

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

**PARENTS'
WILLINGNESS AND THOUGHTS OF ENGLISH IMMERSION**

A Pro Seminar Thesis in English

by

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HUMANISTINEN TIEDEKUNTA KIELTEN LAITOS

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Parents' willingness and thoughts of English immersion

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Tämän kvantitatiivisen proseminaarityön tarkoituksena oli tutkia vanhempien tietämystä kielikylpyopetuksesta sekä heidän halukkuuttaan tarjota sitä englanninkielisenä lapsilleen. Tarkoitus oli selvittää, tietävätkö vanhemmat kielikylvystä entuudestaan ja olisivatko he kiinnostuneita laittamaan lapsensa kielikylpyopetukseen. Tutkielmassa tarkasteltiin myös vanhempien käsityksiä siitä, miten kielikylpy vaikuttaa esim. kielelliseen kehitykseen tai muiden aineiden oppimiseen. Tutkielma tarjosi vanhemmille kahta kielikylpymallia, osittaisen ja totaalisen, joista vanhemmat saivat valita mieluisemman. Tutkimukseen vastasi noin 60 ensimmäisen ja toisen luokan vanhempaa kahdesta Jyväskylän alakoulusta. Vastaaminen tapahtui suomen kielellä kysymyslomakkeella, jossa oli sekä monivalinta- että avoimia kysymyksiä.

Tutkielman viitekehyksenä käytettiin aiempia tutkimuksia kielikylvyn tehokkuudesta ja tuloksista sekä sen vaikutuksista äidinkieleen ja muuhun oppimiseen. Tutkielma hyödynsi myös useita kielikylvyn määritelmiä sekä kielikylpyoppaita. Kielikylpy on usein päiväkodeissa tai alakouluilla alkavaa vieraan kielen opetusta, joka kytketään leikkiin ja käytännön tilanteisiin. Kielikylvyn periaatteena on, että kieli opitaan omaksuen, havainnoiden, toistaen ja toimien. Oppimisympäristön luonteeseen kuuluu toiminnallisuus, lapsikeskeisyys, innostavuus ja kannustavuus. Kieli toimii osana jokapäiväistä elämää ja muodostuu näin luonnolliseksi osaksi lasten verbaalista maailmaa.

Tutkimuksen aineistoa tutkittiin kvantitatiivisin menetelmin, mutta avointen kysymysten kohdalla myös laadullista analysointia käytettiin. Tilastollisesti merkittävä tulos oli vanhempien halukkuus osallistua kielikylpyyn. Tulokset osoittivat, että lähes kaikki vanhemmat myös tiesivät kielikylvystä ennestään. Suurin osa vanhemmista olisi ollut kiinnostunut tarjoamaan lapselleen kielikylpyopetusta, ja lisäksi osittainen kielikylpymalli oli selvästi suosittumpi. Vanhemmat kokivat kielen opetuksen tärkeäksi nykypäivänä ja hyvän kielitaidon sijoitukseksi sekä laajempien mahdollisuuksien antajaksi tulevaisuudessa. Tutkimuksen suhteellisen pienen aineiston takia laajempaa tutkimusta kyseisestä aiheesta silti tarvitaan. Koska vastaaminen oli vapaaehtoista, epäselväksi jäi onko kielikylvylle tulevaisuudessa yleisesti tilausta vai oliko vain enemmistö kyselyyn vastanneista kielikylvystä innostuneita.

Asiasanat: language education, immersion, language acquisition, teaching method

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1 INTRODUCTION

English is a vital language in today's world. Internationalized world and multiplying cultural relations have made the role of English even more emphasized and valued than earlier. Multiculturalism and having relationships and contacts with people from other cultures are highly appreciated by most people (see e.g. Kushner 2003). English language has grown to be a self-evident and important thing in people's everyday life. Therefore, since English has started to be a natural part of life, I have become interested in how it could also be taught in the most natural and effortless way as possible. One answer for this could be immersion teaching. Since it tries to make use of the processes of mother language acquisition, there perhaps could not be a more straightforward way for learning a second or a third language.

According to Baker (2003:2), being bilingual offers a bridge between cultures. One is able to get wider communication framework and a wider range of people with whom to communicate. One also gets economic and employment benefits and broader world view through two languages. Baker (2003:2) suggests that being bilingual grows tolerance towards different races and cultures. Knowing several languages and being able to communicate fluently in more than one language raises self-esteem and gives security and broadens identity. I agree with Baker (2003) and I also consider all these just mentioned aspects extremely worthwhile and valued things to achieve as well as to teach to children.

Since there are various research about the effects and results of immersion programmes but only a few reports about parents' willingness and attitudes of placing their children into these programmes (see e.g. Laitinen 2001:61), there should definitely be more research conducted about parents' attitudes toward immersion teaching method. After all, parents are the ones who decide whether they want to provide their children with immersion or not. Therefore, this paper was planned to bring out today's parents thoughts and willingness for English immersion programme starting from the first level of lower comprehensive school. This research focused to investigate which one of the types would be more desired, partial or total and whether parents would want it to begin at the level of kindergarten or in the first year of school. The terms early, middle and late immersion are not specifically taken into consideration neither in the research nor in its questionnaire. Although, since the immersion type offered in this

research was for children aged from 3 to 7, according to the model of Baker (2003:130), I would consider it to be early immersion.

This paper proceeds by first introducing the theoretical framework of this study. Language immersion method as well as its achievements, problems and most examined research areas will be explained in more detail. After introducing the main guidelines of the research, I will then present the data and methodology of the present study. Research questions and rationalizations for the chosen methods will be discussed. After that, the research results will be presented followed by a discussion section. In the discussion, I will concentrate on themes that cover for instance, parents' views of immersion as a facilitating or a hindering factor, parents' reasoning for choosing immersion and finally, their ideas for partial immersion. In the conclusion, I will bring out the main limitations of the present study as well as the areas of immersion method that still need developing and further research to be conducted. At the end of the paper, one is able to find bibliography and an appendix, which is the questionnaire form in Finnish and in English.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter I will introduce what immersion teaching involves and what have been the most examined areas of research concerning immersion programmes. First, there will be a short introduction of immersion's historical background and discussion about its current terminology. Then, the main didactics and guidelines will be presented according to several researchers who have done years of work in the field of immersion programmes or second language teaching. After that, I will pay attention to the most investigated themes; the immersion's effects on children's first language development, overall results of immersion programmes as well as comparison results between general teaching and immersion teaching. Since immersion teaching has been proved to be an effective way, I think it should be promoted and developed even further.

2.1 Different terms of immersion

Since Canadians are considered as the originators of immersion teaching, I will first introduce their model shortly. Language immersion has its roots in the 1960's when a group of French parents started to work to change the language teaching in Canada. The parents felt that the French language teaching at the English speaking area was insufficient for their children. They wanted to support their children's French and to provide their children with as good French skills as English in order for them to have equal opportunities within both languages. In 1965 the first immersion kindergarten started to work. The aim was to develop skills in immersion language that correspond to the skills of the first language. As French was a language of a minority in Canada, the one principle of immersion programmes became to be that the immersion language should be the one that has a minority status in the country where it is taught. (Harju 2005:7)

Currently, there are various descriptions of what immersion teaching actually means and they differ slightly in their descriptions of ages or time being used for teaching in the immersion language. Although, there are several models, I am going to follow the ones that Baker (2003:130-131) and Harju (2001:10-11) mention. These models are suitably clear and have also already been used and modified in Finland. According to Baker (2003), there are different kinds of immersion programmes: early, middle or late immersion and according to the amount of teaching, total or partial immersion. Early immersion usually starts at the kindergarten when children are between the ages from three to six. Middle (or delayed) immersion is for nine to ten years old children and thus, takes place at school. Late immersion begins as late as at secondary levels. According to many researchers (Lauren 2000:42, Harju 2005:10-11, Baker 2003:131 etc.) the most famous and the most successful programme is early total immersion, where children use the immersion language all the time when at kindergarten. Total middle immersion would then be a programme where all the school subjects (except children's mother language) would be taught in the immersion language. After a few years, when proceeding to the upper levels, the amount of immersion language gradually reduces (in about 20% periods) and the amount of first language teaching increases. Thus, at the last levels of lower comprehensive school there is about 50% of immersion teaching left. Partial immersion provides about 50% of school subjects in the immersion language throughout infant and junior schooling.

In Finland, Swedish is a minority language and therefore, according to the model of Canada, a suitable immersion language. Since Swedish has already been taught likewise and there are plenty of good results (see e.g. Lauren 2000, Bäckman 2004 etc.), I decided to deviate from the original model only in the aspect of language. I determined to focus on researching attitudes towards English immersion in Finland. In addition, there have already been studies that have made the same exception (see e.g. Laitinen 2001) and there are remarks that new variations of immersion teaching have appeared (e.g. Buss & Mård 2001). As Laitinen (2001:25) confirms, there is a change or a trend where the term immersion has gotten new variations. The immersion language is not necessarily anymore the minority language of the country; instead it can be a language that has usually been taught as a separate subject (as English in Finland). Laitinen also mentions that the reason why it has been said that the immersion language should be the minority language is because a brand new language and culture is thought to may distract the development of children's cultural identity. I would not worry about that when considering children who are living surrounded by their mother language and culture. After all, the learning of a new culture takes time and I believe that even though attempted, the teaching of cultural things is often left less focused. In addition, I think that it depends what is being taught. For example, if teaching handicrafts in English, of course Finnish handworks would be practised and talked about. Talking in English does not mean that only English culture would be dealt with.

Also Buss and Mård (2001) have found out that in Finland the term language immersion has spread and it has been used with programmes that do not possess the key features of an original immersion programme. Since the Finnish counterpart for the term is *kielikylpy* i.e. 'language bath', the use of it has been confusing and led to wrong using (see Buss and Mård 2001:162). For instance, early partial immersion programmes have used this specific term although the time used for teaching in the immersion language varied differently according to the model of Canada. In addition, in many programmes in Finland the time used for the immersion language was increased during the programme, which is opposite to the Canadian model (Buss and Mård 2001:166-167). Since there is no unanimous agreement, I am going to hold to the descriptions of Baker (2003) and Harju (2001) and vary only in that one aspect: providing English as the immersion language in a Finnish programme.

2.2 Introducing the methods and principles of immersion teaching

When the first Finnish immersion group was founded in 1987, in Vaasa, Lauren (2000) developed the main didactics for immersion teaching. Overall, he emphasized the following issues:

- 1) The teacher has to understand well the children's mother language in order for children to start gradually speaking the immersion language when they feel ready.
- 2) The main point should always be on the content, not on the language form and especially at first, the emphasis should be on understanding rather than producing the language.
- 3) The teacher should speak a lot in order to expose children to the language by using gestures, pictures and facial movements as aids. Therefore, one of the most important techniques of immersion teaching is to visualize and illustrate everything that is being talked about. (Lauren 2000:85-86.)

In immersion teaching, of course the amount of the teacher's input is hugely different than in traditional language teaching. That is in fact, the most effective factor of the teaching. Since the teacher uses English all the time, pupils hear it every day and they have to make an effort to understand the teacher's talk in order to know what to do and when. In addition, young children are often eager to play and to do things by themselves rather than just sit and watch and thus, they will simply want to learn and understand what the teacher is trying to say and do. As Dunn (1983:16-17) states, young children want to please their teacher as well as their parents. They are enthusiastic to build a relationship with their teacher and if the teacher is also interested in making relationships as well as enthusiastic of the language itself, the contacts and the atmosphere will become successful. In addition, as Dunn (1983:16-17) emphasizes, the teacher has to understand children's developmental needs and to be able to place herself on the level of children. Thus, children can rely on the teacher and feel secure even if the language is first incomprehensible. In short, teacher's role is to be as reliable and comfortable as possible.

One important aspect of the immersion method is that children can communicate in their native language if they want to. Thus, it is important that the teacher understands also the children's native language. Learning situations use a lot of different kind of

discourse strategies. For instance, repetition is one of the most important strategies. Through repetition, it is made sure that everyone understands. (Kosonen 2004:54)

Baker (2003:135-136) has differentiated seven “*main classroom features of successful immersion programs*”. First, immersion should last about 4 to 7 years to be successful in a way that children can achieve receptive second language proficiency. According to Baker, immersion tries to grow empathy towards the culture of language. In that way children become more receptive towards it, and they are able to identify themselves to it. Secondly, the curriculum is the same as for mainstream teaching/children. Third, a lesson would be preferable to divide into sections where each language is used in its turn. Fourth, it is vital to plan well how much time will be used on teaching in the immersion language and how much in the children’s mother language. Of course that derives also from the choice of total or partial immersion programme. Fifth, parents have an important role in immersion programmes. They have to be committed and enthusiastic about their children’s language learning. Also teachers have to be specifically committed to bilingual education. Sixth, the class should be homogeneous, i.e. all children at the same level. This helps the teachers’ job notably and I dare to claim that it also makes the atmosphere more secure especially for the shy students. Shy children may become nervous if they notice that some pupils are more fluent than they are. They may not even want to try to speak if they feel that others think that they are not successful enough. Hence, homogenous group makes learning fairer to the learners. Seventh, immersion programmes provide additive bilingual environment. By this, Baker means that students learn a second language “without detracting from the development of the first language”. (Baker 2003:193)

Baker (2003: 137-139) also states the *main language strategies and techniques* that are used by immersion teachers. The following things were listed; using caretaker speech (slow, simplified speech), using contextual support and visual material, signalling, connecting the unfamiliar with the familiar, repeating, summarizing, using indirect error correction and checking understanding with various methods. According to Baker’s strategies, teacher has to be sensitive to non-verbal feedback from students (i.e. reading their faces and knowing whether they have understood or not) and be able to negotiate meanings in case of problems. Teacher also has to consider errors as important signs of learning, not as mistakes and be active on giving learners continuous feedback of their success (Baker 2003:137-141).

2.3 Learning outcomes of immersion methods

In this chapter, I will focus on the most investigated areas of immersion. Thus, I will concentrate on one of the main worries often expressed by parents (see Laitinen 2001) and one that several researchers have been most interested in. The former is about how immersion effects on child's mother language or what influences can it cause to it and the latter, is about general successfulness of immersion particularly from the point of view of learners.

2.3.1 Immersion's effects on children's first language

Language acquisition can sometimes be seen different from language learning. According to Toivainen (1999, quoted by Kosonen 2004:51) acquisition can be seen as unconscious process, happening in a natural environment of language use. Learning, on the other hand, is restricted to classroom or similar situations and conscious processes. Language immersion programmes aim at the same kind of situation where mother tongue is usually acquired. Thus, acquiring a language is made to feel and occur as natural as possible. Nevertheless, this method of acquiring a second language may intimidate some people. One might think that if a young learner, who has just learnt his own mother language, starts acquiring a new one might loose the touch to the first one. Therefore, there has been much of research on this theme but all of them have gained positive results; first language has not been forgotten.

One of the most important matters of immersion is that the first language of children will not be overlooked. It is one of the reasons I would prefer partial immersion instead of total. Some subjects, for example history and mathematics, should remain to be taught through children's mother tongue and thus, the teaching in children's first language as well as its preserving would be well ensured. Another point is that e.g. mathematics and history might feel too complicated for children just starting to learn this type of terminology in their native language. Baker (2003:132-133) considers that it may be due to skills that children lack when trying to be mathematical in English. Their skills have to be sufficiently developed before they can start thinking and using them in other contexts.

Even still, there is no evidence that immersion would threat the first language. According to Kosonen (2004), students who have attended immersion education have

not had negative impacts on their native language. They have done same reading and writing tests than students in general teaching programmes, and achieved similar or better results (Kosonen 2004:53). Also Lauren (2000:28) has achieved results favouring immersion. He found that during the last year of upper comprehensive school immersion students achieved better results in their mother language tests than students in the traditional programme. Lauren wonders whether the reason for that could be that immersion students learn through the learning of language to investigate language more carefully. According to Lauren (2000:28), also students who had had learning problems performed better. He considers this to be the result because in an immersion classroom, language is used as a tool of action. I think that surely could be the matter. In immersion programmes children are able to use the language immediately in a real and purposeful situation and therefore, the language does not remain to be only a subject or topic of teaching. Situation feels natural for using a different language from their mother language and that is why learners start using it relatively quickly. Meaningful situation seems to work. I believe it motivates learners for making more efforts and thus, to learn. Whether immersion teaching would suit for children with learning problems, is a topic that would need more research and could also be a theme for another paper.

2.3.2 Success and profits of immersion teaching

The very first results of immersion teaching are from the research conducted by Lambert & Tucker in 1972 (Lauren 2000:64). It was the first experiment of immersion but already then the results were all positive. Immersion children coped as well as the reference group. There were no lacks in their mother language development, nor in their cognitive development or in their learning of other school subjects (Lauren 2000:67). The results of the first immersion group in Finland were also positive. The group consisted of Finnish children who had immersion teaching in Swedish from the beginning of their kindergarten life. Children were interviewed after they had accomplished the whole comprehensive school. According to Lauren, they would have chosen immersion programme again and they felt that they had benefited from it. They also felt that they were on the same level with their mother language with their friends who had attended the general teaching in their mother language, Finnish. (Lauren 2000:114-148)

There are various results that confirm the fact that immersion teaching is an effective way of learning (see e.g. Harju 2005, Laitinen 2001, Baker 2003 etc.). Generally, students who have attended some kind of immersion teaching (early total/ late partial or else...) have been satisfied with it. Students have particularly appreciated oral skills that they gained from the programme and just the fact that they are able to use the immersion language and not being nervous about it. The teachers' everyday English has encouraged and urged students to use English. As de Courcy & Mård-Miettinen (2004:70) found out, from the point of view of pupils, the teachers pushing them to speak the new language was considered worthwhile. After the immersion programmes, students have been able to see that speaking is the only way for learning a language. (de Courcy & Mård-Miettinen 2004:60-75) The old saying 'practice makes perfect' seems to be accurate.

2.4 Comparing immersion to traditional teaching

There exists also another old saying 'the earlier the better' and it as well fits in the immersion teaching. Young children are at the age where everything new fascinates but they have not yet formed any specific attitudes or opinions towards other cultures and languages. Therefore, children aged from 3 to 10 are at a very suitable age to be immersed in a new language and culture. In the past, there have been studies that reveal that the attitudes of immersion students towards the immersion language have not been more negative than general students'. But even if the attitudes would not become more positive, I agree with Ladvelin that at least there is a chance that negative stereotypes will stop growing (Ladvelin 2004:78). Thus, the earlier the children are accustomed to new languages, the better their tolerance and understanding grows.

Ladvelin (2004) examined Finnish immersion students on their last year of comprehensive school and two years after it. They had been in the immersion programme from kindergarten to the last level of upper comprehensive school. When still in school, the majority of interviewees gave positive feedback. They were grateful for having had the opportunity to learn Swedish (the immersion language) like that. They thought that they had learned Swedish much easier than their friends in general teaching. Overall, the experience had been positive for them. When the same students were interviewed two years later, their answers were as positive as earlier. Now, they

emphasized the speaking skills they had acquired and of which they were very thankful. (Ladvelin 2004:79-85)

Bäckman (2004:39) has compared traditional Swedish teaching against Swedish immersion teaching method. According to this research, Swedish immersion teacher used 100% Swedish when teaching whereas traditional Swedish teacher used 65% Swedish. This reveals that in the immersion programme, children have more opportunities to use as well as to become exposed to the language than in general teaching. Bäckman (2004:39) reports that 86% of the pupils in the immersion programme estimated that Swedish was spoken 50-100% in classes. 61.7% of pupils of the traditional programme estimated that Swedish was spoken 20-70% of the time. (Pupils were at the 8th level of secondary school.) The two teachers of different methods had also different views about teaching. The traditional teacher mentioned that in immersion programme, language is used as a tool for achieving knowledge whereas in the traditional programme language is studied to be able to use it for achieving knowledge. Teaching differs also in terms of material. In the immersion programme, teacher and students make the material and there are no books. (Bäckman 2004:36-44)

In a case study of Hollihaka made by Laitinen (2001:100-104), the results found were extremely positive concerning the comparison made with older students. Laitinen compared 11 to 12 years old students who had taken immersion teaching for over five years to 9th grader mainstream students who had attended regular English teaching. Overall, the test examined students' oral, listening, writing and reading skills. The results were that immersion students outperformed in all skill categories of the test. Especially oral skills of the immersion students were found to be much better. This is a delightful fact because after all, immersion teaching uses much oral practicing and also aims to develop learners' conversational (i.e. practical) skills. The general performance of the immersion group was also found to be more homogenous than the one of the 9th graders. According to Laitinen (2001:104), immersion programmes can thus be seen to be appropriate for all kinds of students.

In this chapter I have introduced the theoretical guidelines for this research. I explained the terms used in this research and presented results of the previous studies that concerned immersion teaching in various ways and proved its effectiveness. In the following chapter, I will concentrate on the data and methodology of the present study.

3 DATA AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Parents have often acted as initiative factors for immersion programmes to start, as was in Canada as early as in 1960's. Parents had also an important role when founding the early total immersion programme in Hollihaka as Laitinen (2001:39) announces. If parents are not the ones who initiate the programmes, they are definitely the ones who support the continuance of them. Since parents have this significant role, I decided to research parents' thoughts and willingness for this subject. The aim of the present study was to seek answers to the following questions:

1. Do parents in general schools have previous knowledge of immersion teaching?
2. Which one parents would be interested in providing their children with; partial or total immersion teaching?
3. What is the willingness rate for an English immersion teaching generally? Do parents consider it worthwhile?

The most important goal of this study was to find out whether there would be demand for English immersion programmes. Since questionnaires were used in gathering the data, I considered quantitative research to be more worthwhile to the present study and also to give more wider and generalized results. Next I am going to introduce the way in which this research was conducted, how the data was gathered and what kind of an analysis was used.

3.1 The data

Since this study was planned to investigate parents' thoughts and enthusiasm towards English immersion teaching, the data was gathered through questionnaires that were distributed by nine classes of two elementary schools in Jyväskylä. Through simple questionnaires I expected to get many answers in a short period of time as well as to reach various parents. Questionnaires were delivered in January 2008 to the parents of first and second level pupils of lower comprehensive school. Parents of first and second year level pupils were chosen because I considered that immersion teaching would be best related to them. In addition, the questions concerned their choices when their children were at kindergarten or at the first level of lower comprehensive school. Since parents were free to answer the questionnaire, the amount of answers, parents' sexes, ages as well as social backgrounds are arbitrary. Since the goal of this study was to find out only about parents' attitudes towards immersion, their backgrounds were not taken

into consideration. Approximately 170 questionnaires were dispensed and after a week 60 of them came back with answers. Although there are 60 answers, there is not that many in every question. Some questions have been skipped over or the answers were otherwise ambiguous and therefore, eliminated.

The questionnaire (see Appendix) consisted of six multiple-choice questions but in three of them there were also a chance of giving explanations and elaborating the answers. The questionnaires also included brief information about immersion teaching in case that one would not have ever heard of it before. Also the division between total and partial immersion was mentioned and explained. Generally, the questionnaires inquired the following things from the parents: previous knowledge of immersion teaching, would they prefer immersion starting at the level of kindergarten rather than in school, how do they consider immersion's effects on other school subjects or on language development, would they have wanted to provide their children with English immersion teaching in the first level of lower comprehensive school, would they choose partial or total immersion and what school subjects would they feel natural to teach with immersion language (in partial immersion).

3.2 Methodology

In order to achieve wider knowledge of parents' willingness towards immersion programmes I decided to conduct a quantitative research with the data consisting of 60 answered questionnaires. Therefore, mostly quantitative methods were used but some questionnaire answers by the participants were analyzed also qualitatively. This relates to the open questions of the questionnaires where parents were able to give examples and elaborate their choices. The rest of the data was processed using statistical analysis. First, it was entered into Excel computer programme and after that direct distributions were calculated. Thus, valid percents were gained taking into account also the incomplete answering percent in a few questions. From some of the questions also cross-tabulations were drawn. I wanted to elicit whether there was an overlap with the parents who had rather chosen kindergarten immersion but also answered positively to the question of choosing the immersion starting from the first level of lower comprehensive school. The cross-tabulations also cleared out how the parents, who had chosen the English immersion, considered immersion's effects on their child's linguistic and mother language development. To investigate whether the results of wanting

immersion were statistically significant, exact significances were received using the Fisher's Exact Test. Having now presented the description of the data and methodology, I will next approach the results gained from the research.

4 RESULTS

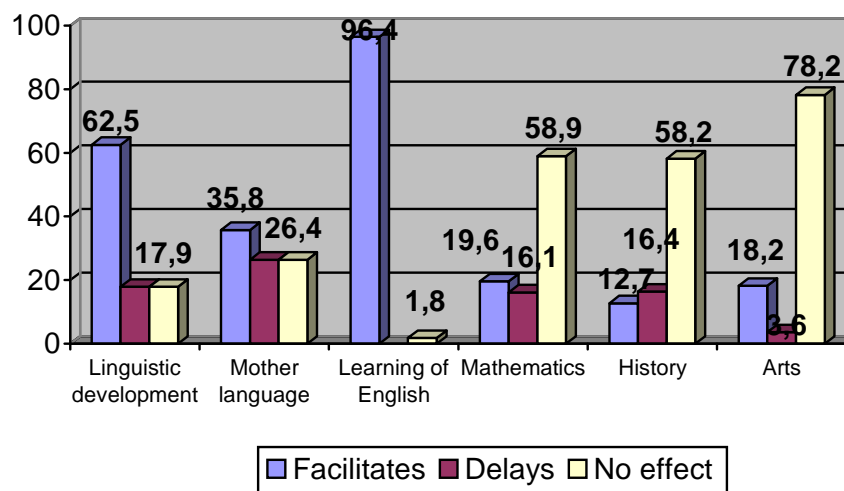
In this chapter, results drawn from the questionnaire answers are presented and explained in more detail. The findings will be displayed in percentage terms and using tabular form. Also answers to the open questions will be discussed by giving examples. At first, I will shortly introduce the parents' present knowledge of immersion method and how they thought that immersion teaching could affect on the development of other school subjects and child's developing skills. Next, the results, why this study was conducted in the first place, will be revealed. They deal with the general willingness for immersion and draw a comparison between kindergarten and school immersion. Finally, I will present the parents' willingness for either partial or total immersion and which school subjects parents considered to be most suitable for partial English immersion. Mostly the parents' answers were rational and realistic. It was clear that they had based their choices more on reasons than on emotions.

4.1 Parents' previous knowledge and immersion's developmental influences

According to the results, the majority of parents, 90%, had previous knowledge of immersion programmes and teaching methods. By an open question, parents were also asked to elaborate what they knew about immersion. Mostly parents knew exactly what kind of teaching immersion is. Most answers mentioned that it is a method where children are exposed to a new language in normal situations during their daily life at the kindergarten or school. Some of the answers seemed to include more knowledge about total immersion and some seemed to focus more on partial immersion teaching. For instance, some answered that the target language is used all the time and some considered it to be used only partly. Overall, parents had good knowledge of immersion and some even knew that it has been used in Swedish speaking areas in Finland. Mostly parents emphasized that it is a natural way to acquire a new language and that it tries to make the learning of a new language feel easier. Some parents had also experiences from partial immersion programmes or their children had attended an English club.

Since I was interested in how parents consider immersion programmes' influences on other linguistic and learning areas, the questionnaire consisted of multiple-choice questions where parents were able to choose the right alternative according to their thoughts. The questionnaire inquired whether they thought that immersion affects in a delaying, hindering or facilitating way a child's linguistic and mother language development and the learning of mathematics, history, arts and English. Most of the parents considered that immersion facilitates child's linguistic development (62.5%) as well as the development of mother language (35.8%). 26.4 % of the parents thought that immersion delays child's mother language development and another 26.4% of parents thought that it does not affect in any way. When concerning the influences on school subjects, the majority of the parents considered that immersion has no effects on the learning of mathematics (58.9%), history (58.2%) or arts (78.2%). Second biggest groups tend to think that immersion could facilitate the learning of mathematics (19.6%) and arts (18.2%). Immersion's effects on learning English were considered clearly positive. Predictably, 96.4% of parents considered immersion facilitating the learning of English. Figure1 demonstrates the distributing of the votes.

Figure1.Views of immersion's effects on other skills



There were also cross tabulations made out of couple of questions. I wanted to research what kind of views parents who had chosen immersion programme had about how immersion affects the overall linguistic development and the development of mother language. According to the received results, the majority of parents who were willing to choose immersion teaching considered that immersion programmes would

facilitate the linguistic as well as mother language development. 50.0% of parents willing to choose immersion regarded it to facilitate the L1 development and 77.1% considered it to facilitate generally the linguistic development of a child.

4.2 Willingness for kindergarten vs. school immersion and general willingness for immersion

The present study was planned to receive general information about parents' willingness for English immersion and whether they would prefer it to begin at the kindergarten level or at the school level. According to the parents' answers, the general opinion was on the side of the kindergarten. Majority of the answers (72.4%) preferred immersion that would start from the kindergarten level. What becomes to the general willingness of English immersion, the research found that there was one. Overall majority would have chosen English immersion starting at the first level of lower comprehensive school if they had had the opportunity. The positive answers for choosing immersion programme were statistically significant since 65.5% chose English immersion whereas 34.5% of the parents did not.

Parents who were positive towards immersion teaching mostly emphasized the importance of knowing languages nowadays and the fact that through immersion, learning languages would become easier. They considered learning to happen almost accidentally and thus, it would not form to be a compulsion. Parents considered learning a language through immersion to be easier, more motivating for the children and also a helpful way to learn. Parents thought that learning a language like that would also facilitate the learning of other languages in the future. Many parents stressed the fact that since learning languages, especially English, is appreciated and needed in today's world, it would be important to begin the learning as earlier as possible. Many answers also brought out the fact that because young children learn more easily, it would be suitable to introduce them a new language and culture already at the kindergarten or at the beginning of lower comprehensive school. Thus, also their attitudes and tolerances would grow more positive towards other languages and cultures. Some of the parents had had positive experiences from immersion or their children had been in an English club and therefore, they would have wanted to guarantee the already learnt language to continue to grow and develop. Overall, parents considered the immersion method to be

funnier, easier and a meaningful way to learn English through normal situations and practical using of the language.

Those parents who would not have been willing to place their children in the immersion stressed the fact that children who have just started school have enough challenges already. Parents considered that starting to learn a new language would hinder the learning of other school subjects or confuse the child's mind. Most parents emphasized that it is enough to first learn children's mother language well or they were satisfied with the ordinary language teaching (i.e. starting at the 3rd grade). Some parents mentioned that it would not suit for their child who is suffering learning problems already or that they have too little knowledge of the immersion. Some explained that they would choose the programme if they would have to move to or live in England. Mostly these parents seemed to think that there is time to learn languages later on and that first grade is huge enough challenge on its own.

Since there was an overlap between the questions of choosing either kindergarten or school immersion and whether parents would had chosen the provided immersion at the first level of school, a cross tabulation was made out to clear up the answers. According to the cross tabulations, 57.1% of the parents who would not had chosen immersion, had chosen rather immersion that would begin at the school level. On the other hand, 75.0% of the parents, who had rather chosen kindergarten level immersion, had also chosen immersion that would have been provided at the first level of school. To summarize this, parents who were not positive towards English immersion would rather choose immersion that would begin at the school level. Whereas, parents who would have chosen immersion were also more positive towards earlier immersion, that is, they would probably be enthusiastic to begin the immersion teaching as early as at the kindergarten level.

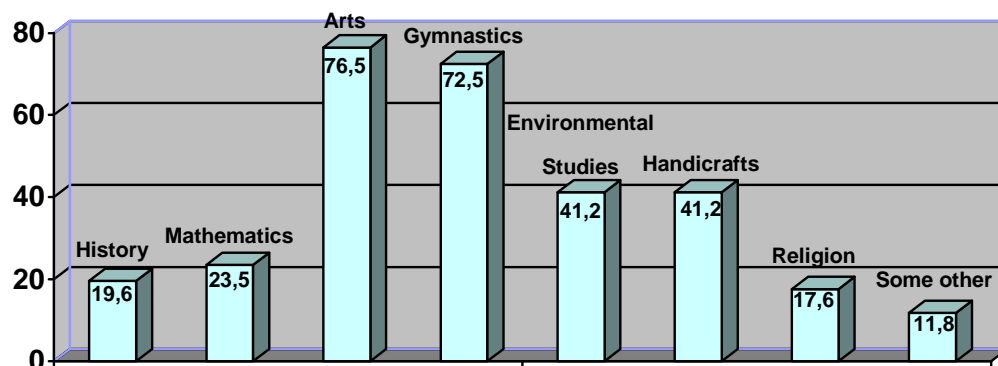
4.3 The choice between total and partial immersion and the subject choices for partial immersion

Parents were also enquired whether they would prefer partial or total immersion. According to the findings, 90.6% of the parents preferred partial immersion programme. Overall, parents emphasized the importance of children's mother language (i.e. Finnish) and the learning and maintaining it. As one parent explained, she would not want English to become a child's second mother language. Partial immersion was generally

considered as an easier option and also not such a change from the general teaching. Partial was also thought to be more neutral in a way that it would not distract child's other development and learning. Some parents suggested that the amount of English could rather be increased gradually than reduced. Nevertheless, a few parents supported total immersion as well. Reasons for this included ideas about its effectiveness. Parents considered it to reach better results and that was the main reason for choosing it. Other parents thought that total immersion is 'too total' and that it could be an outsized challenge for a child if all the school subjects would be taught in English. Some parents considered total immersion worthwhile for children whose parents are bilingual.

Next, parents who had chosen partial immersion were asked to name school subjects that they would want to be taught in English. Figure 2 shows how the votes distributed.

Figure 2. Subject choices for partial immersion



As can be seen from Figure 2, the subjects that rose to be the most suitable for teaching in English according to the parents' views seemed to be arts and gymnastics; 76.5% chose arts and 72.5% chose gymnastics. Environmental studies and handicrafts both had 41.2% of votes and thus, were considered second most suitable for English teaching. The subjects that gained least votes were religion and history. The questionnaire also included a free choice (called 'some other' in the figure) in case that there was a subject that was not mentioned or one that parents would want to be taught in English. Only 11.8% chose the free choice and almost in every case parents' suggestion was music (one suggested chemistry and physics).

In this section, I have presented the results of the data by approximately following the order of the questions in the questionnaire (see Appendix). To sum up, majority of

the parents had previous knowledge of immersion and also would have chosen immersion for their children. Immersion was considered to facilitate the linguistic as well as mother language development and the learning of English. Partial immersion was clearly more popular and most desired subjects for it were arts, gymnastics, environmental studies and handicrafts.

5 DISCUSSION

After presenting the results gained from the research, I will next proceed to discuss and analyze the parents' answers. I will also take into consideration the possible reasons under their negative attitudes and answers and try to find solutions for those from the previous research that were introduced earlier in the chapter of Theoretical background. Similar results from previous research will also be presented as well as compared to the present one. I will proceed by first discussing the parents' view about immersion as a facilitating factor. After that, I will analyze parents' reasons for choosing (or not) immersion teaching as well as the favour of partial immersion and the subject choices of the parents.

5.1 Immersion - a facilitating or a hindering factor?

One of the most investigated themes in this field is the immersion's effects on children's native language and thus, it was also taken into consideration in this research. It is also one of the factors that seem to stress parents the most in the present study as well as in previous studies. According to Laitinen (2001:76), the most typical worry of the immersion parents is "the learning of the mother tongue and its possible effects on learning of the other subjects". Furthermore, the role and responsibility of home and parents was the second most common worry (Laitinen 2001:76). The present research revealed the same results, although, generally parents considered immersion to facilitate the development of native language as well as overall linguistic development. Parents who would have chosen immersion considered immersion's effects strongly facilitating. Still, parents who were negative towards immersion mostly stressed the fact that immersion could hinder child's mother language development. It is an understandable concern but it may be due to the fact that parents may not have had enough knowledge about immersion and how intimately it has been investigated already.

As mentioned earlier, for example Kosonen (2004) and Lauren (2000) have found out that children who had attended immersion had performed also better in their native language compared to students in general teaching. This would support the other parents' opinion that immersion would facilitate children's linguistic development overall. Having more languages than just one is often said to enrich one's linguistic competence as well as worldview and identity (e.g. Baker 2003). In short, parents who were negative towards immersion as a whole seemed to stress the fact that English would become too emphasized in their child's everyday life. On the other hand, that was the same concern that most parents had when they explained why not to choose *total* immersion. What has to be remembered is that parents were not fully introduced how immersion would work in practice. Placing a child to an immersion programme demands a great participation and support from the parents as well, which of course would be discussed in more detail at the beginning of an immersion programme (for more, see e.g. Harju 2005:24-25).

What becomes to the other school subjects, majority of the parents considered that immersion would not have any kind of influence on the learning of mathematics, history and arts. This is probably partly due to the fact that parents did not choose these subjects e.g. mathematics and history to be taught in partial immersion either. Therefore, they considered that those subjects should remain to be taught as they are and hence, immersion would not affect them in any way. On the other hand, arts was the most wanted subject to be taught in partial immersion but even still, parents considered that immersion would not affect the learning of it in any way. Parents may have considered arts to be a subject that does not involve substantial learning. Perhaps arts skills depend more on other factors than learning and maybe, e.g. colours could be easily taught and acquired through painting and other such activities although, done in English. In other words, immersion was not considered to influence on the learning of drawing, which of course can be true. In addition, parents who considered immersion to hinder mother language development did not seem to think that it would also affect the learning of other subjects, e.g. mathematics.

5.2 Choosing immersion - reasoning or sentimentalizing?

The most interesting and important result found was that according to the data, parents would be interested in providing their children with English immersion. They considered it worthwhile and a great investment for the future. Learning English with more practical and perhaps more relaxed and comfortable way seemed to be important. Parents emphasized that learning languages should not feel as a negative compulsion although it is vital in today's world. Most parents also regarded immersion to be successful. Laitinen (2001) has also gathered similar answers from parents who had tried English immersion. In the case study of Hollihaka School, most parents were generally satisfied with the immersion programme and considered it as a successful way to learn languages (Laitinen 2001:75). In addition, Paasila and Rissanen (1997 as quoted by Laitinen 2001:59) have found out that immersion programmes have fulfilled well parents' expectations of their children's language learning.

In the Hollihaka case study conducted by Laitinen (2001:74) parents were also asked to give reasons for placing their children in the immersion programme. The most motivational reason was found out to be simply the learning of English and the second most given reason was "opportunities in the internationalizing world: studies, work" i.e. giving better opportunities for their children in the future. Third most given reason was "learning the language in a natural effortless way", which I think is the most useful aspect of the immersion methodology. Comparing these reasons with the ones I gained from the parents reveal that the contributing factors for choosing immersion are same. Generally, parents tend to think about their children's future and how they could learn languages the easiest way as possible. Laitinen has also found out that parents who place their children in immersion programmes are often well educated and thus value education (Laitinen 2001:73).

Parents, who were not willing to choose English immersion, seemed to have clear reasons for it. Biggest concern, after the deficient acquiring of native language, seemed to be the fact that they considered starting a school to be a huge enough challenge on its own. Some parents were already satisfied with the traditional language teaching and some stressed their learning disordered child. Although, there are some statements (e.g. Lauren 2000:28) that immersion method would be suitable for learners who are having learning problems it is a topic that still needs further research. Yet, learning disordered children are often keen to moving and speaking while learning and thus, learning language through immersion method might be a better learning style for them compared to the quiet sitting, writing and listening in a normal class.

5.3 Modeling partial immersion

As can be seen from the results, partial immersion was clearly more desired than total programme. Since parents wanted to guarantee their children's native language development and learning as well as possible, partial immersion was considered to be more secure and easier. According to the parents' choices, the most wanted subjects for partial immersion programme were arts and gymnastics. Second most wanted school subjects were environmental studies and handicrafts. Since parents were not asked to explain their choices, the reasons for these choices remain unknown. I assume that these subjects are considered quite easy on their vocabulary and learning them usually involves active doing in an open and free atmosphere. Through these subjects, children would acquire useful vocabulary for conversational purposes in contrast to e.g. mathematical vocabulary. Arts, gymnastics and handicrafts are also ones that do not usually use exams at all, which are considered unnecessary also in the immersion method. Based on these reasons, these subjects would cohere well with the principles of immersion method (see 2.2). Of course choosing the best subject for immersion programme involves much more work than just choosing the subjects. It involves discussion between the whole school institution, teachers, headmasters, and parents and maybe even with higher officials from the field of education. In addition financial resources have to be taken into account. For example Laitinen (2001:45), points out that the choosing of the subjects that are taught in the immersion language is also dependent on the schools' financial resources, e.g. what subjects the teachers are suitable/have enough knowledge to teach in English.

In this chapter I have discussed the main findings under the light of previous studies. After summarizing the results and comparing them to the previous ones, it is possible to say that generally, parents have same intentions and motives for placing their children in the immersion programmes. Parents are eager to find alternative ways for learning at least, languages. They want to provide their children with easier but effective and practical ways for learning and they see the importance of being able to speak in other languages. Today's parents have acknowledged and adopted the fact that knowing languages offers wider range of possibilities in many areas of life. Parents tend to think that learning languages well is an investment for the child's future. What was also delightful to notice from the data was that majority of today's parents had knowledge of

immersion programmes. According to the parents' answers, I think it is possible to say that immersion is currently (at least to some extent) a well-known method.

6 CONCLUSION

Even though, the data of this research appeared to be quite narrow it however succeeded in answering the earlier posed research questions (see chapter 3). I will now present the answers in short. First, parents seemed to have good knowledge as well as experiences of immersion method. Second, parents were considerably more interested in partial immersion instead of total. Third, majority of the parents reported to be willing to attend immersion teaching and they considered it to be valuable and useful. What was the most important finding was that there would be demand for immersion teaching if only schools and kindergartens would be ready to provide it.

The small amount of data produced also other types of limitations in addition to inability of drawing very general conclusions. What is worth to mention, is a fact that since parents were free to participate in this research, there is always a chance that only those who were interested in immersion or overall language teaching methods took part. Since the answering percent was only 35.3% and the reasons for not answering the questionnaire are unknown, there is a possibility that those left out would not or would choose English immersion. Therefore, the results perhaps cannot be generalised but they do show strong tendencies of parents being interested in English immersion programmes. Furthermore, since the statistical analysis proved that the results were statistically significant, it could be concluded that there would be demand for immersion programmes in general schools. Even still, further research with larger amount of participants is needed in this particular field.

Language immersion, though already in action, is not totally complete. There are still much to develop. Recently discussed topics involve for example, teachers' specialized training, immersions' suitability for different types of learners and for learning disordered children, making of a national immersion curriculum for all and how immersion programmes could be best run in Finland. Some optional updating training for teachers who are specializing in immersion teaching is already available. However, more specialized training would be needed as well as, if not yet the possibility of specifying for immersion in teacher training programmes, at least introducing this type of method for becoming teachers. Designing a nationwide immersion curriculum would

be important in order to provide all learners with the same immersion teaching. Curriculum would guarantee focusing on the same objectives and programme design and in addition, it would also invalidate all the different variations that are born from the immersion method by not knowing the immersion's principles.

Successful language teaching is something worth to aim. Currently, English has a very high position in Finland and it is not necessarily seen only as a foreign language anymore. For today's human it is a language that is confronted everyday: through working and studying, in the media, when using computer, via music and through the Internet. People understand the importance of knowing languages today but still youngsters often feel that they do not benefit the teaching of languages in school as much as they are supposed to. A question can be raised: how to start teaching English in the most meaningful and practical way as possible? If immersion teaching is the answer for that it certainly still needs to be researched and developed further. Gratifying fact is that at least according to the previous as well as the present study it is possible to say that parents would be enthusiastic towards immersion, the rest is up to schools and education planners.

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8 APPENDIX

Arvoisat vanhemmat,

olen englanninopettajaopiskelija Jyväskylän yliopistosta ja teen kandidaatin tutkielmaa aiheesta kielikylpyopetus. Aineistoksi tarvitsisin tietojanne ja ajatuksianne aiheesta. Tarkoitukseni on etenkin selvittää, olisiko kielikylpyopetukselle tulevaisuudessa tilausta. Vastaaminen tapahtuu nimettömästi tällä lomakkeella. Vaikka vastaaminen on vapaaehtoista, toivoisin mahdollisimman monen vastaavan, koska kaikenlaiset vastaukset ovat tutkimuksen kannalta arvokkaita ja tervetulleita. Lomake palautetaan luokanopettajalle viimeistään pe 1.2.2008 mennessä.

Oletteko koskaan aikaisemmin kuulleet kielikylvystä?

- Kyllä
- Ei

Jos olette, mitä tiedätte siitä?

Kielikylvyn periaatteena on, että kieli opitaan kuin äidinkielenä eli omaksumalla, havainnoiden, toistaen ja toimien. Oppimisympäristön luonteeseen kuuluu toiminnallisuus, lapsikeskeisyys, innostavuus ja kannustavuus. Opettajan tulee olla lasten äidinkieltä ymmärtävä, jotta lapset voivat kommunikoida aluksi myös omalla kielellään.

Tutkimukseni keskittyy kahteen seuraavaan kielikylpy malliin.

Osittainen kielikylpy tarkoittaa, että koko alakoulun ajan lapselle opetetaan osaa (n.50%) oppiaineista englannin kielellä.

Totaalinen kielikylpy taas aloittaa opettamalla kaikkia aineita englanniksi, poikkeuksena lasten äidinkieli. Lasten noustessa ylemmille vuositasoille englanninkielistä opetusta vähennetään n.20 %:n jaksoissa ja äidinkielistä opetusta lisätään.

Merkitkää rastilla mieleisenne vaihtoehdot.

Jos saisitte valita tarhassa alkavan ja koulussa alkavan kielikylpyopetuksen välillä, kumman mieluummin tarjoaisitte lapsellenne?

- Tarhassa alkavan
- Koulussa alkavan

Ajatteletteko kielikylvyn vaikuttavan lapsen

	hidastavasti	haittaavasti	helpottavasti	ei mitenkään
kielelliseen kehitykseen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
matematiikan oppimiseen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
historian oppimiseen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

kuvaamataidon oppimiseen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
äidinkielen kehitykseen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
englannin kielen oppimiseen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Jos olisitte saaneet/ saisitte mahdollisuuden tarjota lapsellenne 1.vuosiluokalta alkavaa englanninkielistä kielikylpyopetusta, haluaisitteko?

- Kyllä, miksi?

- En, miksi ei?

Kumpi opetuksista miellyttäisi enemmän, *osittainen* vai *totaalinen kielikylpy*? Kumpaan opetusmuotoon laittaisitte lapsenne, jos mahdollisuus annettaisiin ja miksi valitsisitte juuri sen?

Jos haluaisitte *osittaista kielikylpyä*, mitä aineita haluaisitte opetettavan englanniksi?

- historia
- matematiikka
- kuvaamataito
- liikunta
- ympäristötieto
- käsityöt
- uskonto
- jokin muu, mikä? _____

Dear parents,

I am a student from University of Jyväskylä and I am doing my candidate's thesis about immersion method. For data, I would need your experiences, ideas and thoughts. My purpose is to find out whether there would be demand for immersion method in the future. Answering is done anonymously by filling this form. Even though the answering is voluntary, I would hope that as many as possible could answer because all kind of answers are valuable and welcome for the research. Please return the form to the teacher of the class on Friday 1st of February 2008 at the latest.

Have you ever heard about immersion method before?

- Yes
- No

If yes, what do you know about it?

The principle of immersion method is that language is learnt just like native language i.e. through acquiring, observing, repeating and actively doing. The nature of the learning environment is supposed to be functional, children-centred, inspiring and encouraging. Immersion teacher has to understand the children's native language in order for children to be able to communicate also in their native language at first.

My research focuses on two models of immersion:

Partial immersion means, that during the lower comprehensive school part of the school subjects (ab.50%) are taught in English.

Total immersion begins by teaching all subjects in English, except children's mother language. When children proceed to the higher levels, teaching in English reduces approximately in 20% periods and teaching in children's mother language increases.

Mark the best alternative according to your view.

If you were able to choose between the immersion beginning at kindergarten and immersion beginning at school, which one would you rather choose?

- Beginning at kindergarten
- Beginning at school

How do you think immersion effects on children's

	Delays	Hinders	Facilitates	Has no effect
linguistic development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
learning of mathematics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
learning of history	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
learning of arts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
mother language development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
learning of English	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If you had had/had the possibility to provide your children with immersion teaching starting from the first level of comprehensive school, would you have wanted/want it?

- Yes, why?

- No, why not?

Which one of the immersion teaching methods would please you most, *partial* or *total*? To which one would you place your children if you had the possibility and why would you choose that one?

If you preferred *partial immersion*, which subjects would you like to be taught in English?

- history
- mathematics
- arts
- gymnastics
- environmental studies
- handicrafts
- religion
- some else, what? _____