagsan*' – *happy Eid*'. She replied '*heh?*' the first author repeated the greeting. He then reverted into English. '*How come just last year you were fluent in the Somali language, and you knew no English; and now you do not know what I am saying in Somali?*' She giggled and elaborated, '*my mum cannot understand me!*' (Abikar, 2020). This means that her communication with her mother, whom she came to the UK with at the same time, has been disrupted because of her second language development at the cost of her HL at that early age. Montrul (2008) reaffirms that children who have yet to reach their late childhood are likely to lose their HL in a second language (L2) dominant environment. This is because their HL acquisition might have been incomplete. The rate with which HL decline occurs, such as the above pupil demonstrates, can be alarming; this is only one of the many examples from the study and further data are explored below.

Cummins (2000) studied loss of Gaelic in a Scottish context and recounted how, for reasons including lack of political will and lack of learning materials, the Scottish pupils faced dilemmas in terms of using their HL in schools. He continued further to explain that this circumstance became reversed as educators found that students who used Gaelic became good readers of English when '*...they had a basic grounding in Gaelic grammar and literature.*' (Cummins, 2000, p.173). From Cummins' work, it may be evident that HL needs maintenance as well as stimulating. Cummins' (1976) language interdependence hypotheses provides a helpful framework to make sense of

understanding the performance in classrooms by children operating in two languages. The interdependence hypothesis postulates that the proficiency gained in one language can be transferred to a second language if sufficient exposure of the second language is observed. This means that when children learn concepts in HL literacy, they may be in a better position to transfer that concept to the English literacy.

The following section will explore two policies to contextualise the positioning of HL in education in England: The Bullock Report (1975) and the National Curriculum of England (DfE, 2013). These two landmark policies are chosen because they show different conceptualisations of HL within education policy discourse, and they represent a change in thinking between 1975 and 2013. These policies contribute to our understanding about the existence of inequality in classrooms with regard to language hierarchies, and provide background to how pupils developing EAL in classrooms may be having a different experience in terms of their languages being recognised and supported today, compared to forty years ago. These two policies also help to demonstrate that change in this context is slow, perhaps even stagnant.

## **2. Exploring the changing policy perspectives on home languages**

### *2.1 Bullock (1975) Report*

Countries that host migrants usually devise strategies for developing migrant children's language skills. The history of such provision in the UK can be usefully traced to the Bullock Report (1975) when *Sir Alan Bullock* was commissioned by the then Secretary of State for Education and Science to investigate teaching in schools of reading and developing English language skills. Among recommendations reported by Bullock (1975) was how to help children acquire the ability to use language in different contexts. To realise this, Section 5.1 of the Bullock Report suggested a) educating parents with the process of language development; and b) enhancing the teacher's skill and knowledge in accurately supporting the child's language needs. These recommendations can conceivably be assumed as an inherent aspect in classroom learning since they highlight two crucial facts that concurrently enhance the

child's academic achievements, the place of the parent/primary carer, and the teacher within this.

Furthermore, Bullock (1975) stipulated that in order for teachers to be in a position to monitor the competence of children's language progress, they must retain the ability of examining the verbal interaction of the class in terms of an explicit understanding of the operation of language. This appears to be logical because auditing activities in the classroom, in this case, the child's language progress, requires the teacher's skill to allow them to consider a variety of classroom verbal interactions. Nonetheless, in the case where the teacher and the learner operate in different languages, explicit or mutual understanding is a challenge. Moreover, in 5.10 of the Bullock Report, recommendations are made that all children should be helped to acquire as wide a range as possible of the uses of language; to help parents understand the process of language development in their children and to take their part in it; and parents and teachers to work together to promote the child's language skills (Bullock, 1975). For the latter, Bullock (1975) explained that it helps teachers' measured attention to the child's precise language needs, and their inventiveness in creating situations which enhance this. Teachers' inventiveness is a critical element in classrooms, yet, the teacher's inventiveness should not be confined in certain contexts, with consideration also given within the context of EAL learners.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the Bullock Report for this chapter is its suggestions for maintaining the child's culture and language.

No child should be expected to cast off the language and culture of the home as he [sic] crosses the school threshold, nor to live and act as though school and home represent two totally separate and different cultures which must be kept firmly apart. The curriculum should reflect many elements of that part of his life which a child lives outside of school (Bullock, 1975. p.286).

Despite Bullock's recommendation of a role for HL in the 1970s, that has not been realised today in England.

## *2.2 The National Curriculum of England (NCE)*

The National Primary Curriculum in England, which was introduced in 1988 and revised in 2013 (DfE, 2013), clearly instructs the advancement of English language to support classroom learning, where English is the medium of instruction. Thus, one can question the extent to which EAL students who are newly arrived in the UK are capable of understanding the classroom instruction when unfamiliar language is used to make sense of content in the form of the same new language. This dilemma may then further negatively impact the EAL learner's academic attainment. This may place the EAL learners under pressure which is exacerbated 'through language policies that clearly positioned English as the prestige language...' (Keh and Stoessel, 2017, p.110).

To promote the inclusion of EAL learners, the NCE (DfE, 2013) section 4.5 instructs teachers of the need for understanding the difference between additional needs, EAL learning and special educational needs and disability. The section continues by advising that activities for EAL should be planned in age-appropriate ways and should take account of the length of time in the country alongside previous education and ability in other languages.

Section 4.6 emphasises EAL student need in relation to advancing communication skills in English. Consequently, the NCE (DFE, 2013) clearly gives preference to and prescribes the use of English over other languages. Since children spend an average of six hours in school every day, the school environment is highly influential in their developing language skills and prescribing English over other languages, makes the maintenance of HL literacy by the EAL child potentially untenable. The foremost task of teachers is instructed within the NCE to be advancing the communication skills in English by pupils whose language is different than English. This is explored in this chapter and shown to be difficult to achieve without also prioritising HL. Because languages used by the child and teacher are different, effective mutual understanding may become difficult if not impossible. In many cases in schools in England, there is just one teacher and sometimes a teaching support assistant for a class size of thirty children. Thus, it can easily be understood that advancing the communication skills through planning and executing teaching opportunities in English for all these EAL

learners with divergent levels of English proficiency, can be a difficult if not impossible task to achieve. This chapter does not offer solutions to this complex problem, but it does offer suggestions to incorporate HL learning alongside the medium of English whenever possible. The following section will clarify the first author's doctoral study and methodology.

### **3. Introduction to the doctoral study**

The doctoral study examined the perception of learning HL in extra-curricular activities. The first author was motivated to complete this study because of his philosophy that he would be in a better position to inspire a community of learning (pupils and parents learning HL literacy together at home) as well as for his professional development (understanding how HL & L2 reinforce each other). A desire to support EAL learners in general also drove motivation for this study. Observations of pupils who are newly arrived, as well as those who were born in England and use a HL, often demonstrated grammatical mistakes when writing English. In the case of those newly arrived, grammatical mistakes may have begun to occur because of higher concentration upon acquisition of English. After a period of time trying to master the English language, it was noted that pupils began to lose mastery of their HL. This is a phenomenon known as subtractive bilingualism (Baker and Jones, 1998).

Participants of the study were 13 Year 4 pupils, who are 8-9 years old (8 boys and 5 girls) in a primary school in England, and 7 of their parents (all mothers). Participant children's pseudonym names and gender is noted in the table 1 below.



## **INSERT Table\_1\_Abikar\_Bovill\_Andrews HERE**

**Table1.** Participants' Pseudonym Names, Abbreviations and Gender

All participants were of Somali origin. Following a process of gaining voluntary informed consent, guided by the BERA guidelines (2018), the pupils and parents were separately involved in learning the reading, writing, listening, and speaking of HL interventions for 45 minutes per week over 24 weeks, at the first author's school. The reasoning for separately involving the pupils and the parents was not a pedagogical decision but one of timing and convenience. The first author's availability to teach the children was Thursdays after school; and the separate availability of parents was on Wednesday mornings when they drop off their children.

To help demonstrate the voluntary nature of participants' engagement with the research, about 4 weeks before the end of the study, four pupils: Fatha, Liban, Ikram and Ibrahim opted to discontinue their involvement for personal reasons. Thus, their data is not available in post assessment. This withdrawal from the study also helps to demonstrate that power relations were mediated well within the study, in that these four pupils felt confident to let the first author know of their desire to withdraw from the study, free from consequence. As a person of Somali origin, the first author had worked at the school since 2004 and developed a good working relationship with previous and current parents and students, and lessening power imbalances was an important consideration. The four participants who opted to discontinue the study demonstrates a sense of equality in the research relationship that might not have been achieved by an outsider.

According to the BERA guidelines (2018), research participants can be regarded as vulnerable when they possess characteristics such as being from an asylum-seeker background, having limitations in their understanding of academic research or the fact that English is not their first language. Thus, since the participants of the study possessed these qualities, they could be considered as vulnerable participants. This understanding inspired the first author to treat the study participants not just, according to Aldridge (2016), as objects of the research but as active citizens with

important contributions to offer. Ways in which this was achieved were, as well as the above exercising of freedom to withdraw, by the first author acting as one of the participants and learning HL literacy together. An example of dispersing power relations is found when pupils were quick to correct the first author's HL typing errors without worry of consequence.

Prior to the study, participants were involved in pre-HL literacy assessments of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The aim of the assessments was to obtain a base line with which to gauge whether HL literacy improvement occurred after HL literacy intervention. For reading, the participants (pupils and parents separately and on a one-to-one-basis) read 100 words from a Somali language non-fiction text called '*biyaha*' ('*water*'), which the first author had prepared. Victoria State Government's (2023) conversion chart provided a systematic way of calculating the percentage of correctly read words. For example, if a reader mispronounced 4 of the 100 words, then  $100/4 = 25$ . This means 1 out of 25 words was incorrect and is noted by the ratio 1:25. Table 2 below displays ratios and their corresponding percentage of accuracy, based on these calculations.

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**Table 2** Reading Calculation (adopted from Victoria State Government, 2023).

The extra-curricular activities with the children ran for 45 minutes at a time, one session a week over 24 weeks. The extra-curricular activities took place on school premises. The number of children slightly fluctuated over these weeks, but most sessions were attended by most of the thirteen children. A total of 30 lessons – 15 for the pupils and 15 for the parents were delivered. They consisted of a) Somali alphabet, short vowels, long vowels, double consonants and consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words and how to blend letters; b) grammar topics such as using capital letters, full stops, pronouns, articles, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and active and passive sentences; and c) reading parts of non-fiction (the banana tree, stories of Prophet Mohammed

(Peace Be Upon Him- PBUH), the African continent and the Islamic calendar), and fiction stories (the clever policeman and the Noor) Somali texts.

Following the extra-curricular activities post HL literacy assessments of reading, writing, listening, and speaking were conducted with 9 of the thirteen original children, as 4 had opted to discontinue the study at this point. In addition, a qualitative method was used as the aim of the study was to generate theory by analysing the impact of HL literacy on participants. Children's perspectives on the intervention were collected using semi-structured interviews. Each child was interviewed once. The interviews were conducted in English although they were given the choice of English or HL, they chose English. Each child was interviewed for circa 8 -10 minutes, a short time span which is in keeping with their likely level of desired attention due to their ages. Interviews took place on school premises and were conducted to get an understanding of the potential impact of the extra-curricular activities upon the children.

The study adopted descriptive statistics to the quantitative HL literacy assessments as Holcomb (1998) noted that it is a clear way of organizing and summarizing data for interpretation. Additionally, the study was not large enough to generate meaningful inferential statistics. The qualitative interviews were analysed by using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps thematic analysis: familiarizing with the data, generating the initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming the themes and, finally, producing the outcome or the report. In addition to the interviews, a research reflective diary was used to offer the opportunity to regularly update the records. The participants' semi-structured interview data indicated that children perceived that learning HL was important for their identity awareness, developing their cognitive skills and communication. Due to space limitations the cognitive skills theme will be focused upon, alongside the development of positive attitudes to learning HL.

### *3.1. Findings from semi-structured interviews and HL assessments: Importance of HL for Cognitive Advantage and Positive Attitudes to Learning.*

This section reports the interview and HL literacy assessment data of the study. The interview was conducted in English. However, for the pre and post HL literacy assessments, children had to use HL to capture their level of HL skills.

The study found that children were in a better position to transfer the concepts learned in Somali to English and vice versa.:

Muallim: I am now able to translate from English to Somali.

Also, it could be the case that the children may find learning HL literacy easier than English literacy in the first instance.

Muallim: The thing that is good about the Somali language is because it is my first language. All my ancestors learned Somali. It is my first language, and it is easier than English.

Another child added:

Gelle: I learned grammar... which is easier than learning English grammar.

From above, it can be deduced that children are in a position to assess their HL learning in comparison to English literacy and, this assessment ability may then help them with their classroom activities by transferring concepts from HL to English and vice versa. For instance, during the study, Ubah (reading HL text) loudly murmured that for Somali language,

Ubah: in order to form an adverb, a word comes before the adjective (si tartiib- slowly) whereas the English adverb, the 'ly' is the suffix of the word.

This demonstrates that the child was using particularly complex understandings of grammar and was able to relate back and forth between both their HL and English. Participants of the study showed motivation to learn HL during the study and learned it rapidly, as demonstrated by the pre and post HL reading assessment data (chart 1) below.

The findings indicated that pupils' language skills in reading, comprehension, listening and speaking improved when compared with the base line scores of the pre-

study assessments. Due to space limitation, the reading data will be presented in Chart 1 since it is indicative of the progress that children made in all areas of HL literacy except the writing where no one achieved the minimum score of 10%. Similarly, in terms of space limit, pupils' names were substituted by letters and numbers (Figure 1):

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**Figure 1:** Pupils' pre- and post-reading assessment data (Adapted from Abikar, 2020)

All pupils participated in a pre-reading assessment, however, only nine pupils participated in the post-assessment. PU05 left for Somalia, PU09 and PU10 were busy with other activities outside school, and PU13 withdrew from the study without giving a reason.

Further demonstrations of learning success are explored in the qualitative interview responses and through the children's enthusiasm for learning and sharing the learning with parents, for example,

Fatha: you know I challenged my mother whether she knows the Somali short and long vowels and she said she did'.

On another occasion, during the semi-structured interview, I requested a child to provide answers in English and he replied,

Ali: Somali ayaan rabaa (I want to speak in Somali)

Though this utterance does not directly demonstrate improved cognitive ability, it does demonstrate a renewed enthusiasm for the HL and a positive attitude to learning. An enthusiastic learner is likely more engaged with the process as demonstrated by Wood (2017, p.23) who notes that 'positive cognitive engagement ... approaches learning activities with enthusiasm'. Additionally, the children realised that they possessed an empowering tool in their use of their HL potentially not yet shared by others in the community, such as their older siblings who were not part of the study. An interesting dynamic emerged where the participants felt they could share their

knowledge gained from using HL in the intervention with others in the community, acting as their teachers. This is demonstrated in the following extracts.

Leyla: Mr Shamsudin, my brother tried to read the Somali sheets you gave us yesterday. He could read them but, the word 'jeer' the 'ee' he read it as the English 'ea'. Then I told him that 'ee' is sounded like English alphabet 'a'.

The children in the study also felt empowered to teach HL literacy to their peers at mosque where they learn the Quran, as demonstrated by the following:

Gelle: I want to teach it (HL literacy) to people who go to my mal'amad [the mosque where children go to learn the Koran].

These positive learning moments demonstrate that the children were enabled to gain confidence in their learning and wanted to function as useful members of the Somali society.

During the study, the first author experienced how pupils' conceptual understanding was expanded as they appeared to have gained confidence in transferring HL to English and vice versa, for example,

Muallim: I am now able to translate from English to Somali.

Conceptual understanding was expanded in this instance due to gaining confidence in both their HL and English, this is because,

...children who benefit from literacy and concept development in their mother tongue are more likely to succeed in learning additional languages...' (Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013, p.510).

If the participants of the study demonstrated such positive attitudes towards their confidence in translating HL to English in such a brief time as this study, it is reasonable to consider the question: how would their performance in classroom be if

HL literacy was used alongside English as a medium of instruction in the longer term? Additionally, the benefit of learning HL extended beyond the participant children to their peers from other minority communities in the classroom. For example, a Year 4 child (of non-Somali origin) once disclosed to the first author that he read a bilingual (English and Somali book) to one of the participants of the study. Thus, the first author observed that,

The study appears to have positively impacted on a pupil who neither shares cultural nor linguistic identity with the Somali-origin pupils (Research diary).

Although it was not the scope of this study to observe how learning of Somali language HL could extend to the children from other communities, these observations are useful to note as further areas of research. The above is a powerful observation which depicts the realities hidden from view when policy makers construct policy which does not take account of the richness of the multicultural and multilingual reality in England.

#### **4. The case for home language policy**

The first author's thesis demonstrates how HL literacy learning by participants contributed positively to their wellbeing by enhancing their confidence, motivation, self-esteem, and positive attitude to learning. The thesis also demonstrated the need for HL policy in classrooms, if the aim of England's primary curriculum is introducing children to the essential knowledge that they need in order to be educated citizens (DFE, 2013).

The data from the study shows the intrinsic part that HL literacy plays in the child's life both inside and outside of the classroom. This has long been understood by education practitioners, children, families, and researchers, but has not been enacted by policy makers in England. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the conceptualisation of HL within education policy appears to be less strong today than it was four decades ago. Use of HL may increase self-confidence and provide a secure environment for children fostering positive attitudes to learning, particularly if they

are displaced from their native country. The doctoral study demonstrated that grasping the concept of English grammar by using their newly learned Somali grammar concepts fostered a desire in participants to share this HL literacy with their peers, family and communities.

In the context of migration, in most cases, the learner is expected to use a language other than their HL. The learning they receive is likely to differ from the learning experience of children learning in their native country. The learner may lack meaningful language signs as the new language can be unfamiliar to their brain (Benjamin, 2014). This, then, may create difficulty for the child to express themselves and constitute as barriers for their understanding of both their HL and acquiring the new language (in this case English). Barriers that presented from the doctoral study for both understanding HL and acquiring the new language of English, were a lack of HL literacy input at home as parents were found to be proficient in HL speaking skills but less confident in writing and reading. This is eclipsed however, by the dominance of English at school in all areas of literacy, often at the total expense of HL. Outside of the classroom this is compounded by, for example, interacting with friends in English, and older siblings too who are also subject to losing their HL proficiency and struggling to acquire English for the same reasons as the participants of this study.

Due to potential differences in ethnicity between the child and peer group, and the child and teacher, the child may find it a challenge in associating themselves with the new environment (school). Thus, this may force the child to feel alienation in the classroom. The newly arrived child may experience a delayed learning process, caused by the unfamiliar medium of instruction which might necessitate extra support. These barriers can establish an environment in which the child may feel embarrassed by the consequence of their inability to perform what their peer group are able to do (Jackson Jr. 2014).



## **5. Challenges to the introduction of home language policy**

In the above section, we have discussed the importance of HL literacy for the children's performance in the classroom, in the family and the wider community. However, despite this, a concrete HL policy is absent in England.

Bullock's Report (1975) was a helpful example in terms of preserving the child's culture as it clearly discouraged expectations of the newly arrived child to abandon their language and culture when they begin their school journey. It also emphasised that the reality of the child's life outside of school should be reflected in the curriculum. From the report, it is evident that keeping both the HL and dominant language prominent in the curriculum should be the expectation, if the aim is to advance the English language skills in classroom this current study concurs.

However, the contemporary reality is that we live in a complex and unpredictable world. The findings of the doctoral thesis illustrate the potential benefits and opportunities of focussing on the HL of pupils who have EAL and that these are being missed in policy and could be capitalised upon if a HL policy was adopted. This has far-reaching consequences beyond the immediacy of the primary classroom. For example, participants of the study did not only think about their current HL status but pondered the dilemmas they might encounter in the future if they would not be in a position to communicate with relatives back in Somalia.

Thus far, despite almost 50 years since the Bullock report (1975), no concrete measures have been adopted in English policy regarding the importance of maintenance of HL. In a time where anti-immigration sentiment can be seen to be increasing (Peresman et al., 2021) the argument for policy change regarding the importance of HL in schools, becomes both more important to resolve and more difficult to enact. Maintenance of HL alongside acquisition of English is in line with England's multicultural reality (Panayi, 2014). However, Adam (2014) postulated that since the mid-nineteenth century, education and politics have been intertwined and how they are organised reflect the social and political ways of viewing how the world works, therefore, political will is needed if such policy is to be enacted.

## **6. Conclusion:**

This chapter, evolved from the first author's doctoral study, which strongly proposes for the introduction of HL policy in England to enable teaching HL alongside English. It is argued that such policy would establish priorities and developments which are necessary for effective HL education. This is because the Primary National Curriculum in England (NCE) (DFE, 2013) suffers from the lack of HL enrichment which would empower EAL learners. Also, this policy if introduced would raise the awareness of English schools' obligations towards HL. As the example given at the beginning of this chapter about solving a simple arithmetic problem, and the doctoral study discussed here, it can be seen to be in the best interests of EAL learners in England to benefit from a HL policy introduced by the UK government.

NCE (DfE, 2013) rightly prescribes the promotion of the whole student: their spiritual, moral, cultural, mental, and physical development. Likewise, it instructs schools to prepare students for opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences for later life. If that is the aim, then it is actually inconceivable not to consider the multi-ethnic reality in England's classrooms where almost two million students are EAL learners? The doctoral study has highlighted that EAL pupils consider HL literacy learning as an integral resource for their identity and a tool for academic achievement.

As the responsible entity, as well as the institute that safeguards the wellbeing of children in England's schools, the Government of England needs to reflect more fully than it currently does in policy, the fact that education is for all and not only for an indigenous segment of society. Introducing a HL policy would be a step toward establishing priorities and developments necessary for EAL learners' social and academic attainment. Finally, to end the chapter, we would like to share some of our reflections on the first author's doctoral journey.

## **7. Lessons learned from the viva team: Doctoral student, Director of Studies, and Second Supervisor.**

During the study the pupil participants were keen to demonstrate what they had learned in the interventions delivered. They discussed this with the researcher conducting the study, Shamsudin Abikar. Shamsudin came to us (his doctoral

supervision team) with this request and between us all we arranged for the participants and those of their parents that could make it, to attend a language seminar being hosted by Jane Andrews, the Second Supervisor. This was part of Jane's own research. Both the Director of Studies and the Second Supervisor attended this event, where the pupils enacted a play, first in Somali language and then in English. This was a rich and rewarding display of the wider benefits of research. The children were proud to present what they had learned, and the parents delighted to hear it. The academic audience were impressed with the enthusiasm for learning conveyed. As part of this day the Director of Studies, Helen Bovill conducted a 'what it is like at university' session with the participants who were evidently proud, overawed and enthusiastic to think about this potential step in their life. These demonstrate the unintended consequences of research and how a project can grow in many ways.

As a Doctoral Researcher, I (Shamsudin Abikar) learned that before embarking on a doctoral journey, one needs to be mentally prepared for what it might bring, and it is important to be well-organized. Furthermore, despite working with Somali origin pupils for more than a decade in this particular school, I could not help but realise how little I knew about their emotions towards their HL. Prior to the study, I was anxious about choosing the topic as I was a little wary of whether participants would be interested in the study. However, I proved myself wrong when participant children demonstrated their strong feelings towards learning their HL. This study also helped me to learn more about the power of relationship building. This included: relationships between me the children and parents; as well as relationships between children, between parents, and between children and parents.

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