

Exploring Educators' Linguistic Attitudes Towards Purism and Flexibility in Maltese Education

Dr Melanie Darmanin

Institute of Community Services, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology

ABSTRACT

Malta, a small island state at the centre of the Mediterranean, is a bilingual country where the national language, Maltese, coexists alongside English. The interaction between these two languages has shaped patterns of communication, with most speakers alternating between them depending on the context. This is particularly evident in early years education, where educators may adopt either purist or more flexible approaches when facilitating learning in the national language. The underpinning research study examined educators' perspectives on these approaches through a mixed-methods questionnaire completed by 144 practitioners working in early childhood education and care settings across Malta. Analysed through descriptive statistics and a thematic approach involving systematic coding and the refinement of themes, data revealed that Maltese educators frequently associate linguistic purism with the “*proper*” and “*ideal*” use of Maltese in educational contexts. In practice, however, linguistic flexibility is more widely acknowledged, particularly as a means of ensuring comprehension among young learners. Findings further showed that while code-switching and translanguaging are generally regarded as “*acceptable*”, pseudo-loanwords and code-mixing are often consciously avoided in educational settings. According to the participants, these do not align with personal or institutional expectations, despite their prevalence in everyday discourse. Participants also expressed concerns about factors that restrict the use of Maltese in early years settings, including parental influences, a lack of educator proficiency in Maltese, the top-down influence of educational language norms and the increasing number of non-Maltese children living in Malta.

Keywords: bilingualism; language views; linguistic purism; linguistic flexibility; Maltese language.