

THE STATE OF GAELIC IN SHAWBOST

Language Attitudes and Abilities in Shawbost



SABHAL MÒR OSTAIG

We at Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the researchers at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig are very keen to be involved in any plans the community makes for Gaelic in the future, and we welcome any enquiries about the research or about possibilities for developing Gaelic in Shawbost.

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**GAEELIC IS⁷
DYING AS A
COMMUNITY
LANGUAGE IN
SHAWBOST,
BUT IT CAN BE
SAVED. *YOU*
CAN MAKE A
DIFFERENCE.**

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SUMMARY

THE MAIN POINTS CONTAINED IN THIS REPORT ARE:

1

There is a wealth of Gaelic in Shawbost, with a high percentage of fluent speakers. There is also great goodwill towards Gaelic.

2

But Gaelic in Shawbost is at the tipping point right now because of a lack of daily use.

3

The passing of Gaelic from one generation to the next – intergenerational transmission – has all but ended in Shawbost.

Fluent speakers are not using Gaelic often enough in daily life in the community to ensure that Gaelic is transmitted to the younger generations, or to family and neighbours.

The language is falling apart and may be dead as a community language in Shawbost within one or perhaps two generations.

4

Children in Gaelic Medium Education are more likely than children in English Medium Education to use Gaelic in the home and in the community. Bilingual education for all children is critical to Gaelic's survival as a community language.

5

Gaelic in Shawbost can be saved by encouraging and by providing ways for everyone to become fully bilingual.

The community, with agencies, can promote the use and learning of Gaelic through: bilingual education for all children; Gaelic learner classes for different levels of ability; integrating Gaelic into social and economic life; and by family and neighbours encouraging one another to speak Gaelic in their daily lives.

INTRODUCTION

This report is a short summary of some of the main conclusions from a research project carried out in Shawbost, Lewis, during 2009-10. The research, called *Barail agus Comas Cànan* (2010) [translation: 'Gaelic Language Attitudes and Abilities' (2010)], looked at:

- ✘ **ability in Gaelic in Shawbost** (speaking, understanding, reading, writing)
- ✘ **use of Gaelic in daily life in Shawbost** (within the home, as well as in the local area)
- ✘ **attitudes in Shawbost towards Gaelic.**

The Shawbost research was commissioned by Bòrd na Gàidhlig and carried out by a team based at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, led by Dr Gillian Munro^①. The main purpose of the research was to get a detailed picture of language ability, attitudes and use in a community in the Western Isles where 'facility in Gaelic is dominant'. The research team, guided by expert advice in the Western Isles, chose one of the strongest 'Gaelic-dominant' communities in Scotland: Shawbost, Lewis. The Shawbost research results therefore constitute a litmus test of the strength of Gaelic in the Western Isles today. How this report summary is used - or isn't - by residents and agencies to strengthen Gaelic in Shawbost will also be a litmus test of the will or desire of Shawbost residents and agencies in the Western Isles to plan a better future for Gaelic.

This short summary is intended, first, to give back the research information to Shawbost residents, and to thank everyone for their participation. Second, it is hoped that this short summary will stimulate you, the reader, to read the full report. Third, it is hoped that the results will galvanise residents and agencies into further action.

A full census of every household was carried out by a team of four home visitors, who distributed and collected both a household questionnaire and a detailed questionnaire for every adult and child resident in Shawbost. Response rates were exceptionally high (see Conclusion 1). Fourteen interviews were carried out with individuals, and with staff of local institutions, to get a better understanding of the context for the questionnaire results. Results were then presented in the full report, *Barail agus Comas Cànan* (2010), which is available on the Bòrd na Gàidhlig website, as well as in the Post Office, Shawbost School, and Ionad na Seann Sgoil in Shawbost.

The research team and Bòrd na Gàidhlig are deeply indebted to Shawbost residents and local development professionals for their cooperation. We hope that this research will not only be of interest, but will be of use in ensuring that Gaelic survives and thrives with the next generation in Shawbost.

^① Although the main researcher in Shawbost and the report writer was Dr Gillian Munro, several colleagues contributed to the questionnaire design, commented on the Shawbost report drafts and on this document, and took part in discussions about the implications of the research. These researchers were: Iain S. Taylor, Dr Timothy C. Armstrong, Dr Mike Cormack (all SMO) and, in the initial stages of the research, Dr Marsaili MacLeod (Scottish Agricultural College). Processing of the questionnaires and production of tables and charts were carried out by Brian MacDonald of Lèirsinn Research Centre for Gaelic, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. Maria Russell helped also in the inputting of questionnaires into a database. The team of home visitors who administered the questionnaire were critically important to the project. They were: Mary Smith, Colin George Morrison, Anne Marvin and Innes MacSween.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

CONCLUSION 1

There is a wealth of Gaelic in Shawbost, and a strong desire to retain the language in the future

1.1: Are people in Shawbost interested in Gaelic?

Every household and resident in Shawbost was contacted and asked to participate in the research. The response was phenomenal: see the last column in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Number of questionnaires returned

	Number of questionnaires returned	Number of questionnaires possible (holiday homes excepted)	Success rate for questionnaires returned (%)
Questionnaire A (household)	160	161	99%
Questionnaire B (adults)	254	308	82%
Questionnaire C (children)	45	68	66%

1.2: How fluent are Shawbost Gaelic speakers?

Adults were asked to assess their Gaelic fluency in understanding, speaking, reading and writing Gaelic.

> 66% of adults in Shawbost are fluent in Gaelic.

1.3: Does Gaelic matter to people's identity who live in the Western Isles?

Almost nine out of ten adults rated Gaelic as central to their identity as people living in the Western Isles.

> 88.7% of adults agreed with the statement, 'To maintain their identity, the Western Isles need their Gaelic speakers'.

1.4: Does it matter if kids don't speak Gaelic?

Almost eight out of ten people thought that children in the islands must learn Gaelic.

> 77.8% of adults agreed with the statement, 'It is essential that children in the islands learn Gaelic'.

CONCLUSION: Gaelic fluency levels are high, and Shawbost residents are very supportive of speaking Gaelic and of saving the language.

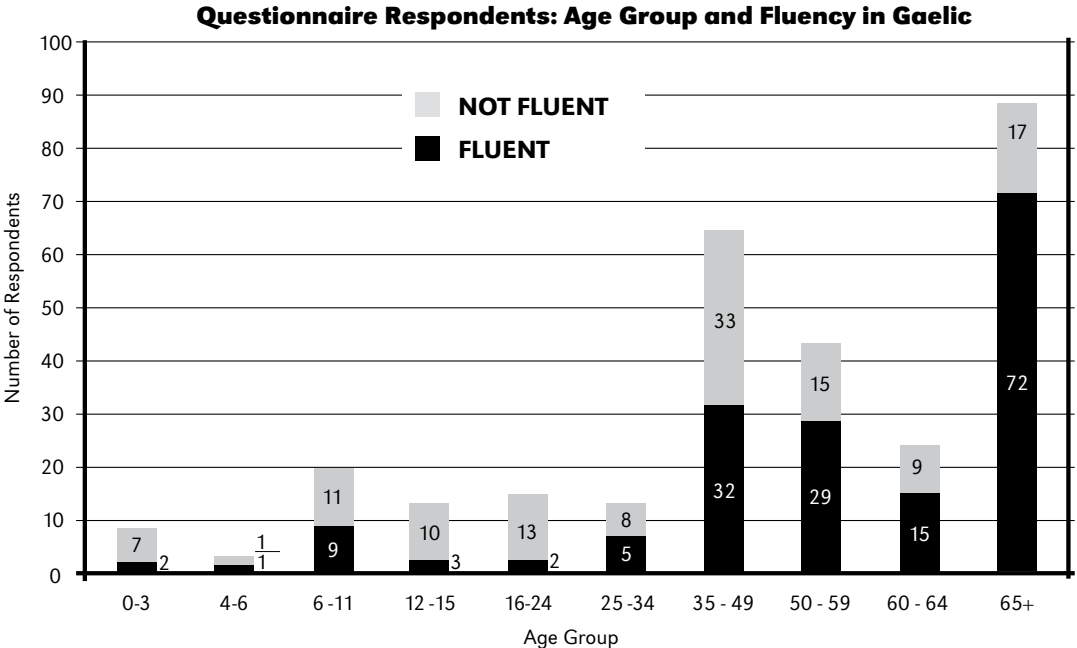
CONCLUSION 2

Gaelic as a community language in Shawbost is at the tipping point right now

2.1: How fluent are Shawbost residents?

Figure 2 below compares the numbers of fluent and non-fluent Gaelic speakers and then shows how the patterns vary between age groups.

Figure 2: Comparison between age and Gaelic fluency of questionnaire respondents



2.1.1. Figure 2 shows that **66% of Shawbost residents are fluent speakers**. However, **Gaelic fluency is concentrated amongst those aged 50 and older**. Figure 2 shows that language shift has gained momentum, particularly in the last forty to fifty years, **and that there is an established and growing pattern of language shift to English**.

Fluent speakers of Gaelic – with the highest concentration amongst these older age groups - are critical to Gaelic language revitalisation in Shawbost, because they can pass the language on by using it and by encouraging its use amongst those in younger age groups.

2.1.2. Analysis of fluency in understanding, reading and writing Gaelic shows that **73% of adults understand Gaelic fluently, 64% can read Gaelic fluently, and 21% can write Gaelic fluently**. On the whole, there is a wealth of fluency in Gaelic among adults and they could help children and the children’s parents become fluent too.

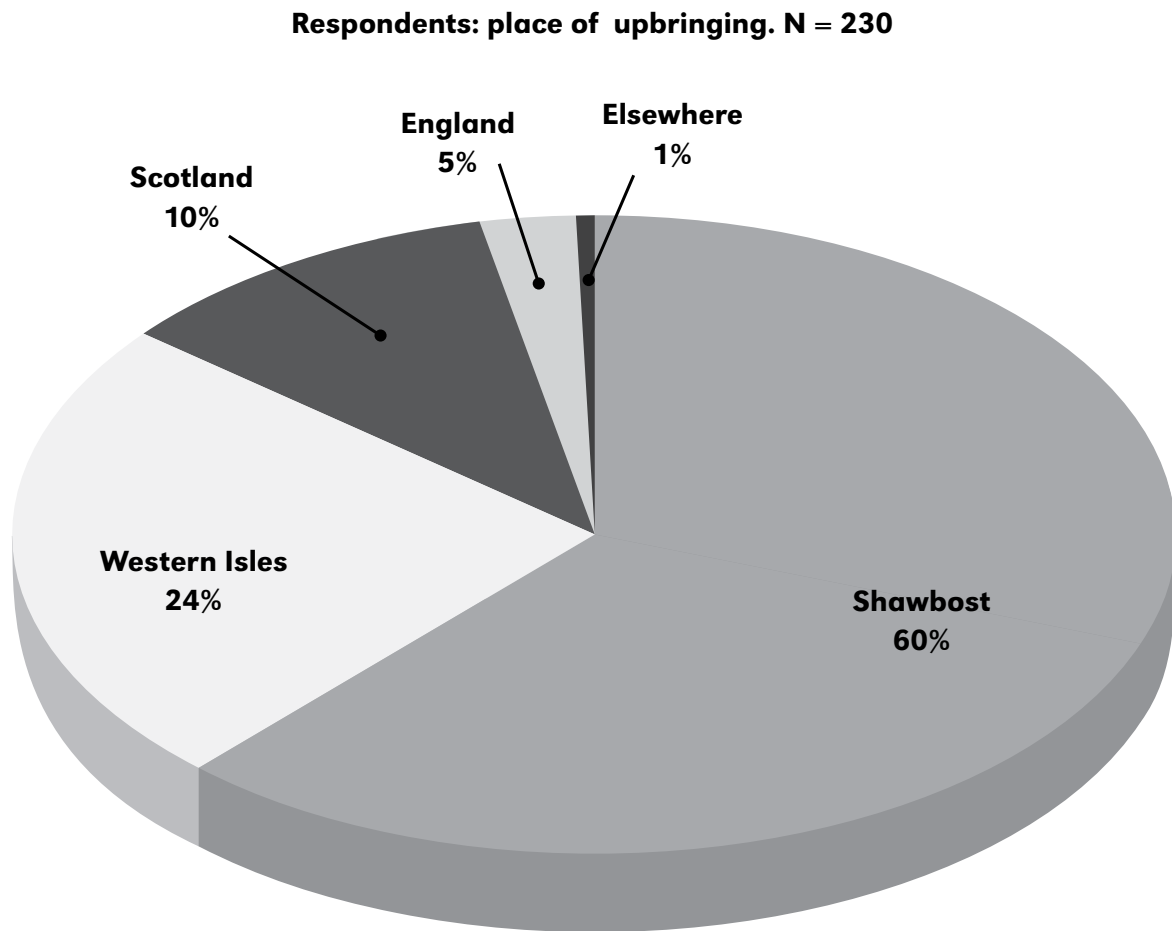
2.1.3. For children under 16, Figure 2 shows that fluency in spoken Gaelic is, overall, very weak amongst most of the youngest age groups: **(almost) one child in four speaks Gaelic fluently, and a further one child in five can speak Gaelic fluently for most subjects of conversation**.

Analysis of understanding, reading and writing showed that **one third of children can understand Gaelic fluently, only one child in ten can read Gaelic fluently** (although many of the children in the survey were very young anyway to be reading), and **one child in four was fluent in writing Gaelic**.

2.2: Is the decline in Gaelic fluency due to in-migration?

The pie chart in Figure 3 shows that 84% of residents are from Shawbost or other parts of the Western Isles (the majority of these were from other parts of Lewis). This pattern was even stronger for their parents' generation. The move to English is not, therefore, caused by in-migration of non-Gaelic speakers.

Figure 3: Place of upbringing



Place of upbringing and numbers of people:

Shawbost	137
Rest of Western Isles	56
Rest of Scotland	24
England	11
Other (Northern Ireland, Germany)	2
Total	230

2.3 What is the main language(s) of the home?

Younger and larger households are mainly or only English-speaking.

As Figure 4 below shows, Gaelic is strongest in one or two person households, where the majority of these people are aged 50 and older.

Figure 4: Main household languages and the number of people in each household

Language	One person household	Two person household	Three person household	Four person household	Five person household	Six person household	Total
	Number of households						
Gaelic only	24	23	3	0	0	0	50
Mainly Gaelic	15	10	6	2	2	1	36
Gaelic and English equally	1	4	3	4	2	1	15
Mainly English	0	10	7	1	4	1	23
English only	6	10	5	2	3	1	27
Total	46	57	24	9	11	4	151

2.4. Is anyone learning Gaelic?

Only one in ten persons said that they were learning Gaelic.

Half of those who had moved to live in Shawbost in the previous ten years said that they had started learning Gaelic. They recorded positive attitudes towards Gaelic. These findings suggest that new residents can be further encouraged to learn and use Gaelic in the community.

All residents were asked to say what could be done to use Gaelic more in Shawbost. They replied: flexible learning opportunities, including classes for parents and other learners, and closer links between fluent speakers and learners.

2.5. What is happening to the language in public settings in Shawbost?

“Twelve years ago, I held every meeting [in Gaelic], but now there isn’t a single meeting that’s held in Gaelic”.

“Well, the problem just now is we can’t have a meeting in Gaelic in Shawbost, because English-speakers don’t understand”.

The main language of formal meetings and in community settings is English. This is largely because only Gaelic speakers are expected to be bilingual; they expect and are expected to use the dominant language of the majority, English, as the quotes above show.

This is a phenomenon known as ‘uni-directional bilingualism’, where a majority, powerful language such as English can dominate a weaker, minority language such as Gaelic. This situation can be countered by an emphasis on supporting all residents to become bilingual: this would lead to ‘universal bilingualism’, where everyone is fully bilingual (see Glossary).

2.6. Is Gaelic used in other community settings?

Although 66% are fluent Gaelic speakers, and many more have some Gaelic, Shawbost residents are choosing to use English in virtually every social setting in the community – this is demonstrated in Figure 5, below. Figure 5 compares where fluent and non-fluent Gaelic speakers use their Gaelic. The results provide an opportunity for encouraging Gaelic and universal bilingualism in these locations.

CONCLUSION: Gaelic fluency is high but is concentrated among residents aged 50+. Its use had severely declined as a language of the home and in social groups.

Figure 5: The languages used by fluent and non-fluent Gaelic speakers in different situations in Shawbost

PERCENTAGE: LANGUAGES USED BY FLUENT AND NON-FLUENT GAELIC SPEAKERS												
SITUATIONS	English only		Mainly English		Both equally		Mainly Gaelic		Gaelic only		Total number	
	FLUENT	NON-FLUENT	FLUENT	NON-FLUENT	FLUENT	NON-FLUENT	FLUENT	NON-FLUENT	FLUENT	NON-FLUENT	FLUENT	NON-FLUENT
At the Gardening Club		40		40	10	20	40		50		10	5
At Clann an Là An-Dè		67	4	33	7		46		43		28	3
At the fank		20		40	15	40	60		25		40	5
To elders	1	40	5	52	14	8	51		29		120	25
At the Comann Eachd-raidh		50		25	27	25	43		30		37	4
To neighbours	4	55	2	38	24	6	47	1	23		133	69
To the minister	6	41	7	56	19	4	46		23		123	27
Phoning family	2	70	13	20	27	7	38	2	21	2	117	56
You and other adults in household	8	73	8	22	24	3	35		26	2	92	59
To other congregation members	1	40	2	56	33	4	49		13		120	25
You and your partner	10	68	13	28	19	4	39		18		99	57
To the head teacher		61	12	26	32	13	40		16		25	23
To your partner and children	8	52	24	27	26	18	31		12	3	51	33
Grandparent and grand-child	11	50	19	22	36	19	23	3	11	6	64	36
To school teachers		64	23	16	39	20	31		8		26	25
To customers in the Post Office	3	66	8	24	54	9	29	2	7		118	59
You and children	8	63	22	30	32	7	25		13		63	46
To customers at Butt View Stores	2	68	5	28	57	4	27		9		44	25
To Cròileagan children	18	57	9	14	55	14	18	14			11	7
To nurses at the health centre	11	75	23	21	34	5	23		9		133	63
To patients at the health centre		67	8	24	60	9	28		4		128	58
To Community Council members	9	60	9	40	55		27				11	5
To Cròileagan staff		33	10	33	80	17	10	17			10	6
To the home help		50		25	73	25	9		18		11	4

Figure 5 (contd): Languages used by fluent Gaelic speakers and non-fluent Gaelic speakers in different situations in Shawbost

PERCENTAGE: LANGUAGES USED BY FLUENT AND NON-FLUENT GAELIC SPEAKERS												
SITUATIONS	English only		Mainly English		Both equally		Mainly Gaelic		Gaelic only		Total number	
	FLUENT	NON-FLUENT	FLUENT	NON-FLUENT	FLUENT	NON-FLUENT	FLUENT	NON-FLUENT	FLUENT	NON-FLUENT	FLUENT	NON-FLUENT
To staff at Butt View Stores	20	88	11	8	49	4	9		11		45	25
At the grazings committee	12	83	24	17	44		16		4		25	6
To your manager at work	48	84	13	11	26		11	3	2	3	54	38
To Post-Office staff	19	79	37	16	29	3	12		3	1	127	62
To school support staff	5	65	32	29	47	6	16				19	17
Amongst children	19	63	34	27	32	10	11		4		53	30
To your manager	44	86	25	7	19	4	11	4			36	28
To customers at the Inn Between	6	86	18	9	61	5	15				33	22
To the teaching support person in school	18	68	31	16	38	16	13				16	19
At Horshader CDC	5	73	65	20	20	7	10				20	15
To those you line-manage	40	81	30	13	20	6	10				10	16
To receptionists at the medical centre	32	84	32	13	27	3	6		3		133	63
To co-workers	14	67	29	23	52	8	5	3			63	39
To other school parents		65	27	22	65	13	8				26	23
To youth club children	7	67	60	33	27		7				15	9
To the Inn Between staff	65	92	18	4	12	4	6				34	24
To Youth Club helpers		70	38	30	56		6				16	10
To children in the school	21	76	25	16	50	8	4				24	25
To the doctor at the health centre	73	92	18	6	8	2			1		131	63
To customers at work	17	55	26	38	57	7					35	29
At Scottish Country Dancing		50		38	100	13					4	8
To other Cròileagan parents		50	22	25	78	25					9	8
To the Inn owners	92	100	5		3						39	23
At the School Board	11	86	33		56	14					9	7

note: the figures represent percentages
 note: empty boxes represent zero

CONCLUSION 3

Intergenerational transmission of Gaelic in Shawbost is broken

3.1. How many parents speak Gaelic to their children?

Although 66% of adult residents are fluent Gaelic speakers, in Shawbost today:

Only one parent in five speaks mainly or only Gaelic to their children.

The research showed that **62% of parents are using mainly or only English** with their children; and 74% of the children are using mainly or only English when speaking to their parents. This is shown in Figures 6 and 7.

Analysis showed that if a parent had been brought up by parents who spoke **Gaelic and English equally** in their childhood home, when they themselves became parents they were likely to use **mainly or only English** with their own children, and **three quarters** of them sent their children to **English Medium Education**.

However, today's parents who were brought up in a **mainly or only Gaelic speaking household were more likely to speak mainly or only Gaelic to their children**, and to send their children to **Gaelic Medium Education**: virtually every parent in this situation chose Gaelic Medium Education.

Figure 6: The languages which parents speak to their children

Children: Language spoken TO the child by the parent	By the Mother		By the Father	
	Number	%	Number	%
Gaelic only	4	8.9	1	2.4
Gaelic mainly	8	17.8	5	11.9
Gaelic and English equally	6	13.3	9	21.4
English mainly	11	24.4	11	26.2
English only	16	35.6	16	38.1
In total	45	100.0	42	100.0

Figure 7: The languages which children speak to their parents

Children: Language spoken BY the child to the parent	By the Mother		By the Father	
	Number	%	Number	%
Gaelic only	0	0	0	0
Gaelic mainly	5	11.6	3	7.7
Gaelic and English equally	6	14.0	7	17.9
English mainly	13	30.2	10	25.6
English only	19	44.2	19	48.7
In total	43	100.0	39	100.0

CONCLUSION: The figures show that, currently, the majority of parents and children choose to use mainly English or only English with each other. This research suggests that parents should be strongly encouraged to use mainly Gaelic or only Gaelic in the home with their children, so that their children can have a chance to become fluent speakers of Gaelic.

3.2. What do the children speak to their brothers and sisters?

The research showed that 34 out of the 39 children (87%) in the sample speak mainly or only English to their siblings. Five children (13%) use Gaelic and English equally with siblings, but **no child** uses mainly or only Gaelic with siblings.

This is clear evidence that English is becoming the dominant language for all children in Shawbost.

3.3. What do grandparents and grandchildren speak to one another?

Approximately **half of all grandparents speak to their grandchildren mainly or only in English**, even although their generation is the most fluent and able to support the child to learn Gaelic.

Figure 8: Languages which grandparents speak to the grandchildren

Children: Languages which grandparents speak to grandchildren	Mother's father		Mother's mother		Father's father		Father's mother	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Gaelic only	5	12.5	5	12.2	3	8.1	1	2.4
Gaelic mainly	5	12.5	4	9.8	6	16.2	10	24.4
Gaelic and English equally	8	20.0	12	29.3	7	18.9	8	19.5
English mainly	6	15.0	5	12.2	7	18.9	7	17.1
English only	15	37.5	15	36.6	14	37.8	15	36.6
Other	1	2.5	0	0	0	0	0	0
In total	40	100.0	41	100.0	37	100.0	41	100.0

CONCLUSION: Clearly, inter-generational transmission of fluent Gaelic has all but stopped in Shawbost, despite the fact that 66% of residents are fluent speakers, who could help to:

“... Provide real support to young parents. Gaelic parenting is a lonely task. How to do this in a modern world - I have no idea.” (young parent from Shawbost)

Models for successful inter-generational transmission are available. The TWF project in Wales (www.twfcymru.com) sends trained home visitors to support and advise young families on raising children bilingually. Even when only one parent or grandparent speaks Gaelic, it is still possible to raise children bilingually using the One-Parent-One-Language method (see Glossary). There is a wealth of advice available, based on international research, to parents who wish to raise their children bilingually, and with support from agencies and from the community, there is no reason why parents should feel as isolated as the parent quoted above.

CONCLUSION 4

Children in Gaelic Medium Education are more likely than children in English Medium Education to use Gaelic at home and in the community

4.1. Do parents choose bilingual education for their children in Shawbost?

Parents of children in Shawbost said that all but two of the thirty five children reported on had some Gaelic, and about half of the children had attended the Cròileagan. One third of children aged between 4-15 were fluent in Gaelic.

However, more than half of the parents chose English Medium Education for their school-age children (shown in Figure 9, below).

Figure 9: Children: Education

Children: Education	Number (45 people in total)	%
Cròileagan	21	46.7
English-medium childcare	3	6.7
Gaelic-medium childcare	2	4.4
Gaelic and English-medium childcare	2	4.4
Gaelic-medium primary school	16	35.6
English-medium primary school	18	40.0
Gaelic as a secondary school subject	2	4.4

NB Respondents could make more than one choice

Source: Children 0-15

Given that Shawbost residents are very positive towards Gaelic (see conclusion 1) and want children in the islands to speak Gaelic, it is puzzling why more don't choose bilingual education. Interviews suggested that parents lacked support and guidance in dealing with a range of issues, such as their own lack of fluency or confidence. **More support and advice from fluent speakers and from agencies is required to support parents. A policy of giving every child bilingual education is the most inclusive option for all children.**

4.2. Does GME strengthen the use of Gaelic by children in the community?

Yes. The research results presented in Figure 10 showed a link between receiving Gaelic Medium Education in Shawbost School and using Gaelic in family and community settings. However, very few children in English Medium Education used their Gaelic outside of school.

CONCLUSION: If Shawbost residents do want children in the islands to speak Gaelic in the home and the community, Gaelic Medium Education is the option which would best support this.

Figure 10: Children: Language use and school education in Gaelic/English Medium

LANGUAGES USED BY PUPILS IN GAELIC MEDIUM EDUCATION AND ENGLISH MEDIUM EDUCATION												
SITUATIONS	English only		Mainly English		Both equally		Mainly Gaelic		Gaelic only		Total number	
	GME	EME	GME	EME	GME	EME	GME	EME	GME	EME	GME	EME
To parent's partner	5	11	3	5	6		2				16	16
To other adults	1	11	5	5	5		5				16	16
To other children	1	11	4	4	7		2				14	15
To grandparents		7	1	5	6	3	8	1	1		16	16
To neighbours	1	10	2	7	9		4				16	17
To other relatives	1	14	4	3	7		4				16	17
To cròileagan staff		1										1
To cròileagan children	1	5		4	3						4	9
To cròileagan parents		5		3	3						3	8
To a school teacher		6	2	6			11		3		16	12
To the school head teacher		8	1	5	3		11		1		16	13
To the teaching-support worker		7	1	4	2		4		2		9	11
To school support staff	1	8	3	3	5		6				15	11
To school children	2	7	6	6	7						15	13
To children's parents	1	9	2	4	9		2				14	13
Youth Club	6	7	5	2	5						16	9
Sunday School	6	3	3	2	5						14	5
Youth Fellowship	2	1		1							2	2
Other clubs	3										3	

note: figures represent number of pupils

note: empty cells represent zero

note: ages 4 to 15 only

note: Gaelic Medium Education includes one child who was also in English Medium Education.

CONCLUSION 5

Gaelic can be saved

5.1: Can anything be done? YES.

“So, the effort will have to be huge [...] like it was in Israel when it was a new country [...] It has happened before, and it can be done” (Shawbost resident)

No language is lost or beyond hope. Even a dead language can be revived. In 1880, there were no native speakers of Hebrew, but through the 20th century, Jews worked to revive their language, and now there are five million native speakers of Hebrew in Israel and nine million speakers globally.

Gaelic in Shawbost is definitely alive. But having a high percentage of fluent speakers and positive attitudes towards Gaelic in Shawbost are not enough: **Gaelic needs to be spoken in the family home and in the community**, if it is to continue.

5.2. What can be done?

1. Community members need to encourage **universal bilingualism** among all residents in Shawbost. Without this, uni-directional bilingualism will result in English monolingualism in Shawbost.
2. This can be achieved by a number of **language development initiatives**
 - ✕ introducing bilingual education for **all** children
 - ✕ giving support to **all** parents in achieving bilingual households
 - ✕ introducing greater opportunities to learn or relearn Gaelic
 - ✕ encouraging Gaelic in the workplace through training opportunities and the valuing of Gaelic language skills in the workplace.
3. **Agencies also must play their part in working with Shawbost residents** on a day-to-day basis, promoting local Gaelic development schemes in the home and the workplace.
4. **Language development workers and community volunteers** are needed to work directly with individuals and families in the community. The team of four questionnaire visitors and one researcher had a tiny but significant impact, as one Shawbost resident remarked:
“Now look, you have four people going round this village. It’s already giving people a boost. Those four and others would have to be here all the time”.

Finally, we hope that this short summary of some of the full report's key findings will encourage you to **read the full report**.

This summary is intended to contribute to a **sincere dialogue between Shawbost residents and development agencies about the future of Gaelic in Shawbost**. The researchers and Bòrd na Gàidhlig believe that a language with fifteen hundred years of history behind it, and with a high percentage of fluent speakers in Shawbost today, deserves our efforts to revitalise it. We hope this summary and the full report help Shawbost residents take that most vital first step in any language revitalisation programme, through providing and encouraging:

... an open honest assessment of the state of the language and how people really feel about using and preserving it, replacing wishful thinking and denial of reality with an honest evaluation leading to realistic recommendations.

Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer (1998)

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GLOSSARY

Intergenerational Transmission (Tar-chur eadar Ginealaichean)

Intergenerational Transmission is when a language is passed from parents and other family members to children in the home. Most language experts agree that intergenerational transmission is the foundation of a healthy community language. When a language starts to die out as a community language, intergenerational transmission is one of the first things to fail, and needs to be actively encouraged and supported if the language is to remain a community language in the future.

One-Parent-One-Language (Aon-Phàrant-Aon-Chànan)

OPOLO or the Grammont system is a way of raising bilingual children, where one parent speaks one language with the children all the time, and the other parent speaks a second language with the children all the time. Parents often use this method when one parent does not speak one of the languages, for instance, when one parent does not speak Gaelic, that parent then uses English with the children while the other parent speaks Gaelic. Parents can also call on grandparents, aunts, uncles and other relatives to speak Gaelic with the children and support bilingualism in the home. The experts agree that consistency is the key to the success of this method; that each adult picks a language and speaks only that language with the children.

Tipping Point

Nancy Dorian first coined this term when she was studying the death of Gaelic in communities on the East Coast of Scotland. She noticed that when a language dies as a community language, it often all falls apart very quickly, in one generation, and she called this the tipping point. She also noticed that community members often do not realize that their language is at the tipping point and dying out, and tend to overestimate the health of their language.

Uni-directional Bilingualism (Dà-chànanachas Aon-taobhach)

This is a type of bilingualism where everyone in a community speaks a powerful majority language, like English, but only some of the community members also speak a weaker minority language, like Gaelic. This is always an unstable and dangerous situation for the minority language. Much more stable is **Universal Bilingualism** (Dà-chànanachas Coitcheann) where all members of the community are expected to be bilingual in both languages, all children attend minority-language schooling, and adults are provided with support to learn the minority language if they do not already speak it. This is the situation in strong Welsh-speaking areas in Wales and in strong Irish-speaking areas in Ireland, for instance.

