



Report

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School Language Survey: Abraham Moss Community School

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1. Introduction

Our study is based on multilingualism in schools and how secondary school students, in particular, use different languages to communicate. We have anonymously surveyed around 100 students from Abraham Moss Community School, generating data which will hopefully provide insight into what languages are used, how they are used, and attitudes towards them.

Children of immigrant families are often assumed to be held at a disadvantage in society. However, it is clear that multilingualism is something that should be celebrated in the UK. English as a lingua franca means that its status is one of international prowess; English speakers are inevitably on the up. For people moving to the UK, learning English as a second language (L2) is often deemed as necessary in order to elevate the amount of accessible opportunities. Many families, quite rightly, still opt to speak their heritage language in the safety of their own homes and therefore feel it necessary for their children to learn to speak this language as well. By retaining a sense of identity through speaking a heritage language, speech communities are likely to form where those of similar ethnic backgrounds settle within a certain area. A school located in or near a speech community may be reflected in the speech of its students. Children who speak multiple languages may also tend to have peers and friends who speak the same language as them.

The questions that we are aiming to answer using the data we have collected include the following:

- *Does place of birth affect English language proficiency?*
- *What are the most common languages (apart from English) spoken in the school?*
- *Do languages in the school reflect nearby speech communities?*
- *Does family have an influence on choice of language outside of the home?*
- *Are students fluent in all languages that they speak? Can they read and write in these languages?*
- *Do supplementary schools aid the learning of a language?*
- *How do the school cater for multilingual students?*

We have to remember that our data only accounts for a small percentage of students in the school. We must also note that because of the children being of a young age, their answers may not be entirely accurate. However, it is important to understand how they themselves perceive the languages that they speak and their awareness of who speaks what around them.

2. Case Study

Abraham Moss Community School is a large school based in Crumpsall in North Manchester. It caters for children aged 3 – 16 years, but our focus was those in Year 7, aged between 11 and 12. The school prides itself on its multiculturalism and multilingualism: according to the Department for Education, 80.1% of pupils at the school have English as an additional language. This made it a suitable location for our survey into multilingualism in schools.

Crumpsall is a largely residential, working-class area around three miles north of Manchester city centre. The school is very involved with the community and runs projects relating to the residents from ethnic minorities in the area; they run a 'Talk English' project to educate adults in the community and equip them with more fluency in English. This is alongside a 'Somali Supplementary School' specifically aimed at helping Somali members of the community to learn English. These projects suggest that multilingualism is prominent in Crumpsall and neighbouring areas, and that the school helps to educate those who have English as a second language.

Abraham Moss is categorised as a community school, meaning it is state-funded and all teaching staff are employed by the local education authority (LEA). The school was issued with a flagship status by the Inclusion Quality Mark in September 2014. It is evident from the website, and upon entering the school, that the institution is proud of being inclusive and ethnically diverse. The website immediately mentions that the school is "committed to celebrating diversity" and this is further seen in the GCSE languages offered at the school. Alongside the expected modern foreign languages (French and German), the school also offers Urdu as a GCSE.

Our method of interviewing the pupils assessed who they spoke which languages to, and their levels of fluency in all languages. The survey asked the children what languages they spoke to various family members and what languages these family members would use when addressing them. By means of adding a question to the original survey, we also elicited information about what languages some of the students spoke to their peers. This was important as it gauged the status of heritage languages beyond the school gates, and helped create a picture of the children's attitudes towards the languages they speak. The survey also assessed the students' proficiency of all languages, including English. We asked them to count to 10, name body parts, describe family members and daily routines in both English and their home language or languages. Each student was given a score out of 3 for how well they performed in these four tests, which was totalled out of 12 to work out their perceived language proficiency. We also asked the pupils whether they could read and write in their target languages. They demonstrated their ability by writing small samples of the languages on our survey sheets. As some students were reluctant to speak in languages other than English, we often had to spend some time encouraging them. Whilst time-consuming, it paid off to spend longer reassuring the children, as most of the time their fluency was higher than they would have initially let us believe.

In order to gain further insight, we emailed the school administration with the intentions of finding out what the school has in place to cater for multilingual students. We wanted to know whether there are any additional language provisions offered by the school and if they would have an impact on the languages spoken by the children or their attitudes towards multilingualism. Additionally, we wanted to obtain an overview of the languages spoken by staff in the hope that it might show the school's capacity to relate to multilingual students.

3. Data

After gathering our data, we have identified the heritage languages used in the school. Urdu appears to be the most popular language, with a total of 47 students out of 99 having this as their first language. We have displayed the data in figures 1 and 2, where it can be seen that 47% of those surveyed said that Urdu is their main language. Other popular languages (other than English) include Punjabi and Arabic, with Somali, Albanian and Farsi also being spoken by a small majority of students.

Figure 1

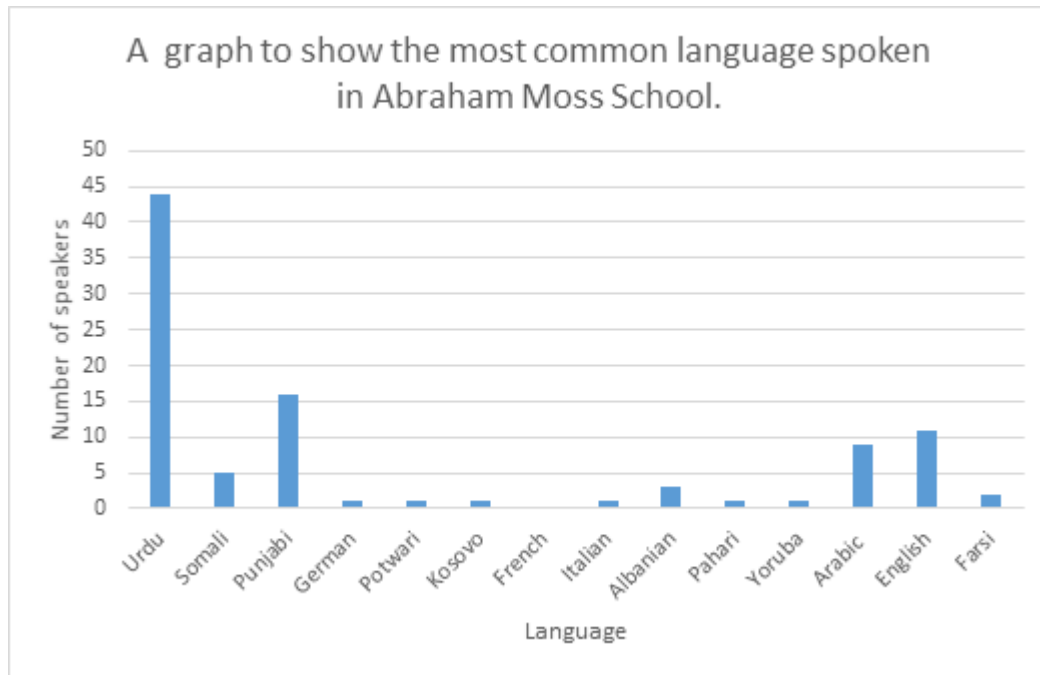


Figure 2

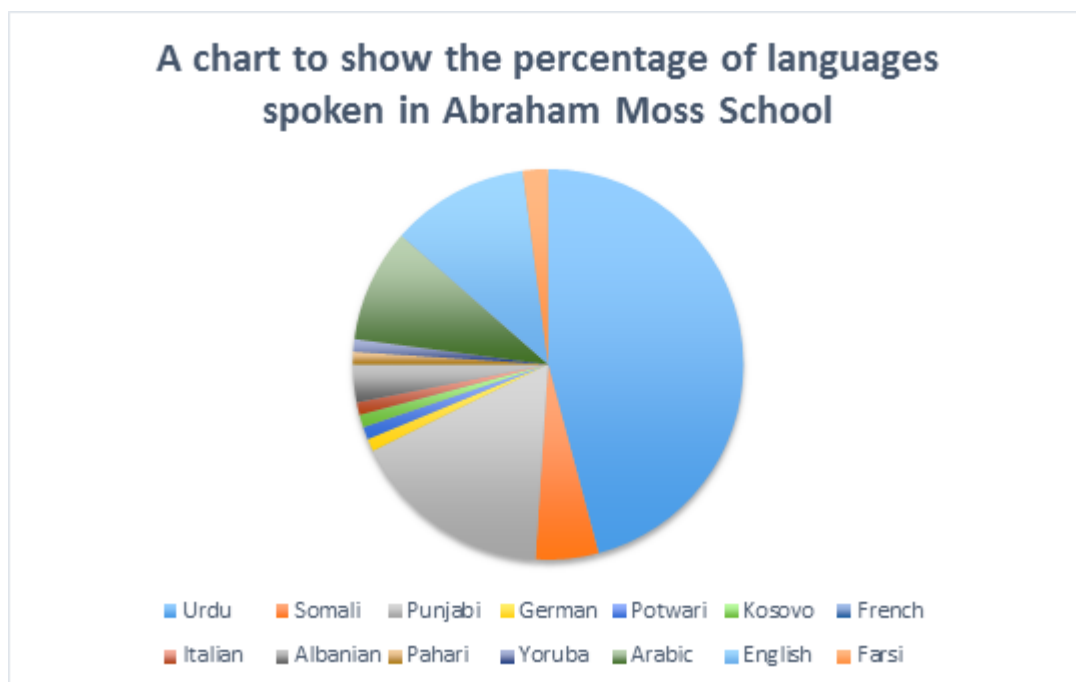


Figure 3

Home Language	Speakers	Percentage
Urdu	47	47%
Somali	5	4%
Punjabi	16	16%
German	1	1%
Potwari	1	1%
Kosovo	1	1%
French	0	0%
Italian	1	1%
Albanian	3	3%
Pahari	1	1%
Yoruba	1	1%
Arabic	9	9%
English	11	11%
Farsi	2	2%

In our first report, in order to find out whether the languages spoken in the school accurately reflect the nearby speech communities, we gathered data about the diversity of the population living in the areas surrounding the school. We found that the population of Crumpsall, where the school is situated, is predominantly White British, but that the population of an area very near by (Cheetham Hill) is predominantly Asian (UK Census 2011). We also found that according to OFSTED's January 2014 report, there are over 60 languages spoken in the school, and that the majority of Abraham Moss Community School is of Pakistani origin (2014). We found that another school, King David High School, situated very closely in the same area, is much less diverse. As can be seen in Figure 1, the most widely spoken languages in the school other than English are Punjabi and Urdu. As Urdu and Punjabi are the national and provincial languages of Pakistan respectively, this is reflective of the surrounding communities, who are mostly of Pakistani origin. Arabic is the liturgical language of the Islamic religion and is the next most widely spoken language in the school (Ethnologue, 2009). Many of the students in the school attend Mosque school or Mosque services and learn Arabic, suggesting that their families are Muslim, therefore this is also reflective of the surrounding communities.

It is interesting to note that only 11 students out of 99 stated English as their only home language. The other 88 speak multiple languages, including English, which again proves the diversity of both the school and the area that it is situated in.

Figure 4

English proficiency	Number of students
100%	97
92%	1
83%	1

The section of the survey that consisted of the proficiency test provided clear evidence that almost all of the students surveyed had 100% proficiency in English. Only two students were found not to have 100% proficiency, with Student 51 gaining 92% and Student 66 gaining 83%. It was noted that Student 66 was probably able to describe the routine but didn't want to, either because they felt shy or because they got bored of doing the survey. Student 51 gained 2/3 in describing their family, hence their score of 92%.

Figure 5

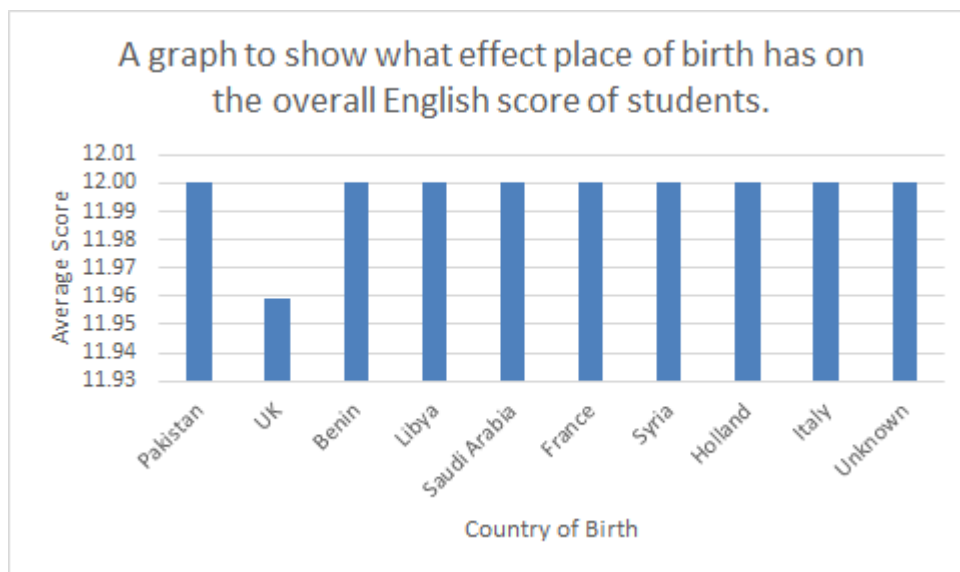


Figure 6

Students born outside of UK	Students born in UK
39	60

Another question that we wanted to answer was whether place of birth affects language proficiency. Student 66 was born in the UK and Student 51 was born in Pakistan, moving to the UK in their childhood (unspecified). 39 of the 99 students surveyed were born outside of the UK, only one of these students did not gain 100% proficiency. A number of the students born outside the UK were reported to have moved to the UK when they were up to 11 years old, this would suggest that even though they did not travel to the UK until this age, their level of proficiency was not affected. Figure 5 shows that the only students that did not gain 12/12 in the English proficiency test were born in the UK, and the average score was still 11.96/12, suggesting that English proficiency was very high regardless of the place of birth of the students. As a result of these findings, the only conclusion that can be made is that place of birth does not affect English language proficiency, however, with a larger sample size, and a more thorough test of language proficiency, we might find other results, and for this reason, the conclusion we have made cannot necessarily be considered as reliable.

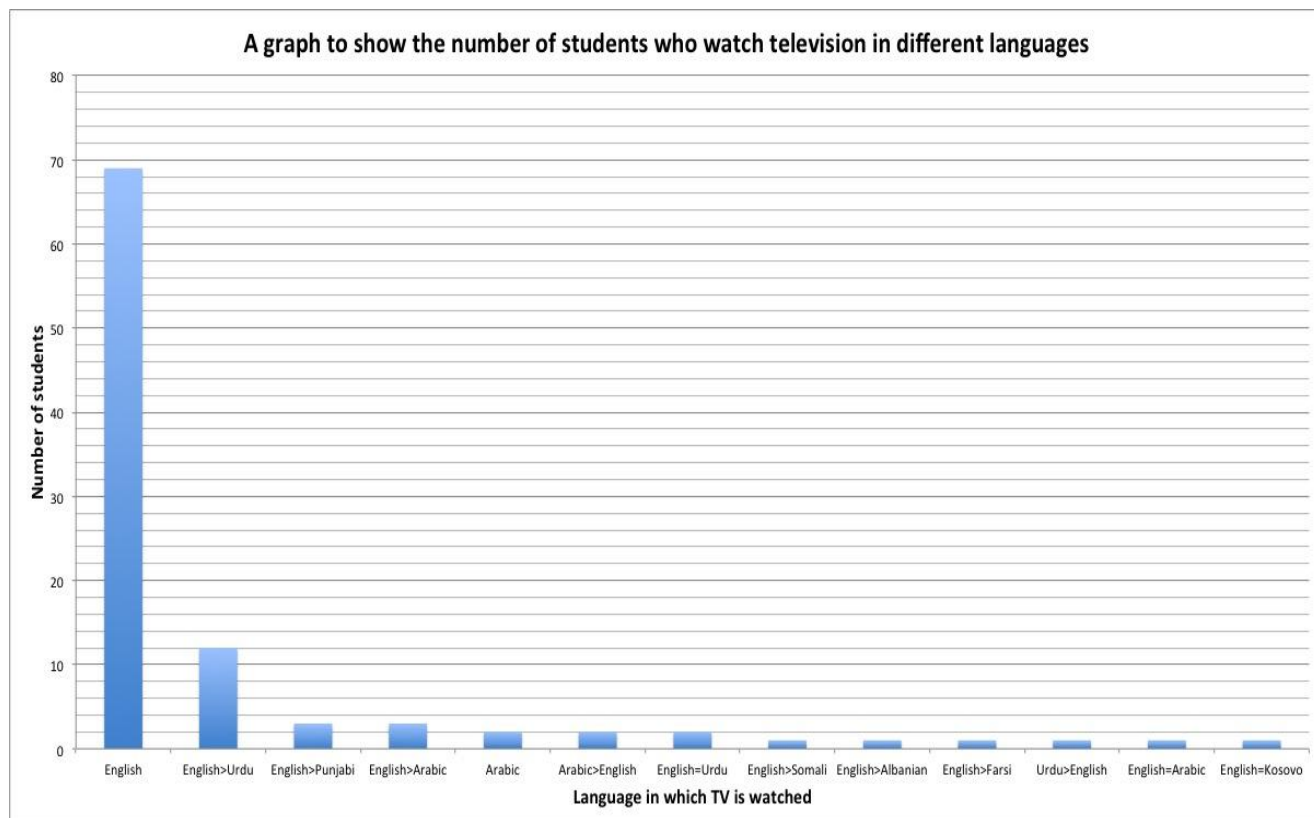
Figure 7

Supplementary School	Total	Can also write in home language
No	64	24
Arabic School	7	7
Mosque	19	9
Mosque School	3	1
Farsi School (Used to)	1	1
Arabic School (Used to)	1	1
Mosque online	1	1
Sunday School	1	1

In addition to this, we were investigating whether supplementary schools aid language learning. In our first report we found that “the school also offers a Somali Supplementary School on Sundays, where they offer additional language support for Somali families.” Of the 99 children that we surveyed, 1 student reported attending this specific school. This student was reported both to be fluent in reading and writing in Somali, as well as gaining 100% proficiency in the test when asked to speak in Somali. As can be seen in figure 5 above, a total of 31 students reported learning Arabic either at Arabic school, or at the Mosque, or at an equivalent establishment. Although the Mosque is not specifically a supplementary school, the students still learn Arabic there, suggesting that the Mosque acts as a quasi school environment. 68% of the students attending the supplementary schools can write in their home language, compared with only 38% of the students who don’t attend any kind of

supplementary school. This difference between the two provides good evidence that the supplementary schools aid language learning, as 30% more of those who do attend supplementary schools can write in their home language than those who don't.

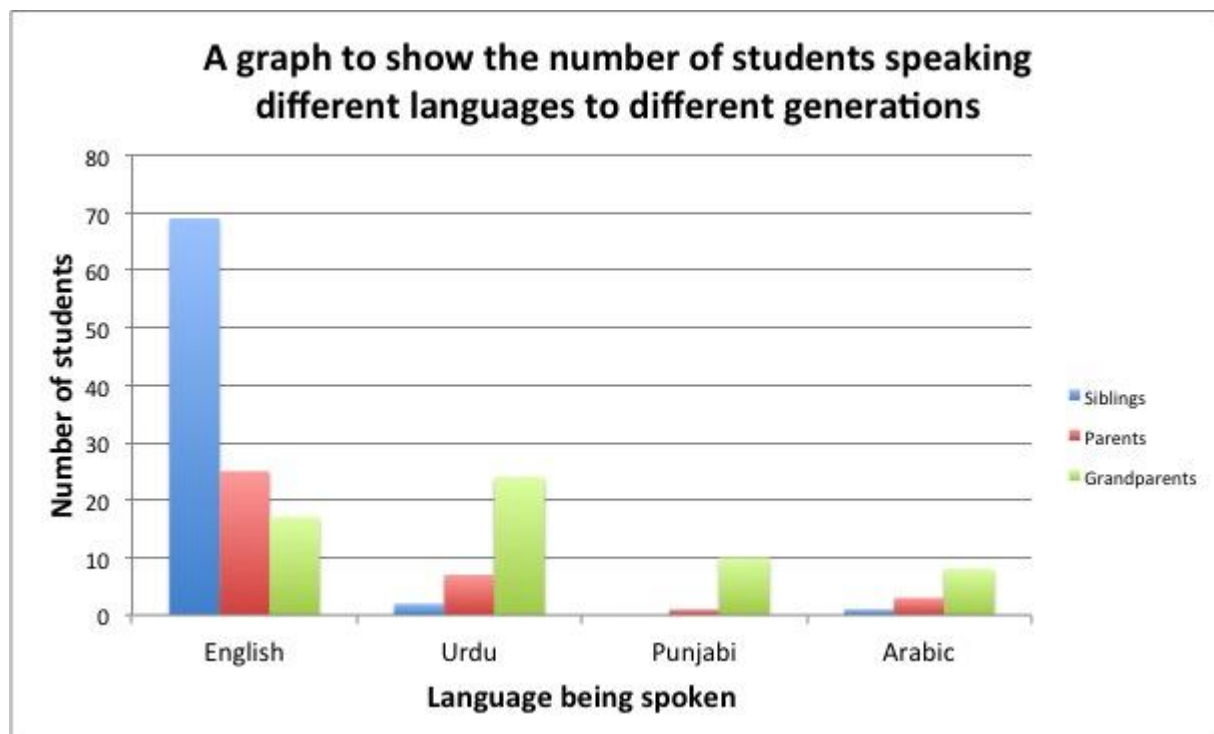
Figure 8



The domains of language use include reading books, being read books (by parents), watching television and films. Children may find themselves inclined to reading or listening in their heritage language when it comes to all kinds of media, what with it being readily accessible in many languages here in the UK. Although many books are often translated, films tend to be subtitled and occasionally dubbed. However, as the majority of students are proficient in English, there would be little need for this. They may instead choose to watch television programmes or films that originate from their home land. For example, there are many Bollywood films, as well as channels that cater for specific speech communities. Our data shows that English is in fact the most popular language for both reading books and watching television, with the responses of 74 and 69 students respectively. Most of the answers also included English, whether as a primary or secondary choice alongside Urdu, Punjabi, Farsi etc. Only 1 respondent reads and 2 watch television in Arabic alone. It

appears that even bilingual children often opt for English, which is perhaps unsurprising as it would be expected that most surrounding media is available in this language.

Figure 9



We have discovered a generational shift present, whereby children use different languages with older generations of their family than they do with their own. It turns out that, when looking at the top four languages in isolation, English is used more with siblings whereas Urdu, Punjabi and Arabic are used more when speaking to parents. The frequency increases yet again when speaking to grandparents. This may be because parents, and grandparents even more so, prefer using their heritage language at home. If born in the UK, it is likely that all children in a family will have a higher proficiency of English than of their heritage language. We can therefore expect the students to mostly speak English to their siblings, as proved in figure 8. We also wanted to find out if there is a correlation between the languages that the students use to speak to their siblings compared with their peers. Whilst attending an English-speaking school, it may be expected that students would speak English when in school vicinity. However, it could be the case that students speaking the same heritage language will tend to be more sociable with one another and use this language ability as a means of exclusivity among friends. As an example, we have looked at some students who speak Urdu as a home language. Out of 11 respondents, 6 claim to speak English to both

their siblings and peers. 3 of these also specified that they speak English to their friends even if they happen to speak Urdu. Those who speak both English and Urdu to their siblings also use English with their peers but 1 respondent occasionally uses Urdu with their peers as well.

At Abraham Moss, it became evident that the school caters for the large variety of multilingual students on various platforms; they implement many different methods in order to meet their students' specific learning needs and requirements. To aid the learning from the very beginning, Abraham Moss Community School employ six full time teachers, alongside four bilingual teaching assistants; this is considered a large department solely dedicated to teaching English as an additional language. Within the department, staff training is provided, teaching and supporting partnerships inside the classroom are formed, and the opportunity to gain qualifications are offered to older learners. Pastoral support is also accessible for all, including the parents of the students. This therefore allows parents, who might not have a high level of proficiency in English, to be provided with support in order to benefit their child's education in the home environment. Furthermore, free ESOL (*English to speakers of other languages*) lessons are provided to recently arrived parents to help enhance the English skills required to help support their children, as well as to help them in coping with UK life.

Additionally, the matter of bilingualism is perceived as an honour rather than a disadvantage. Consequently, in order to aid the development of this, students are encouraged and entered for as many language GCSE qualifications as possible, other than English. It is a key focus at Abraham Moss, to encourage the development of all languages. Urdu is offered as a language option in each year group, due to the heritage and speaking of many students. This is reflected in our findings (figures 1 and 2).

The school also conducts meetings for parents of specific cultures or linguistic groups. As a result, confidence is enhanced and they are able understand that the school both listens and appreciates their needs and requirements. For example, in order to cater for students and parents of a Somalian heritage, a Somali supplementary school is held at the school every Sunday. It is organised entirely by the Somali community, with minimal, purely practical support from the school itself.

Students are encouraged to read in languages other than English and so the school library is readily supplied with books in various languages. Alongside this is the opportunity for the

pupils to train as young translators, enabling the children to see the importance of multilingualism and benefit from it first-hand.

Staffing also holds a variety of language speaking teachers too. Languages spoken by teachers include: Urdu, Arabic, Kurdish, Yoruba, Romanian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Italian, Punjabi, French, and German. The main receptionist is fluent in five languages, those being English, Urdu, Punjabi, Gujarati and Hindi. This therefore prevents any conversation barrier arising.

4. Conclusion

This study allowed an in depth look into the languages spoken and how they're used within the community at Abraham Moss Community School and the surrounding areas. From our research, it's clear that the school prides itself on its vast diversity and caters to the needs of a plethora of ethnic backgrounds, partially shown through its additional language provisions. The school has a large English as an additional language (EAL) department, consisting of staff who provide staff training, teach EAL, provide pastoral support, and interpret in meetings for parents and students.

Our research succeeded in answering all of the questions we had about the school's multilingualism. Our data was limited, and although this decreases the reliability of our research, we found evidence that place of birth does not seem to have a significant effect on English language proficiency, as almost all of the students had 100% proficiency in English, and those that didn't were close. We also found that supplementary schools do appear to have a positive impact in learning a language, and that there was a generational shift present in what language the students speak to relatives and peers in. Most bilingual children from our sample would choose to read books, watch television and speak to their peers in English over their home language, this is interesting but perhaps unsurprising, as English resources are much more readily available in comparison to their heritage languages, which are spoken less in the UK.

This study confirmed what we predicted from our original research of other literature, that the main languages spoken in the school other than English would be Urdu and Punjabi, as this reflects the surrounding areas of Cheetham Hill and Crumpsall.

We also found that Arabic was prolific in the school, which aligns with expectations as Islam is the state religion in Pakistan (the origin country of many students).

Our method provided us with fascinating results, and allowed us to discover a large majority of the information we set out to find out. Given the opportunity, we would put more research into whether place of birth affects English language proficiency, as our data suggests that there is no difference between those born in the UK and those born elsewhere, but a larger sample size could prove different. More rigorous proficiency testing could provide more in-depth information into how different factors affect how competent students are at speaking different languages. Finally, a larger sample size would enable us to gather more reliable data in order to gain sturdier evidence to make more confident conclusions.

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