

What Do We Know and Not Know about Choice of Medium of Education in South-East Wales?

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ABSTRACT

It is widely assumed that as a result of school choice, Welsh-medium schools in south-east Wales largely cater for students from privileged, middle-class backgrounds. The main aim of this article is to examine whether evidence supports this assumption. While it is difficult to determine whether Welsh-medium schools are elite educational institutions or not, it is evident based on data on free school meals (an indicator of household poverty) ratios of schools, that Welsh-medium schools have on average lower proportion of students from the poorest households compared to English-medium schools in south-east Wales. This article also aims to explain how the context (the circumstances in which decisions are made) and process (how decisions are made) of school choice contribute towards the trends with regards to the social composition of Welsh-medium and English-medium schools in south-east Wales. This article argues that by drawing on both Rational Choice Theory and Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory (two theoretical frameworks that have been influential on school choice research), researchers will be able to gain a better understanding of the process underlying choice of medium of education.

Key words: Welsh-medium education; school choice; social class; Bourdieu; Habitus; Capital; Rational Choice Theory

<https://doi.org/10.16922/wje.19.2.8>

Introduction

Education is considered by many to be one of the main mechanisms in revitalising minority languages such as Welsh. For instance, in 2010, the Welsh Government established a Welsh-medium education strategy aimed at continuing the growth of Welsh-medium education. In the strategy, the Welsh Government states that Welsh-medium education ‘offers the best conditions for developing future bilingual citizens’ (WAG, 2010: 7). The establishment of Welsh-medium schools is considered to be particularly vital in areas of Wales that have relatively low proportions of Welsh speakers such as south-east Wales.

In south-east Wales, most parents have the choice of whether to send their children to a Welsh-medium or an English-medium school.¹ This choice is not available to every parent in Wales. Many parents who live in rural parts of Wales have limited choice in terms of their children’s schooling and children tend to attend the local ‘bilingual school’. The north-west county of Gwynedd, where the proportion of Welsh speakers is relatively high, remains the only local authority in Wales where the majority of children attend Welsh-medium primary schools.

In recent decades, there has been a growth in Welsh-medium education in south-east Wales. This is largely due to the commitment and demand from parents, teachers, political leaders and activists who have wanted children in south-east Wales to be educated in the Welsh language. In 1949, three Welsh-medium primary schools were opened for the first time in south-east Wales – Tyderwen in Maesteg, Ynys-Lwyd in Aberdare and Ysgol Gymraeg Caerdydd in Cardiff (Thomas, 2013a: 27). According to recent figures (see Welsh Government, 2016: 5), there are now sixty-four Welsh-medium primary schools, two Welsh-medium middle schools and nine Welsh-medium secondary schools in the area.² While the first Welsh-medium schools were established to provide children from Welsh-speaking backgrounds the opportunity to receive education in their mother tongue (Lewis, 2008: 75), the majority of primary, middle and secondary schoolchildren in anglicised areas such as south-east Wales now come from non-Welsh-speaking backgrounds (see StatsWales, 2016). These statistics dismiss Khlief’s (1976: 181) outdated statement that ‘Welsh-medium schools predominantly serve a Welsh-speaking middle-class’.

Despite this growth, Welsh-medium schools in south-east Wales remain a distinct minority compared to English-medium schools. Based on School Census data (see Welsh Government, 2016), approximately 12 per cent of

the primary schools and 10 per cent of the secondary schools in south-east Wales are Welsh-medium schools. Consequently, those who choose Welsh-medium education tend to make an active choice because English-medium education tends to be the default option for parents in this part of Wales.

In response to these developments, a number of studies have examined the factors that influence Welsh-speaking and non-Welsh-speaking parents to send their children to Welsh-medium schools (for example, Williams et al., 1978; Packer and Campbell, 2000; Thomas, 2010; Hodges, 2012; O'Hanlon, 2015). Yet, little research has examined the types of parents that send their children to Welsh-medium schools. At the same time, it is widely assumed that as a result of school choice, Welsh-medium schools in south-east Wales largely cater for the middle classes. For instance, in his study of public sector stakeholders in Wales, Mann (2011) found a clear perception among some of his participants that Welsh speakers and those educated in Welsh-medium schools in south-east Wales were predominantly from privileged socio-economic backgrounds.

The main aim of the article is to examine whether empirical evidence supports this assumption regarding the social composition of Welsh-medium schools in south-east Wales. This article will also illustrate how school choice contributes to the differences in the social composition of Welsh-medium and English-medium schools in south-east Wales. This article will draw on findings from previous research on choice of medium of education in south-east Wales as well as data from interviews with six parents who opted for Welsh-medium education that were carried out as part of my study exploring young people's aspirations in the south Wales valleys.³ This article will argue that drawing on two theories that have been influential on school choice research – Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory (which includes his concepts of economic, social and cultural capital and habitus) and Rational Choice Theory – will enable us to gain a better understanding of the process underlying choice of medium of education.

*The social composition of Welsh-medium and
English-medium schools in south-east Wales*

The proportion of students on free school meals (FSMs) in schools is the most accessible indicator for examining the social composition of

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Table 1. FSMs ratios of Welsh-medium and English-medium primary schools in south-east Wales*

<i>Local Educational Authority</i>	<i>Average for all schools</i>	<i>Primary English medium</i>	<i>Primary Welsh medium</i>	<i>Differences between English medium and Welsh medium</i>
Blaenau Gwent	27.2%	28.0%	10.7%	17.3%
Bridgend	21.7%	21.9%	18.9%	3.0%
Caerphilly	22.4%	23.8%	14.5%	9.3%
Cardiff	21.5%	22.9%	13.9%	9.0%
Merthyr Tydfil	21.7%	22.6%	13.2%	9.4%
Monmouthshire	10.6%	10.6%	10.6%	0.0%
Newport	19.0%	19.4%	13.8%	5.6%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	27.5%	29.6%	13.7%	15.9%
Torfaen	17.7%	18.2%	14.3%	3.9%
Vale of Glamorgan	12.2%	13.0%	8.2%	4.8%
South-east Wales average	20.2%	21.0%	13.2%	7.8%
Wales average	17.0%			

*Dual-stream primary schools have been omitted from the data.

Source: Welsh Government school census data 2014–16

Welsh-medium and English-medium schools in south-east Wales. As FSMs ratios fluctuate every year, I have chosen to look at the average percentage of students on FSMs between 2014 and 2016 from the school census data. Table 1 shows the average percentages of students on FSMs in Welsh-medium and English-medium primary schools in different local authorities across south-east Wales, and Table 2 shows figures for Welsh-medium and English-medium secondary schools.⁴

Similar to what Thomas (2013a) discovered based on data from 2005, it is evident that Welsh-medium primary schools and secondary schools across most of the local authorities in south-east Wales have on average lower percentages of students on FSMs compared to English-medium schools in these areas. The only exception is found in Monmouthshire (a relatively affluent local authority), with no percentage difference in the

Table 2. FSMs ratios of Welsh-medium and English-medium secondary schools in south-east Wales*

<i>Local Educational Authority</i>	<i>Average for all schools</i>	<i>Secondary English medium</i>	<i>Secondary Welsh medium</i>	<i>Differences between English medium and Welsh medium</i>
Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen	21.4%	21.7%	11.7%	10.0%
Bridgend	16.5%	16.9%	13.4%	3.5%
Caerphilly	21.0%	21.7%	11.8%	9.9%
Cardiff	21.9%	24.5%	8.3%	16.2%
Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf	20.1%	22.2%	11.6%	10.6%
Vale of Glamorgan	13.0%	13.9%	6.3%	7.6%
South-east Wales average	19.0%	20.2%	10.5%	9.7%
Wales average	16.6%			

*Prior to September 2016, the Welsh-medium secondary school for students in Blaenau Gwent, Newport and Monmouthshire was in Torfaen. Therefore, the schools within these authorities have been combined to make one category. The Welsh-medium secondary school for students in Merthyr Tydfil is in the neighbouring borough of Rhondda Cynon Taf. Therefore, the schools within these authorities have been combined to make one category.

Source: Welsh Government school census data 2014–16

average FSMs ratios of Welsh-medium primary schools and English-medium primary schools in this local authority (see Table 1).

Another trend that is evident in the tables is that the average FSMs ratios of Welsh-medium schools and English-medium schools vary across different local authorities. The FSMs ratios of Welsh-medium and English-medium schools tend to be higher in socially and economically deprived areas such as Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf compared to relatively affluent areas such as the Vale of Glamorgan.

However, we need to acknowledge that these tables mask differences between individual Welsh-medium and English-medium schools in south-east Wales. There are certain English-medium schools that have lower percentages of students on FSMs compared to Welsh-medium schools. Based on school census data, between 2014 and 2016, Shirenewton Primary

School, Monmouthshire and St David's Church in Wales, Vale of Glamorgan (both English-medium schools) were the two primary schools with the lowest average FSMs ratio in south-east Wales (0.2 per cent). Cowbridge High School, an English-medium school, was the secondary school with the lowest average FSMs ratio in south-east Wales (2.9 per cent) between 2014 and 2016.

More fundamentally, we must treat this data with caution as there are limitations of using FSMs ratios to measure the social composition of these schools. It is important to remember that this indicator only covers pupils who are eligible and who are also claiming FSMs. A recent Welsh Government report (2013: 2) discovered that not all eligible families apply for the scheme due to a range of factors such as the stigma attached to receiving FSMs. Based on data from England, Hobbs and Vignoles (2010: 685) also found that FSMs status does not capture large numbers of low-income households as they do not fall under the eligibility criteria. Therefore, we can conclude that the general trend is that Welsh-medium schools in south-east Wales have lower proportions of students from the poorest households as they have on average lower percentages of students on FSMs. Yet, it is difficult to determine whether Welsh-medium schools are elite educational institutions as information regarding FSMs status of students does not tell us the socio-economic characteristics of students who do not claim or are ineligible for the scheme.

*Choice of medium of education and the social composition of
Welsh-medium and English-medium schools in south-east Wales*

This part of the article explores how school choice contributes to the differences in terms of the social composition of Welsh-medium and English-medium schools in south-east Wales. Researchers such as Gorard et al. (2003: 183) argue that the housing market and economy as opposed to parental choice primarily affects the social composition of different schools. This is consistent with the marked differences between the FSMs ratios of English-medium and Welsh-medium schools in relatively deprived areas such as Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf, and the FSMs ratios of such schools in affluent areas such as the Vale of Glamorgan (see Tables 1 and 2).

Yet, the housing market and economy alone cannot adequately explain the variation in terms of the FSMs ratios of Welsh-medium and

English-medium schools. This is because Welsh-medium schools serve larger catchment areas, which includes the catchment areas of local English-medium schools. Thus, choice is a key factor which impacts on the social composition of Welsh-medium and English-medium schools in south-east Wales.

Over the previous decades, there have been a number of studies that have explored choice of medium of education in Wales (for example, Williams et al., 1978; Packer and Campbell, 2000; Thomas, 2010; Hodges, 2012; O'Hanlon, 2015). Yet, there has been little attempt to explore how the process of school choice may impact on the social composition of Welsh-medium and English-medium schools. Often, previous research has depicted choice in terms of medium of education as being a decontextualised process. As noted earlier, those who choose Welsh-medium education are essentially making an active choice as English-medium education is often the default option in south-east Wales because of the relatively high numbers of English-medium schools compared to Welsh-medium schools in this part of Wales. Furthermore, previous research implicitly presents choice of medium of education as being a rational choice. Rational choice theorists argue that parents make calculations of the costs and benefits of sending their child to different schools and choose the school that will provide their child with the greatest social, academic and economic benefits (see Bosetti, 2004). Existing studies on choice of medium of education have focused on the factors that influence parents to opt for either Welsh-medium or English-medium education and have paid little attention to the process underlying choice of medium of education. The factors that previous studies have identified which influence choice of medium of education in south-east Wales will now be explored.

Choice of medium of education in south-East Wales: a 'rational' choice?

In previous studies, cultural factors are considered to be one of the main factors that influence parents to opt for either Welsh-medium education or English-medium education (Packer and Campbell, 2000; Thomas, 2010; Hodges, 2012). In these studies, Welsh-speaking parents generally present their choice of Welsh-medium education as being a natural choice because they want their children to be educated in the same language as the language of their home. These studies also demonstrate that cultural factors

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may motivate non-Welsh-speaking parents to send their children to Welsh-medium schools as well with some of these parents expressing a desire for their children to learn the language despite not speaking Welsh themselves.

At the same time, the Welsh language may deter certain parents from sending their children to Welsh-medium schools with certain parents not wanting their children to learn the Welsh language (Packer and Campbell, 2000: 592). Researchers such as Gorard (1997: 26) have also found that some parents opt for English-medium education because they consider Welsh-medium education fosters a divisive nationalism among their students.

However, other parents may prioritise factors beyond cultural factors when making choices regarding medium of education. Existing studies have also highlighted how educational factors may influence parents to send their children to Welsh-medium schools (Packer and Campbell, 2000; Hodges, 2012). In these studies, certain parents cite the growing evidence of the cognitive benefits of bilingualism (see Baker, 2011, for a review of this research) as a reason for choosing Welsh-medium education. Furthermore, previous studies have shown that the reputation of Welsh-medium schools as being highly successful educational establishments may also direct parents towards choosing this type of school (Packer and Campbell, 2000; Thomas, 2010; Hodges, 2012).⁵

Educational factors may also direct parents towards choosing English-medium education instead of Welsh-medium education. We need to acknowledge that certain English-medium schools perform better compared to Welsh-medium schools. Based on school census data, in 2016, Cowbridge High School had the highest score in terms of average capped points score (the average of all of the students' eight best results) at Key Stage 4 (388.6). In previous studies, certain parents have referred to the good educational standards of an English-medium school as a reason for opting for English-medium education (for example, Thomas, 2013b). Certain non-Welsh-speaking parents who opt for English-medium education have also expressed concerns regarding the impact that Welsh-medium education would have had on their child as they would be taught in a language that was not their first language (see Packer and Campbell, 2000; Gorard, 1997). Another concern among non-Welsh-speaking parents is that they would be unable to support their child and help them with their school work if they had chosen Welsh-medium education as they did not understand Welsh (see Packer and Campbell, 2000; Thomas, 2013b).

Economic factors also play a role in shaping choice of medium of education. Due to the decentralisation of certain functions which started with the establishment of bodies such as BBC Cymru/Wales in 1964, the Welsh Office in 1965 and more recently the National Assembly for Wales in 1999, there has been an increase in the number of jobs that require Welsh speakers over the last half century. In addition, policies such as the recent Welsh Language Measure of 2011 which established a Welsh Language Commissioner, has made it a legal requirement for public bodies and certain private organisations to comply with standards relating to the Welsh language. As a result of these policy developments, parents who opt for Welsh-medium education perceive this type of education will provide their children with 'linguistic capital' (see Bourdieu, 1977a) as they perceive that the Welsh language will provide their children with an advantage when looking for work in Wales (for example, Williams et al., 1978; O'Hanlon, 2015). These studies have also discovered that parents who opt for Welsh-medium education consider that the Welsh language may provide their children with the means of becoming upwardly mobile as a number of higher-managerial or professional jobs, particularly within the public sector, in Wales require Welsh speakers. Statistical research to a certain extent provides support for parents' perception, indicating that Welsh speakers are less likely to be unemployed (for example, see Jones and Robinson, 2011: 55) and on average earn more (for example, see Makepeace and Wass, 2011: 86) than non-Welsh speakers, particularly in areas where Welsh language use is low.⁶

Yet, certain parents may be deterred from sending their children to Welsh-medium schools because of their perception of the economic value of the Welsh language. For instance, certain parents who opted for English-medium education have noted in previous research that they chose this type of education for their children as opposed to Welsh-medium education because they perceived that the benefits of speaking Welsh were restricted to the labour market in Wales (see Gorard, 1997; Packer and Campbell, 2000).

Situational factors (related to the location of the school to the home) also influence choice of medium of education. As there are fewer Welsh-medium schools in south-east Wales compared to English-medium schools, children tend to have to travel substantially longer distances to their local Welsh-medium school compared to their local English-medium school. Some children have to travel to the neighbouring local authority in order to attend their local Welsh-medium secondary school.

Under the Learners Travel (Wales) Measure 2008, there is a statutory duty for local authorities to provide free transport for students who have to travel either 2 miles or more (for primary school students) and 3 miles or more (for secondary school students) to their nearest suitable maintained school, which includes Welsh-medium schools (see Welsh Government, 2014).⁷ However, Welsh-medium education in south-east Wales remains to be a logistically inconvenient option for many parents and children. Previous studies have shown that the difficulties of travelling to the local Welsh-medium school and the convenient location of the local English-medium school may influence parents to opt for English-medium education (Packer and Campbell, 2000: 590; Thomas, 2013b: 169).

However, some parents may opt for Welsh-medium education mainly due to logistical factors. There are some parents who live closer to the local Welsh-medium school than the local English-medium school. Several participants in Evans's (2014: 211) recent study in Porthcawl noted that they sent their children to the Welsh-medium primary school because it was 'on the way to work'.

Choice of medium of education and Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory

However, we need to acknowledge that choice of medium of education is not solely the product of rational considerations. Influenced by Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory, researchers such as Gewirtz et al. (1995) and Butler and Hamnett (2010) have also illustrated how the possession of different forms of capital – economic (related to the possession of financial and material resources), social (associated with our social networks) and cultural capital (associated with our education and cultural knowledge) influences school choice. According to these researchers, parents from different class backgrounds adopt different strategies when it comes to deciding which school their child will attend. These studies identify parents, mostly from higher socio-economic backgrounds, who are active in the process of school choice and who use their economic, cultural and social capital to ensure that their children gain a place in the 'best' schools in the area. In contrast, due to their lack of economic, social and cultural capital, parents, particularly from lower socio-economic backgrounds, either find it difficult to understand vast swathes of information regarding different schools or are less inclined to engage in the process of school choice and consequently choose the closest school for their children.

Habitus is also considered by these researchers to be influential in the process of school choice. According to Bourdieu (1977b: 72), habitus corresponds to a set of 'durable' embodied dispositions, which we acquire at a young age from the family and from individuals within our community. At the same time, habitus is also responsive and may modify through the contact we make with individuals from different social groups (DiMaggio, 1979: 1464). For Bourdieu (1990: 64–5), habitus provides us with an idea of who we are and constitutes what is considered to be normal and reasonable behaviour for 'people like us'. Therefore, decisions concerning choice of school are also shaped by class-based dispositions regarding aspects of the school such as the type of students who attend the school, the attitudes of the teachers and the ethos of the school.

Bourdieu's concepts of capital and habitus may provide some explanation for the differences in the social composition of Welsh-medium and English-medium schools in south-east Wales. As aforementioned, parents tend to make an active choice when choosing Welsh-medium education due to the larger numbers of English-medium schools in south-east Wales. There may be a number of parents, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who may be hesitant in exercising school choice in south-east Wales and may opt for the local English-medium primary or secondary school. However, we also need to acknowledge that a number of parents who opt for English-medium education exercise school choice and consider a range of schools before choosing a school for their child. The role that different forms of capital and habitus may play in shaping parents' choice of medium of education will now be explored further.

The different levels of economic capital that parents possess affect what schools they consider to be practical and impractical to send their children to. As noted earlier, some parents are deterred from sending their children to the local Welsh-medium school as it is generally further away from their home compared to the local English-medium school. On the one hand, the choice to opt for English-medium education on these grounds may be perceived as being rational as it is more of a convenient option and it also saves time and money. However, we also need to acknowledge how the possession of economic capital affects the practicalities of travelling to certain schools. Parents who possess low levels of economic capital may find it more difficult to send their children to a Welsh-medium school in south-east Wales compared to those who possess higher levels of economic capital because they may not have access to a car and may consider public transport costs to be too expensive. Therefore, the lack of economic capital

may prevent certain parents from sending their children to Welsh-medium schools.

As most parents who opt for Welsh-medium education are not fluent in the language, it is highly unlikely that these parents have been educated in a Welsh-medium school. Existing studies on school choice have demonstrated how possession of cultural capital affects ability to analyse and assess different sources of information regarding schools (Butler and Hamnett, 2010; Alegre and Benito, 2012). These studies have found that parents who possess cultural capital, predominantly those from higher socio-economic backgrounds, are able to understand and evaluate information from published evidence because of their education and familiarity with the education system. With regards to choice of medium of education, research has found that published evidence such as inspection reports are important sources of information for parents who opt for Welsh-medium education (see Thomas, 2013b: 177). For instance, within my own study, one of the parents in the research, Mark's mother, noted that she had carried out her own research on local schools based on inspection reports before choosing Welsh-medium education for her children:

I did my own research to be honest 'cos I had read their [the Welsh-medium school] inspection report. And I sort of ... if I knew people whose children had gone there then I spoke to them and said 'What you think?' and that was it really ... But, I would make up my own mind ... I read the inspection report [on the Welsh-medium school] and it was good.

At first glance, Mark's mother's choice of Welsh-medium education for her children appears to be rational. Based on inspection reports, she chose to send her children to a Welsh-medium school as she considered it to be a 'good' school, which her children would benefit from attending. At the same time, we could argue that Mark's mother's possession of cultural capital in the form of her familiarity with the education system (she had progressed to university and was now a teacher) enables her to decipher and evaluate information from documents such as inspection reports confidently regarding local schools. We also need to acknowledge that certain parents who opt for English-medium education may also possess cultural capital, thus enabling them to be able to carry out their own research and decipher and decode published information about schools.

On the other hand, existing studies have found that parents who lack cultural capital may find it difficult to be able to analyse and assess published

information because of their educational background and unfamiliarity with the education system (Gewirtz et al., 1995). As a result, these parents tend to rely more on what they hear from individuals in their social network rather than what is written in published materials (Alegre and Benito, 2012).

The social networks of individuals play an important part in shaping parents' choice of medium of education. Existing studies have found that one of the main sources of information regarding Welsh-medium schools for parents are people within their social network such as extended family members, friends and other parents (Packer and Campbell, 2000; Hodges, 2012; Thomas, 2013b). As Ball and Vincent (1998: 380) note, there are many different grapevines that parents have access to and access to particular grapevines are not only structured spatially, but also are based on social class relations with individuals tending to mix with other 'people like us'. The social class differences in the social networks identified in such studies may explain the differences in the social composition of Welsh-medium and English-medium schools. Certain parents, who opt for Welsh-medium education, may have gained knowledge about Welsh-medium schools from an extensive social network which includes other parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds and parents who have sent their children to Welsh-medium schools. The same may be said about certain parents who have considered a range of schools before opting for a particular English-medium school. In contrast, for some parents, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, their social network may be limited to other parents and neighbours from similar socio-economic backgrounds who may influence them to send their children to the local English-medium school. Future research needs to explore the role different types of social networks play in shaping choice of medium of education.

Previous research has also demonstrated how the social composition of the school may play a decisive role in the process of school choice (see Gewirtz et al., 1995). Relating to Bourdieu's concept of habitus, this research has shown that parents want to send their children to a school where their children will have classmates from similar social backgrounds. Knowing that their children will attend a school which is different to the one that other children in the area attend may deter parents from sending their children to a Welsh-medium school. For example, studies have shown that parents may choose to send their children to an English-medium school because they feel that these schools provide a base for neighbourhood

friendships and prevent their children from being ostracised (Packer and Campbell, 2000: 590; Thomas, 2013: 169). Evidence also suggests that the assumption that Welsh-medium schools are populated by the middle classes may play a role in discouraging parents from sending their children to these types of schools (see Packer and Campbell, 2000: 591).

In contrast, parents, particularly from middle-class backgrounds, may be motivated to send their children to schools that have middle-class intakes because they believe that being with children from socially and economically advantaged backgrounds will be beneficial for their children's education and will prevent their children from ending up in the 'wrong groups' (Gewirtz et al., 1995: 34). For instance, one of the parents in my study, Luke's mother (a qualified nurse), who had opted for Welsh-medium education, referred to the social composition of the local English-medium primary school at the time:

I think where we lived at the time when Luke was younger ... the catchment area would have been a rough school and I just didn't want him to go to that school because there were so many children from the local council estates that used to go to that school. I didn't want them to go into that school ... so that's why I chose for them to go to a Welsh [medium] school.

In the extract above, Luke's mother discusses how she considered the local English-medium primary school to be 'rough' largely because of the catchment area of the school. She talks about the types of students who she envisaged attended this school – 'children from the local council estates'. As McKenzie (2015: 20) notes, popular representations promoted by certain media outlets and politicians depict estates as 'sites of wrongness', populated by people who lack aspiration, moral values and work ethic which are needed to become a successful citizen in today's society. For Luke's mother, sending her children to a Welsh-medium school would prevent her children from becoming friends with children who may have a negative impact on their schooling.

Yet, as discussed already, there are certain English-medium schools that have similar or lower proportions of children on FSMs in comparison to Welsh-medium schools. These English-medium schools may attract certain parents because of their socially and economically advantaged intakes.

Discussion

The main objective of this article was to examine if there were differences in the social composition of Welsh-medium and English-medium schools in south-east Wales. Based on analysis of FSMs ratios, on average, the percentages of students who are on FSMs in Welsh-medium schools are lower compared to English-medium schools in south-east Wales. However, there are certain English-medium schools such as those situated in affluent areas which have lower FSMs ratios compared to Welsh-medium schools. Yet, we must acknowledge the weaknesses of using FSMs status as an indicator of social and economic disadvantage. Crucially, FSMs status does not tell us anything about the socio-economic background of students who are ineligible or do not claim FSMs. However, FSMs status does provide a reasonable measure of family poverty. Therefore, while it is difficult for us to state that students from Welsh-medium schools come from privileged backgrounds based on the data that is available, it is fair for us to conclude that Welsh-medium schools have on average lower proportions of students from the poorest households. While there are alternative indicators to measure socio-economic characteristics such as parental occupations, household income or aggregated measures of socio-economic status for the area in which an individual lives, these indicators are fairly inaccessible compared to FSMs ratio and still have weaknesses (see Gorard, 2012).

This article also aimed to explain the differences between the FSMs ratios of Welsh-medium and English-medium schools. Along with the economy and housing market, parental choice is a major factor which contributes to the differences in the social composition of Welsh-medium and English-medium schools. In order to understand how choice of medium of education impacts on the social composition of schools, we need to acknowledge the context in which choices are made regarding medium of education in south-east Wales. As there are relatively few Welsh-medium schools in south-east Wales, parents who opt for Welsh-medium education in south-east Wales are likely to have made an active choice with regards to their child's education primarily because they are making a choice that is different to the decisions made by other parents within their neighbourhood. Yet, we should not colour all parents who opt for English-medium education as being uninvolved in the process of school choice. While some parents who opt for English-medium education may have only considered the local English-medium school for their children, there are other parents who do exercise choice and consider a range of

schools before choosing an English-medium school that they think is suitable for their children.

Previous studies on choice of medium of education have often depicted choice of medium education as being a rational choice among parents, with parents portrayed as considering the advantages and disadvantages of different schools and choosing the school that will benefit their child the most. Existing studies have shown how perceptions of the educational standards of Welsh-medium and English-medium schools and perceptions regarding the cultural, cognitive and economic value of the Welsh language shape choice of medium of education. The proximity of the school to the home is also a factor that influences choice of medium of education with parents tending to choose schools that are convenient to travel to.

However, we also need to acknowledge how the possession of different levels of capital and habitus shape what parents consider to be the 'best' schools for their children. The uneven distribution of social and cultural capital and to some extent economic capital expands the choices available for certain parents and constrains the choices available for other parents in terms of medium of education. Habitus also plays a role in decisions concerning medium of education as class-based dispositions may shape the way in which parents perceive different aspects of the schools such as the social composition of the school.

Future funded research is required to explore the context and process of choice of medium of education in south-east Wales. With statistics indicating that Welsh-medium schools have relatively lower proportions of children on FSMs, future research needs to compare and contrast the process of school choice among parents from different social backgrounds. Furthermore, there is an urgent need for researchers to explore what prevents parents, particularly those from poor households, from sending their children to Welsh-medium schools. In addition, future research needs to examine the extent to which different characteristics and different factors influence choice of medium of education. Drawing on Rational Choice Theory as well as Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory will enable researchers to gain a better understanding of choice of medium of education. With no signs that children in all schools in Wales will be educated through the medium of Welsh in the near future, research into this area is vital in order to help Welsh Government to develop policies that will enable children from all social backgrounds to access Welsh-medium education.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Gareth Rees and the peer reviewers for their invaluable comments on this article.

Notes

- ¹ Welsh-medium schools are defined as schools in which students are taught and assessed in the Welsh language (apart from the subject of English) and Welsh is the day-to-day language of the school; English-medium schools are defined as schools in which students are taught and assessed mainly in the English Language. However, students study Welsh as a second language up until Key Stage 4 (WAG, 2007).
- ² Dual stream primary schools are included in these figures.
- ³ While the number of parents interviewed as part of my study was small, I believe that the data from these interviews supplement findings from previous research on choice of medium of education and school choice.
- ⁴ Figures for middle schools (which educate children from the age of 3 to 16–18) have been split, with figures for children up to Year 6 (the final year of primary school) included in the primary school figures and figures for children from Year 7 (the first year of secondary school) and above included in the secondary school figures.
- ⁵ Statistics indicate that Welsh-medium schools on average perform better than English-medium schools (see Thomas, 2013a). While researchers such as Reynolds et al. (1998) have argued that school processes and practices contribute to this trend, others such as Gorard (2000) contend that the higher educational standards of Welsh-medium schools are largely due to the socio-economic characteristics of the students in these schools.
- ⁶ However, this does not necessarily mean that speaking Welsh causes Welsh speakers to have higher earnings and lower unemployment rates. Other factors such as educational attainment also contribute towards differences in earnings and employment rates.
- ⁷ There is no statutory duty for local authorities to provide free transport to post-16 students (Welsh Government, 2014: 17).

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